EXPLORING THE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT
OF RUSSIAN AND SOMALI ESL LEARNERS:
A COLLABORTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
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ABSTRACT

Recently there has been an increase in immigration and migration in the world. Due in part to this transience, interrupted schooling has become an educational challenge in terms of consistent schooling and job stability. Language education and literacy development are no exception to this issue. Though emergent literacy approaches have been advocated for younger learners, few studies look at the issues of interrupting or delaying the acquisition of literacy in a second or third language and how to address these learners’ educational needs. This study explored how the English literacy skills of six participants from two immigrant families developed over one year and what the external issues and strategies influencing these participants’ literacy growth were. Data were collected from participants, teachers, administrators, and family members, creating a collaborative ethnography of the culture of the literacy acquisition environment for these participants.

The family unit was chosen as the unit of investigation in this study in part because during such global upheaval and relocation, it is the family unit that is often the most constant and stable. Furthermore, the family unit is unique in that it may influence L1 or home literacy and in turn L2 literacy development. This study investigated this native literacy issue in the context of the family unit and reports on how this was addressed when the L1 skills were underdeveloped. Familial variables such as SES and status in community, which also affect the importance of literacy acquisition, were also
explored. Additionally, the range of ages a family provides allowed investigation into the influence of age on second language literacy development.

The research methodology in this study was qualitative in focus. Data triangulation was established through a series of observations (at school and in the homes), interviews, literacy measures, text analysis, and teacher questionnaires. Family visits were made to ascertain home-school connections in terms of literacy support and individual family member literacy responsibilities.

The findings indicated that while development in L2 literacy acquisition may be slow, over time changes in writing speed, fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy as well as reading accuracy and comprehension were observed. Issues found affecting L2 literacy development included size of the L1 community, mobility, parental involvement, conducive home study environment, L2 literacy demands in school assignments, previous schooling, text and technology access, and types of home literacy functions. Strategies facilitative of L2 literacy acquisition included copying text, accessing input, accessing background knowledge, practice reading, vocabulary development, and careful text selection.

Recommended pedagogical practices include suggestions to investigate each learner’s individual educational background and needs, provide academic readiness skills for students affected by interrupted schooling, immerse students in content based topics, demand authentic writing and reading tasks of learners, assess learners frequently in multiple manners, advocate for learners at program and district levels, establish and maintain positive communication exchanges with parents, and educate teachers about the unique issues of SLA.
Dedicated to my families
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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

Changing migration trends in immigration waves to the United States in recent decades and expected future increases have created an educational challenge that America has yet to overcome. “According to the 1990 census, the number of immigrant students enrolled in public schools has increased from 26.8% in 1983 to 31.5% in 1993. Additionally, the number of students who do not speak English at all increased by more than 50% between 1980 and 1990, with approximately 30% of those being children and adolescents of compulsory school age” (Waggoner 1993, 1994 as cited in Mace-Matluck, et al 1998, p. 1). Not only are schools affected by such increases but so are government, university, and adult education programs. New legislation mandating greater English language proficiency for legal aliens to receive welfare benefits as well as naturalized citizenship raises the stakes for learning English for this population. According to 1997 Census Bureau estimates, approximately 10% or more of the U.S. population is comprised of immigrants or refugees (Mace-Matluck et al 1998, ix). Furthermore, data collected in 1990 suggest that from 1980-1990 the number of persons residing in the U.S. who self-report that they do not speak English “very well” has increased 38.1% (Waggoner 1999, 16-17). Meeting the educational needs of this increasing population may be one of the greatest challenges for American educators in this new century.
Of these learners, some are well prepared for the American workplace and schools, and some succeed in attaining higher level degrees of education. Other domestic ESL learners, however, are not as well prepared to face the rigors of advanced reading and writing in English in America and never achieve a higher education; more are limited in the level of job success they attain due to restricted English language skills.

The ESL programs available to these speakers of other languages upon arrival in America can range from pull-out, sheltered, or adjunct course programs spanning all grades (K to 16) and levels (elementary to advanced) for all ages (birth to 100). Classes might be conversational in focus, grammatically driven, functional in purpose, or simply offer tutoring for homework. As such, although K-12 and adult ESL standards are being proposed by professional educational organizations, their implementation is nearly impossible in the face of such radically diverse ESL programs and varied local situations across the U.S. Furthermore, no standard national ESL curriculum exists in the U.S. as it does in other countries. Consequently, as the demand for ESL classes increases in schools, community colleges, and universities across the nation, so does the need for clearer definitions of learner needs and expectations in the midst of such diversity.

The issue of understanding the variety of ESL programs offered across the U.S. is further complicated by the issue of identifying the learners and their needs. Federal immigration and welfare status descriptions of resident aliens and citizens stipulate a need for domestic non-native speakers (NNS) to be minimally proficient in all four skill areas in English to receive federal benefits. These aliens/potential citizens, however, are not required to demonstrate any English proficiency before immigrating to the U.S.
International NNS university students, on the other hand, who wish to apply for visas to study in the U.S. are often required by university admission criteria to attain minimal TOEFL or similar standardized test scores, which draw heavily on advanced academic reading, grammar, and writing skills in English before coming to the States. Ironically, some public universities do not require these same test scores for admission for domestic or resident (non-visa) NNS students, as they have immigrant, refugee, or citizenship status in the U.S. These discrepancies in language admission criteria policies for domestic and international students illustrate the misunderstood nature of ESL students on the part of schools, university administration, and ESL programs. This policy problem is compounded by the fact that in general, domestic and international ESL students demonstrate very different English language proficiencies and needs yet strive to enter the same academic or career arenas. While both groups were not born in the U.S. (with few exceptions), many strive to reach the same “destination” but arrive at the doorstep of academia via very different educational paths.

The area of interest for this study has evolved out of several revealing incidents that this teacher-researcher has experienced while teaching undergraduate ESL composition to both international and domestic students at both the university and community college levels as well as student teaching in an urban middle school ESL classroom. The breadth of this experience has allowed me to reflect on the incongruencies of schooling backgrounds and disparate literacy skills of ESL learners. For example, I have observed that domestic students are generally stronger oral participants in class and are more verbal in their classroom behavior and interaction in comparison with the international students. Furthermore, domestic students typically
exhibit weaker academic preparation in English reading and writing proficiencies than their fellow international classmates. Such skills typologies are indicative of Cummins’ (1983) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Literacy Proficiency (CALP) skills classifications. Among same age domestic students, I have witnessed an even greater variation in schooling background depending on L1, political and economic situations of their countries of origin, and educational expectations. Both domestic and international students with such different academic preparations, however, are enrolling in colleges and universities and are consequently experiencing phenomenally different "success" stories. Even more startling is the disproportionately small number of domestic ESL learners who even entertain the idea of and then matriculate into tertiary education institutes. For example, one middle school ESL student whom I was helping edit a paragraph she had written for sentence boundaries remarked that she does not need to know this punctuation as she certainly never intends to go to college as it was out of her reach. This troubling pattern of limited success and/or denial of such opportunities by domestic learners at such a young age needs to be rectified so that these chances are not merely taunting mirages beyond the grasp of America’s new citizens.

Putting aside differences in schooling and educational goals, even when looking at NNS enrolled in American colleges or working in the United States, the uniqueness of the domestic ESL speaker is noteworthy. Traditionally, the university has been an arena for academic thinking, lecturing, reading and writing. Most international students enter the university with some degree of background experience in this realm and have been trained for years accordingly in English literacy skills. However, many domestic ESL
students do not matriculate into secondary or tertiary schools with as much experience and familiarity with academic English skills such as intensive reading, academic writing, and basic grammatical control. Others who face the workplace lack basic literacy skills in English or even in their native languages. Both domestic and international learners, nevertheless, may be partially "proficient" in English: the international students are typically proficient in English literacy skills and meta-grammar while the domestic students are generally proficient in oral/aural English skills and American attitudes (Harklau et al 1999). Such a proficiency division is shown below in Figure 1.

As can be seen, individual international students may fall at any increment below the x-axis while domestic students often fall to the right of the y-axis. It is this gap in literacy skills for the domestic learners, the barrier to the more literate half of the continuum, the inconsistency of academic literacy program requirements and assessment standards, and the lack of research in this area that have prompted this study. I have focused this study
on the needs of the domestic students not because the international students are less important but because in the scheme of American education, the domestic students are at greater risk.

This lack of academic literacy skills preparation on the part of the domestic ESL learner is compounded by frequent student denial or unawareness of this lack of preparation or by stark contrasts between home and school literacy experiences. Immature learners are often unaware that overall language proficiency may be subdivided into speaking, reading, writing and listening skill areas and assume that if they are fluent speakers of English that this will translate into all skill areas and propel them through the rigorous hurdles of academic curricula. At the start of their college course work, which often coincides with university ESL placement testing in writing, some domestic students are unable to verbalize or even recognize their differing proficiency levels in literacy skills (such as writing and reading) and interpersonal communication (speaking and listening). Some, in fact, equate their proficiency in speaking with their skills in academic reading and writing. Some students have coasted into college on the coattails of inflated high school grades, inconsistent local ESL assessment procedures, and an already well-established American identity based on years of socialization in American society and classrooms. This experience has built a false sense of identity and self-esteem for many domestic students who are then startled to find their English skills reassessed during college orientation and themselves suddenly reacquainted with the “ESL department” of yester year at the university level (Panferov 1997). For example, I once had a domestic college student in class who had graduated from an American high school and lived in the U.S. for five years. Upon entering the university, he was stunned
to learn that an old friend recently arriving from their country of origin had placed into the same ESL writing level as he. My student was baffled in trying to comprehend how he who was now so very proficient orally in English was placed at such a low level in writing, equal to someone just arriving in the U.S. Eventually for some, the harsh reality of poor performances in reading, writing, or grammatical exercises and assessments draws a clear stinging picture of this false security. Other domestic ESL learners feel defeated before even considering a higher education and simply exist in low paying jobs where higher English literacy skills are not required. For some, the difference in literacy realities between home and school or work is so vast that English literacy seems unattainable (Heath 1983).

This harsh transition from home to school or work and from secondary to post-secondary schools may be softened for domestic students with appropriate literacy preparation and a clearer definition of skill expectations for students. Schools and work institutions must be clearer in defining the expected proficiency levels of all language skill areas for both international and domestic ESL persons. Focused consciousness raising classroom activities may alert students to unequal proficiencies in different skill areas and help students become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in English. In order to recognize the domestic learners’ self assessment of their own ESL reading, writing, and speaking skills and their ensuing expectations for college or work success, the learners must be able to verbalize their self-concepts in reading, writing, and speaking and recognize the discrepancies between real literacy demands and their own current proficiency levels.
Unlike international students, who often come from consistent academic backgrounds with EFL course curriculum focusing on academic skill areas, most domestic students have been exposed to seemingly haphazard ESL preparation in the U.S. and have experienced sporadic schooling at best in their originating countries, often interrupted by moves due to war, financial distress, or other extenuating events in their lives. Most international students matriculating into the university, however, have experienced standardized national EFL curricula and consistent training and evaluation in English academic literacy skills and have led relatively calm lives. Depending on the individual learner’s age and length of stay in the U.S., a domestic learner may spend on average two to three years in middle or high school ESL classes ranging from pull-out instruction with vocabulary and homework help to full sheltered classes in reading literary texts (Elliott et al 1996). The case study piloted for this study of domestic ESL students revealed that ESL students in American middle and high schools may experience a range of instruction such as reading texts as vast as second grade readers to Shakespeare, grammar instruction as prevalent as traditional tree diagramming or absolutely non-existent, writing assignments as demanding as senior projects and as elusive as sentence cloze completion tasks. Evaluation of language skills and in other secondary content courses are as varied as penalizing “D’s” to inflated “A’s” to Mickey Mouse sticker rewards. ESL placement criteria have been found to be as extreme as any variation of standardized or semi-standardized language tests or IQ measurements to placement according to age and even physical height (Panferov 1996). For instance, I have witnessed the placement of a new ESL teen whose reading ability was assessed at a second grade level into 12th grade. Fleischman and Hopstock (1993), on the other hand,
point out that “27% of English language learners in high school and 19% in middle
school are assigned to grades at least two years below the grade appropriate for their age”
(cited in Mace-Matluck et al 1998, p. 2). In other cases, placements may be made
according to age and not ability which may be both demeaning and demotivating to the
students. This inconsistent ESL training and assessment across the country has evolved
from varying local school board policies and inconsistent testing and evaluation of
students and the programs in which they place.

The inconsistency of these ESL programs and policies is further confounded
when one considers that many domestic students’ L1 literacy levels range from
“nonliterate to literate” (Haverson and Haynes, 1982). This inconsistency is an issue of
extreme concern as L1 literacy skills have been found to transfer to L2 literacy
development (Canale, Frenette, and Belanger 1988, Carson et al 1990, Cummins 1983,
1984). In addition, logistically applying the preliminary findings from these studies
becomes even more difficult with heterogeneous classrooms and limited access to
teachers with proficiency in the learners’ native languages. Consequently, understanding
how to best serve the needs of ESL learners who lack L1 literacy skills is still evolving.

This study will not attempt to synthesize nor rectify all of these inconsistencies in
American school policies but rather will reflect individual literacy programs and
influences in as much as they act upon a group of individual learners, in an effort to
contribute to the research in literacy education in general. In the brink of these
knowledge gaps, however, it is the domestic students who have consistently struggled
and who will therefore be the focus of this study. Furthermore, since so many domestic ESL persons (both youth and adult) never even cross over into the arena of university study, this study will investigate what happens in the literacy lives of NNS outside that elite academy and seek to understand their families, schools, work, and basic education programs and explore why domestic ESL learners are so often weak in English literacy skills and consequently procluded from university study and career advancements and the success these entail. For instance, what opportunities are there to create bridges for domestic ESL learners to also reach that coveted path to success? And do these answers lie in our ESL programs or in the learners, society, or in other factors? This lack of understanding of the domestic ESL learner’s learning environments and opportunities leaves a vast gap in our current pedagogical knowledge. This gap becomes even broader when one considers the great diversity among individual learning situations and the chaotic teaching responses that are created to meet individual cases. While foreign language pedagogists and professional organizations have created standards which demarcate curriculum objectives for all language skills, second language educators continue to struggle with an embryonic form of standardized curriculum and essentially to even understand the dynamics of a rapidly fluctuating second language learning population’s needs.

Purpose of this study: Research Questions

The purpose of this descriptive study was to investigate in-depth the development of academic literacy of ESL learners who have recently arrived in the U.S. within the
context of the family unit. The impetus for working with the family as the unit of investigation derives from my own experience as a middle school ESOL instructor in the Central City School¹ district, watching several of the newly arrived children struggle with basic literacy tasks and wondering just what sorts of activities these children were involved in after school hours. I suspected that many of the children were not participating in literacy events at home and wondered whether that among issues of behavioral readjustments, cultural shock, and other age related adolescent antics might help explain some of their struggles in school.

Two cultures were represented in the family samples with one adult and two children selected from each family to represent a broader view of the literacy experience across ages and cultures. Descriptive data were reported ethnographically by children, parents, teachers, testers, employers, cultural informants, and other significant persons in the NNS participants’ lives. This was collected and analyzed to identify common factors emerging from the data that act upon the domestic ESL learners’ English literacy development. Common participant-reported factors influencing their ESL literacy development were compared with other-reported factors to seek out common emerging trends of influence.

This study took place in five stages with the research questions below being investigated in each stage. The three central research questions investigated were as follows:

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¹ Pseudonyms are used for all place and person names in this study
1. What were the issues in the lives and environments of the participants influencing domestic ESL learners’ literacy development?

2. What changes occurred in the participants’ literacy development over the course of one year?

3. What were the strategies that most helped the participants to progress in their English reading and writing proficiencies?

As this study took more than one year to conduct, the data collection procedure was divided into five main stages for the purposes of facilitating the gathering of information to answer the aforementioned research questions. As such, the findings presented at the end of this study respond to the three primary research questions and do not necessarily answer each of these stage questions as they are often embedded in the main question categories. The focus of each investigative stage as driven by the primary research questions is detailed in the following subquestions for each of the five stages.

Stage One: Gathering Baseline Data and History

1. What factors do domestic ESL learners value as important influences on their development of their writing, reading (i.e., academic literacy), and speaking English?

2. How do these domestic ESL participants self-rate their own English proficiency in these skill areas? And in comparison to their L1 skills? Based on a common measurement instrument, how do others (teachers, family members, employers, etc.) assess these participants’ proficiencies and how do these compare with the
participants’ own ratings? How do the participants’ reading and writing English proficiencies score on a standard measure of literacy?

3. What is the socio-historical context for the development of both their native language literacy (if applicable) and English literacy? What role has their family had in encouraging and developing that literacy?

Stage Two: On-Going Data Collection and Observation

1. What are the factors commonly identified among participants in reference to stage one question one?

2. How do these factors manifest themselves during participants’ literacy experiences, in observations of, in interviews with individual participants, and in text analyses of participants reading and writing samples over time?

3. What are the factors and literacy influences that are common among family members?

4. What are the factors and literacy influences that are common across families?

5. What are the factors and literacy influences that are common across ages?

6. How do "others" (ESL and content area teachers, testers, parents, employers, and other significant persons) corroborate the common factors and influences identified in stage two?
7. Does the participants’ native language literacy (if applicable) seem to aide 
   development of English literacy? Do participants with weaker or non-existant L1 
   literacies exhibit more difficulties in ESL literacy acquisition such as less literacy 
   growth in English?

8. What types of exercises, teaching approaches, activities, texts, etc. do participants and 
   others view as most helpful in developing the participants’ literacy skills?

   Stage Three: Reassessment of Literacy Skills

1. After one year, what changes have occurred in the participants’ literacy development? 
   How have the standard scores of their reading and writing English proficiencies 
   changed? How have the participants’ self ratings of their literacy changed? Based on 
   a common measurement instrument, how do “others” re-evaluate the participants’ 
   reading and writing proficiency levels?

2. Do the participants’ self-assessments of language proficiency level confirm “other-” 
   assessments of their proficiency levels?

3. If they wish this learning experience to date had been different, what changes would 
   they recommend? And what needs or goals do the participants currently foresee for 
   themselves in developing their literacy in the future?
Stage Four: Reflections on Literacy Development

1. What are the common factors identified by both the participants and "others" that were important to the development of domestic ESL learners’ literacy during the course of this study?

2. What needs or goals do the participants now foresee for themselves in developing their literacy beyond the scope of this study?

Stage Five: Synthesis of Development Trends

1. What are the common factors and needs in ESL literacy development across individuals in a family?

2. What are the common factors and needs in ESL literacy development across cultures?

3. What are the common factors and needs in ESL literacy development across ages?

4. How might these findings influence ESL literacy pedagogy for domestic learner

Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical underpinnings and assumptions of this study are fivefold: ethnographic data is a trustworthy medium for viewing within an interpretive paradigm; learning is a socio-cultural phenomenon; knowledge is a product of constructive
interactions with self, others, and environment; learner self-investment involves becoming aware of metacognition, and finally Cummin’s (1983 and 1986) categorization of learner language constructs, namely CALP and BICS language skills is accurate.

Although some preliminary base line data for this study were collected by way of quantifiable literacy measures and by self- and other- literacy assessments, the major approach towards data collection in this study was qualitative in manner and ethnographic in data collection methodology. As researcher, I situated myself within the qualitative interpretivist paradigm in that I attempted to gather as “thick” a description as possible of the domestic ESL learners’ “real” situation, grounded in the participants’ own words and contexts (Fu 1992, Massa 1990). From there, I attempted to interpret this data collaboratively with my participants to make sense for educators like myself and “others” who shape and affect the domestic students’ literacy development and to try to understand how this population can be better served. I chose to collect and interpret my data from within the interpretivist paradigm for I believe that a singly positivist approach to collecting and viewing data would not capture all of the multiple-view data necessary to make sense of the learners’ own reality (Sparkes, 1992, p. 24). In so doing, I attempted to understand the “Weltanschauung” of the domestic ESL person which would be beyond my reach as a positivist researcher if I were limited to quantifiable measures of data. The ethnographic approach to my data collection while being a participant observer, however, has allowed me to push beyond an etic researcher biased (and perhaps “blinded”) view and better understand my participants’ own emic reality (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). Furthermore, from within the interpretivist paradigm, I was able to discover
emerging grounded theories in the data and reinterpret the data and methodological approaches as necessary.

Another important theoretical perspective to this study is the idea that learning is a social process. Learning evolves out of interactions with parents, peers, teachers, etc. (Vygotsky 1978). Literacy, of course, by its very nature involves exchanging information in transactions between persons in written form. Formalized literacy instruction in school programs is regarded by some to be one of the most important social vehicles through which children learn the dominant culture and language (Fu 1992, Trueba 1990, Freire and Macedo 1987). Outside of school, families are found to be the smallest social organizations that determine culture, language, and literacy acquisition (Massa 1990, Heath 1983). Consequently, while exploring the development of literacy skills of families and individual participants in this study, observations focused on how social interactions influence L2 literacy development.

The idea that knowledge is constructed through social interactions is also an important perspective for this study. Educational perspectives that previously considered knowledge acquisition as a process of “banking” or transferring measures of knowledge into empty vessels discredits both the individual and sociohistorical knowledge bases that learners bring with them to the ESL literacy learning experience. Freire (1985) warns against such isolating theories and argues instead for reality transforming knowledge that both teacher and student create together through interaction and engagement. Vygotsky (1978) also urges educators to recognize that learning and constructing knowledge must be relevant to the learner while Dewey (1938) suggests learning be related to prior
knowledge. Therefore, the literacy learning experiences of the participants in this study were examined through a constructivist lens expecting that learners made greatest gains in literacy development when they were able to work with contextualized language and access background knowledge (Freeman and Freeman 1992) with the support of their first language learning situations (Massa 1990, p. 30) to create ideas about and test hypotheses (Ellis 1994) about English texts and literacy practices.

Another theoretical support in this study is the belief that the participants were motivated to develop their English literacy, and they became more involved in the learning process through collaboration with my study. It was expected that as each participant became more aware of his/her metacognition regarding language learning, he/she became more tuned into his/her language needs and more invested in his learning (Brundage and MacKeracher, 1980, cited in Nunan, 1988, p. 22-23). By anchoring this study in the theoretical belief that the learner is the most important agent for his/her literacy development, the objective of this study--to understand the learners’ own interpretation of their literacy development and influences upon it--remained focused on the domestic ESL learner. This self-awareness potentially allows the participants to critically examine their own literacy experiences and perhaps empowers them to take control of this aspect of their ESL education (Freire 1978).

Finally, in order to make sense of the differing English language proficiency skills exhibited by domestic ESL students, Cummins’ (1983, 1986) categorizations of BICS and CALP were used initially in classifying the differing language proficiencies of participants with the understanding that domestic ESL persons are generally more
proficient as BICS learners while advanced literacy skills are crucial in developing CALP. Longer development times have been found to be necessary for CALP growth, yet this does not discredit learner proficiency in BICS in English. For example, Cummins (1981) argues that BICS takes only 2-3 years to develop while CALP takes 5-7 years--findings that were later confirmed by Collier (1989) and Cummins (1989). This understanding precludes simplistic and subtractive stereotypical interpretations of domestic ESL students as “dumb” or “slow” when faced with highly literate CALP tasks and recognizes the value of highly developed BICS, which are more typical of immigrants or refugees. Furthermore it echoes a need for more longitudinal studies in this field.

Definition of Terms

Preliminary terms used throughout this study shall be defined as:

*Literacy:* a proficiency to read and write comprehensibly in English according to expected scholastic traditions.

*Non-native speaker (NNS):* a person whose birth, heritage, or primary language is not English and who has learned English as a second or additional language possibly as a result of resettlement in an English-dominant country.
Domestic learner: a permanent resident/alien or citizen of the United States who has come to the U.S. according to immigration or refugee status. Age may range from child to adult.

International student: any visa-holding foreign student who has come to the U.S. for the sole purpose of university study.

Student: used in the context of domestic school, college or any adult education program in which a learner is enrolled in a program of ESL (or other content) study.

Others: any ESL or content area secondary or post-secondary teacher, tester, parent, cultural informant, or other significant person who participates in the domestic student’s literacy development.

Self-ranking: a student’s own verbalized attitude on a scale of 0 to 5 (with 5 being the highest) of his/her proficiency in writing, reading, speaking, and listening in his/her L1, L2, L3 proficiencies in English. Other-ranking is similar however scores are ranked by parents and/or teachers.

L1/L2 Literacy levels: as operationalized by Haverson and Haynes (1982):

- nonliterate: speaks but does not write or read in language with a writing system
- preliterate: speaks language which does not have writing system
- semiliterate: minimal education with limited literacy skills
• literate in a non-Roman alphabet: literate only in language such as Chinese, Lao, Arabic, etc.

**Proficiency:** a general perception of the student’s reading, writing, and speaking abilities in English as assessed by the student and/or others. **Academic** proficiency skills are a compilation of reading and writing literacy skills.

**Fluency:** a measure of the total number of words written in a text by a participant during a timed writing exercise.

**Writing speed:** a measure of total words per minute written by a participant during a timed writing exercise

**Syntactic Complexity:** a specific measure calculated for each timed writing sample based on the average number of words produced per t-unit for each text.

**Accuracy:** a specific measure calculated for each timed writing sample based on the average number of error free words per t-unit for each text.

**Holistic score:** a measure of overall proficiency based on the assessment of the participant’s writing based on the Test of Written English rubric.

**Reading accuracy:** a measure of the participant’s correct responses to discrete comprehension questions about the reading texts used during the reading tests.

**Reading comprehension:** a holistic score of the participant’s global text summaries of the reading texts used during the reading tests.
Family: a permanent group of persons residing together with at least one adult parent or guardian and at least one child sharing one culture and one native language.

Participant: any member (adult or child) of the two families of focus in this study.

Cultural informant: a native or near-native speaker of the L1 of my participants who is very knowledgeable of the respective culture.

Issue: an event, interaction, influence or other person which might act upon the development of a participant’s literacy. Though an issue may be highly correlated with an outcome, it does not necessarily mandate a causal relationship in terms of literacy development.

Strategy: any action a participant, teacher, or parent deliberately takes to influence a participant’s literacy in a positive or even potentially negative manner.

Significance of this Study

This study is significant in that it investigated several different factors influencing domestic ESL learner education which previously had not been addressed in studies specific to this learner population. Factors such as family influences on literacy development, resistance and barriers to literacy acquisition, cultural means of coping with arrival in the U.S., attitudes towards literacy, and the role of L1 in literacy development, for example, are only vaguely understood for this growing population. Learning more about the needs of both adult and child domestic ESL learners is becoming more
important with the rising number of NNS in the U.S. and with recent welfare and citizenship policies requiring increased English proficiency. The diversity of these learners makes it pertinent that educational approaches are congruent with the literacy backgrounds and language development of these people.

This issue is further exacerbated with the increased influx of peoples entering the U.S. environment with limited or no literacy skills in their native language. Some research studies to date do address the cognitive (Bell 1995, Carson et al. 1990, and Cummins 1983, 1986) and social (Heath 1983, Gillespie 1993, Wallace 1986, and Ogbu 1980) issues of L1 to L2 literacy transfer which have implications for domestic ESL learner literacy development. Few definitive findings, however, have been found nor understood about other factors acting up on the domestic ESL student learner, such as the resulting affective effects of this transfer (or the lack thereof) or how aware the learner is of his/her own language proficiency and literacy growth and agents thereof. Partially this is due to the difficulty of operationalizing such constructs as "motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem"-- a caveat that Ellis acknowledges in research of this nature (1994, p. 471). The qualitative nature of this study, however, ensures thicker descriptions of these factors, thereby widening the scope of this research to include multiple factors and multiple views. Furthermore, as the field of SLA research develops in the area of individual learning styles and strategies, the findings from this study will be helpful in identifying common successful learning approaches utilized by domestic students in second language learning environments.
In addition to contributing to a gap in knowledge in our field, this study will raise awareness for students, parents, teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and testers about inconsistencies in ESL literacy curricula across the country and inconsistent placement and assessment procedures. Findings from this study may be applied to revisions in local ESL programs and methodology both at secondary and post-secondary levels. University teacher education programs might use these findings to better prepare future teachers (both in ESL and in content areas) to address the unique educational needs of domestic ESL students. Local school districts as well as commercial testers and test-creators may use the findings from this study to reassess the appropriateness and reliability of current means of assessing ESL students. In light of current issues regarding the development of standardized secondary proficiency testing, school administrators might, based on the findings from this study, consider their own students differently in such test situations. And perhaps more consistent means and procedures for evaluating domestic ESL students language proficiency may be considered for university admission.

Finally, most importantly, as the number of domestic ESL students increases in American classrooms, attention will focus on how to better educate these learners in general and prevent attrition from secondary and higher educational settings.
Assumptions

Several assumptions underlie this study:

- Participant- and other-reported data was verbalized as accurately as possible in light of constraining issues of terminology, memory, language (translations) and researcher interaction. When appropriate, translation opportunities were provided to participants so that they could use their L1 in interview situations that were not focused on L2 production.

- Any written documentation provided by participants or others as reflective of the student’s literacy development process were unaltered and truthful.

- Translations of any interviews or text documents by cultural informants were true and accurate.

- The domestic ESL participants in this study are generally more “at academic risk” than international university ESL/EFL learners who may have stronger academic and literacy backgrounds and who have been the focus of many other studies.

- The children participants in this study were assumed to be enrolled in some literacy program in school; whether parent participants were enrolled in an adult ESL course of some sort depended on individual situations.
The participants in this study were physically and mentally able, as well as motivated, to participate in this study and the assessments and exercises accurately reflected their literacy development.

Literacy skills in reading and writing are vital for successful completion of a secondary or higher educational degree program and consequently necessary for job success and economic growth.

The family units which I worked with in this study were stable and welcoming to my various intrusions as researcher.

Limitations

The limitations of this study as currently understood by the researcher are fourfold: (1) generalizability/transferability, (2) validity/trustworthiness, (3) subjectivity, and (4) accessibility of subjects. The nature of the interpretative paradigm in which this study was situated along with triangulation of data and subjects should, however, have reduced the degree of limitation of each—depending, of course, on the ultimate interpretation by the reader who reviews this study in its final written analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 241).

This study is limited in terms of generalizability or transferability to other similar research situations in that each individual participant and family is unique and the subjects are not representative of the ethnicities of all domestic ESL students in America.
Both of the cultures of families chosen to participate are, however, representative of two of the larger cultural groups of newcomers to the site city (Immigrant Student Report, 1998). Coincidentally, these cultures both represent two different continents in the world thereby broadening at least the geographic representation this study represents. In addition, the home language of both families derive from two separate language families, namely, Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic, and consequently present a broader range of linguistic representation. “Thick” data descriptions of these families’ literacy ethnographies should have provided ample data for the reader in recognizing ultimate possibilities of transferability to other cultures, ages, sites, and populations.

The truthfulness, accuracy, and availability of data collected from the participants and others in this study was limited by their ability to verbalize information for self-report exercises and their ability to access such information in their memories. Some terminology was offered to the participants when soliciting certain topic specific information; however, care was taken to not guide the subjects to specific responses. Similarly, memory jogging prompts were used to aid participants but only in controlled measures so as to avoid similar coaxing of answers. Care was taken with all transcriptions and translations to assure accuracy and representativeness of participants’ responses.

Subjectivity on the part of the researcher may have acted as both a limitation and as a research tool during the process of this study. I maintained a reflective research journal and continued to read current literature in the field throughout the study in order to better recognize any biases that may have evolved from my position. Similarly, in
order to minimize unusual reactions such as cases of observer’s paradox (Labov, 1970) participants were formerly taped for interviews only after a friendly rapport had been established and they felt comfortable with the purpose of the study.

Finally, the issue of accessibility in reaching both participants and other informants such as ESL and content area teachers, and testers were a logistical limit overcome by as many means as necessary. All were contacted by any physical means possible until all possibilities were exhausted. Compensation, which did not influence any participant’s literacy development, was offered to encourage family members to participate in this study. Cultural informants were also compensated for translations and their time and emic insights into the culture of the respective families.

**Summary**

In summary, the bases for this study are grounded in several issues. There is a need to learn more about domestic ESL learners in America because 1) that population is increasing and expanding in number, 2) there is little coordination nationwide among ESL programs and across levels and ages, 3) placement criteria into ESL literacy programs are often arbitrary, 4) learner needs of this population are particularly difficult to assess based on gaps in their schooling histories and sometimes limited literacy training, and 5) the L1 literacy proficiencies of domestic students may vary widely. This study focuses on literacy as a language skill because reading and writing have been found to be successful tools for attaining higher education and upward career advancement. In order to better understand these issues, the focus of this study is to attempt to collect
information about issues affecting domestic ESL learners’ literacy development, observe changes in their literacy in the course of one year, and to summarize what has most helped them to progress in overall their English reading and writing proficiencies. Data collection techniques ranged from quantitative language proficiency measures to qualitative observations, interviews, questionnaires, and text analyses. The participants were members of two families hailing from two distinct cultures, which is indicative of the increasing diversification of domestic American urban populations.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Rationale for the Review

In order to better understand the theoretical context and need for investigation into this area of research, we need to explore the boundaries of knowledge that already exist about language learning, literacy, and learners in a second language environments. Although cognition and other internal processes are obviously important to language learning, as this study is focused on the second language learning environment for persons who permanently reside in a target language country, this review will emphasize what we already know about external factors acting on the literacy development instead of internal variables. The theoretical literature background for this study will draw from six major areas: learner needs clarifications, literacy development and assessment, input issues, social factors, individual learner issues acting on SLA, and pedagogical issues in L2 literacy development. These six categories will help explain what type of language it is that the domestic ESL students produce and perhaps why it is acquired (or not) by the domestic learners and the issues and strategies they engage in over time to develop this language. A discussion of the methods used to measure this language and classify these issues and strategies follows in the next chapter.
Population definition

The focus of this study is the “domestic ESL” learner. Naming this learner population as “domestic” has come about from an attempt to capture within one word both immigrants, who have come to the U.S. voluntarily, and refugees, who have involuntarily immigrated to and resettled in America (Faltis and Wolfe 1999, Hansen and Oliver-Jones 1982, Harklau et al 1999, and Mace-Matluck et al 1998). This is not to discredit, however, the important distinction between coming to the U.S. voluntarily or involuntarily. This migration motivation will indeed be considered in this study although not captured in this term. Instead, the aim is to focus on learners who currently and permanently (or soon to be permanently) reside in the U.S. under some legal status thereby excluding persons in the U.S. on visitor, business, or student visas who will eventually return to their countries of origin (Harklau et al 1999). Previous studies have looked at domestic ESL learners but labeled them differently. For example, Perkins and Scarcella (1986) compared writing samples of “international” and “permanent resident” ESL students. The term “permanent resident,” however, does not include residents still on preliminary immigration or refugee visas or with only conditional residency. Scarcella and Lee (1989) and Phillips (1984) also studied domestic ESL learners, but they focused on the variable of length of residency rather than type (that is temporary or permanent) of residency and so labeled their subjects as “short-term” vs. “long-term” and “recent arrivals” vs. “immigrants,” respectively. As this study will not focus on length of stay as a single variable, these terms are inadequate. Similarly, “immigrant” as used by Scarcella and Lee (1989) and in several studies in Harklau (1999) disregards “refugees”
who may well be participants in this study depending on reasons for resettlement in America. Consequently, “domestic” ESL learners seem to be the most appropriate term for this study. No matter how this population is labeled, understanding the learning needs specific to this population is critical though it has generally only been explained in isolated cases such as by individual cultural groups (e.g., Bui 1983, Yao 1985) or academic level (Johns 1993). While this study does not attempt to fill this gap, it boldly steps into that research arena to contribute a more pluralistic approach to defining the needs of this growing population.

**Population numbers**

Underlying this need for a better understanding of such a population is the recognition of the increased number of non-native English speakers in the U.S. overall, as well as an increased number of NNS residents and citizens who plan to stay in America permanently rather than return to their countries of origin. According to 1997 Census Bureau estimates, approximately 10% or more of the U.S. population is comprised of immigrants or refugees (Mace-Matluck et al 1998, ix). Data collected in 1990 on persons residing in the U.S. who are 5 years of age and older, reveal that the number of non-English speakers in American homes who self-reported that they do not speak English “very well” has increased 38.1% since 1980 (Waggoner 1999, 16-17). As we anticipate the onset of new census reports in this new millennium, similar increases are expected. Compounding this need for a better understanding of this population of domestic ESL learners is a need to see over time how their educational goals are best met. Few studies, however, are dedicated to understanding longitudinally the specific nature of educational
issues and the needs of domestic ESL learners. Consequently, a call for more research into literacy issues of these learners has been voiced by several researchers (Adamson 1993, Bosher 1998, Faltis & Wolfe 1999, Ferris 1999, Harklau 1994, and Mace-Matluck et al 1998).

**School population**

This increase in the population of domestic learners is, of course, streaming into our K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and adult education programs. “One in six of all youths age 14-19 in the United States either speaks a language other than English as home, was born in a foreign country, or both. There were 3.4 million of them in 1990” (Waggoner 1999, 18). More are expected. For example, by 2010 more than 22% of school-age children in America will be immigrants or children of immigrants (Fix & Passel, 1994 cited in Mace-Matluck et al 1998, x). More than 73% of these non-English speaking youths have had 9-11 years of schooling and 26% have had only 5-8 years (Waggoner 1999, 34). However, drop-out rates for non-English speakers are staggering with only 13% of non-English speaking youth earning high school diplomas (Waggoner 1999, 33). Even so, an increase in enrollment of NNS students is also expected at the post-secondary levels. For example, by the year 2000, CUNY freshmen numbers are expected to count more than 50% of their total number of students as being born outside of the U.S. (Lay et al. 1999, 176). In 1990 in the state of Ohio, the site of this study, youths age 14 to 19 numbered 59,000 who were non-English speakers (Waggoner 1999, 31). Overall, the Buckeye state ranks in the top ten of states with the most numerous linguistically diverse youth across the nation (Waggoner 1999, 27).
Their Literacy

Beyond the numbers, the characteristics of the literacy backgrounds that these domestic students display are remarkably different from their international student counterparts. Domestic ESL students often exhibit stronger oral/aural skills than their counterpart international classmates. The written language they produce manifests features of spoken language such as fragmentation and word final morpheme dropping. Inappropriate vocabulary use in certain academic contexts is also a quality of their English skills (Muchinsky and Tangren 1999). To understand the origins of these features, it is helpful to step back and examine what it means to be literate.

Literacy Development

Functions

Literacy can also be divided according to the function it serves, for example, functional, cultural, and academic literacies (Crandall and Imel 1991). Though definitions for “functional” literacy vary, grade level equivalents are often used to express literacy expertise with a sixth-grade equivalent being considered functionally literate (ibid, p. 2). This functional ability to read and write in American society would seemingly be a minimal goal of the parent participants in my study. Academic literacy may also be considered as simply reading and writing; however, academic literacy is more complex as it entails constructing meaning and conveying ideas across a written medium and interacting with text with a motivating purpose of greater understanding of some given topic (Bernhardt 1991, Hudelson 1994). Johns (1997) adds that this literacy is also a compilation of “strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and
producing texts” (p. 2) in a social context. This academic literacy would seemingly be a
goal for the younger participants in my study as they would presumably be taught in
school to read and interact with texts and to write according to academic tasks. However,
whether these literacy levels are attainable by both parents and children or whether both
parents and children even desire to be proficient in either type of English literacy is
unclear. McKay (1992) advocates for teachers of “academic literacy” to be flexible with
L2 writers and to respect the various social and cultural contexts which may inform a
student’s writing. Though studies have been undertaken to follow young families
acquiring L1 literacy (Heath 1983, Taylor 1983) and the development of L2 literacy for
children (e.g., McKay & Wong 1988 and Spack 1997) and even in the context of families
for adult learners (Wiley 199) and at cross-generational literacy programs (e.g., Holt &
Holt 1995 and Weinstein-Shr & Quintero 1995), no current literature seems to investigate
the nature of literacy development for both parents and children in second language
contexts over time.

**Views on literacy**

Literacy has been examined via two major approaches: cognitive and social
views. Some researchers (Cumming 1990, Just & Carpenter 1987, and Scribner & Cole
1973) view reading and writing in the L2 as a cognitive function. Others (Gillespie 1993,
Hamayan 1994, Heath 1983, and Wallace 1986) view literacy as a social process. Some
also view the possibilities of multiple literacies (Carson 1992, Delpit 1988, Johns 1997,
and Street 1984) wherein one person maintains "literacy" in many social or discourse
contexts. Still others consider literacy as combination of cognitive and social factors interacting together.

No matter whether one views literacy as social, cognitive, or multiple in focus, how a learner chooses to use his/her L2 literacy skills to improve his/her own life situation reveals the idea of critical literacy (McLeod 1986). The concept of “critical literacy” as discussed by Shor (1999) “challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for social and self-development” (p. 1). The idea of empowering people to choose to use their own literacy skills to change their world around them and the opportunities that are available to them is a pedagogical, social, and individual issue (Freire 1985, Kozol 1991). Studies (e.g., Frye 1999 and Hammond & Macken-Horarik 1999) have shown how pedagogical programs that empower ESL learners to critically reflect and act on their life situations can be beneficial. Whether learners willingly choose to assert themselves with a L2 literacy identity to change the situation of their lives beyond the influences (or perhaps without any) of a classroom environment is difficult to discern. Researchers like Pennycook (1994) might argue that dominant language power situations would suppress the domestic ESL learner yet experiences like Rivera (1999) show how learners can contribute to and influence their own lives and communities despite being situated in a dominant English language environment. Some educators, however, caution against employing critical pedagogical teaching approaches in ESL classrooms (Johnston 1999) due to the political undertones of the approach. Certainly these cautions might apply to some domestic ESL learners who have come to the U.S. due to political strife in their countries of origin or who may find themselves politically in
Understanding the role of L2 critical literacy in domestic ESL family units is an angle yet unexplored.

Assessment

Returning again to the basic question of what constitutes being literate in English for an ESL student is the problem of defining the parameters for a rubric that addresses this issue. Rather than assume one is either literate or illiterate as in a dichotomy, suggestions have been made to consider literacy a continuum of sorts. For example, Haverson and Haynes (1984) suggest a continuum of L1 literacy levels with which to compare L2 literacy skills starting from non-literate (not able to read and write in the L1 as it has no system for writing), preliterate (not able to read and write as the L1), semi-literate (able to function at basic level in L1), and literate in a language with a Romanized alphabet. Similarly, Crandall and Imel (1991) argue that whether one is literate needs to be considered on a continuum of issues rather than a dichotomy. These suggestions are similar to general L2 language proficiency measurement rubrics such as those proposed by ACTFL (Phillips 1999) for measuring language proficiency. Perhaps as a subset of general language skills, L2 literacy might be defined and measured against conditions and outcomes as described by Spolsky (1989) for “knowing” a language.

L1 influence

Further confounding the issue of defining the literacy levels of domestic ESL learners is the question of native language literacy and its influence on L2 literacy acquisition. For example, Carson et al. (1990), Canale et al. (1988), Goldman et al.
Mace-Matluck et al. (1983), and Weinstein (1984) all investigate and find support for L1 literacy transfer to L2 in general. In her review of the studies in L2 reading, Bernhardt (1996) found that L1 reading helps in L2 reading. Roberts (1994) found similar support for both the transfer of reading L1 and writing L1 skills to L2 literacy development. Studies in contrastive rhetoric have found that L1 rhetorical devices do indeed manifest themselves in L2 writing (e.g. Takano 1993). However, both Taylor (1988) and Edwards (1977) found that prior learning and L1 maintenance differ in terms of their effect on L2 language acquisition over a period of time. Finally, Skehan (1990) investigated the relationship between L1 CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) and its transfer to L2 CALP and found that the underlying learning capacity, BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills), is related to L1 acquisition (Ellis, 1994, p. 498). Ellis suggests that the results of Olshtain et al.'s (1990) study on social class and L2 achievement support Skehan's finding by attributing L2 success to a more developed L1 CALP (1994, p. 205).

If a domestic ESL learner, however, is not literate in his/her native language or does not speak a language which has a written form, any strategy for facilitating L2 literacy based on L1 experience must reviewed. For instance, Collier (1999) suggests offering enriched L1 and L2 literacy experiences to bridge this apparent gap. Though emergent literacy approaches have been advocated for younger learners, few studies look at the long term effects of delaying the acquisition of literacy in a second or third language until after puberty. Based on research with children, Hamayan (1994) advocates for creating literacy learning contexts which are embedded in authentic real life experiences with rich input.
Summary

The learning needs of domestic ESL learners are still vaguely understood while their numbers in the American context are increasing. Interrupted schooling and the reasons for which these persons relocate to America often adversely affect their literacy development or hinder the opportunities for these persons to learn to read and write English at adequate levels to succeed in this society. At the same time, the demand for literacy acts of this population fluctuates wildly from L1 to L2 media to functional daily literacy tasks to abstract academic exercises. Consequently identifying the literacy learning needs of this population as a whole and matching their learning histories with pedagogical objectives is simply a difficult task. This study attempts from a very limited view to carve out an understanding of the learning histories and needs of six members of this large population.

Input Issues

Another important area of consideration in L2 literacy acquisition is the influence of input on the L2 learners' development. The types of input such as caretakerese, foreigner talk, and teacher talk are all influential in general on L2 learning. Nevertheless, assuming that the L2 learner in America interacts with Americans, the findings that native speakers do not naturally correct ungrammatical speech (Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt 1978, Clyne 1978) may be troublesome for the learner testing his/her hypotheses in communication. This compounded with the findings that learners prefer to self correct (Schwartz 1980) may leave the second language learner unable to recognize
and therefore correct false hypotheses and errors. Variability in the learners’ exposure to
interlocutors in the L2 is also an external influences on the L2 learners' SLA. Some
studies have also shown that the learners' language input and output may vary due to the
external situation (Tarone 1979) or audience (Bell 1984). These fluctuations may
enhance the domestic language learner's repertoire or perhaps confuse the learner,
whereas such great differences might not be manifested in a FL environment. Finally,
another issue of input is the matter of what Krashen (1982) calls "comprehensible" input.
Whether a learner is able to sort through the massive amounts of input he/she might
encounter while in the target language environment (and if so, how) is a question for
further research.

Language Standards

Another factor acting on the L2 students' learning and to consider when assessing
literacy skills is the sociolinguistic environment and discourse communities in which the
learner finds him/herself interacting in the L2. Consider, for instance, the issue of
language standard. The question of what language standard a learner becomes proficient
in has come under considerable review as world languages are changing around the globe
learn a non-standard dialect of the L2 (Beebe 1985, Chambers & Trudgehill 1980,
Eistenstein 1982) because this is the language environment in which he/she is located.
This language may in turn be adapted (perhaps as a pidgin) to suit the community of the
immigrant. For example, Fishman et al. (1968) documented "standards" within a Puerto
Rican community which indicated the possibility of social fossilization, an idea later
investigated by Schumann (1978) in his study of pidgin languages and SLA. The danger lies therein, however, of judging or assessing a learners' second language against the typical standard of the L2. Both Cummins (1981, 1983) and Canale and Swain (1980) suggest frameworks for language assessment; however, a learner may be found to be minimally proficient in the standard while in fact being quite proficient in the L2 dialect. Problems arise when learners are unaware of these dialectal or discourse differences and are unable (or perhaps unwilling) to adjust (Valdman 1992). Codeswitching between the L1 and the L2 are often common among bilingual and immigrant groups and may attribute to the standard and variety of language a learner projects (Hornberger 1987) and may potentially by overcome by subtractive bilingualism or the loss of the L1 even as the standard home language, depending on the age of the speaker and their school language program (Hudelson 1987, Wong Fillmore 1991).

Another angle of L2 literacy acquisition to consider is the developmental stages of SLA in all four skills areas. Presuming that literacy is an ability situated among reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, one must consider the general knowledge in SLA research about language learning and related interlanguage studies. For example, Scarcella and Lee (1989) examined morpho-syntactic stages of L2 writing acquisition as well as the use of rhetorical and lexical items in writing by short term and long term U.S. residents. Similar to interlanguage patterns found in other studies (e.g., Clahsen et al 1983), Scarcella and Lee found both sets of learners following through similar interlanguage stages, however, with longer term learners having greater control of lexical and rhetorical structures. In investigating the language of second language learners, Richards' (1972) study of immigrant interlanguage documented the presence of a stable
language which manifest as immigrant community norms. This perhaps provides the initiative for a more in-depth look at domestic student language development over time at both micro and more macro levels with an assumption that being in the target language context influences language and interlanguage development.

Summary

Language input, particularly in the L2, is of concern for this study in that the linguistic context in which the participants carry out their daily lives may vary dramatically resulting in exposure to numerous standards and forms of the L2. The amount and type of L2 exposure potentially affects the language domestic ESL learners produce and may even influence the L2 standard the participants eventually master. Similarly the amount and type of L1 exposure may influence the participants’ ability and motivation to transfer skills and techniques to the L2 learning process. This study examines the amount and types of both L1 and L2 input the study participants are immersed in and analyzes the resulting L2 literacy development.

Social and External Factors

While understanding the linguistic contexts, learning needs, and literacy backgrounds of the participants in this study is important for investigating their L2 literacy development,
Environment

Studies have shown that simply being in the target language environment with formalized instruction is perhaps not the most conducive to SLA (Schumann 1978, Klein & Dittmar 1979). Pica (1983) found that in a comparison of groups that were exposed naturally to the L2, in formal instruction of the L2, or in a mixed setting in fact the learners who were instructed were most advantaged. In fact, domestic ESL learners, who have not experienced formalized learning environments or who have has disrupted schooling backgrounds, even including some time in American schools, may be disadvantaged when considering their L2 academic literacy levels (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998). In my own college ESL teaching experiences, I have found that domestic students entering the university are in fact very communicative in their English speech; however, when asked to write literate academic essays they often struggle as they have rarely been exposed to the metalanguage of grammar or academic essay organization in American-based educational programs. Ferris (1999) explains this phenomenon as being a result of not being taught the metalanguage to talk about writing in their American secondary schools. Similarly, problems with grammatical editing arise as many domestic ESL students who spend some time in school in America do not learn grammatical terminology (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998 and Reid 1997). Furthermore, students who are in general unfamiliar with the conventions of academic standards and expectations may
be disadvantaged not only in L2 literacy acquisition but in the pursuit of other school interests (Lay et al 1999, Losey 1997, and Mace-Matluck et al 1998).

**Language Programs**

Keeping domestic ESL learners--especially children and adolescents--in formalized sheltered ESL programs, however, is seemingly not the key to advantaging these children over time. Placement into ESL only programs can lead to problems similar to general education problems with tracking (Harklau et al 1999, Kozol 1991, and Mace-Matluck et al 1998) and lead to ESL specific issues such as lack of opportunities to compete with more proficient speakers (Miramontes 1993). Mainstreaming ESL learners too soon, however, can also have detrimental effects. Students may be exited form sheltered ESL programs based on oral proficiency skills while their literacy skills may not yet be so developed (Hartman and Tarone 1999) and mainstream teachers may not be fully prepared to aid an ESL learner with incomplete English literacy skills (Lay et al 1999, Urzua 1986).

**Family Literacy**

Understanding the roles of social and family factors influencing L2 literacy and language development is also key to this study. As a social unit, the family defines the cultural and moral expectations of a learner while mediating the influences of school and society. Many social issues may act upon family L2 literacy development including language use in the home, learning histories, gender expectations, informal literacy
learning opportunities, access to texts, and parental support. While numerous studies have investigated family literacy (e.g., Purcell-Gates 1995, Taylor 1983, 1991, 1997, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988), few have compared two families longitudinally in the acquisition of L2 literacy—the focus of this study. While studies in literacy have focused on school or adult community classes, the richness of this study of family literacy lies in the bridge it provides between understanding the individual, the school or literacy program, and society.

**Gender**

One social factor influencing L2 literacy acquisition is gender (Burstall 1975, Losey 1997). For instance, studies have shown (e.g., Labov 1991) that women tend to use more standard forms of a language while men do not and that girls can be more successful in school as patterned by cultural norms (Gibson 1982). Considering this in an L2 environment, it would seem that women are more likely to succeed in SLA than men (consider Burstall 1975 and Nyiko 1990) who have found that women are more successful in certain L2 aspects of language learning. Therefore, it would seem women are predisposed to better SLA. When one considers the multitude of factors influencing gender roles (see Tannen 1990), women in second language environments, however, may, in fact, find themselves restricted from opportunities for using the target language. For instance, Ellis (1994) suggests that women are less exposed to English in the UK as they are more often designated as homemakers and do not have the opportunities (which Spolsky 1989 considers necessary for SLA) to interact in the L2. For instance, a woman may have traversed the entire globe and come to live in the U.S. but may never speak a
word of English is she is limited by family, culture, etc. from venturing out into the target language community.

**Socioeconomic Status**

Another external factor to consider influencing the L2 environment is the learners social economic status (SES). Studies have shown that in a foreign language environment (see Burstall 1985, Shohamy 1991) the higher class ("advantaged") students have more success in SLA. However, Holobrow et al. (1991) found that in an immersion class that there were no differentiating results on the learning due to SES. In light of these studies and my own observations of ESL students thus far, it would seem that the SES may indeed influence the second language learners SLA.

**Length of time**

Another external influence on SLA for the second language learner is the length of time the learner spends in the target country. For instance, a learner who spends 20 years in the country would seem at first to have an advantage over the learner who spends only two years in the target country. Studies by Patkowski (1980) and in the Heidelberger Forschungsprojekt (1978) have found, however, that only the first years of exposure are the most influential on learning and that afterwards the influence of the length of stay is minimized. Similar results were found by Phillips (1984) and Wolfram and Hatfield (1985) who upon comparing learners who had just arrived in the target country with those who had been there longer found that length of stay in the U.S. did not seem to influence grammatical development. Scarcella and Lee (1989), however, did find rhetorical and lexical differences advantaging students who had resided longer in the
target country in terms of rhetorical development but not for syntax. Unfortunately, many young domestic learners believe that if he/she has lived in the U.S. long enough he/she will have “perfect” English in all skill areas while in fact evidence in some cases contradicts this ideal.

Parental influence
Another social factor to consider is the role of parental influence and family interactions. Overall studies have shown (Blakely 1983, Burstall 1975, Gardner 1985, Morrow 1989) that parents seem to have a positive effect on the L2 learning. For example, in the case of Richard Rodriguez (1982) who narrates in his autobiography how his parents were very supportive of his learning of English, he eventually became extremely proficient in English although he eventually lost his native language skills and found this process very alienating. Their enthusiastic support, though, for his success in school and their overall involvement in his schooling seemed to compensate for their own lack of English proficiencies and instead propelled his learning through their indirect involvement. Encouraging such participation on behalf of parents of domestic ESL learners like this can be difficult although highly beneficial (Kozol 1991 and Mace-Matluck et al 1998). Furthermore, parents who have had positive educational experiences themselves generally exhibit positive attitudes towards school and L2 learning (Losey 1997).

Child and adult roles
In instances, however, when the parents are minimally proficient in the L2 themselves, they may depend on their children to act as translators for the target language
and culture (Mace-Matluck et al 1998, Shannon 1987, and Vasquez 1989). This pressure on the L2 child can be positive in motivating them to perform L2 functions or perhaps negative in catching children and adolescents in difficult adult roles.

**Home school gaps**

In other cases, there may be mismatches between the children’s experiences at school and at home (Cook-Gumperz 1993, Mace-Matluck et al 1998). Consider the L1 research by Heath (1983) and Sinclair and Ghory (1987) which found that mismatches between the home and school environments may hinder students' learning in school and apply unnecessary pressures and stress. Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Rodby 1999) posits in his framework of interacting home and school issues that new L2 writers will, however, have more success in literacy development when separate realms (like home and school) are connected (p. 48-49). Akre (1990) makes the same advocacy point in encouraging teachers to bring the learners’ lives into the classroom content, and Cummins (1986) encourages teachers to join the community and “redefine” what it means to be a classroom teacher empowering her students.

**Culture**

The issue of culture has been examined for both general influence on language learning as well as specific influence on rhetoric. In general, studies have found that learners who come from cultures that are more similar to the target culture have been found to be more proficient in the L2 (Svanes 1988). Thus, a learner whose culture is more like the target culture may become more proficient in the L2. One model of SLA,
the Intergroup model, (Giles et al. 1982) proposes the condition when a learner perceives
that his/her own ethnicity is permeable or not preclusive of the new target culture (C2),
he/she will become more proficient in the L2, a finding supported that same year by
Gibson (1982). Others, however, find that this “cultural match” theory is too simplistic
and find that it does not account for many other influences on SLA (e.g., Losey 1997).
Still others advocate for incorporating the home culture into the learning context for the
L2 (Akre 1990) and “culturally responsive pedagogy” in the classroom (Erickson 1987).

**Acculturation**

Whether a learner acculturates his/her own cultural identity or completely
assimilates to the target culture is another issue for long term study of literacy
development. One model of acculturation, Schumann's (1978), posits that a learner's
SLA will be a direct result of his/her contact with the target language culture and
community. In this model, he suggests that several social (for example, social dominance
of the L2, inhibition, length of stay, cohesion of L1 group, etc.) and psychological
(language shock, cultural shock, motivation, and ego boundaries) factors determine
whether or not the learner does in fact acculturate with resulting SLA. Studies have
given support to Schumann's model (Gibson 1987, Maple 1982); however, others have
not (e.g., Day 1985, Swain 1981). Evidence does suggest that America can be a country
which supports native language and cultural maintenance while acculturating to
American “norms” yet simultaneously contradictorily demanding complete assimilation
Certain cultures, families, or individuals may simply resist any processing or changing of
their native cultural identity as writers. Negotiating between two identities may be beneficial at certain points in their L2 development (Chiang & Schmida 1999, Fu 1995, Gonzalez et al 1997, Shen 1989). Studies in contrastive rhetoric have suggested how L1 rhetorical devices may be applied to L2 writing (for example, see Connor 1996, Hinds 1987, Kaplan 1966, Leki 1991, and Matalene 1985) as a result of maintaining native culture writing expectations in spite of differing L2 expectations or in an attempt to transfer skills in writing from the L1 to the L2 as a literacy strategy.

Summary

The L2 social environments and interactions which domestic ESL learners find themselves in may significantly influence their potential L2 literacy development. Opportunities for formalized language training are often sporadic for adults and even vary greatly across K12 districts and schools. Social and cultural expectations for reading and writing in English may be directed more by familial, cultural, and gender norms than by the expectations of teachers in the classroom. Likewise, economic and time restrictions including length of stay in America may direct learning more than any textbook or classroom exercise. Consequently, this study, in searching for issues affecting L2 literacy development explores, these topics as potential influences on the study participants’ literacy growth.
Individual Learner Issues

Just as external social factors are very important for understanding the L2 literacy development my participants will undergo, so are individual differences important in understanding each individual writer and reader.

Age

The influence of age on overall success of second language learners in SLA has been studied among others by Cummins and Nakajima (1987), Johnson and Newport (1989), and Oyama (1976), Patkowski (1980, 1990), and Preston (1989) who found that, with the exception of Cummins and Nakajima's study, the younger the second language learners arrived in the target country the better their success in L2 acquisition. Similarly, Gibson (1987) and Tarone et al (1993) found that the younger a learner is upon arriving in the new L2 country, the more success they had in SLA. Cummins and Nakajima concluded that older students were more successful in reading and writing because of their previous L1 reading and writing experience--a finding concurrent with the idea of L1 to L2 literacy transfer and a finding which suggests that domestic ESL learners who arrived in America with immature L1 CALP are more likely to be disadvantaged in acquiring L2 CALP. This contradicts the expected advantage for the domestic ESL learner with earlier target language exposure and longer length of residency. Similarly, confounded with this is the question of the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg 1967), which posits that younger learners may have an advantage in SLA.
**Affective Factors**

Another area of theoretical consideration is the influence of affective factors, specifically anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation on L2 literacy acquisition. In reviewing some of my previous university domestic students' own literacy autobiographies, I have read many stories recounting great motivation to master the English language and others revealing confessions of having no motivation to even study it. Others tell stories of debilitating fear their first year in an American high school or reoccurring test anxiety which plagues them to this day in the university. Ellis and Rathbone (1987) and Bailey (1983) both found diary accounts of students telling of anxiety to speak in classrooms in front of more proficient speakers or to answer teachers' questions. Similar fears were expressed by domestic learners (Losey 1997) in an L2 writing classroom. Outright resistance to literacy learning tasks may be a result of distrust of educational agents or political players positing this non-participation as a counter to anxiety (Freire 1985, Giroux 1983, Losey 1997). Minimizing anxiety about L2 literacy events would seem to be of considerable pedagogical importance if domestic learners are to advance their literacy skills.

Self-esteem would also seem to be a critical factor to consider in L2 literacy acquisition. Although Gardner and Lambert were unable to find a significant relationship, Heyde (1979) found a positive correlation between self-esteem and oral production--a finding reflected in my own students' recollections. The role of self-esteem in literacy acquisition, however, may be far more complex than it seems as esteem may vary depending on literacy task or interlocuter context (Losey 1997).
In studies on motivation, integrative motivation to assimilate and succeed in the L2 culture is attributed to SLA success by Gardner and Lambert (1972) while Oller and Perkins (1978) documented that a desire to succeed spurred by negative attitudes towards the target language community also breeds L2 success. However, Spolsky (1989) argues that the learners' attitudes towards the target language and culture will directly influence either motivation to learn the L2. Furthermore, Gardner and Lambert (1959) posit a resultative hypothesis that when a learner is integrative motivated to learn the L2, he/she will succeed more so than a learner who is instrumentally motivated. Gardner's (1985) social-educational model posits that L2 learning happens when the learner is positively motivated (integratively) to learn the L2. This model does consider motivation as a primary factor, but I would argue that as Pierce (1995) and other researchers have shown, motivation may not be the primary external influence on a learner. Perhaps "investment" which Pierce (1995), Norton (1997), and others (Hansen and Liu 1997) consider more encompassing than traditional integrative/instrumental motivation markers (Gardner and Lambert 1959) is a more appropriate lens through which to investigate the influence of affect on L2 literacy acquisition. Norton (1997) describes “investment” as a construct which considers “the language learner as having a complex history and multiple desires. An investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own social identity, which changes across time and space” (p. 411). A more fluid definition of the desires motivating one’s language learning which changes depending on situations such as this may better suit the dynamic roles domestic learners face daily in their lives in the target language country.
Learning styles and strategies

Differences in learning style preferences and learning strategies are also an area of importance to this study. Although still relatively understudied in terms of second language learners, both Blanton (1993) and O’Malley et al. (1985) have found evidence that domestic ESL learners do not employ many successful learning strategies in their study of English whereas advanced learners of foreign languages were found by Chamot (1987) to employ more strategies than elementary level learners. In addition to often needing to develop linguistic strategies, Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) advocate that adolescent domestic ESL learners generally need to also develop general schooling strategies for academic success.

Another learning strategy employed by bilingual learners is to transfer skills and content knowledge from the L1 to the L2. Cummins (1981), for example, posits in his theory of interdependence that providing a learning environment that is supportive of the native culture and L1 will result in more proficient (and perhaps more accurate) L2 learning. Friedlander (1991) argues that accessing the L1 for writing in the L2 is helpful when the topic is L1 dependent. Similarly, researchers (Lay 1978 and Johnson 1983) have found that the L1 is helpful for planning for writing in the L2. Koda (1987) found that being able to transfer reading skills for one type of character language is helpful for reading in another. In general, some educators (Leki 1992) feel that direct strategy teaching may increase learners’ meta-awareness of their literacy processes and thereby potentially help them. Other researchers, however, have found that such attempts are unhelpful, such as described in an autobiographical study by Bell (1995). Hedgecock and Atkinson (1993) found that this aide in L2 literacy acquisition did not necessarily help in
L2 writing. Carson et al (1990) have also found that L1 writing can impede L2 writing. Still other cognitivists (Scribner and Cole 1973, 1978 and Cumming 1987) have found that neither reading nor writing in the L1 helps with the same task in the L2 as the cognitive processes are completely different.
Summary
Each of the six participants in this study is an individual with unique personalities, circumstances, and goals. While studying such a variety of factors does not allow for generalizing the findings from this study to others, it does create an understanding of the richness and complexity of the individual language learner. Numerous affective factors may influence a learner’s literacy development in terms of motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety. This study considers these factors as potential issues influencing the literacy learning context. Similarly, age is an interesting issue affecting L2 development. As a result, care was taken in this study to select participants who range 40 years in age. Learning strategies and styles are also considered in terms of how the individual participants go about acquiring L2 literacy during this study.

Pedagogical Issues
Previous educational experiences
Intermingled in this issue of L1 literacy transfer is the thorny issue of dividing literacy from one's educational background. Some studies (Robson 1981) have investigated semi-literate ESL speakers and found that previous experience with schooling influences how one succeeds in a L2 formal learning environment. Similarly, Bosher (1998), Collier (1989) and Muchinsky and Tangren (1999) have found previous educational experience in the learner’s originating country to be positively transferred to L2 learning experiences. It is, however, extremely difficult to separate one's L1 literacy from how one was schooled in the L1, as generally one becomes literate in some sort of educational program. Depending on the school environment and attitude towards the
learners' L1, the educational program may greatly help the L2 learner by encouraging maintenance of the L1 (Collier 1999, Cummins 1983, Lambert 1974) or if a negative attitude is promoted towards it, the L1 may in effect disappear resulting in subtractive bilingualism for the child learner which may be adversely affect the child's overall educational experience (Fishman 1977, Cummins 1988).

**Formal vs. Informal learning**

The external environment for the second language literacy learning may take place in a natural (informal) environment (especially for adults) or as a classroom (formal) learning environment (especially for children). Findings are inconclusive as this point as to whether formal instruction or a natural environment is preferred for SLA. Studies have shown, for instance, that learning in the target language environment (Fathman 1978, Gass et al 1985) is preferable to learning in a foreign language environment. Other studies have shown that being in the target language environment is perhaps not the most conducive to SLA (Schumann 1978, Klein & Dittmar 1979). Pica (1983) found that in a comparison of groups that were exposed naturally to the L2, in formal instruction of the L2, or in a mixed setting that in fact the learners who were instructed were most advantaged. These studies are signs that we need to consider further research into the positive effects of formal instruction. Certainly, in this study, I pay attention to the types of learning experiences my participants have and to how literacy skills are “taught” to them by their teachers, tutors, colleagues, and experiences.
ESL Programs

Another important consideration for the younger immigrant learner is the type of educational program he/she is placed in to learn the L2 and the method of instruction. Most L2 language programs can be categorized as immersion, submersion, bilingual, two-way bilingual, pull-out or segregation programs (Mace-Matluck et al. 1998, Skuttnab-Kangas 1986, 1988). A recent program approach to working with newly arrived domestic ESL students creates the structure of a newcomer or welcome school which focuses on L2 literacy instruction and modified content teaching (Chang 1990, Friedlander 1991, Mace-Matluck et al 1998). Finally, in considering the adult parents in my study, those who do participate in some sort of literacy program will probably find that their course is part of some overall adult basic education program (e.g., GED preparation, work training, etc.) which is similar to a submersion program with NES or some sort of sheltered program for second language learners.

Teaching and assessment methods

Recent discussions about method in which the L2 is taught is also a controversial issue affecting the L2 learners' SLA. For instance, traditional formal manners of instructing grammar have been in recent years replaced by a more communicative approach to language teaching (Brumfit 1984). Results have shown, however, that learners may not manifest as much accuracy in language use as desired when exposed to a communicative method (Li 1998) or a submersion environment, where learning is "natural”.

Approaches to methods for teaching domestic students vary widely. In Harklau et al (1999) and Losey (1997), recommendations are given in support of allowing domestic
ESL writers to draft and revise often. General support for process writing is offered by Hartman and Tarone (1999) who base this pedagogical approach on evidence from other studies (Kroll 1991, Leki 1992, and Zamel 1982). Edelsky (1986) urges teachers with domestic ESL learners to give opportunities for new English writers to write often to develop fluency and in a personalized manner. Bosher (1998) found in her study of Southeast Asian writers that reading and writing processes utilized by more metalinguistically aware writers differed from others and so urges teachers to be aware of individual differences even among writers placed at similar proficiency levels. Similarly, Leki (1993) found different writing strategies between experienced and less experienced writers. However, while these more discursive and rhetorical levels of teaching emphasis do facilitate L2 literacy acquisition, based on evidence that domestic ESL learners often lack metalinguistic knowledge about literacy issues as well as grammatical terminology and editing skills, it can be presumed that mechanical level approaches would also benefit domestic ESL learners. In fact, according to Hartman and Tarone (1999), most secondary ESL teachers do have considerable training in grammar and consequently focus on this more in their teaching (p. 111).

How domestic ESL learners are assessed in their L2 literacy skills can also vary from one situation to another. Some intake and exit programs do assess both L1 and L2 literacy skills (Mace-Matluck et al 1998); however, whether most assessments are discrete point or not remains generally unknown. Standardized tests such as TOEFL or the MELAB are often used to evaluate international students at university levels. These tests, however, are often not administered to domestic ESL students. In terms of literacy tasks for course assignments domestic ESL students may tend to exhibit greater fluency
in their writing but simultaneously less grammatical and rhetorical control (Muchisky & Tangren 1999). Giving feedback to writing by domestic ESL learners who do not have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge of grammar terminology, etc. seems non-productive (Ferris 1999). Matching the most effective assessment tools for domestic ESL students with their literacy tasks seems to be yet understudied.

**Materials and curricula**

Similarly, teaching materials and course content are important aspects to any domestic ESL learner’s academic literacy experience. Generally with these learners more emphasis on what the learner knows (and less on subtractivism) may be the key to greater second language learning. Several studies show support for drawing on learners’ background knowledge and previous experience for effective literacy experiences (Bernhardt 1991, Freire 1985, and Losey 1997). However, in cases when young domestic ESL learners have had broken schooling experiences, teachers can not wait until sufficient CALP skills are developed in the L2 or risk the children falling further behind in content knowledge (Mace-Matluck 1998). Certain opportunities for L1 instruction (Collier 1999) would greatly benefit these learners.

**Summary**

Every learner enters the L2 classroom with some previous learning experience albeit with vastly different histories. This study considers the learning histories of each of the six participants as well as their current formal and informal learning environments. As this is an L2 issue, specific attention is paid to the types of ESL programs the participants are
enrolled in and the teaching and assessment methods and materials used in these classes. Consideration is also paid to how these learning contexts best facilitate learning for the domestic ESL student.

Conclusion

This brief overview of the literature in second language pedagogy indicates four major areas of need for more investigation--each of which this study will touch on. First is the issue of the specifically different nature of needs for domestic ESL learners who are neither international students nor foreign language learners. While both of these populations have been greatly studied, the domestic ESL learner is less understood yet the numbers in this population are increasing. Furthermore, the issues of interrupted schooling and other situations that create the conditions for these persons to relocate to a country like America often adversely affect the literacy development or opportunities there for these persons thereby compounding the difficulties of understanding the needs specific to these learners. The intention of this study is to closely investigate these issues at an in-depth level. Secondly, the role of how native language literacy affects second language literacy development continues to be in question. With many adult domestic learners and their children not developing or maintaining native language skills in reading and writing, the loss of potential for skills transfer may be great. As educators we need to better understand how much this may affect our students’ overall potential L2 literacy growth. Finally, coupled with both these areas are both the issues of educational input or schooling and familial influence over literacy development. How schools and families can best work together to develop the literacy skills of both parents and children as well
as opportunities to stimulate overall educational success remains unclear. This study
will look at the numerous external variables and the complex roles each party plays in the
eventual success of the domestic learners’ literacy development.
Overview

“Qualitative research design begins with a question” (Janesick, 1994, p. 210). In this study, the guiding overall question asked “how can the acquisition of English literacy skills by recently arrived domestic ESL learners be best supported and developed?” The investigation into this question dictated a need to begin preliminary inquiry into “the answer” through an ethnographic design. Participants, others, and the researcher as participant observer collaboratively constructed a response. To establish this response, data showing literacy development were gathered via text samples and reading and writing measures. Data about the issues influencing the development of this literacy, being primarily social and individual, in nature were gathered via observations, questionnaires, and interviews.

Once a sufficient saturation of data was collected, the approach to data analysis and management for this study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. For example, this study required an on-going re-evaluation of participants’ literacy
development via a standard assessment tool measured in t-units as well as holistic evaluation and comparisons of learner- and other-reported factors from stages one and three. These were managed with appropriate quantitative measures and statistical procedures. Stages one through four, however, required the analysis of qualitative data from observations, interviews, document analysis and the investigation of emerging trends in factors. Coding and categorization of data were used to sift through trends and theories evolving out of the data in response to my target research questions. Eventual “paring down” of data across categories was managed by data tables and charts to allow for more global clarity of each category. Qualitative or comparable software management programs were used to facilitate writing the literacy development “story” of each participant and family. Overall analysis of data proceeded first with individual case study analysis and then according to family and age groups with respect to each research question in focus. The results presented in the following chapter tell first the individual stories of literacy development and then compare the six participants’ progress and the issues and strategies they engaged during the study.

**Site and Participant Selection**

The very nature of my ethnographic study and investigation directed that my site selection be one where I was already somewhat familiar with the ESL learning opportunities at the site. Therefore, my site was one of convenience and easy access--the Midwestern city where I reside. With 670,000 city residents, nearly 1% are Somali, more than 1% are Southeast Asian, and almost 4% are Hispanic (“Immigrants Flock”)--evidence that immigrant waves are reaching beyond the costal states and cities which
have more traditionally hosted new residents to America. As such the sampling technique I used was maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) so that the participants in this study might show a greater representation of this diverse immigrant population.

District and Family Selection

Due to recent influxes of refugee and immigrant populations concentrated in my site city, the city’s largest urban school district has experienced a 40% jump in the last two years in ESL enrolled students and has increased ESOL teachers by nearly 80%. As a result, the district has created two intensive sheltered ESL programs for newcomer children from grades 6-8 and 9-12 to better serve their educational needs (“Immigrants Flock”). In addition, nineteen other school centers in the district offer ESL services for mainstreamed children. From this population of students, one Somali family was chosen for this study as it represents one of the largest ethnic populations in the district (ODE Report, 1998) and because of their typically interrupted schooling background and limited native language literacy skills. The particular family that was chosen was invited to participate based on teacher recommendations.

The second family chosen to participate in this study was selected from a different urban school district in the site city. Ideally, it would have been convenient to select two families from one district to limit differing variables. However, a second family meeting the appropriate qualifications for this study was not available in the first district. A Russian family was chosen for the study because of their traditionally strong educational
background and native language literacy skills and seemingly very different scholastic traditions than of the Somali culture. The eventual family chosen was selected upon teacher recommendation and similar amounts of time in the U.S. as the Somali family.

Although this second school district is much smaller than the first, it is considered an urban district and it offers similar ESL programming as the first. In both districts, I have had previous experience working with the ESL teachers and have already established rapport with them thereby positioning the participants and myself in a familiar school environment with minimal disturbance to the domestic students’ usual school routines. Teachers and administrators in both districts assisted in directing me to families meeting qualifying criteria for my study. Administrative permission to contact and work with both families with children enrolled in the schools was negotiated with district administrators, ESL program coordinators, and local building authorities. Once this permission was granted, with the assistance of my cultural informants, consent from both families and all six participants was established.

Participant selection

Each family included at least one parent and two child participants enrolled in a school district’s ESL program; however, other family participants (i.e., parents and other siblings) were not necessarily enrolled in this particular district’s ESL program. Although other members of the family were interviewed and observed, this study focused on one parent and two children (one younger and one older) from both of the families.
complete sample of six subjects, therefore, was not random for logistical criteria prohibit such selection.

As I chose particular family members to participate in my study, participant choices were made both based on family demographics and participant preferences. For instance, in the case of the Somali family, the father was deceased so I worked with the mother as the parent participant in the study. With the Russian family, however, I invited both the mother and the father to decide who would like to be a focus participant in my study. The father volunteered because he was taking classes at the community college. As both the Russian mother and father were active participants in their daughters’ literacy lives, I do not feel that focusing on the one over the other skewed the resulting data stories that I collected. Similarly, the fact that there were only two children in the Russian family determined my choice to work with only two of the Somali children as participants so as to create symmetrical family cases, each with one parent and two children.

General Data Collection Procedures

The basic approach to data collection in this study was a cycle of gathering broad informative data leading to more in-depth “thicker” data descriptions first from the domestic student participants and then again from other available informants, such as teachers and other family members, who have impacted the subjects’ literacy development. The two main approaches to gathering this data about literacy issues were
through interviews and observations. To reflect the participants’ literacy development, a multi-measured approach towards literacy assessment was employed: text analysis of participants’ writing, reading analysis of the types of texts they read, periodic controlled timed writing and reading sampling measures, interviews with participants, and teacher input. Scores from the timed reading and writing assessments are presented not as indicators of statistically significant changes but as quantitative data used to help “fill in the picture” more fully of the participants’ literacy experiences. As such, the data collection procedures reflect a “hybrid” of qualitative and quantitative methods for addressing the study’s research questions with the quantitative data adding to the “thick data” interpreted via the qualitative paradigm. A general time line for the study is displayed in Table 1.
### Table 1: Time Line for the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Approximate # of Months</th>
<th>Main Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gathering Baseline Data and History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>On-going Data Collection and Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reassessment of Literacy Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reflections on Literacy Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Synthesis of Literacy Trends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between stages of data collection and analysis, I reviewed the data and continued to read current literature in order to search for emerging trends in my own data. As necessary each stage was repeated until saturated data was gathered whereby there was “repetition in the information obtained and confirmation of previously collected data” (Morse, 1994, p. 231). Emergent common factors were then analyzed. Detailed explanations of each stage of data collection follow. Whenever necessary, pilots of each data gathering instrument were completed. The entire course of study and data collection took one year to complete to allow for extended individual literacy growth as CALP has been shown to require extended time to develop (Cummins 1983, Collier 1989).

**Data Collection Tools**

Data were collected for two reasons: 1) to measure literacy development of the participants over the course of the year and 2) to understand how this development took
place and what factors seem to support the acquisition of it. Table 2 presents an overview of the data collection tools used in the study with explanations of each to follow.

Table 2: Overview of Data Collection Tools and Research Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Corresponding Focus of Analysis</th>
<th>Reference to Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) interviews</td>
<td>a) interview tapes and transcripts</td>
<td>1. Issues influencing literacy development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) observations</td>
<td>b) observation notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) teacher questionnaires</td>
<td>c) responses to items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) demographic questionnaire</td>
<td>d) information entries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) timed writing measures</td>
<td>a) word count, t-unit analysis, holistic assessment</td>
<td>2. Changes in literacy during the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) writing samples</td>
<td>b) type, task, and function of writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) timed reading measures</td>
<td>c) discrete comprehension questions, overall summary of text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) reading samples</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) skill ranking by participant and others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) interviews</td>
<td>a) interview tapes and transcripts</td>
<td>3. Strategies facilitative of literacy development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) observations</td>
<td>b) observation notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literacy Measures

Although the focus of this study was not the linguistic development that the participants made during the year, in order to better understand how their literacy development was best facilitated, a general understanding of their progress in writing and reading in English needed to be accounted for. Consequently, literacy measures were administered at both the beginning and end of the study and periodically during the year. The following section explains how these were conducted and evaluated.

Writing Measures

Text types

Timed Writings: Measures of the participants’ writing proficiency in English were made based primarily on a series of controlled timed writing exercises lasting from ten to twenty minutes, which I administered to the participants during the year. These were analyzed for various measures described below. Writing prompts were designed to elicit accessible topics and rhetoric. Choices in topic were also offered so as to minimize topic effect. Copies of the writing prompts are located in Appendix E.

Natural Texts: Texts which the participants would have normally written, that is without the intrusion of this study, were also gathered and analyzed for type of writing and literacy function. These natural texts were not, however, analyzed for writing proficiency for this study, for reasons later described in the study.
Text Analysis

Each of the timed writing measures were analyzed by a discrete measure using a basic word count as well as a t-unit analysis approach and holistically for an overall writing proficiency value. This span of discrete to holistic assessments was used in this study because this range affords a broad view of each participant’s writing abilities in English.

Speed or the average number of words per minute written during a timed writing exercise was measured based on a total word count for the text for the duration which the participant wrote. Although specific time limitations were assigned for each exercise, if the participant stopped sooner, this time was noted and used to calculate each individual’s time for each text. Speed was measured merely to indicate the participants’ overall speed of writing assuming that more proficient writers write faster. As the school-aged participants face numerous timed writing exercises (such as exams, quizzes, and state proficiency tests), speed is an important value for them and so was recorded in this study.

Fluency has been used as an indicator of overall writing proficiency (e.g., Larsen-Freeman and Storm 1977, Pawley and Syder 1983, Reid 1990, Romstedt 2000). In this study, fluency was considered to be the total number of words written during each exercise. This construct was measured to contribute to the overall description of the writing proficiency for each participant.

T-units or terminal units of text including an independent clause and its subordinating elements have been used as units of measure for the discrete qualities of syntactic complexity and accuracy (e.g., Ishikawa 1995, Gaies 1980, Polio 1994, Polio
1997, Scott and Tucker 1974). For the purposes of this study, a “t-unit” was considered any unit of text including an independent clause (or an attempt at one) and its subordinating components. Proficiency or “Syntactic Complexity” as a specific measure was calculated for each writing sample based on the average number of words per t-unit for each text. Accuracy was measured based on the average number of error free words per t-unit for each text. Spelling and articles errors were not counted as errors for this study.

Holistic text assessment has been used in previous research on English writing (e.g., Charney 1984, Hamp-Lyons 1991 and 1992). In this study, holistic assessments of the participants’ writing were conducted in order to provide a more global view of their writing with less focus on discrete points such as word count or grammatical errors and more on the overall communicative nature of their texts. In order to afford more “objectivity” to the discrete measures of writing proficiencies, each timed writing measure was evaluated anonymously by three evaluators who are trained in standard TWE assessment. Their training was considered applicable for this assessment as it generally focuses on L2 writers who are not yet enrolled in English medium university academic programs, such as the participants in this study. In this case, the three evaluators first calibrated their scoring with a set of standard compositions and then, being “calibrated,” they each read and evaluated all of the participants’ available timed writings. A mathematical average of their scores on a six point assessment rubric was calculated and included as a component of the participants’ overall writing proficiency.
Reading Measures

Text types
Measures of the participants’ reading proficiency in English were made based on a series of three reading exercises, which I administered to the participants at the beginning, midway, and at the end of the year. Each reading instrument was created from a series of texts designed to prepare students for the ninth grade proficiency test in Ohio. As all of the child participants will have to pass this text to graduate from high school and because even the youngest readers, albeit elementary students, seemed able to read at such a level, the preparatory texts were used. Texts were arranged to increase in difficulty. The participants were instructed to complete as much of the test as they could with no time limitations. Each text item included a short text with accompanying discrete comprehension questions. Participants were asked to summarize each text as well. Texts, which the participants would have normally read for school or personal interest, were also noted. These were rated by grade level and analyzed for genre, difficulty, and function. These are described in the individual participants’ descriptive stories in the following chapter.

Reading Assessment
The participants’ English reading proficiencies described in the next chapter are based on the assessment of the accuracy of their reading for discrete points, as elicited by multiple choice comprehension questions, and their ability to comprehend the overall meaning of the text based on their summaries of the texts. While multiple choice tests are certainly problematic, they have been used widely in the field of second language reading to measure comprehension of discrete points (Berhardt 1996). To supplement
this measure, the participants were also asked to summarize their overall understanding of the texts. While summary recall in the L1 may be preferable to adequately assess a learner’s overall comprehension of a text (e.g., Berkemeyer 1989), this was not possible in this study as not all of the participants are able to write in their L1 and an interpreter was not available to assess such recall texts. Consequently, a compromise was made with short summary exercises written in the L2 which were scored based on correct presentation of the overall meaning of the text and supporting points. In the case of two participants whose reading skills were quite low, modified or supplemental reading measures were made. These are described in their individual stories.

Social and Individual Factors Influencing Literacy Measures

Interviews

Interview Formats
Interviews are a common technique for collecting ethnographic data (e.g., Fontana and Frey 1994, Heath 1983, Mehan 1981, Spindler 1987, Watson 1988). In this study, interviews were conducted approximately every month when possible with the family participants. Three interview formats were used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURED</th>
<th>1. Issue-Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Text-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEN-ENDED</td>
<td>3. Exploratory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Interview Formats

Issue-based interviews consisted of a series of questions structured to elicit information on a particular issue or topic (e.g., literacy history, literacy strategies, cultural influences,
etc.). Topics for interviews were determined in accordance with the research questions of this study as well as with themes that emerged from data during the course of the study.

*Text-based interviews* consisted of a series of questions structured to elicit information on a particular text that the participant had either recently read or authored. Focus also led the interviews to explore the participants’ experiences while writing/reading this text.

*Open-ended exploratory interviews* occurred periodically to evaluate the participant’s understanding or opinion of a particular event or topic as each evolved during the course of the study. These were more free and conversational in nature. Occasionally, adult participants expanded on these interviews by offering responses via email.

**Interview Procedures**

When possible, all interviews with the six participants were audio-taped and transcribed. When necessary, an interpreter was present to facilitate the process. If the participant or interviewer judged that the topic at hand was too sensitive for any reason, the interview was not taped. All interviews took place in a location convenient to the participant. Transcriptions of each interview were returned to the participants after the interview so that he/she might check the text for accuracy of representation. Structured interview questions were used as a guide to facilitate the interviews though modifications were made as appropriate to each individual situation. (see Appendix C for samples of structured interview questions).
In reporting interview data for each participant, their responses are often paraphrased rather than quoted verbatim. Paraphrases were used in situations where the responses were so brief, generally because of the age or language proficiency of the respondent or shortened translations of the responses. While paraphrasing may be considered a methodological limitation, in this particular study as the focus was on the content of the responses and not on the linguistic representation of them, it was felt that as care was taken to ensure that the participants’ own “voice” was still preserved, that these paraphrases would be sufficient.

**Observations**

Observations are also a common ethnographic technique for collecting data (e.g., Adler and Adler 1994, Glense and Peshkin 1992, Spindler 1982). In this study, formal observations of the children were conducted in the schools for more than a year, where I as researcher acted at times as distant on-looker and at other times as active participant in the class. Informal observations were also made in the homes with the parents or in the case of the one also in their adult language classes.

Observations of the child participants in their school setting took place at least two times a month. Observations of the parent participants were less frequent depending on their individual schedules. Observations of the home environment were open-ended and exploratory in nature.

**Observation Formats**

Observations consisted of six formats listed in Table 4.
Participant-focused observations consisted of a period of time in which the researcher focused attention on the activities, mood, behaviors, etc. of the participant at hand. Focus for these observations was determined in accordance with the research questions of this study, themes that emerged from data during the course of the study, or by the actions of the participant as they evolved during the observation.

Other-focused observations consisted of a period of time in which the researcher focused attention on the activities, mood, behaviors, etc. of persons (such as teachers, family members, co-workers, etc.) who interacted with the study participants. Focus for these observations was determined in accordance with the research questions of this study, themes that emerged from data during the course of the study, or by the actions of the participant as they evolved during the observation.

Environment-focused observations consisted of a period of time in which the researcher focused attention on the physical environment surrounding the participant. These
observations focused on the print environment, learning support facilities, and other physical entities that may have influenced the literacy development of the participants.

*Activity-focused observations* consisted of a period of time in which the researcher focused attention on certain activities which the participant is involved in. These observations focused on literacy activities or other school, family, or work activities that may have potentially influenced the literacy development of the participants.

*Issue-focused observations* consisted of a period of time in which the researcher focused attention on evidence of certain issues or topics (e.g., literacy history, literacy strategies, cultural influences, etc.). Topics for observations were determined in accordance with the research questions of this study as well as with themes that emerged from data during the course of the study.

*Exploratory observations* occurred periodically to evaluate the participant’s understanding or opinion of a particular event or topic as each evolved during the course of the study. Length of such observations depended on circumstances present.

**Observation Procedures**  
Structured observations were approximately one hour in length during which the researcher recorded discursive notes related to the focus at hand. The focus of each rotated periodically to facilitate more extensive data gathering. Open-ended observations were longer in time and occurred less frequently. Approximately two observations of
each participant happened monthly. All observations took place either in the school or home environment of the family participants with appropriate permissions acquired for access to each.

At the start of every observation session, basic descriptive information covering the following information was formally collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End Time</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Class Period*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of other persons present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their nationality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Their gender: F ____ M ____</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium for recording observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format of observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary summary of activities in location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson Focus*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus of observation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Potential questions/ideas being explored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For a school observation

Table 5: Sample Observation Form

Simultaneously, the researcher took discursive notes on focus of observation. The content of these field notes included but was not necessarily limited to the following: chronological listing of class activities, questions for future focus/interviews, descriptions of lesson focus and participants in interactions, descriptions of physical setting, and confidential descriptions of other students.
Skill Ranking
Although evaluating one’s own L1 and L2 language proficiency levels is a subjective exercise, I asked all six of my participants to self “rank” their own reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills on a scale from one to five (with five being the highest). While I did not use this as a valid measure of their actual language proficiency, it was a helpful guide in understanding in a somewhat quantifiable manner how the participant felt about his/her own language abilities as well as a means of comparing their own assessment of their proficiencies in their native language. These measures also served as a mirror into the complex nature of the participants’ identifies as language speakers, reflecting the person’s own view of their skill levels. Similarly, this measure allowed for input from their teachers and/or parents that could also be compared, reflecting their own views of the learners’ skill levels. While there was no standard scale measure for comparing, I did not offer one either—allowing instead for the participant’s own feeling for how well he/she could communicate in his/her own individual situation to be that guiding comparison.

Demographic Questionnaire:
A short questionnaire was completed by all six participants at the commencement of the study. This was submitted to the researcher prior to beginning the initial formal interview. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.
**Document Collection**

Text analysis has been another common ethnographic method (e.g., Hodder 1994, Taylor 1997). Text analysis employed in this study as it allows for the researcher to unobtrusively collect data about the “natural” texts in their lives. Throughout the study, each of the participants was asked to lend me copies of the various texts they wrote and/or that they were reading for school or home functions. These texts were collected and analyzed for text genre, function, and difficulty.

**Teacher Questionnaires**

Teachers of the participants were invited to complete short questionnaires about the participants at certain points during the study. Teachers who had access to email received the questionnaires in this manner. Some submitted their responses on paper. The questions on these short questionnaires asked about the teachers’ own observations of the participant’s reading and writing in school. Whenever possible, multiple teachers for each participant received these questionnaires so that multiple responses on each participant could be compared, drawing a more complex sketch of the participants literacy experiences.

**Reflective Journaling**

Reflective journaling is an informal method of reviewing and reconsidering data as it is collected and the ideas which evolve out of it (e.g., Lincoln and Guba 1994). In order to keep track of evolving theories and ideas as well as potential biases and trends in
this study, as researcher, I kept a personal research journal which I wrote in regularly
during the course of this study. I consulted this journal throughout the study and
reviewed earlier portions of it during each stage of the study.

**Missing Data Cases**

In certain instances specific data on certain participants may not have been
collected for various reasons. As interviews, observations, and literacy measures were
frequent over the course of this study, there were occasional time conflicts, missed
appointments, absences, illnesses, etc. which interfered with “planned” data collection
moments. Because the nature of this study was naturalistic and ethnographic in
approach, if after several attempts these sessions could not be rescheduled, they were
simply analyzed as being part of the on-going data story. Although these “gaps” were
not deemed to be detrimental to the overall data collection and analysis process, they are
noted as they appear in relation to the particular individual participants’ data stories in the
following chapter.

**Stage-Specific Data Collection Procedures**

**Stage One: Gathering Baseline Data and History**

During the first stage of my research, I asked my participants to first complete a
questionnaire which gathered demographic information such as L1, length of stay in the
U.S., type of previous ESL instruction, educational history, etc. Descriptions of any ESL
program that participants attended were also collected.
Once preliminary data were collected and my frame of subjects was verified as “domestic” learners and all appropriate consents to participate in the study were acquired, I invited three family members to complete an open-ended interview (which like all interviews, when possible was audio taped) in which they described their L1 and L2 literacy development, academic struggles if any, family attitudes towards literacy, and similar questions based on data from the previous questionnaire. As part of this interview, participants were asked to rank their own reading, writing, and speaking skills in English on a scale previously tested in a pilot study.

Finally, a standard measure of the learners’ reading and writing proficiency in the form of a diagnostic assessment was conducted which was then repeated and compared at the end of this study. Measurement form depended on the age of the participant and general proficiency level estimates based on an initial visit with participants. The information gathered at the first session served as baseline data for future reference.

Also to confirm self-ratings of literacy proficiency levels and test measures, when applicable, I invited teachers to do the same. These ratings along with test measures were compared for an understanding of how accurately participants self-assess their literacy skills and to obtain a broader understanding of the participants’ L2 literacy proficiency during this initial stage.

**Stage Two: On-Going Data Collection and Observation**

Over the course of one year, intensive data was collected for each of the family participants. During this stage, regular cycles of observations, culminating in prolonged
exposure to the participant family culture, and interviews with participants took place in the home, school, or other appropriate location as convenient for the participants. Each cycle was guided by the research questions established during this stage and by document analysis and emerging theories for investigation. Furthermore, participants were asked to reflect and comment on data findings from observations and interviews. Emerging trends of factors from this data were categorized and compared to look for potential theories relating to literacy development. On-going collections of documents exhibiting participants’ literacy skills were also gathered for text analysis. Frequent timed writing and reading assessments were made to ensure balance in literacy skill assessment of collected text documents and actual proficiency levels.

Simultaneous cycles of observations, interviews, and comparisons of data with family participants, as well as observations and interviews with other informants (teachers, administrators, parents, etc.) also took place during this stage to gather comparative data. Each cycle was guided according to emerging trends in family participant data.

Stage Three: Reassessment of Literacy Skills and Overall Literacy Functions

After several months, all family participants were encouraged to retake a standard measure of literacy skills similar to that which they took during stage one of this study. Similarly, each participant (as well as teacher informants) was asked to rerate the participant’s reading and writing skills in English using the same scale used in stage one. Data were compared for growth in literacy development throughout the year.
Stage Four: Reflections on Literacy Development

During this stage, participants, others, and cultural informants were asked to review the data showing growth in literacy skills. These interviews were open but focused on inviting insight into how and why literacy development took place (or did not) and on predicting what future goals the participants might meet and how in further developing their English literacy skills.

Stage Five: Synthesis of Development Trends

During this stage, the researcher reviewed, coded, and analyzed all data for trends and emerging theories relevant to stage five research questions. Findings were shared with both participating families.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

The research design of this study embraces a series of data sets and participant and informant contributions thereby insuring triangulation of data and a more emic, accurate, and hopefully ethical picture of the ESL literacy learning environment for the domestic learner. Data were triangulated via input from individual participants, parents, teachers, and others by means of observations, interviews, text analysis, and assessments. Case studies of each family and the individual participants within them were supported by a “triangulatory” compilation of data from each individual, the
culture of their family, and other informants. As literacy is a communal and not an isolated activity, it is vital that in investigating the development of it that such a multiple-viewed approach be taken to data collection (Massa 1990, p. 35). These channels of data collection together created clearer imagines of the issues domestic ESL learners face while acquiring English literacy skills and of the nature and speed of this literacy development. To maintain the trustworthiness of this data, however, I engaged the following measures throughout the course of this study:

_Prolonged exposure to the “target” culture:_ As participant observer, I spent more than one year periodically visiting with my subjects throughout the course of this study. Continued contact was maintained even during data analysis to support our rapport and reciprocity. This long exposure to the “target family cultures” in their homes and daily environments ensured a more representative ethnography of the domestic ESL learner’s literacy environment and situation (Fu 1992).

_Rapport:_ The basis for rapport for this ethnography was established at the commencement of this study and continually negotiated and renegotiated to extend through a yearlong period of exposure to the “target family cultures” with mutual trust laying the groundwork for this prolonged study (Fu 1992). Having previously worked with students from both Russian and Somali cultures, I have experience navigating through interactions with domestic ESL learners and assisting them in networking with local agents who can help them during this early transitional period in their lives in their new country. Participants felt open to ask me as an American cultural informant for help.
in issues unrelated to this study which continues to foster a feeling of trust and rapport between us. In the case of these two particular families, I grounded my initial rapport with them in my credentials as an ESL teacher and a language learner. In the case of the Somali family, I had previously worked with the youngest participant in an ESL middle school class the year before. This experience afforded me the “prestige” of being introduced to his family as an English teacher. In fact, it even carried over my teaching name of “Ms. P” which I used to help identify who I was when phoning the family and making initial contacts. Consequently, my relationship with the Somali family evolved around my role as an English teacher and an informal liaison for the school district. In the case of the Russian family, my initial rapport began with them based on both my background as an ESOL teacher but even more so based on my experiences studying and teaching in Russia and being an advanced Russian speaker married to a native Russian speaker.

*Reciprocity:* Reciprocity was established among participants, teachers, and myself in this study to ensure that a multiple-viewed “Weltanschauung” of each individual and each family’s literacy situations could be established and conveyed to the final participant—the reader (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994, p. 256). To motivate participants and others to cooperate in this study and to accurately represent themselves, data and the analysis thereof were made available to all participants.

*Member checks* were on-going throughout all stages of this study. I asked participants to review interview transcriptions, observational data, and initial emerging themes during
data analysis. Feedback from any participant’s reactions and reflections were incorporated in the final analysis.

**Peer Debriefing and Self-reflectivity:** In an effort to maintain awareness of my own biases and theoretical weaknesses, I asked peer doctoral students to dialogue with me throughout this study. Consultation and cooperation with other researchers and with teachers who work with domestic ESL students was also encouraged, leading to more viewpoints of the domestic ESL learner’s literacy culture. In addition, I traced my own developing theories, inspirations, hesitations, and biases in a reflective research journal.

**Other Debriefing:** In an effort to balance my etic view of my participants’ literacy situations, I asked both ESL teachers and cultural informants to share their own emic reflections on emerging trends and ideas.

**Thick description:** So that the participants and readers of my study may draw clear conclusions from the data and analyses, I have provided as “thick” descriptions and transcriptions as possible including extensive information about the context and culture of each (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Such rich descriptions of the data will help the reader in transferring the findings to their own situations.

**Data Management and Selection:** While striving for “complete” thick descriptions in observations, interview discussions, and text analysis, my primary focus was on gathering data which may reflect the participants’ literacy development processes in social interactions (with emphasis on native culture and American interactions) and in individual experiences. Consequently, classroom observations, for example, will focus
on subjects’ behaviors in groups and as individuals dealing with literacy tasks. Such prioritizing of data entailed certain selections of data while other pieces were less targeted (Fu 1992).

*Consent and Confidentiality:* To commence this study and maintain confidentiality of data throughout the study, at least three levels of consent and support were attained. University level consent for initiating this study was first obtained through the IRSB (protocol approval # 00B0005). Upon receiving university consent for this study, both school districts were contacted for appropriate permissions. With district support, individual ESL teachers were contacted to establish appropriate frames for selecting participant families. Solicitation letters were sent to these families and a meeting was arranged to explain the study and consents to participate were obtained. Participants were assured that all data concerning them would be held in utmost confidentiality throughout and after the study. Documentation about these consents is provided in the Appendices.

**Conclusion**

The final collaborative ethnography created in this study is a sum of many data collection procedures including observations, interviews, questionnaires, text analyses, and literacy measures. It is felt that the dual qualitative-quantitative nature of these methods has firmly rooted the resulting data stories in trustworthy and reliable data. The stories the data tell are presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Findings and Discussion

Overview
As the previous review of literature suggests, there are at minimum four major areas in need of investigation in the realm of domestic ESOL student literacy development. These include exploring these students’ actual learning needs and issues in their own lives, understanding the scope and influence of interrupted schooling, and recognizing the roles that both schools and families play in promoting L2 literacy acquisition. This study attempted to address some of these gaps by exploring these three central research questions.

1. What were the issues in the lives and environments of the participants influencing domestic ESL learners’ literacy development?
2. What changes occurred in the participants’ literacy development over the course of one year?
3. What were the strategies that most helped the participants to progress in their English reading and writing proficiencies?
This chapter presents the most salient findings from the study based on these three questions. I first introduce the general background of the study location and communities and the two families that participated in this study. Next I describe and summarize the literacy issues and developments for the six individual study participants. Then I compare the most salient issues for the six participants in terms of social, familial, school and individual issues which influenced this literacy development. Finally, I follow this segment with a comparative analysis of the changes these participants experienced in their L2 writing and reading over the course of the study and the learning strategies which they found to be most helpful in facilitating this literacy development.

Background of the Study

Two families, each with three study participants, were involved in this study. One family, the Omars, a Somali family, included the mother, a teenage daughter and son, as research participants, and the other family, the Pavlovas², a Russian family, included the father, a middle school daughter, and a younger daughter, as research participants. The study focused on these six individual participants from among other family members, who while they were present, were not the focus of the study. The selection of these two families was made partially based on their willingness and their being representative of the immigrant population groups in the site city or highly concentrated populations in their respective school districts. Recent estimates count the Somali population at 17,000 in a city of 711,470, as counted in the 2000 census, with nearly 30% of the city’s school district LEP student enrollment being Somali. While the Russian population is much

² While the Russian family name for a man would decline as “Pavlov,” for the purpose of this study as two of the three participants are female, “Pavlova” was used instead.
smaller at around 2,000, (Columbus Dispatch 12/12/1999), the concentration in the respective school district ESL program is nearly 60% (ODE LEP enrollment 12/21/2001). Being accessible and willing participants, the Omar and Pavlova families were invited to participate in this study.

The location for this study is a Midwestern city of nearly 711,470 people. While there are at least ten colleges and universities and sixteen school districts in the city proper and the surrounding county, one community college and two K12 school districts were part of this study. The community college was visited because the Russian father attended classes there during the study. The two school districts that were selected were both urban districts that were accessible to me due to previous rapport with the ESL programs in these districts. The Omar family was selected from the Central City School District where of the nearly 65,000 students, over a thousand Somali native speakers are enrolled in the district’s ESL program. The Pavlova family was chosen from the Bedford City School District where of the 2,400 students, 21 Russian speakers compose 60% of the district’s ESL program.

While the Omars and Pavlovas live within five miles of each other, differences in their respective school districts certainly exist. The average family income for the Central City Schools (CCS) is $28,801 while for the Bedford City Schools (BCS) it is $93,064. This economic gap translates into differences in school district wealth as both are publicly funded schools. Both the Omar and Pavlova families, however, themselves were on public assistance during this study. In terms of academic performance, approximately 43% of the CCS district students and 99% of the BCS were college bound. The drop out rate for CCS was around 12% but only 1.4% for BCS (ODE 12/31/2001).
While these numbers are only meant to introduce the school districts, they clearly indicate differences between the two. However, as this study focused primarily on the families and the individual participants, this difference was considered merely as another variable enriching the issues the individual participants faced in their quest for L2 literacy.

**The Families**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Pavlovas</th>
<th>The Omars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ivan, father</td>
<td>Halima, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina, older daughter</td>
<td>Fatima, older daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sveta, younger daughter</td>
<td>Abdi, younger son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6: The Family Member Participants*

The Pavlova family immigrated to the US in June of 1999. They came here directly from Moscow, Russia, where this family of four—father, mother, and two young daughters—lived prior to their move. They emigrated from Russia due to economic reasons as a year prior to their departure several economic markets collapsed and their investments in real estate business turned sour. While Ivan had worked as an accountant in a real estate firm, his wife taught Russian literature in a Moscow middle school. The girls, Marina and Sveta, then just eleven and nine, attended school as well. The Pavlovas have relatives in town and so chose to relocate to the Midwest after a brief layover in New York City. While there are approximately 2,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union in this Midwestern capital, the Pavlovas continue to speak Russian at home with a
small group of friends and family in the neighborhood. Both Ivan and his wife are graduates of post-secondary institutes in Russia though neither were working in their specialties during this study as they both needed to improve their English in order to be able to do so. Until such time, they were dependent on state subsidies and Ivan’s student worker wages at the community college. All four family members are quite literate in their native language, Russian, and enjoy reading. Also, all four members had studied some English in school or in language programs before they arrived in the US. They make their home in a quiet green neighborhood in a cozy rented two-story home with individual rooms for both girls, where each had a desk and a study area. The shelves are lined with books and magazines and the walls adorned with the girls’ artwork. Though at the time of this study the Pavlovas did not own a television, they did have a computer and used it frequently to access information and communicate with friends and family.

The Omar family immigrated to the US in 1997, stopping first in Florida for several months before moving on to Ohio. They came here via a long arduous route that led them from the war in Somalia in the early 1990’s to refugee camps in Kenya and then finally to the US. Back in Somalia the family enjoyed a certain status as the father, before being killed in a bombing, worked at a high level ministry of health position. The mother, Halima, with a secondary education, worked in a financial department for the government. Some of her older children began school in Somalia before the collapse of the schools, others in the refugee camps in Kenya, and others not until they arrived in the US, depending on their ages. Halima lives in town with three of her children in her home along with her own mother, and she has several children now scattered across the US. At the start of this study, both her daughter, Fatima, and her younger son, Abdi lived with
her. Halfway into the study at age seventeen, Fatima married and moved across town with her new husband. Here in the US, the Omars are part of a large Somali community of nearly 17,000 speakers though many hail from traditionally warring clans so internal dynamics of the group are quite complicated. Even so, the Somali speaking population has grown tremendously in recent years building up community resources in stores, restaurants, clinics, and businesses as a group. While Halima has had some work experience for her government in Somalia, she did not work during the study due to both health and language reasons. Fatima held various odd jobs at restaurants and warehouses during the study. Abdi worked briefly bagging groceries at a local store. While Halima and her older children including Fatima are literate in Somali, none read very much for pleasure. As the Somali language became a written language only in the 1970’s, reading does not hold nearly as esteemed a position in Somali culture as the tradition of Russian literature does spanning across the centuries. Consequently, both Abdi and his youngest sister are illiterate in their L1 and began to learn English only upon arriving in the US as preteens. The Omars make their home in a small two-level apartment in a housing project just off a major freeway in the city. The children do not have desks but rather study at the kitchen table or in the living room sprawled across couches amongst the commotion of the household. At the time of this study, the Omars did not own a computer, but they did have two televisions in the living room, which ran almost constantly, though one was primarily dedicated to video games. There are no books or other printed matter visible in the common living space but plaques with prayers in Arabic which hang in the living room.
My relationship with both families was quite different. As a researcher entering the home environment and intruding on their school lives, I was always alert to the repercussions of my being present. Known to both families as an ESL teacher, I was afforded the luxury of entering their lives. However, in each case, my presence was interpreted slightly differently.

In the case of the Pavlovas, as a Russian speaker, I was welcomed as a cultural informant, able to speak about American life and able to quickly draw comparisons to Russia. When communicating about non-study related issues such as where to find a good dentist and what the latest art exhibit is or in negotiating meeting times on the phone, I, in fact, spoke in Russian with the Pavlovas. This linguistic camaraderie generated a level of trust between us and provided me quick entrée into their lives. In interpreting their literacy lives, this trust and my insight into Russian culture afforded me a sort of “insider” perspective of their family’s story, although I am not a “true” member of the Russian cultural community.

In my relationship with the Omars, I entered via a very “outsider” point of view, knowing only a few words in Somali and having only minimum understanding of Somali culture. This “lack” of knowledge, however, counter intuitively allowed me to ask questions and more than likely incur social “blunders” under the guise of my ignorance than a Somali researcher might have been allowed. For instance, in trying to hire an interpreter to work with me at the beginning of my study, three Somali interpreters declined the opportunity. One refused because of his gender (as he did not want to be interpreting for Somali women), one because of potential clan disagreements, and another because of not wanting to “invade” the lives of another Somali family. As a non-Somali,
I was forgiven these issues and welcomed into their home despite my lack of cultural finesse. Consequently, even though one might assume that my cultural insight into the Russian culture might have afforded me a bias as a researcher towards the Pavlova family, I think the dual insider and outsider roles which I carried respective to each family, in fact, balanced my perspectives of both families. This initial entrée at the start of the study into both family contexts as both an insider and an outsider helped shape my final resulting in an emic perspective of the ethnographies of both families.

Each family member regarded me slightly differently throughout the study as well. From the Pavlovas, the father trusted me enough to allow me to observe him during difficult testing situations. His daughters both ran home from playing outside to greet me when I arrived for a visit. They smiled and waved to me when I entered their classrooms. Their mother phoned me for advice and asked for my help in delivering presents to family members in Russia on a visit after the study concluded. From the Omars, Halima and her own mother regarded me with respect as an English teacher, offering me the best seat in the room and bringing me refreshments. Daughter Fatima regarded me rather like an older sister asking for my help with assignments and calling to check on me when my first child was born at the end of the study. Abdi viewed me very much still as “Ms. P” asking me to help him resolve school problems and get him excused from classes. As such, my relationships with the Pavlovas and the Omars were very different yet both quite “symbiotic” in that all participants gained something from the relationship.

In the next part of this chapter, I describe and summarize what I “gained” as a researcher in this study--the literacy issues and developments for the six individual study participants. I begin with the Pavlovas and describe first the background and literacy
history of the father, Ivan, then for his older daughter, Marina, and finally his youngest
daughter, Sveta. Next I describe the background and literacy history of the Omars
starting first with the mother, Halima, then her teen daughter, Fatima, and finally her
younger son, Abdi. Samples of each of the six individual’s writing are presented in
Appendix E. After these individual presentations, I return to a comparative view of the
six participants and discuss the issues found to be most salient in influencing their L2
literacy development. Finally, the chapter concludes with data analyzing their L2 literacy
development during this study and the strategies which helped them progress.
Ivan

Individual Situation

Ivan is a 44 year old educated family man who has completed his high school education near Moscow and then graduated from a Management institute in Moscow, Russia, where he also studied some computer programming. At the time when he left Russia he was working in a real estate managerial/accounting position. When he arrived here in the U.S., he began studying English first in a community based ESL program and then matriculated into a community college. He is continuing his studies at the community college in order to improve his English and computer programming skills.

In addition Ivan works part time for the college as a work-study student assisting the assistant accountant where he files and does data entry and other office tasks. His attempts to find a regular job have thus far been thwarted by his lack of English skills (even for a Russian company in town) or computer programming skills. As a result, he continues to study, biding his time until his skills elevate his employment potential. Ivan’s hobbies include driving a car, watching the stock exchange, reading newspapers in Russian and English, and visiting art museums around the state with his family.

Personality

In terms of personality, Ivan is a “low key” relaxed person who speaks his mind in the presence of his Russian speaking friends and family. Though often very shy to speak in class and called “reticent” by his speech teacher, he was always very willing to speak English with me during our interviews. He spoke haltingly with errors but was
willing to sacrifice accuracy for fluency in his speech, even at the risk of being corrected by his wife and daughters.

**Issues in Literacy Development**

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Ivan’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of his literacy learning as a child learning both Russian and later German as well as his experiences as an adult learning English. Furthermore, I present some of his memories of reading and writing in the context of his family and later in school and college settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure he experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of him during this time.

**L1 Learning/Family and Childhood**

As a child, Ivan recalls learning to read when he was eight years old. Although he did not do any reading before beginning school, he does remember his mother reading children’s books to him. In turn, he remembers later reading those same books to his younger sister and eventually to his own daughters. He also recalls as a child seeing both of his parents read for relaxation after they would come home from work. Ivan reports that he would see them reading newspapers and classic books and occasionally they would write letters to relatives.
**Russian Ranking**

Ivan self ranks his reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in Russian all at the top score of five (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest). He considers himself a member of a large community of literate Russian readers who have studied in school and are therefore able to read and write. He claims that the Russian language is simple because “how I hear is how I can write” the language.

**Foreign Language experiences:**

His experience learning a foreign language, German, began in high school and continued later in the university/institute. He ranks his current German skills (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) with an average three for reading, writing, and listening, and a lower two for speaking, though he claims to remember very little German overall.

**General Literacy Issues**

**Language Input and Type**

Although Ivan claims that he is immersed .5% of a day in an English speaking environment (with the other 99.5% being Russian), this in fact seems slightly exaggerated. Though he speaks Russian with his family and friends, he does attend school and his work study five times a week for about seven hours each where he is exposed to some level of English.
At work, he says that he supplements any communication problems with hand gestures and if he becomes too tired he retreats to finding the one Russian-speaking co-worker in his work study office and defuses with him. As such, since he functions in an accounting position, Ivan clarifies that the “real” language of his work place is “math.”

In an academic L2 setting, Ivan first attended community based adult English as a Second Language courses for a few hours several times a week. By the beginning of our study, Ivan had transferred to the community college and was enrolled in an intensive ESL language program having already completed two intensive ten week quarters of a ten credit course. During our study, Ivan was enrolled for at least six to ten quarter contact hours at the community college in courses ranging from ESL to Computer Programming.

<table>
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Table 7: Courses that Ivan took during the year

Ivan attended classes and works in his work study position five days a week where he is exposed to English. He estimates that he spends about seven hours a day on campus.
either working or studying or in class. At home he claims to spend six hours daily studying English and/or computer programming.

Though Ivan owns and frequently uses a computer at home and at work, it is interesting to note that his family had no television, a frequent source for language input in a target language country, until the end of study. For immediate news updates during the course of our study, Ivan relied on computer news, the radio, or newspapers.

**General Literacy functions**

When asked to comment on what he thinks it means to be “literate,” Ivan responded that it means that a person is able to read and understand books, newspapers, and websites. He explained that literacy develops solely as the result of learning. He contrasted this with oral skills when, for instance, a person might be able to listen and understand a language and speak in response but if they are not literate they are not able to write a response.

**Reading:**

Beyond reading an occasional classic book for fun, Ivan regularly reads documents for work and deals with bills and school memos for family issues. He gets his news from both Russian and English newspapers and websites. News from Russia comes via the internet or letters in Russian. Culturally he seems to think that Russians read more in more locations (i.e., on the subway, bus, trains, etc.) while he usually only sees Americans reading in libraries.
In an every day context, Ivan reads several types of texts including textbooks, newspapers, classic books, web pages, and various work documents in English. He reports that on an average week he reads four English newspapers such as the local newspaper and also want ads for job postings on local internet sites.

**Writing:**

Though he alone responds to many of their current household bills and letters in writing, some are decided and attended to together with his wife—a pattern that he claims they developed as a young couple in Russia. When Ivan corresponds with family and friends in Russia, he writes letters and emails in Russian. The only writing in English he reports to have to do regularly is for work and for that, he explains, he often works from a template or form letter to write thank you letters, resumes, or cover letters. Occasionally he also sends instant messages for work in English.

**Summary**

Exposed to reading and writing early in his childhood, Ivan has shared his literacy tradition with his own children both in English and in Russian. Ivan is an active reader in Russian and in English and he enjoys reading on topics of interest to him. However, Ivan writes only when compelled to by work, school, or other familial obligations.

While Ivan’s personal estimation of his immersion in English versus Russian seems askew considering the 99.5% versus .5% breakdown, in fact, he seems to spend a good deal of time exposed to English and completing various English literacy tasks. As his home environment still functions in Russian, with the exception of his assignments,
he may not yet feel comfortable in his level of English fluency and rather still feel like he is “drowning” in the L2 environment. His estimate for his ratio of exposure may be more indicative of a comfort level—especially considering how frequently Ivan turns to Russian speaking classmates or colleagues for assistance during class or work when he needed some sort of clarification.

**L2 Development: Learning English**

**Goals:**

At the beginning of this study, Ivan remarked that one of his goals in learning English was simply to learn to read and write better. He could already tell his proficiency had improved, though, citing that when he arrived in America he could only say “Hi” and “Bye” in English and only knew the alphabet.

Ivan’s main goal by the end of our study was to learn English and computer programming to get a job. Ivan says that he does not really want to study but understands that he needs to speak English well and so he continues his studies. He explains that if he were satisfied to work in a labor position English would not be so important and he could have stayed in Russia, but he still holds out hope for working in a “white collar” position in the U.S. where English is necessary. Until then, he feels “uncomfortable” with his current work situation. He explains, “I am going to the college because I have welfare and need to work off this assistance. I have a university education in this field. I am looking for a job as programmer and sending a resume. This is a main think for me.”

(Email 4/24/01 #31).
Academic Literacy Issues

Writing tasks/text types:

I had an opportunity to observe Ivan in four of his courses at the community college over the course of one year. Two of these courses were ESL reading and writing classes and two were ESL speech and conversation classes. Based on the course syllabi from the reading and writing classes, Ivan was expected to write several paragraphs and short essays based assignments as well as journal about and summarize texts that he had read for class. Writing accounted for nearly 80% of the course work. Occasional short answer and essay tests were also administered as part of these courses. For his speech classes, his writing assignments were limited to notes supposedly taken during interviews, writing dictionary definitions of new vocabulary, and creating note cards for speeches.

While visiting these classes, I collected copies of the assignments and texts that Ivan wrote for the purposes of these courses. I also asked him to allow me to copy essays that he had written during the quarter previous to our study as well. While observing these classes, I watched in particular for the types of writing assignments and tasks required of him in class. In the lower level writing class, on the day that I observed, the only writing required of Ivan was a collaboratively written position statement on his group’s opinions of gun control. Ivan did not record or write for the group but he did read their statement to the class. In the upper level ESL writing class that I observed, Ivan first wrote a cloze vocabulary quiz and then later wrote during the class period
conferenced with the teacher on the first draft of a cause-effect essay that he has drafted for homework. At the end of the class period the teacher announced that she would expect the students to write peer reviews of their partners’ essays during the next meeting.

Initially, I began collecting these text assignments from Ivan that he reported to have written for his courses. This collection includes a diagnostic paragraph, a comparison-contrast paragraph, an argument composition, a timed descriptive essay, a descriptive essay, a cause-effect essay. While the first four texts were written in a controlled classroom environment, the latter two were written as out of class multiple-draft assignments. The length of the texts ranged from a half page to two pages handwritten.

Ivan was always willing shared his texts with me. In fact, some that I was not expecting. Although I collected these “naturally-occurring” text samples from all of my participants throughout the course of our year of data collection together, I soon realized, thanks to Ivan, that this sampling could not be my only source of writing samples for their writing. I learned this the day when observing his upper level writing class, and Ivan turned to me and handed to me another text—a short vocabulary list. He explained that he recognized that I liked to collect his texts and so he thought I should have this particular one too. With that, he handed me his vocabulary list telling me that it was his “cheat sheet” for the vocabulary quiz I had just seen him take.

Indeed, I had watched him seemingly cheat through this quiz—looking over at his neighbor’s paper, talking with his neighbor in hushed tones, and passing this very “cheat sheet” back and forth to his Russian speaking neighbor, and even trading papers during
the quiz. In fact, based on the code of Student Misconduct provided for the course, Ivan was violating four statements of cheating and plagiarism. This all bewildered me as I watched the teacher sitting at the front of the room engrossed in some other reading oblivious to what was happening in her classroom. I was even more stunned when Ivan turned to me and handed me this “cheat sheet” revealing to me that he fully trusted me, perhaps based either on our rapport developed over the course of this study or my somewhat “insider” view of Russian social relations and culture. Handing me this “cheat sheet” was an admission to his guilt though he did not seem to view this as such—though I, as a university writing instructor, did.

In our after class debriefing on this particular day, Ivan told me informally that this particular course really did not meet his need to practice English speaking (it was after all a reading and writing course) and so to compensate, he would often “borrow” papers and journal entries from friends who had taken the course prior to him. Jokingly, he reported this was a sort of “business” that students had networked to navigate the course. Stunned, I appreciated Ivan’s confidence in sharing with me but soon realized that these samples could really not be a measure of his (or any of my other participants’) development as I could never be fully certain that the texts that I collected were written by the participants themselves (and not their friends). As a result, I implemented a regular routine of asking the participants to write periodically in controlled 20-30 minute timed environments where I assigned them a choice of topics. I was hesitant at first to sacrifice this option of collecting “natural” texts which the participants would have been writing anyway (for school or work assignments) and that I had not compelled them to produce but felt that to sustain our trusting relationship and rather than antagonize Ivan or
any of the others about the “ownership” of the natural texts, I would accept the texts as indicators of the types of writing tasks they were completing and not evaluate them for literacy development. As such texts were collected randomly as they were available. Selections that were made between texts favored a variety of text types when possible.

Of these “natural” texts which I did collect for Ivan, all were shorter texts that were based on descriptions of some idea or event. None of the texts relied on citing or synthesizing from other sources. The most frequently required rhetorical structures were description, comparison, contract, definition, and the establishment of causal relationships.

Of the classroom timed writings, Ivan received good scores ranging from a B to an 8.2 to 8.75 on an overall score of 10. For the out of class multiple-draft assignments, he received a 7.25 (again out of 10) for the one but no grade for the other as it was an earlier draft. Examples of comments from his teachers included “Clear but brief,” “Where is required outline? Prewriting?” “Work on variety and details,” “Proofread,” ”Good outline. These [points] look hindsight, are they?” “Fine expression.”

Though seemingly not too complex in task structure, Ivan seemed to do well on these writing assignments. His grades and comments from the teachers indicate that he is producing quality work for the course. Based on the insight that he shared with me about sometimes submitting assignments written previously by friends who took the classes before, the teachers’ comments about missing prewriting, outlines or early drafts suggested that he may indeed be submitting finished “polished” works but not his own. The good scores on the timed writing exercises do, however, seem to still indicate that he
was succeeding in the class although he may not have been motivated enough to do the work completely on his own.

**Writing process:**

Although I never had an opportunity to observe Ivan actually composing a text in a class, I watched him informally when he wrote for me on six occasions. Each time he composed in a linear process of start-and-stop rarely ever crossing out, revising, or editing any part of the texts.

When asked in an interview about his composing process, Ivan dutifully rattled off what he calls the five steps of writing process: “prewriting, outline, first draft, second draft, and final” (Text Based Interview 8/16/200) When asked about how he applies this he says that “when the person know what he is writing, it is easy.” He reported in fact that it takes him only one night to write a draft. When asked about whether it was more difficult to write an in-class timed essay, he said that “it is difficult [in class] because I can’t use ...” and then he motioned to a book.

In a teacher questionnaire about his writing, when asked about his writing process, the teacher explained that “He may use his choice of pre-writing; then topic sentence or thesis statement, rough draft, peer review, and second rough draft, and final draft. He has no problems following this format” (Butcher 8/13/2000). She had, however, not necessarily even seen him complete this entire process in class, and had in fact asked about missing draft components herself.

The speed of his drafting for out of class (home) assignments and his indication that he occasionally uses an outside source to help with his composing seem to
undermine Ivan’s actual application of the writing process. Also he reported that on occasion his daughters would help him with his writing. He is, however, very aware of the idea of drafting although he rarely implements it in practice.

**Reading Tasks and Text Types:**

While observing Ivan in his classes over the course of a year, I found that the general approach to reading was that class readings were shorter and longer texts were read primarily outside of class with occasional homework checks such as matching exercises or class discussion for comprehension checks. For example, in the lower level writing class, one day that I observed, Ivan brought a matching reading homework exercise to class which he had completed for a longer text.

Textbooks I observed Ivan using in some of his ESL classes were writing texts for ESL students (*The Process of Paragraph Writing*), ESL pronunciation texts (*Sounds Great*), and issues readers for high school students (*Close up Foundation-Current Issues*). Class content was supplement by different texts such as various parts of The United States Constitution, The Bill of Rights (study guide) and lines from famous speech excerpts including the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

When asked to self-report what he read over the course of the summer when our study was in progress, Ivan reported the following list: *Gobseck* by Onore de Balzak, *Writing Academic English* by Oshima and Hogue, *Models for Writers* by Alfred Rosa, *Beginning ASP 2.0* by Brian Francis et al., and *HTML for the WWW* by Elizabeth Castro. Though the first text was for pleasure reading, it is certainly not indicative, even
in translation, of contemporary English usage. Two were for an ESL writing course he was taking at the community college and are commonly used in such courses. The two computer books were not for a course he took in the summer but were support materials for a course he would take that autumn.

**Reading process:**

When asked about the process he goes through when reading in English, Ivan responded “When I read, I understand. Because I know grammar, I understand” (Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). On other occasions, however, he did indicate that vocabulary can be an issue for harder texts—especially if the topic is not about computers. He also frequently referred to using a dictionary to decipher more challenging texts.

In class during observations, I saw reading as a process that ranged from mechanical oral reading with little or no attention to meaning to exercises in negotiating meaning in groups. For example, in one of his oral communication classes, the students read dialogues aloud for practice in word stress with no attention to meaning. In another speech class, Ivan’s teacher wrote proverbs on the boards and practiced them in choral repetition with the students and then explained them and asked for similar-meaning sayings from the students’ first languages. In a writing class, I observed Ivan meticulously deciphering a vocabulary quiz and the instructions for taking it. And in another, the reading process was more open with students discussing a homework reading that they had had on organizational patterns for writing cause-effect essays and then attempting to summarize this assignment for the class.
These observations as well as the reports by Ivan on his reading assignments seem to illustrate his overall proficiency as a reader. Well read in his native language, Ivan is able to transfer decoding and deciphering techniques to reading in English. Also, he is keenly aware of using his background knowledge in computers as well as classical story plot lines to guide him through some of his difficulties in reading in English.

**Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development**

Ivan has been exposed to numerous types of reading and writing tasks throughout this year. Beyond the basic pedagogical issues of literacy development in a L2, three main learning issues seem to be affecting Ivan’s reading and writing development in English: motivation, cheating, and disregard for suggested pedagogical processes.

As Ivan’s motivating goals for studying changed during this study from a more intrinsic motivation to learn English to a more extrinsic reality of looking for a computer programming job using English, the courses he took also shifted from being more language based to more computer content courses. Simultaneously as the ESL writing assignments required of him seemed to become more complicated and his dedication to spending more time on them seemed to wane, his motivation to complete all of his writing assignments without using outside help also declined.

Unlike writing, reading continues to be an enjoyable task for Ivan. Reading brings content that is of interest to him, and as a result he continues to read both in Russian and in English—especially on topics related to world news and computers. These motivations coupled with his methodical reading processes have guided him through more difficult English reading tasks.
As a result in the decline of Ivan’s motivation to complete all of his ESL writing tasks, the issue of cheating arose for Ivan as a student as well as for me as a researcher. Guarding our reciprocal research relationship, I adjusted my own means of collecting writing text samples while I watched for indications as to why Ivan was employing such a seemingly “unethical” approach to completing his assignments. At this point, it seems that both his general dislike for writing and his perception of mismatched needs between these writing assignments and his own learning goals may account for his unorthodox strategy. While this strategy of “borrowing” texts is certainly not acceptable nor necessarily expected in an academic context, Ivan’s motivations for employing such a strategy are generally of a survival nature and not maliciously intended.

A third learning issue for Ivan seems also to deal with writing and his disregard for the writing process. Although he understands and can recite the various steps in the writing process, his apparent disregard for implementing these drafting steps fully is somewhat puzzling. While writing teachers often recommend this process as a strategy to cope with longer writing tasks, Ivan, no fan of writing, seems to disregard it and attempts instead to get by with minimal drafting or changing of text. It is understandable that Ivan in disliking writing is avoiding it somewhat by minimizing his time spent with it although it would seem that using a drafting process might make the task more manageable and with that more palatable to him.
Changes in Ivan’s Literacy Development

To better understand how Ivan’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of his literacy goals, his opinions of how his reading and writing have changed, his own self rankings of his English language proficiencies, and informal evaluations by his teachers. Furthermore, I present measures of his writing and reading proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of his writing.

L2 Development

Ivan began to learn English only when he arrived in the U.S. He ranks his arrival English as a “zero” level knowing no English except “Hi” and “Bye.” When he and his family first arrived in America, he turned to his sister and her husband for help with communication issues. He recalls, for instance, that upon arriving in New York City he was unable to explain at the airport that he needed to find their way to Ohio. He called his sister and she clarified the problem. Later he began to rely on his daughters for help saying that his “daughters speak very well.”

Other than a basic understanding of the English alphabet upon arrival in the U.S., Ivan was unable to read or write English. One year later at the start of this study, Ivan did not consider himself literate in English because when he read an English newspaper, for instance, he could not understand all of the words in the article nor the words in his dictionary.
At the end of our study, Ivan reported that his writing and reading have both improved. In terms of his writing, he feels that he writes better using more English words and that in general he needs to write more texts such as memos for work and exams in his studies. He still does not enjoy writing in English and reports to struggle with spelling.

He reports that his reading is better at the end of the study because he feels he is able to read more letters and newspapers. “Hard texts are still difficult to read,” he reports, “but simple texts are easier.” If he does not know the vocabulary or is unable to piece it together from context, he finds reading hard. Overall, he feels that reading is easier to manage than speaking because when speaking one can forget words and “My mind doesn’t help me. My memory is short,” but in reading the words are stable and this allows him to learn new vocabulary. Though he does not enjoy writing at all in English, Ivan does enjoy reading books on topics that interest him or even the local city newspaper in English. In general he still prefers reading about computers or reading classic books.

**Self Rank**

When asked to rank his English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at both the beginning and end of this study, Ivan initially ranked himself with reading 4, writing: 3, speaking: 2, listening: 3. He explained this ranking saying that when he had first arrived in America every skill would have been ranked at “zero.” At the start of our study, he chose these rankings adding that the “four” in reading was because he could read and understand texts on computers fairly well but that if he had to rank his understanding of stories, he would give himself a “three.” Furthermore, though I did not
ask him about this as a separate category, Ivan offered that he would give himself a 5 in grammar.

Although Ivan’s self-ranking of his reading skills was the same at the end of our study, it is interesting to note that there were several fluctuations in his assessment of his writing, speaking, and listening skills. At the end of our study, he ranked himself as follows.

<table>
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<th>Ivan End of study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
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Table 8: Ivan’s Self Ranking of his English Skills

Reading seems to be the skill he feels most confident in, and so on some level it makes sense that his assessment of his reading proficiency in English would remain consistent. The drops in both his assessments of his listening and his writing skills are somewhat puzzling. Perhaps this is due to some experiences he has had at work or in his classes. Having attended several classes where he was held accountable on some level for the information presented orally by the instructor’s may have reduced his initial confidence in these skills. He had remarked that if he did not understand what was said in class, he simply looked at what the other students were doing and mimicked them.
This, as a coping strategy, may not have helped him so much to improve his listening comprehension. Also, the reality of being immersed in a target language context in more content area classes than ESL classes, where so much incomprehensible information may seem to almost “assault” the non-native speaker may have humbled Ivan’s initial opinions of his listening comprehension skills.

As to the change in his assessment of his writing skills, although he received good grades for most of the writing assignments that he did for his courses, the fact that these may have been bolstered by “assistance” from his friends may account for this drop in his confidence in his writing skills. Finally, this increase in his assessment of his speaking skills—the one skill area he most frequently mentioned to me as needing the most to be improved—may be the result of his being “forced” in numerous classroom situations over the course of the year to speak in English, possibly resulting in gains in his confidence. Also, these changes may be directly influenced by the language classes he had most recently taken—both in conversation and speech. There is an option too that these changes may be the result of a sort of Labovian Paradox whereby his behavior (or in this case his ranking) may have changed as the result of being observed by me. Ivan may also have felt more confident in his assessments of his skills earlier in our study when I did not know him as well, resulting in a sort of self-preservation or face-saving strategy before me at the end of our study.

Other rank:

Two of his instructors also shared rankings of Ivan’s language skills with me. His ESL writing teacher ranked his skills as reading: 4, writing: 3, speaking: 3, listening: 4
His ESL speech teacher ranked his oral skills as speaking: 3 and listening: 4 (5/17/2001). His speech teacher did not feel confident to assess Ivan’s writing and reading skills as the class understandably was mostly oral. These rankings by both Ivan and his teachers are compared below.

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<td>Listening</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Comparison of Ivan’s and His Teachers’ Ranking of his English Skills

It is interesting to note that both Ivan’s own rankings of his reading skills and his writing teacher’s assessment are consistent. The fact that she ranks his writing skills higher than he does may be an effect of her memory of his standing in her class. She says in fact, “His errors are mostly with articles, prepositions, and word order. He can use descriptive language well, and writes clearly” (Butcher 8/13/2000). Ivan’s lower ranking may also reflect his own disappointment in his writing performance in actual writing situations since then, or Ivan may also be hedging on his own evaluation knowing that not of all his writing assignments for her class were authored by him alone or that with his high value of grammar that not all of his grammar errors had been eliminated from his writing.

The congruency of ranking by Ivan at the end of the study and both of his teachers for his speaking skills suggests a level of common understanding of his ability to express
himself orally in English. What is more striking is the disparate rankings of “four” by both of his teachers of his listening comprehension skills while he gives himself a low “one.” Though again this is not a true indicator of his actual listening proficiency, it is curious to note that both of his teachers felt that he was understanding class lectures and conversation quite well in class while the student seems to be indicating that he did not at all.

Tracking Changes in Ivan’s L2 Literacy Development

Writing

Speed

Figure 2 illustrates the measures for Ivan’s speed in writing as measured at six points during the year. As can be seen, Ivan’s overall speed as measured in terms of words per minute did not fluctuate greatly over the course of our study.

Figure 2: Ivan's Writing Speed
While certainly not a measure of the quality of Ivan’s writing, these speed indices do illustrate the general pace at which he composes in English at around 8 words per minute. The steadiness of his pace shows a slow but deliberate speed which scarcely varied according to topic or to time interval.

Fluency

Figure 3 displays the measures for Ivan’s writing fluency as measured at six times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.

![Figure 3: Ivan's Writing Fluency](image)

While the total average word count for Ivan calculates out to approximately 83 words given a ten minute writing period, one must note that for the first measure he wrote for three minutes longer and for the last measure he wrote for only nine minutes. These
choices in how long he wrote were his own as I did not want to any way pressure him in an already seemingly artificial writing exercise. These numbers, however, do show a level of fluency in producing English text during a short period of time.

**Writing Proficiency and Accuracy**

Figure 4 illustrates the measures for Ivan’s syntactic complexity and accuracy in writing as measured at six points during the year.

![Figure 4: Ivan's Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy in Writing](image)

Although neither his proficiency nor his accuracy varied widely during the study, the measures of proficiency (average words per t-unit) did gradually increase despite one slight drop. Accuracy as measured by average error free words per t-unit seemed to increase overall though there were two cases of rapid rise and fall. These fluctuations
may be due to any number of factors including the writing prompts, his topic familiarity, or his stamina at that time.

**Holistic Writing Evaluations**

In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Ivan’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored all six of his writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in the following figure.

![Figure 5: Ivan's Average Holistic Writing Scores](image)

While the scores do not change dramatically for Ivan during the study, they do tend to increase slightly. This would seem to indicate that his overall writing proficiency may have improved during the course of the study.
Reading

Accuracy and Overall Comprehension

Figure 6 below illustrates the measures for Ivan’s reading accuracy and overall comprehension on three reading tasks administered during the year.

As can be seen, Ivan is generally more accurate in interpreting specific points about reading than in explaining his overall understanding of the whole text. This may be the result of his more careful word by word “localized” reading with emphasis on vocabulary and grammar than on the overall global meaning of texts. The juxtaposition of this relationship changed during the final reading measure. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Ivan attempted and consequently failed in answering specific reading comprehension questions than he had on the earlier measures.
Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development:

Overall, Ivan’s writing and reading in English improved during the year our study took place. While his writing speed remained fairly steady, his overall proficiency and accuracy in writing increased as indicated by both these respective scores and the independent scores of the holistic raters. His reading in English varied in that his overall comprehension of texts slightly increased yet his accuracy in discrete comprehension varied. As an adult learner, such slow but steady improvements are expected over time.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies

To better understand what helped Ivan’s literacy develop the most during this study, in this section I present an overview of his opinions of what learning and/or teaching strategies helped him in general with English and specifically in writing and reading. I also share the opinions of some of his teachers on these matters and my observations of these strategies in practice in his classes.

General Learning Strategies:

In terms of the learning or teaching strategies that Ivan seemed to advocate for learning English in general, his views seem to be classified into four major areas: native language support, content as motivator, teacher patience with the enduring process of learning, and the role of teachers, peers, and parents as learning guides.
On two separate occasions when prompted in interviews about helpful learning aides, Ivan referred to native language (L1) support. For the part of the teacher, he explained that “If teacher can speak in Russian, it is very good for beginner.” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000). Similarly, on another occasion, he suggested that textbook explanations of grammar should be in the L1 (Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Indeed on numerous visits to his classes, I observed him conferring with a Russian speaking neighbor for clarification of language issues. Certainly as an adult literate in his L1, requests for native language explanations would seem to be a common learning strategy.

Content as Motivator

In terms of content matter as a motivator, Ivan seemed to view this idea from three angles. From one view, he advocates simply learning English via another content subject (Literacy Exploration and Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). From another, he suggests that learning English is more motivating when that content is of interest to the student, which for him would be about computers (Final Interview 5/20/2001). And finally, he recommends that teachers know what content the student has already studied so as to avoid seemingly meaningless repetitions (Acculturation Interview 2/9/2001). Considering that Ivan’s learning goals are to establish himself in a computer programming career of some sort and not to pursue any more English language study than absolutely necessary, it seems quite rational for him to see content as a vehicle for motivating learning. His grades of all “A’s” for his computer courses at the community
college compared to a spread from “A” to “C” in his ESL classes seem to demonstrate support for his opinion.

**Teacher Patience**

Ivan was quite vocal about his belief that teachers must be patient with learners who are enduring the process of learning in a second language. He urged teachers to recognize that students learn to speak at different times even if they are placed at the same level and that until this happens to be patient. He recommends that teachers listen to their students and explain and re-explain everything to their students as much as needed (Acculturation Interview 2/9/2001). Having seen Ivan in situations like this where he was not at first understanding something but then soon with repetitions of explanations he was, I could certainly see how Ivan—especially as an adult learner—appreciated his teachers’ patience.

**Teachers, Peers, and Parents**

For learning support, Ivan relies on three agents: teachers, peers, and parents. His belief in the demanding role of teachers seems to be somewhat culturally defined. When asked about the difference between American and Russian teachers, he replied that Russian teachers are stricter in general about checking homework and asking questions of their students about their work and American teachers are less apt to check-up on their students and expect questions to come from their students. This belief of his may indeed have been confirmed when he realized that in certain classes in America he was able to
not complete the assignments himself and still receive good grades for the course without anyone checking up on him.

In terms of getting learning support from his peers, Ivan relied on his classmates for clarifications of questions in class and sometimes looked to them, literally explaining “If I don’t understand sometimes, I look what people do around me and I understand.” (4/24/01 Email #31). I have also observed Ivan on numerous occasions in class completing assignments in either partner or small group task structures which he always seemed willing to participate in. Of course, it would also seem obvious that Ivan’s trust in friends as “resources” for assignments is indicative of his respect for his peers and the knowledge banks they bring to the learning process too.

Finally, the contributor Ivan most strongly advocated for in the learning process was the parent. Overall he claims that “No teacher, no books, only if you stay at home with [the children]” is this helpful for learning (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000). He backed this by saying “I think if my wife and I don’t help, [our] daughters can’t know what they know now.” This role for parent support is especially transparent for him as a tutor for his girls in math and science—two subject areas he believes American educators to be particularly weak in (Final Interview 5/20/2001). Ivan does indeed step boldly into this position of helping his girls with their school work as does their mother. Having seen his own parents in the role of reading books and stories to him, he has perhaps learned this responsibility based on modeling in his own childhood.
Unhelpful Issues and Strategies

In terms of unhelpful strategies or issues complicating Ivan’s learning, he mentioned four major issues—two being interpersonal issues (avoidance and speed) and two being pedagogical (incomplete assessment and mismatched needs).

Avoidance

One issue that seemed to hamper Ivan’s opportunities to improve his English by interacting with native speakers was what was perceived by him to be “feigned” bouts of complete incomprehension of his speech in order to avoid asking him to repeat or clarify what he was saying. For example, when asked what a barrier to his communicating in English was, Ivan replied that when he asks “for help and Americans pretend they can’t understand me” (Acculturation Interview 2/9/2001). The reasons for such avoidance may be numerous including even honest misunderstanding, but for a larger Midwestern city and state capital, one would expect (and even hope) that the population would be somewhat accommodating and even previously experienced in communicating with non-native English speakers.

Speed

Another challenge to communicating in English that Ivan brought up was when people speak English too quickly. An obvious challenge to any second or foreign language speaker, this particular issue seemed to be becoming a somewhat more sensitive issue for him in that already half way through our study, Ivan was commenting that his daughters were already able to “outpace” his speaking in English (Acculturation
Interview 2/9/2001). As a parent, this must certainly be a somewhat daunting (and perhaps even embarrassing) issue.

**Incomplete Assessment**

One of the pedagogical issues that Ivan found to be unhelpful in facilitating learning English was what seemed to him to be incomplete assessment of the learner’s achievement and progress. He argued for instance that “American teachers don’t want to know if children have knowledge—[and they] go forward whether students understand.” This explains what he considers to be the reason why Americans “don’t know math” (Final Interview 5/20/2001).

**Mismatched Needs**

Another challenge to learning English for Ivan has been the requirements for him to take ESL classes at the community college which do not fit his perceived needs of learning. Wanting to focus on speaking, he felt quite demotivated to be forced to take a course in writing. In turn, he did not fully invest himself in the class nor was his grade for the course as high as for others. In considering this issue, even if program directors were able to persuade him to take the course, seeing no future in academic writing for himself at the time, the course never ever really gained any meaning in his life. He even felt inclined to point out to me mismatches between some of the learning tasks for the course and his own goals citing examples of such mandatory vocabulary words including “travesty, measly, and incipient.” He viewed these as highly literate words that would
probably not be terribly useful to him as he wanted only to be conversing in every day English and working as a computer programmer.

Overall it seems the learning strategies most helpful to Ivan have been to turn to others for support when he needed it as well as to rely on his native language as a means of clarification. Patient interlocutors encouraged his learning while teachers unaware of his content learning interests or personal learning motivations were not as helpful for him.

**Writing Strategies**

When asked about what was most helpful in terms of learning to write in English, Ivan replied with five main issues: dictionaries, knowing grammar, vocabulary, and rhetorical structures, and his family. Dictionaries were helpful for him in managing spelling issues in English as well as checking on unfamiliar vocabulary. His preference—surprisingly for a computer fan—was for an “old fashioned” book dictionary and not an on-line word processing tool. When asked how he would advise a friend just beginning to learn English, he recommended that his friend “Study grammar. After that they [teachers] need to tell you words because if you don’t know words, you can’t do” (Literacy Exploration and Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Both learning grammar and new vocabulary words are important to Ivan and were mentioned on several occasions during our visits together. Even so, Ivan has recognized the importance of knowing more global rhetorical organizational techniques to facilitate his writing. For instance, when asked about a past timed writing exercise when he compared his Russian
home town with his American home town, Ivan replied that now in hindsight knowing how to structure a comparison contrast paragraph he would be able to implement that organizational structure and produce a better quality paragraph (Text Based Interview 8/16/2001). Finally, when these tools or strategies are exhausted and Ivan still needs help in writing, he reports that he asks his family for help. This is interesting in that he does not ask his teachers for help nor the tutors in the community college writing center as he has found his family to be more helpful and accessible overall.

In observing Ivan in his ESL classes at the community college, I saw two of Ivan’s preferred writing strategies in practice: vocabulary building and rhetorical organizing. In several of his classes, vocabulary definitions were explained and often tested for usage in discussion or quiz formats. Rhetorical and organizational strategies were also discussed in class and were often--depending on the course--the basis for reading for homework.

Other helpful writing strategies that I recognized as a writing teacher myself but which Ivan did not mention as being particularly helpful to him were discussions of the writing process, audience awareness, and general student preparedness. For example, in his advanced ESL writing class, the teacher both reviewed and described the writing process with the whole class and then also met individually with the students to conference about narrowing and planning to write their topics. Adjusting writing according to audience was also addressed in at least two ways—both using the class as the audience for group collaborative assignments written in class and in terms of task type, especially argumentative assignments requiring awareness of both pro and con sides of an issue. Students’ being prepared for class was also a strategy which seemed to
intuitively aide the students in their writing. Ivan modeled this himself on numerous occasions when, for instance, he came to class having already written his thesis statement for his essay for homework while other seemingly less prepared students rushed to craft one before class began.

When I asked Ivan’s ESL teachers what advice they would give Ivan to improve his writing, two main strategies arose--practice and organization. While recognizing his writing strengths, his writing teacher still suggested that Ivan “write daily to reinforce his strengths which are sentence variety, descriptive language, use of transitions” (Butcher 8/13/2000). Organizing his thoughts in his texts was both lauded and recommended for Ivan. His writing teacher suggested, “He needs to develop his ability to write a topic sentence with a controlling idea. Narrow his topic to one that is manageable. Strengthen his grammar and punctuation skills” (Butcher 8/13/2000). His speech teacher, on the other hand, pointed out that “Ivan did quite well with organization of his speeches. He has a very logical mind” (Schnee 5/17/2001). Interestingly, neither teacher indicated that he needed to focus on grammar or vocabulary—the two most important strategies for writing well, as far as Ivan was concerned.

**Reading Strategies**

When asked about what was most helpful in terms of learning to read in English, Ivan recommended three strategies: begin at an early age, prepare readings before class, and learn vocabulary. Although Ivan did not read in English to his daughters at a young age, he does recognize the potential positive contribution of learning to read in any language at a young age and did read in Russian to his own daughters just as his own
parents had read to him as a child. Ivan, in fact, recommended that parents begin reading to children when they are already one year old (Final Interview 5/20/2001). Reading assignments before coming to class also helped Ivan so that when in class lecture or discussion and the “teacher tells me [about the reading] I can know a little better, I know what they talk about.” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000). Ivan exhibited this “preparedness” on several occasions finding to no surprise of most teachers that actually doing his homework helped him to follow the lectures in class. And finally, just as with writing, Ivan found that learning vocabulary was a strategy that helped him with developing his reading proficiency in English.

In observing Ivan in his ESL classes at the community college, I saw only one of Ivan’s personal reading strategy preferences in practice—learning vocabulary. Vocabulary definitions were often glossed from reading texts with explanations given in class. Ivan did seem to believe, though, that the vocabulary needs to be practical useful words as he found that the mandatory vocabulary lists in his advanced writing class were readily unusable in his everyday readings. When Ivan did not understand certain vocabulary words in class, he often defaulted to one of his general learning strategies and would ask a Russian-speaking neighbor for clarification about any unclear words.

Other helpful reading strategies that I observed in class as but which Ivan did not mention as being particularly helpful to him were the emphases on understanding both rhetorical organization and audience awareness. I saw this particularly in his writing classes which used model essays to facilitate the writing of certain rhetorical patterns. For instance, class texts were used to solicit examples for a group activity on writing argument statements. Audience awareness was also indirectly cultivated as a strategy for
reading when group “reporters” read and shared collaboratively written group texts to the whole class audience rather than depending on the teacher as the sole audience.

When asked what seemed to be the most helpful in facilitating Ivan’s reading progress, his teachers praised his preparedness for class which in turn directly built on his background knowledge. For example, “He always has his assignments and can discuss them adequately when called upon in class” (Butcher 8/13/2000). Already being familiar with the texts prior to discussing them in class seemed to work very well as a strategy for Ivan.

**Overall Summary on Ivan**

While Ivan’s writing and reading proficiency in English did not dramatically change over the course of our study, it seems that facilitative strategies were in place for improving his English literacy, albeit it nearly opposing strategies as implemented by Ivan himself or his teachers. Ivan, for example, preferred more micro-level strategies of vocabulary and grammar development. His teachers, however, seemed to recommend or use more global strategies such as focusing on textual organizational patterns and audience awareness issues. Ivan’s preference for more building block fundamentals rather than for more “big picture” strategies may be indicative of a more field independent approach to learning on his behalf. Making his teachers aware of this learning preference and Ivan himself aware of his teachers’ motives may conceivably have encouraged more efficient literacy learning for Ivan overall.
Marina

**Individual Situation**

Marina, the oldest of two children, is a delightful 13 year old girl easing into her teenage years. Marina was 11 when she and her parents and younger sister immigrated to the US from Moscow, Russia, to Ohio. Marina began elementary school here in the US in the sixth grade and in the seventh grade she moved to the middle school. At the end of sixth grade less than one year after immigrating to the US, Marina had passed both the writing and mathematics sections of the Ohio Sixth –Grade Proficiency Tests but scored below average scores in reading, science, and citizenship. During the seventh grade, Marina made it to the top of her school geography bee and won her school spelling bee. Marina spent two years in the ESL program in her district but then was exited after this period due to her progress and academic excellence.

Marina’s thorough study habits and attention to detail have won her much praise from her teachers and excellent grades overall. Teachers comment that Marina is a “strong worker” and “pleasant and hard working” and has a “positive attitude” and strong work habits. At the end of her second year of school in the US, Marina was carrying a 3.68 GPA and being honored on the distinguished honor roll.

Marina’s school attendance is excellent missing generally no more than eight days on average a year. Even though she remarks school is hard, Marina still overwhelmingly prefers attending school (than ever skipping or being home sick from school).
Marina’s hobbies include reading and drawing. On Saturday mornings, Marina studies at a local art college where she has won a scholarship to attend special classes in drawing. She often decorates book reports and other projects for school with elaborate drawings. Marina devours books both in Russian and in English—so much so that her exuberance to read in Russian has led her mother to begin hiding some of her favorite Russian books in order to force her to read in English. Marina spends her summers reading leisurely and babysitting for her teacher’s son.

**Personality**

Marina is a quiet and somewhat shy girl. One of her language arts teachers tells me that Marina is “very bright and is one of the best in the class though she is very quiet” (Observation 12/15/2000). Initially upon arriving in the US, she was especially hesitant to speak, as she was concerned about her accent. Now as she is adjusting and has gotten over this anxiety. She is speaking more though she still only has a limited number of close friends. She works well with other students in small groups but occasionally gets lost in larger groups. Even so, entering her pre-teen years she was willing to speak up for herself in smaller classes despite any teasing from boys in her class.

**Issues in Literacy Development**

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Marina’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of her literacy learning as a young child in Russia and later here in the US in her elementary and middle
school years. In addition, I present some of her memories of reading and writing in the context of her family and in school settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure she experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of her during this time.

L1 Learning and Childhood

As a child, Marina was often read to by her parents who both advocate and practice reading to young children. One of her first memories of a reading experience in Russian is of her mother reading a picture book to her (Initial Interview 7/19/00). Even up to the time during our study, Marina reported that on evenings when time permitted her mother would still read a story to her and her sister (Literacy Measure #1 5/13/00). At home, Marina often sees both her mother and her father reading books and newspapers, and she has adopted her parents’ preference for reading classics, art histories, and biographies though she has begun to read more contemporary writers as they have been assigned through her school work. Marina also sees her younger sister reading and recognizes that she reads more in English than in Russian.

One of Marina’s earliest memories of writing is learning to write the Russian alphabet when she was about six years old. Now when she writes in Russian it is generally for correspondence purposes—letters and emails to relatives and friends.

As the older stronger English speaker in her family, Marina is occasionally called upon by her parents to help with interpreting, such as calling the doctor’s office to make appointments. Though she claims to not enjoy this simply because she does not “like to speak with adults,” she explains that she always does what her parents ask of her.
(Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/00). As such, she continues to speak only Russian at home with her parents unless she has to help them with something in English and occasionally she humors her younger sister by speaking English with her when she is “showing off” (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01).

**Russian ranking**

When asked to rank her language skills in Russian, Marina self ranks her reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in Russian all at the top score of 5 (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest). Even her American teachers recognize that she excels in Russian, noting that her choice of readings in Russian is “several grades above her peers” (Brandt 8/6/2000).

**Foreign Language experiences**

Marina’s experiences learning a foreign language began with the study of English in the first grade in Russia, which was then later supplemented by brief experiences learning German and Spanish. For five years in school in Russia, Marina learned English grammar, reading, and writing at what she reports to be an “A” level of performance. She remembers learning to write the alphabet in English, the names of the months, and vocabulary words. Eventually, she recalls reading short stories included in English grammar textbooks (Initial Interview 7/19/00).

At a later point, she began to study German though not so extensively as English. She ranks her German skills (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) with an average 3.5 for reading, writing and a higher 4 for listening and speaking. Later here in the US in sixth grade, Marina began a brief course in elementary Spanish as part of an
exploratory foreign language program, which she finished satisfactorily. By the end of our study, she had begun to consider studying Spanish or French in the eighth grade, when she would exit from the ESL program. Although somewhat sporadic, clearly Marina has had positive and successful experiences learning foreign languages.

**General Literacy Issues**

**Language input and type**

A typical week for Marina includes five seven-hour school days immersed 100% in English followed by homework in the evenings. However, at home in the evenings or on weekends, Marina spends nearly all of her time speaking in Russian unless an American friend telephones. At school she speaks English most all of the time though occasionally she speaks Russian but only in her ESL classroom as she feels that in other situations the other students would tease her about speaking another language (Accult 2/9/01). In fact, a student teacher and also a Russian speaker, who worked with Marina’s ESL course remarked to me that she heard Marina speak Russian with her classmates only about three times a week (Observation 5/31/01).

Following her five years of school in Russia where she studied English as a foreign language, Marina spent a quick three summer months adjusting to being in the US when her family immigrated here in June of 1999. Then in September, Marina, as reported by her sixth grade social studies teacher, “took a swan dive right into sixth grade—graceful and confident, yet willing to take a risk” (Heinemann 8/3/2000). During the sixth grade Marina took a full load of classes and received ESL services in the form of a twice weekly pull out program that supplemented her studies. In seventh grade,
Marina took all regular grade level classes with her peers as well as an additional daily class in ESL. All of her classes took place completely in English (with the exception, of course, of her Spanish class).

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Language Arts 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Science 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Social Studies 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Fine Arts 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Family Consumer Science 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Technology 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>General Music 7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physical Education 7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Health 7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ESL</td>
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</table>

Table 10: Courses Marina took during the study

**General Literacy functions**

When asked about “what it means to be literate,” Marina replied that it means that a person is able to spell all words and punctuate correctly as well as get the meaning of a whole text when reading (Initial Interview 7/19/00). She views printed language as functioning to send messages, keep diaries, and put thoughts in words (Final Interview 5/20/01). She makes no distinction of any sort of between being literate in English or in Russian. She feels that being able to read and write in either Russian or English is equally important as then you can do all of your assignments, read all signs and books, and simply enjoy the language. Though with the mountains of junk mail and legal
documents here in the States, she does feel that writing is emphasized a bit more here in American culture (Final Interview 5/20/2001).

**Writing**

Marina writes often both in English and in Russian though obviously more in English. She translates vocabulary and makes Russian-English flashcards to learn new spelling and reading words. She also writes occasional letters and holiday cards to her friends and relatives in Russian. In English, she writes daily for school assignments assuming a seven hour school day and at least two to three hours of homework each evening. Marina also participates actively with her parents in writing by both helping her father with some of his community college assignments and letters he needs written and by receiving editing and idea generating help from her mother about her own assignments.

**Reading**

Marina is a voracious reader. When required to read 1 out of a list of 8 books over the summer for school, Marina read 3. When asked about the types of books she likes to read, she responded “big books” (Initial int. 7/19/00). These books are mainly classics and are mostly all in Russian. Her love of reading was quickly recognized by her teachers at school. “Marina mainly will read in her native language; however, she must do research and focus her library skills in English…..Pleasure reading, however, is a different matter. She reads in Russian at a very high level, several grades above her peers. She reads constantly and almost no ‘junk.’ Her choices are the classics, biographies on painters, historical-type fiction” (Brandt 8/6/00). Another teacher
concurred saying that Marina prefers “reading classics and non-fiction or culture related stories” (Markson 8/13/00).

Summary

Although even at the end of our study Marina still preferred reading in Russian to reading in English, she is obviously a very literate child and is making great progress in English. She excels in reading and is fine tuning her writing skills. Though her attention to accuracy may slow her down at times, her strong work ethic and quality of work are advanced.

L2 Development: Learning English

Goals

At the beginning of our study, Marina’s main goals in learning English were to improve her pronunciation and extend her vocabulary base. She explained that when she first arrived in America, she needed to learn more words and especially to work on “Americanizing” the British English pronunciation she had learned in school in Russia. Also, she found at the beginning that understanding the vocabulary for class assignment instructions was also particularly tricky. She attributed part of the reason for these lingering difficulties to the fact that her English teachers in Russia were non-native speakers (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/00).

By the end of our study, Marina was seemingly less concerned about pronunciation and recognized that her conversations in English were becoming more “natural.” She also felt that she was getting a better grasp of vocabulary and was even
recognizing that at this point she was able to perform better than some of her American classmates on some reading and writing assignments. As her future goals include studying in college—perhaps to be a scientist—Marina hopes to still polish her English grammar some more (Final Interview 5/20/2001).

**Academic Literacy Issues**

**Writing tasks and text types**

In English, she writes daily for school assignments. Besides short compositions, summaries, and poems for her language arts classes, she often engages in other writing tasks in other classes such as note taking, spelling definitions, research notes and reports, letters of inquiry, invitations, response worksheets, and other correspondence (Brandt 8/6/2000 and Heinemann 8/1/2000). Marina reports having to regularly write journal responses about readings for several of her classes. Also for a social studies course, she was required to periodically submit summaries and reflections of current events in the news.

In the numerous observations I made of her classes, I saw that Marina was required to complete several types of writing tasks for school. As shown in Table 11 below, these samples of tasks I observed can be classified into six functional categories linked across disciplines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Information Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete linking verb worksheets</td>
<td>Report on cultural artifact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence parsing</td>
<td>Display information for poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify parts of speech</td>
<td>Summarize book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Creation</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize paragraph structure</td>
<td>Create fictional story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-writing brainstorm/webs of topics for topic generation</td>
<td>Create rhyming &amp; non-rhyming poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free writing/journaling for idea extension</td>
<td>Outline problem solving suggestions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study skills</th>
<th>Responding to Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note taking</td>
<td>Respond to texts in reading journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary assessment</td>
<td>Practice paraphrasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography construction</td>
<td>Summary writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall of poetic devices</td>
<td>Write chapter reading study guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master spellings lists complete with parts of speech and definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Assignment Task Types in Marina’s Classes

Collecting samples of the texts that Marina wrote for all of her classes was a rich and fruitful endeavor. Marina was always very willing to save and later share her writings with me. Her end of the school year piles accumulated vast quantities of paper from all of her classes but mostly from language arts, ESL, and social studies. The samples of texts Marina wrote for her classes and I collected are illustrative of the same above literacy functions and tasks. The texts are examples of an end product for each task category as illustrated in Table 12.
Table 12: Text types from Marina’s Assignments

Although these texts were not randomly selected as they were chosen to show the variety of writing tasks that Marina typically faced in school, the comments across the board she received from her teachers on these texts do show very positive comments about her writing abilities or general English progress. Examples of her teachers’ comments follow in Table 13.
Excellent thought! You do a good job, Marina. One impressive piece of work! Outstanding! Fantastic, Marina! Very interesting paragraph. Good organization and details.

I am so proud of your progress in class, Marina. Please come and ask me if you have any questions. Your English is improving a lot. Keep it up! Great job, Marina. You have improved so much this year! Excellent! Your English is very good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Comments</th>
<th>Comments on English Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent thought!</td>
<td>I am so proud of your progress in class, Marina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You do a good job, Marina.</td>
<td>Please come and ask me if you have any questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One impressive piece of work!</td>
<td>Your English is improving a lot. Keep it up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding!</td>
<td>Great job, Marina. You have improved so much this year!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantastic, Marina!</td>
<td>Excellent! Your English is very good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very interesting paragraph.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good organization and details.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Teacher Comments about Marina’s Writing

While it is certainly possible that Marina received some form of negative comments from her teachers on her writing, none of the 45 texts I collected had any negative criticism from her teachers. This attests, I think, to her fine work and to her teacher high praise for and value of her writing.

In terms of evaluative scores that Marina received on these texts, they too were generally very high if not “perfect” on several occasions. For instance, she received a score of 3.75/4 based on a district writing rubric for a paragraph on a social studies cultural fair her class hosted in sixth grade. In seventh grade, scores on the samples collected from her language arts, social studies, and ESL classes ranged from perfect or near perfect on most all of her assignments with one lower score of seventy percent on a paragraph about her five senses. Her overall grades, shown below in Table 14, for these particular classes were also quite high in the A to B+ range, indicating that her general performance in these courses was, like the comments and grades on her writings, exemplary.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition Scores</th>
<th>Other Written Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/10 descriptive paragraph (7th grade LA)</td>
<td>108/110 book report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/25 current events summary and response (7th grade SS)</td>
<td>40/40 vocabulary quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2 response paragraph</td>
<td>2/2 vocabulary quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45/50 directions paragraph (7th ESL)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10 composition on love of music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5 paragraph on winter vacation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/10 sensory paragraph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Teacher Assessments of Marina’s Writing

When asked to go back and assess her own writing on two assignments from the sixth grade, Marina felt that the evaluations and scores made by her teachers were fair (Text Based Interview 8/16/2000). Gaining confidence later in seventh grade, when asked to self-assess a current events project she had completed for her social studies class, she assigned herself four more total points (out of 25) than her instructor. This may perhaps be due to a slightly exaggerated value of her own skills or simply to difficulties in self-assessing at a mere twelve years of age.

Writing process

In observing Marina in the midst of composing a text, I have noticed that she is deliberate and methodical in her processing. She stops frequently to self edit and even erase when writing in a timed situation. When pressed for time, she does not usually draft or process through any planning steps.

When asked about the drafting process, Marina replied that she thinks “it is just a waste of her time.” One of her ESL teachers noted that Marina “would rather just sit and
write without any prewriting activities” (Markson 8/113/2000). Marina further explained that the only difference between one draft and another was that the final draft was “neat and clear” (Initial Interview 7/19/2000). In my collection of samples, there indeed were few differences rhetorically between drafts, just mainly grammatical changes as encouraged by comments by her teachers. In assignments for her classes, however, Marina was often required to submit various drafts with emphasis on the final draft being “neat” and sometimes even typed. If any major changes were evident, they were between an outline or list form, which had been required as part of the assignment and not between full text drafts. This may indicate a preference for initial planning and final polishing on the part of her instructors with little encouragement for major organizational changes once the draft was already initially in process. Or this may exemplify Marina’s methodical process of writing which although perhaps not terribly fast, as indicated by some of her teachers, is very thorough and often does not require as much major revising during the drafting process.

**Reading tasks and text types**

Over the course of our study, I either observed Marina directly reading the following texts or collected follow-up writing samples such as summaries and book reports about these texts. In general, the scope and variety of texts that Marina regularly read for school is quite substantial. For example, books which Marina read for her language arts classes in sixth grade included *Treasure Island*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Golden Calf*, *Pieter Bruegel*, and *King Midas and the Golden Touch*. Primarily, Marina read these and then summarized and responded to these texts
in her reading journal. Sometimes the assignments cumulated in a more formalized book report. In her seventh grade language arts class, which was integrated with her social studies curriculum, in addition to grade level textbooks, she read *The Old Man Who Made the Trees Bloom*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Roll of Thunder*, *Across the Centuries*, and numerous current event news articles. That year in her ESL class, she read at least one fictional novel, *The Outsiders*, and the class worked through a reading text, *Issues for Today*, and a rhetorical writing guide book, *Independent Writing*. When asked to self-report what she read during summer vacation when our study was in progress, Marina reported that in English, she read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott *Izzy Willy Nilly* by Cynthia Voight. Both were part of a required summer reading assignment for school although only one book was required. In Russian, she read *Gobseck*, *Eugenia Grande* and *Father of Gorio* by Onore de Balzak, as well as *One Last Glimpse* by James Aldridge, *Up the downstairs ladder* by Bel Kaufman, and *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger.

When asked about the kind of reading tasks or assignments she usually had for school, Marina replied that she needed to read (grade level) textbooks social studies, math, and science and that language arts involved at least twenty minutes of reading and then writing in response to that reading every day (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/00). Her teachers commented that in addition to the more “literary” reading tasks in her language arts classes, Marina was also accountable for reading spelling charts, math story problems, textbook content, encyclopedia research, and class notes (Brandt 8/6/2000 and Heinemann 8/3/2000). Marina explained that while it might take her American classmates about two hours to complete their homework including their reading
assignments each evening, it takes her about three hours. Still, she thinks she had more
reading assignments in school in Russia (Initial Interview 7/19/2000). Even so, she
explained that she liked most all of her reading assignments—especially in the seventh
grade—except when the texts focused more on animals than on humans, like The Call of
the Wild, which was not her favorite (Final interview 5/20/01).

Overwhelmingly, teacher comments about Marina’s academic reading abilities
seem to concur that she is a strong reader. In fact, both of her ESL teachers commented
that she was leader in reading in class. Marina seems to be aware of this belief in her
consistent reading abilities as she reported to me at the beginning of our study that she
reads only “big books,” i.e., lengthy classical texts (Initial Interview 7/19/00). One of her
teachers even commented that in her choice of reading texts, Marina seems “to have an
attitude where she places herself about the ‘typical’ reading of native speaker kids her
age.” While Marina never received a separate grade specifically for reading for any of
her classes, the high praise as well as the high marks she received for the classes attest to
her ability to navigate the reading demands and tasks of both her mainstream grade level
classes as well as her ESL classes.

Reading process
When asked about the process she goes about when beginning to read a text for
school, Marina described a fairly complex process. First once she has selected a text, she
looks at the title, any pictures, and looks through the pages. Then she reads the first
sentences to get a feel for the text. Sometimes she takes notes and writes short
summarizes as she reads—though not always in her own words, she admitted. Overall,

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she likes to read first for the general overall meaning. If she encounters problems in understanding something, she generally first asks her mother for help and only then defaults to using a dictionary, which she claims to not like to use (Exploratory Strategies Interview 12/21/2000).

Indeed of the classes of Marina’s that I observed and the numerous writing samples that I collected, reading for general understanding, summary writing, and response writing were common components of her assignments. Her grade level classes as well as her ESL class, however, often supported this general comprehension reading with vocabulary enrichment exercises and occasional scanning for specific informational component comprehension exercises. Marina or sometimes even her mother would create vocabulary and spelling cards complete with Russian translations and transcriptions to help her in learning new words for reading. Occasionally, I would see Russian translations of words written on her school worksheets though this tended to occur less often at the latter part of our study.

Also a few times a quarter in both her language arts and her ESL classes, Marina was required to read some text which she had authored to the class or to report on a book or article, which again resulted in her preparing a sort of “speech” to read to her classmates. She often felt nervous with these sorts of focused oral reading assignments because of her accented English pronunciation but generally received good scores.

**Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development**
Marina is both a strong writer and reader in English. While she prefers more her own minimalist process of drafting when she writes, she does follow a more “process-
oriented” approach to reading. Her class assignments demand a lot of daily reading and writing, which she completes at levels competitive with her peers. Marina is thorough and meticulous in her work and has substantial strategies in place for dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary when it interferes with her comprehension of a text. While she still prefers reading to writing and, at that, certain types of reading texts, she completes most every assignment well and demonstrates clear understanding of the assignment requirements, whatever the topic. Although she sometimes trades off fluency in her writing and reading due to her thorough careful nature of completing her assignments, her competitive driven nature to finish each literacy task well keeps her focused despite how long it might take her to complete them. Overall, Marina enjoys school and loves to read—both of which make completing academic literacy tasks for her school work a joy for her.

**Changes in Marina’s Literacy Development**

To better understand how Marina’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of her literacy goals, her opinions of how her reading and writing have changed, her own self rankings of her English language proficiencies, and informal evaluations by her teachers. Furthermore, I present measures of her writing and reading proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of her writing.
L2 Development

When Marina arrived in America, she had already studied English as a foreign language for four years in school in Russia. There she recalls learning the English alphabet, lists of words, reading short texts, and short grammar exercises (init inter 7/19/00). Though she had a foundation for English on arriving, she was acutely aware of the differences in American pronunciation from the British English she had been taught in school, in fact, finding these differences quite inhibiting at first. Also, she found initially that there were lexical differences, which were confusing as well. In general she felt her English skills were only average on arriving in the US (Literacy Duties 11/4/00).

Almost a year later at the start of our study, Marina felt a bit more confident. She was feeling more certain of her oral skills and pronunciation and less apprehensive about speaking. Her vocabulary was developing more as she was soaking in the target language at school. Although Marina still felt her Russian literacy skills were superior at the start of our study, she did already understand that her reading and writing skills were quite strong even in English.

By the end of our study, Marina’s overall English skills were so improved that she was due to be exited from her school district’s ESL program and to take only mainstream grade level courses with her classmates. In fact, based on the superior grades she was receiving by the end of our study, except for a few idiosyncrasies in her writing, Marina was a strong writer by the end and her reading skills often surpassed her classmates as well. Her ESL teacher attested to this saying that “Marina has always been a good writer. She has learned more vocabulary [this year] and thus is able to use this in her writing” (Markson 6/21/01).
Marina’s overview of the development of her English literacy emphasized a more “complete” understanding of her learning context at school and of each individual assignment. She felt that at the beginning of our study she was still missing the meaning of some texts that she read because of vocabulary that she did not know. By the end of the study, she was feeling more confident in her ability to decipher texts and to guess meaning from the context if she was reading a particularly difficult text. She felt, however, that her writing was about the same (Final Interview 5/20/01).

Self Rank

When asked to rank her English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at both the beginning and end of this study, Marina initially ranked herself at a 4 for both reading and writing and a 4.5 for speaking and listening. By the end of our study, she ranked herself with a 5 each for reading, writing, and listening, and a 4.5 in speaking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marina Start of study</th>
<th>Marina End of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Marina’s Self Ranking of her English Skills

Other rank

Marina’s teachers were also asked to rank her language skills on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). In comparison, these rankings at the beginning of the study by both Marina and her teachers are distributed in Table 16.
It is interesting to note that both Marina and her ESL teacher felt at the beginning of our study that her literacy skills were not as strong as her oral skills. However, her language arts and social studies teachers’ evaluations do not reflect this. This discrepancy may very well be due to the types of interaction Marina was engaged in in their respective classes, with the language arts and social studies classes being larger group mainstream classes and her ESL sessions being more intimate, perhaps allowing for her to speak up more and express her oral skills more fully.

One year later at the end of the study, Marina’s teacher rankings were similar to hers as shown in Table 17.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marina</th>
<th>Language Arts Teacher</th>
<th>Social Studies Teacher</th>
<th>ESL teacher 1 Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Start Comparisons of Marina’s and Teacher Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marina</th>
<th>ESL teacher 1</th>
<th>ESL teacher 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: End Comparisons of Marina’s and Teacher Rankings
While Marina’s own confidence in her speaking skills may be a bit higher than how her teacher ranked her, her teachers’ evaluations may be due to comparisons of her attempting to speak out in her seventh grade ESL class (now a full class and not a pull-out session like in sixth grade) which included some rather vocal and boisterous classmates who may have simply “outspoken” her.

It is interesting to note that Marina’s father when asked at the beginning of the study to rank her English language skills ranked her with a top score of five for all four skill areas. At the end of the study, however, he lowered his score for her speaking abilities slightly. The consistently high scores for her reading and writing reflect those of her teachers’ scores and so does this speaking score drop at the end of the study. While more than likely Marina’s speaking skills did not decline but her sister Sveta’s, who would stand to be a basis of comparison for their father, speaking did improve. In fact, although Sveta is younger than Marina she is less shy and perhaps then seems to their father to be a better English speaker than Marina.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent ranking</th>
<th>Marina Start of study</th>
<th>Marina End of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Parent Ranking of Marina’s English Skills
Tracking Changes in Marina’s L2 Literacy Development

Writing

Speed

Figure 7 below illustrates the measures for Marina’s speed in writing as measured at six points during the year. As can be seen, Marina’s overall speed as measured in terms of words per minute only fluctuated slightly over the course of our study.

![Figure 7: Marina's Writing Speed](image)

Although this measure of speed does not attest to any measure of the quality of Marina’s writing, it does show that her average speed is around 11 words per minute. While the fluctuations are not extreme, they may have been caused by issues such as topic choice. For instance, on the third topic where Marina was the slowest in writing, she elected to write about an American friend. As she at that point did not have a lot of American friends, she may have paused more frequently as she wrote, losing more time in the process although she did have a choice of two other topics for this writing measure. In the same respect, she may have written more quickly for the forth topic about her plans.
for her winter vacation as this topic was perhaps easier for her to envision and as a result may have “flowed” more quickly for her.

**Fluency**

Figure 8 below displays the measures for Marina’s writing fluency as measured at six times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.

![Figure 8: Marina's Writing Fluency](image)

The total average word count for Marina scores at around 140 words. The amount of time she was writing for each measure, however, must be considered as during the first measure she wrote for two minutes longer and for the final measure for two minutes less than the average ten minute writing exercise. While the period of time she took to write does influence the amount of text she was able to produce, overall, these scores do indicate that Marina is a fairly fluent writer allowing for variation in time and topic.
Writing Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy

Figure 9 below illustrates the measures for Marina’s proficiency and accuracy in writing as measured at six points during the year.

While at first glance it seems by these measures that Marina’s overall writing skills have dipped and then revived, overall her writing skills have remained quite stable with the average length of her sentences steadily increasing as well as the accuracy of her syntax and grammar improving overall. The unusual results displayed in the measures of her writing with the first two topics may be topic or rhetoric related. For instance, in the first case, Marina chose a prompt that asked her to describe what she does on a typical day. Her average sentence length in this case was quite large as she constructed long list-like sentences reporting her schedule verbatim for nearly every hour of the day. In the
second measure, she was asked to describe one of two pictures. Marina may have found this rhetorical task easier as it is more concrete and expository in nature or even her experience in drawing may have put her at ease for sighting and describing details in a picture. As such, it would seem that these two measures may not accurately reflect the overall quality of her writing. Instead, the measures should be considered in totality thus compensating for issues such as topic dependency or rhetorical demands.

**Holistic Writing Evaluations**

In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Marina’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored all six of her writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in Figure 10.

![Figure 10: Marina's Average Holistic Writing Scores](image)

With the exception of the final average score, the ratings for Marina’s writing fall fairly consistently between an intermediate four and higher five. As her other scores dropped slightly for the last measure, it is best perhaps to consider the sixth measure as affected
by topic effect or some other factor for her that day. Then considering the slight trend in increasing scores for the other five measures, these assessments seem to reflect the other increases seen overall in her writing proficiency and accuracy.

**Reading**

**Accuracy and Overall Comprehension**

Figure 11 below illustrates the measures for Marina’s reading accuracy and overall comprehension on three reading tasks administered during the year.

![Bar chart illustrating Marina's reading accuracy and comprehension](image)

*Figure 11: Marina's Reading Accuracy and Comprehension*

The texts that Marina was reading, summarizing, and answering comprehension questions about for the above measures were selected from a ninth grade proficiency test preparation book. As a sixth and then seventh grade non-native speaker taking these
reading tasks, her high scores indicate that she is a strong reader in English. Although one of her ESL teachers commented that she did not see extreme gains in Marina’s reading abilities in seventh grade, she did explain this as being the result of Marina’s already strong reading abilities. “She [Marina] is reading a book for my class and has already finished it. It’s a long one and her comprehension is good” (Mueller 5/6/01). While Marina’s reading skills are strong in English, especially in comparison with her ESL classmates, Marina might still benefit from increasing her reading speed in order to compete with her grade level classmates on timed reading tasks (Markson 8/01/00).

Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development
Both Marina’s writing and reading in English have increased during the study. Her syntactic complexity and accuracy in writing have steadily risen. Her reading comprehension and accuracy likewise improved at a strong stable rate. As one of the more proficient readers and writers at the beginning of the study, Marina has continued to progress though less dramatically then some of the younger or weaker participants who had more “room” for improvement.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies
To better understand what helped Marina’s literacy develop the most during this study, in this section I present an overview of her opinions of what learning and/or teaching strategies helped her in general with English and specifically in writing and reading. I also share the opinions of some of her teachers on these matters and my observations of these strategies in practice in her classes.
General Learning Strategies
The general language learning strategies that Marina seemed to find most helpful fall into four main categories: grammar, listening/speaking practice, taking time on assignments, having a peer school guide, and teacher awareness.

Grammar
Marina views grammar as a foundational system used to create language. She explained that every language learner needs to know the grammar of the language in order to communicate. She does hedge her claim, though, by saying that although grammar is helpful even in conversation, it is not everything and the learner needs to know more (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Still she advocated for beginning language learners’ mastering the grammar of the target language—a belief echoed by both her parents.

Listening and speaking practice
From her own experience arriving in America without much experience speaking in English, Marina advocates for learners to take as many opportunities as possible to “practice talking.” This is obviously a strategy that Marina has employed--perhaps at times a bit hesitantly--as she learned to navigate the intricacies of school over the year of our study and the months just before when she had arrived in the US. Though still described by her teachers as a shy and soft spoken girl, she has by virtue of being immersed in school for so many hours of the week learned to speak up a bit more and gained confidence in her own speaking abilities in English. Coupled with this was a recommendation from one of her earlier teachers that she (and other newly arrived non-
native English speakers) spend time watching television to practice listening to American English (Brandt 2/14/2001). During the course of our study, Marina’s family did not yet own a television but they had purchased one at the very end. I would suspect that at that point, Marina’s oral skills were quite advanced and that television would only complement her school experiences though I would expect television to still be quite helpful for her parents.

**Taking time on assignments**

Marina is a very conscientious student and methodical in her studies. This attention to detail coupled with the fact that her studies are being completed in a second language costs Marina a lot of time to finish her assignments. She, however, is patient and does not give up. In fact, she recommends that ESL students ask their teachers to give them extra time to complete assignments (Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). On one occasion when she was not able to finish a project on time and was consequently penalized for turning in her work late, both Marina and her mother were quite distraught about this. While a few of her teachers commented that Marina needs to learn to work more quickly, she is quite determined to not sacrifice the quality of her work to speed. Even so, over time she was able to work more quickly as both her reading and writing fluency increased.

**School Guide**

When I asked Marina about how she was able to “survive” the first few days in her new American school, she quickly recalled having a girl in her class unofficially
assigned to act as a school guide for her. Though she never became good friends with this girl, she was quite appreciative of her assistance in the beginning. In the same vein, one of Marina’s teachers indicated that this sort of “buddy system” is used to help all new students adapt to their school (Heinemann 2/15/2001) while another teacher pointed out that this could be even more facilitative when the peer helper also speaks the same L1 as the new student (Brandt 2/14/2001).

**Teacher awareness**

Faced with an odd problem of not looking any different from any “typical” American student in her school, Marina expressed an opinion that teachers who receive ESL students into their classes should be made aware of the student’s situation and where they come from. I suspect that part of the reason for Marina wanting her teachers to know this was the result of her transferring from the elementary to the middle school after just one year in the US while she was still receiving ESL services but her new middle school teachers did not automatically recognize her need for this support system. As a result she felt that her teachers should be told that she is not a native English speaker and that consequently her work may be in some ways different from her classmates’ or that she may simply need more time to complete this work. Caught as she was at this age of trying to “fit in,” Marina wanted her teachers to know her situation and take it into consideration, yet she did not really want to be treated any differently. She simply wanted her teachers to be aware.
Unhelpful Issues and Strategies:

Peer expectations

Marina herself did not directly admit that she employed any “unhelpful” learning strategies but she did indirectly indicate one to me albeit short lived. And that was simply her not learning about her school’s atmosphere before starting school. In Russia, the first day of school is a sort of festive holiday when all of the students come to school very dressed up in dresses and suits. Transferring this expectation to her new school, Marina showed up on the first day of school in her new American school too overdressed to “fit in.” Over a year later, she still recalled for me how embarrassing that was for her at first. While this was obviously not a threat to her learning, not knowing and understanding the expectations of her peers, especially in the pre-teen years, could become an isolating issue for certain students.

Though Marina did not mention any other unhelpful learning strategies herself, her teachers were able to recognize at least two others, which she may not have even been completely aware of herself.

Soft voice

Several of Marina’s teachers commented in the beginning of our study that Marina was very shy and soft spoken. Some explained that she was sometimes difficult to understand when she spoke not because of language issues but because they simply could not hear her. Though this might seem like an odd “complaint” by an American middle school teacher that her student is “too quiet,” this was clearly still somewhat of an issue for Marina at the end of our study as one teacher indicated that Marina needed to
learn to muster a “stronger tone” of voice in order to improve her English (Mueller 5/6/2001). Marina was aware of her needing practice in speaking English, but despite ongoing encouragement to speak up, she was still sometimes overshadowed by her introverted personality.

**Acting out**

Unusual as it was for a well behaved star pupil, Marina was party to a few instances of acting out against her teacher’s desires in her seventh grade ESL class. Both her regular ESL teacher and the student teacher commented on this short lived “rebellion.” This may have been due to Marina’s feeling more relaxed and able to “let loose” in her small ESL class as well as simply the issue of being a 12 year old girl in a middle school class with some rowdy male peers. Even so this distracted her a bit from her work and caught the attention of both of her teachers although it never merited disciplinary action.

**Writing Strategies**

The strategies that Marina employed to help her with writing in English fell into three main categories: know and learn the structure of the language, copy text when appropriate, and seek help in generating topics.

**Know and learn the structure of the language**

Simply stated, Marina felt that knowing English grammar and being able to manipulate it correctly is one of the best strategies a NNS could use in writing in English.
Thus when asked about helpful strategies specific to improving her writing, she reiterated her claim about grammar as a leading strategy. Interestingly, she also suggested that students “read books to know how to compose sentences” (Strategies Interview. 12/21/2000). While model essays are often used to show students how to write longer rhetorical essays, Marina felt that mimicking structures on the level of the sentence found in her every day reading can also be helpful.

**Copy text when appropriate**

Not that Marina was advocating plagiarism, she understood already from her ESL and language arts classes that she was not supposed to copy text, but she, exasperated by the number of summaries and reports she had to write for some classes, admitted to sometimes simply copying a few chunks of language from the original text. This strategy seemed to work just fine for her in certain cases when copying was far easier than paraphrasing. She used this strategy so sparingly though that her teachers did not indicate this as a problem. Instead, Marina felt she was still composing on her own and only borrowing small bits of text as needed and incorporating it into her own writing.

**Seek help in generating topics**

Marina admitted that sometimes one of the hardest parts of a writing task is to generate an idea to write about. She pointed out that occasionally her teachers would ask her to write a one page essay on anything she wanted, but she found that not having any idea of what topic to write on was harder than the actual writing. To combat these “blocks,” when at home Marina would ask her mother for help in generating topic ideas.
But when at school, Marina said she would not ask anyone for help but simply would “think” (Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Marina’s resistance to asking her teacher for help may have been a face-saving strategy or simply an introverted desire to not “bother” her teacher attending to seemingly more “needy” students.

**Modified teacher expectations for evaluation**

Though not necessarily endorsed by all teachers, one of Marina’s teachers explained that when it came to evaluating her writing for essay questions and some homework assignments, she would modify her expectations slightly (Hertzler 2/15/2001). This was for a content area class and not a writing class per say and was during Marina’s first year in the US. However, in her second year in the US, it was just such a “chance” that Marina felt her teachers still needed to consider giving her about her writing. Indeed on some of her writing assignments, her grade would be quite high and the teacher would point out only a few grammatical mistakes without lowering her grade because of these errors.

**Reading Strategies**

Marina’s strategies for improving her reading in English seem to have evolved from more word level strategies to more global meaning seeking strategies. The strategies she discussed for reading included practice, build vocabulary, careful text selection, comprehension “tools,” and translation.
**Practice**

Marina’s top strategy for improving her reading in English has simply been practice. She proposes that new ESL students simply need to “read lots.” To facilitate this, she suggests that teachers allow students to borrow books to take home to study, allowing perhaps more time for reading and sometimes even translation. Indeed, I often observed Marina in classes where when she had finished an assignment early, she would pull a book out of her book bag and make use of her extra time and read.

**Build vocabulary**

Part of reading a lot for practice, Marina explains, is building vocabulary. Even “little books build vocabulary” (Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Marina has undoubtedly understood as she has waded through numerous readings over the course of our study that the more she read and encountered new vocabulary, the more her vocabulary base expanded.

**Careful text selection**

Though this is undoubtedly something that most teachers consider, Marina herself suggests that when choosing a text to read in English, “Don’t choose difficult texts at first” (Strategies Interview 12/21/2001). For instance, she does not recommend choosing ones that a student would not understand in their L1. For example, she explained that when choosing current event articles for her social studies class, she was always careful not to overwhelm herself by choosing articles about politics or something that she would not understand in Russian. This astutely draws on contemporary pedagogical ideas of accessing students’ background knowledge.
Comprehension tools

Marina’s comprehension “tools” were dual in focus—a dictionary and her mother. Marina admitted to reluctantly using a dictionary if she absolutely had to when reading a text in English. She did not like to interrupt her flow of reading by checking words in the dictionary. Instead she preferred to ask her mother for quick translations. As a last resort, Marina would simply guess at the meaning of the words unless they interfered too much with her overall comprehension. Her preferred method was simply “parental input.” Obviously as Marina’s mother is well read and quite literate, this strategy worked well for Marina when reading at home.

Translation

Translation was a reading strategy that Marina employed at first not too long after she had arrived in the US, but later she abandoned except for occasional use. Apparently this was a productive strategy for Marina when she was initially struggling to grasp any sort of meaning from texts, but now as a more advanced reader she uses this sparingly. On her school papers saved from the sixth grade there were more translations scribbled in the margins of her assignments than later in seventh grade—indicating that indeed she had started to use translation as a comprehension strategy less and less.

Teacher suggested reading strategies

Two of Marina’s content area teachers suggested reading strategies that Marina did not mention, perhaps because they were so well integrated into the overall curriculum that they were not visible to her. The first teacher suggested offering ESL students
guided class notes and terminology guides to help with the reading texts in her social studies course (Heinemann 2/15/2001). This global approach to reading, though not mentioned by Marina as a helpful strategy for herself, was often used in her classes which had longer textbook chunks of material that both NES and NNS students were responsible for understanding. A second teacher recommended that content area teachers with ESL students spend more time checking for comprehension and try different ways to see if they really understood the text. He explained that simply asking “Do you understand?” is not sufficient as students may be too embarrassed to admit that they do not or simply may not know that they have not understood something (Brandt 2/14/2001).

In several of Marina’s classes she was given varied opportunities to express her understanding of a text summarizing it, responding to it, reporting on it to her class, and even illustrating it.

**Overall Summary on Marina**

While Marina’s reading and writing proficiencies in English did not skyrocket this year as she was already quite literate in English at the start of our study, her skills remained steadily on the increase. Her shift away from specific to more general strategies such as sustained reading, drawing on background knowledge, vocabulary enhancement, and meaning guessing have helped her cope with the increasing amounts of reading in her courses this year. Although a writing process of several drafts is often advocated in her classes, Marina continues to use this at a minimum, preferring to dive right in once she has a topic idea and proceed cautiously making only minor “polishing” changes at the end. Her reliance on producing accurate texts from the start may,
however, be hampering her overall fluency in her writing. Even so, Marina is both a
strong writer and reader in English and seems to have found her own way of navigating
literacy tasks in her young academic career.
Individual Situation

Sveta, the youngest of two children, is a sweet delightful 11 year old girl who enjoys the sixth grade. Sveta was 9 when she and her parents and older sister immigrated to the US from Moscow, Russia, to Ohio. In Russia she attended two years of elementary school and then she began elementary school here in the US in the fourth grade. At the end of fourth grade, Sveta received straight A’s for all of her classes and passed the mathematics section of the Ohio Fourth-Grade Proficiency Test. At the end of fifth grade as our study was drawing to a close, Sveta again received straight A’s for all of her classes. During this time, Sveta spent two years in the elementary ESL pull-out program in her district but then was exited after this because of her progress.

Already as a student in Russia, Sveta was showing potential as a good student though one who excelled more in “active” hands-on types of subjects. For instance, she scored high grades in English as a Foreign Language, Music, Physical Education, and Industrial Arts, good grades in Math, Art, and Social and Environmental Studies, and average grades in Russian Language and Literature (Russian School Records). Here in the US, perhaps given more flexible and multiple opportunities to express her individual achievements, she is a star student all around. Her teachers praise her commenting that she is “a remarkable human being. In all subjects, Sveta puts all her effort in to succeed.” (Vanwinkle, final 4th grade report card) and “Sveta is a wonderful student. She has the best work ethic of the entire 5th grade” (Kovach, final 5th grade report card).
Sveta thoroughly enjoys school. She has commented that she hates to ever miss school as she feels like she is missing out. Sveta’s school attendance is exemplary though she has fallen ill a few times these past few years. In her first year here in the US, she missed only three days of school but during the second year she fought off a flu that kept her out of school for 25 days total. Even so, her teachers and parents did all they could to support her by walking her to and from school and the school administration by calling home to check on her if she was not in school. Between their support and her enthusiasm for school, she did not allow these absences to hold her back.

Sveta’s hobbies include drawing, sewing clothes for her dolls, playing outside, and participating in sports like dance and gymnastics. Sveta, like her older sister, studies drawing in a special Saturday program at a local arts college. Her artistic abilities shine through in her art classes at her regular school where she often receives outstanding marks for her creations. Playing sports and running around outside are another past time of Sveta’s—especially when the weather is good. She likes to play with the neighbor’s children and just in general “run off steam.”

**Personality**

Sveta has a very pleasant and extroverted personality. Even though she was a brand new student in a new country with a new language, even at the beginning of our study she was rarely hesitant about speaking English, interacting with her peers, or volunteering in class. She is an active girl, so she sometimes has trouble staying focused and seated—even in comparison to her peers—yet she always perseveres and finishes her work, eventually.
Issues in Literacy Development

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Sveta’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of her literacy learning as a young child in Russia and later here in the US in her elementary school years. In addition, I present some of her memories of reading and writing in the context of her family and in school settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure she experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of her during this time.

L1 Learning/Family and Childhood

As a child, Sveta was often read to by her parents who both advocate and practice reading to young children. One of her first memories of a reading experience in Russian is of her parents reading to her (Initial Interview 7/19/00). Even during our study, Sveta’s sister reported that on evenings when time permitted their mother would still read a story to them (Literacy Measure #1 5/13/00). At home, Sveta often sees both her mother and her father and her older sister reading. She says that her mother reads mostly Russian books and news in English while her father reads his college books in English and websites and email. She explains that her older sister, Marina, reads “anything she sees” (Initial Interview 7/19/2000). Sveta’s enthusiasm for reading is not quite so high as she does not even claim to enjoy reading as a hobby like her mother and sister.
One of Sveta’s earliest memories of writing is learning to write in Russian were the words “Mama” and “Papa.” Now if she writes anything in Russian it is generally a letter or card to a friend back in Russia but really quite minimal.

**Russian ranking**
When asked to rank her language skills in Russian, Sveta self ranks her reading and writing with scores of 4 and her speaking, and listening skills in Russian at the top score of 5 (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest). Obviously, she feels more comfortable with her oral Russian skills than her literacy skills.

**Foreign Language experiences**
Sveta’s experiences learning a foreign language began with the study of English in the first grade in Russia. She remembers learning to write the alphabet in school and some vocabulary her first year. In the second year, she recalls doing more reading in English. For both years’ work, Sveta self-assessed her reading and writing achievement in English back in her Russian school program at an “A” level.

Later here in the US in the fifth grade, Sveta began to participate in an exploratory Spanish language program. She excelled in the class and seemed to enjoy the experience of “playing” with yet another language.

**General Literacy Issues:**

**Language Input and Type**
A typical week for Sveta includes five seven-hour school days immersed 100% in English followed by homework in the evenings. However, at home in the evenings or on
weekends, Sveta spends nearly all of her time speaking in Russian unless she is out playing with an American neighbor or friend. Occasionally, she explains, she also speaks English with her father when he asks her to and sometimes, she admits, she even argues with her older sister, Marina, in English. At school she speaks English all of the time even with other Russian children.

When Sveta’s family immigrated here in June of 1999, she spent the summer adjusting to life in America including a trip to camp. She then enrolled in the fourth grade at the end of the summer. At the start of our study she had already spent a number of months in fourth grade, and then by the end of the study a year in fifth grade when she was promoted to sixth grade. I am told by one of her teachers that though the school where Sveta studies is a public elementary school, parents often move to this district so their children can attend this school rather than a private school. The classes seem “rich” in materials and in support. Teachers stay after an extra 45 minutes every day to help any student who needs extra homework assistance. Sveta, however, does not stay after as her parents help her at home if she needs it. She did, however, have two short ESL tutoring sessions twice a week during school.

General Literacy functions

Although “literacy” might be an abstract idea for a then ten year old child, Sveta had very definite ideas about what it is when I asked her. She explained that it is when someone “writes papers, thinks, writes again nice and correctly.” When I asked her whether she considered herself “literate” in English, she replied, “Not too good” and in
Russian “Not too much.” (Initial Interview. 7/19/00). Still, Sveta believes that reading and writing are both important in Russian and American cultures though she believes that reading is emphasized more in Russian culture and writing more in American culture. She thinks she does plenty of both in school.

**Writing**

Though Sveta is able to write in Russian, she writes substantially more in English. Every day in class, she is required to do some sort of writing task be it for her language arts class, social studies, science, etc. While Sveta claims to never do any writing “for fun,” she does seem to enjoy writing. “Sveta is a hard worker. If she did not like writing she never complained. I believe now that she has adjusted to the [English] written language, she enjoys writing” (Vanwinkle 11/16/00). In fact, her mother commented to me that Sveta does write weekly notes to friend just “for fun.”

**Reading**

Reading in English is also an integral part of Sveta’s day at school for nearly all of her classes. She reads every day for content for her courses as well as for specific research projects and language assignments. When asked whether she reads for fun, she out rightly said, “no.” Her teachers have observed otherwise though. “Sveta seems to enjoy all types of books. I’ve seen her read fiction or books about art in addition to school assignments” (Markson 8/13/00). Any reading that Sveta does in Russian is sporadic. Sometimes she reads letters or cards from friends. Other times she utilizes any books her parents have at home that help her collect content information for her courses.
like science or social studies. She reports that she has no trouble reading and translating this information (Literacy Strategies Interview. 12/21/2000).

Summary

While Sveta does not consider herself very literate in English, her English literacy skills are rapidly improving and she is working at par or above her classmates on her assignments. Though she does not ever really admit to “enjoying” reading and writing, she has been observed to be “enjoying” the process of both. Due to her young age and minimal opportunities to read and write in Russian, however, I would expect that within a few years her Russian literacy skills would deteriorate significantly while her English skills would continue to increase.

L2 Development: Learning English

Goals

At the beginning of our study, Sveta rattled off several specific goals she had for improving her English. For instance, she said that she would like to “know more words, stick with reading my words without a dictionary, read and write the words correctly, and pronounce them correctly” (Initial Interview. 7/19/00).

By the end of our study, although Sveta still did not feel that she understood everything in English, she did feel that overall her comprehension of English was better. She thought her speaking abilities were better but marginally. She felt that both her reading and writing had speeded up and that she knew more words in English overall.
In terms of reading, Sveta felt that she did indeed know more words at the end of the study as she was reading a book *The Long Winter* by Laura I. Wilder and claimed to understand all but one or two words. She also felt that overall she was able to read faster and that when asked to read aloud in class she was not as scared as before. In terms of her writing, Sveta thought that by the end of our study she was able to “write ten single sentences [in a row] easier than I wrote last year” as well as spell more words correctly. Her distant future goals include maybe going to the university to be a teacher, possibly in math because, “I just like to teach” (Final Interview 5/20/2001). It seems safe to predict that Sveta’s literacy skills will continue to develop in the future as she prepares for an eventual university career.

**Academic Literacy Issues**

**Writing tasks and text types**

In the numerous observations I made of her classes, I saw that Sveta was required to complete several types of daily writing tasks for school. As shown in Table 19, her courses are quite varied but typical for an elementary curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Besides weekly paragraph assignments, summaries, spelling lists, and a reading journal for her language arts classes, she often engaged in other writing tasks in other classes such as note taking, vocabulary definitions, worksheet study guide completions, and special projects. A letter home to parents at the beginning of fifth grade explained that mastering sentence structure and comma usage as well as paragraphing would be the three main language goals of the year (Letter Home to Parents 8/28/2000). Admittedly, Sveta liked some assignments more than others. For instance, her ESL teacher reported that “Sveta loves to write stories—long stories. She is very creative and works hard to show this” (Markson 8/13/2000).

In the numerous observations I made of her classes, I saw that Sveta was required to complete several types of writing tasks for school. As shown in Table 20, these samples of tasks I observed can be classified into five functional categories linked across disciplines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Class assignment task types:</th>
<th>Information Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarize a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report on field trip excursion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design &amp; present poster on book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model a pioneer home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe a process</td>
<td>Create a fictional story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe a paragraph</td>
<td>Create historical fiction story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe a time event (biography)</td>
<td>Write poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solve a class issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills</td>
<td>Responding to Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete reading comprehension questions</td>
<td>Summarize a book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to spell and define new vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Assignment Task Types in Sveta’s Classes
Collecting samples of the texts that Sveta wrote for all of her classes was a rich and fruitful endeavor. Often her texts were decorated with elaborate artistic covers. Sveta was always very willing to save and later share her writings with me. Her end of the school year piles accumulated vast quantities of paper from all of her classes but mostly from language arts, ESL, and social studies. The samples of texts Sveta wrote for her classes that I collected are illustrative of the same preceding literacy functions and tasks. The texts are examples of an end product for each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text types collected:</th>
<th>Information Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model of pioneer home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biography on Tara Lipinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetoric</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process paragraph---How to tie shoes</td>
<td>Story—How servant girl Maria became queen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported speech paragraph-conversation between Lincoln &amp; Washington</td>
<td>Story-Hitler &amp; Jewish People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraph—Be careful what you wish for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story—“Yes or No”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraph about school “injustices”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poem about nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>Responses to reading</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling lists</td>
<td>Summary of readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter reading comprehension questions</td>
<td>Book report on Robin Good [sic]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book report on Dollhouse Murders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book report on Julie of the Wolves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Book report on On the Banks of Plum Creek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Text types from Sveta’s Assignments

Although these texts were not randomly selected as they were chosen to show the variety of writing tasks that Sveta typically faced in school, the comments across the
board which she received from her teachers on these texts do show very positive comments about her writing abilities or general English progress. Sample teacher comments are presented in Table 22:
Table 22: Teacher Comments on Sveta’s Papers

Sveta did receive some form of negative or critical comments. Of the 32 text samples I collected, there were only three slightly critical comments. “Very small mistakes,” with an indication to three points in the paragraph. “Clarify,” with section indicated on the page. And a final comment at the end of a composition she wrote: “You have a few common mistakes: the/a and verb tenses.” While indicating areas that needed development, the comments are by far not very critical. This is possibly a sign of heightened awareness to Sveta’s second language status and/or a combination with the types of positive comments made by elementary school teachers on their students’ work, generally avoiding harsh criticism.

Writing process
In observing Sveta in the midst of composing a text, she starts and stops frequently. Some times she erases or crosses out and goes on or other times she looks around the room, as if hunting for inspiration. Still over time she is able to produce
lengthy texts. For example, even in fourth grade less than one year after her arrival in the US, she produced a fictional story that was eight pages long handwritten.

When asked about the drafting process and the extent to which she uses it, Sveta explains her process of writing as initially gathering and organizing information and then writing and recopying. For instance, she uses prewriting techniques such as webs to help her organize her thoughts so that she does not forget her ideas (Initial. Interview 7/19/2000). Other times depending on the type of writing, she is doing she seeks out information from the library. If, for example, she is writing some sort of a report, she might go to the library to locate a book related to her topic, and then she finds “some sentences that looks good and I copy them” (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Finally she writes a draft, corrects it and then recopies or types it.

Her teachers seem to have differing views on how Sveta processes through her writing. Her ESL teacher says that Sveta never uses any prewriting and just writes (Markson 8/13/2000). Her fourth grade teacher reports “She writes a web for prewriting, then she makes a rough draft. Thirdly she self edits. Fourthly I help her edit, and finally she writes a final draft” (Vanwinkle 11/16/00). Her fifth grade teacher, reiterates that “she proof reads most everything” (Kovach 5/23/2001). It seems that editing and final proof reading are certainly part of the end stage of Sveta’s writing process. How she begins it though depends on the type of assignment. It seems that for longer assignments she organizes more. If she needs content information, she gathers it at the library or through the internet. Or perhaps if she is writing something short that is timed as I observed her on several occasions, she does no prewriting at all and just dives right in.
Reading Tasks and Text types:
When asked about the kind of reading tasks or assignments she usually had for school, Sveta explained that she had reading assignments with chapter comprehension questions for science, social studies, and math. She admitted though that reading for social studies was the hardest (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000). For language arts she had a series of genre reading assignments. Students were expected to read from a novel from a particular genre for 20 minutes a night. Genre units included realistic fiction, mysteries, historical fiction, fantasy/science fiction, and adventure novels. Over the course of our study, I observed Sveta reading chapter units from her social studies class, ESL verb tense worksheets, “Scholastic News,” and math word problems. I also collected reading summaries from Sveta for texts such as Robin Hood, The Dollhouse Murders, Escape to Witch Mountain, and Julie of the Wolves. In her writing assignments, she cited from the following texts Daily Life in a Covered Wagon, Welcome to Kirsten’s World, Little House on the Prairie, and On the Banks of Plum Creek.

At least two professional authors visited Sveta’s school during her fifth grade year. In preparation for these visits, teachers would sometimes read aloud the particular authors’ books to the students. On one occasion after a preparatory book reading, Sveta’s teacher asked her to stay after for the next reading of the book as the story took place in Russia and he felt that she would be able to share a bit about her experiences in Russia with the other students.

When asked to self-report what she read during summer vacation when our study was in progress, Sveta reported that she read Amos’s Killer Concert Caper and
Jayhawker in English. And in Russian, she read Treasure Island. Along with her older sister, Sveta read in Russian One Last Glimpse by James Aldridge, Up the Down Staircase by Bel Kaufman, Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger. This would seem to indicate that even while not in school Sveta continues to read.

**Reading process**

When I asked Sveta about how she goes about reading a text, she explained a rather global approach to selecting a book. First she looks at the book’s title and then next at the table of contents. If after reading the first few sentences it seems the book is interesting or will help her gather information she needs, she continues reading (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000). She does not like to use a dictionary too much so if and when she encounters a reading comprehension problem, she explained to me, she asks either her mother or her teacher for clarification (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000).

To increase her reading vocabulary, Sveta often makes flash cards with the spellings and definitions of words. One day when I observed Sveta studying for a social studies test, I ask her how she prepares for it. She explains that she first reads the chapter and then rereads it again. She writes key terms on index cards and then studies them. Overall, it seems that Sveta processes from a more global understanding approach to reading with stops and pauses in between to check for clarification until eventually she understands the reading and reviews it as needed.
Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development

Overall, Sveta is a strong reader and writer in English. She approaches both reading and writing in a process approach working from more global to more specific issues. She spends a lot of time editing and typing though overall does not make many major organizational revisions to her organization when writing. When hard pressed for time, she abandons these organizational strategies and often without prewriting begins immediately to write. Sveta uses vocabulary lists and flash cards to help her increase her word base though in the midst of reading or writing if she needs help with a word she prefers to ask her teacher or parent for help. Sveta completes most every assignment on par or above the quality of work of her peers though while working on longer projects she is often easily distracted. She generally manages to refocus herself and completes her assignments with success.

Changes in Sveta’s Literacy Development

To better understand how Sveta’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of her literacy goals, her opinions of how her reading and writing have changed, her own self rankings of her English language proficiencies, and informal evaluations by her teachers. Furthermore, I present measures of her writing and reading proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of her writing.
**L2 Development**

When Sveta arrived in America, she remembers that although she had studied English for two years in school and her mother had studied with her at home, she did not know many words and she could not talk. By the beginning of our study, she felt confident that she knew more words and had lots of practicing using them (Literacy Duties Interview 11/4/2000).

Almost a year later at the end of our study, Sveta felt that she knew even more words as she was reading a book *The Long Winter* by Laura I. Wilder and claimed to understand all but one or two words. She also felt that overall she was able to read faster and that when asked to read aloud in class, she was not as scared as before. In terms of her writing, Sveta thought that by the end of our study she was able to “write ten single sentences [in a row] easier than I wrote last year” as well as spell more words correctly (Final Interview 5/20/2001). Indeed, Sveta’s overall English skills were so improved by the end of our study that she was exited from her district’s ESL program.

**Self Rank**

When asked to rank her English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at both the beginning and end of this study, Sveta initially ranked herself at a 4 for both reading and writing and a 4.5 for speaking and listening. By the end of our study, she ranked herself with a 5 each for reading and listening, and a 4 each in speaking and writing.
Table 23: Sveta’s Self Ranking of her English Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sveta Start of study</th>
<th>Sveta End of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other rank
Sveta’s teachers were also asked to rank her language skills on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). In comparison, these rankings at the beginning of the study by both Sveta and her teachers are displayed in Table 24.

Table 24: Start Comparison of Sveta’s and Teacher Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sveta</th>
<th>ESL teacher Teacher</th>
<th>4th Grade Homeroom Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

One year later at the end of the study, Sveta’s teacher rankings (Table 25) were similar to hers as shown in Table 24.
Whereas at the beginning of the study, Sveta’s self rankings were generally higher than her teacher’s assessment of her skills, by the end of the study for every skill, Sveta’s score coincided with at least one other teacher. It is evident that she and her teachers believe her reading, writing, and listening have improved though she does not seem to feel that improvement with writing or speaking.

Similar rankings of Sveta’s English skills by her father indicate (Table 26), at least at the end of the study, that her reading and listening have improved. He seems to have felt that her speaking also improved although she may not have felt so. His scores for her writing also coincide with those for two of Sveta’s teachers at the end of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent ranking</th>
<th>Sveta Start of study</th>
<th>Sveta End of study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Table 26: Parent Ranking of Sveta’s English Skills
Tracking Changes in Sveta’s L2 Literacy Development

Writing

Speed

Figure 12 illustrates the measures for Sveta’s speed in writing as measured at six points during the year.

As can be seen, Sveta’s overall speed averages at about 10 words per minute. Though her speed might fluctuate based on topic or interest, in general her speed is on the increase potentially indicating a greater ease in writing for her.

Fluency

Figure 13 displays the measures for Sveta’s writing fluency as measured at six times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.
The average total word count for Sveta scored at 98. Sveta spent on average nine minutes writing for each exercise with the exception of the first measure when she wrote for fifteen minutes, which accounts for the seemingly high fluency score on her first measure. Overall, this steady average fluency seems to show that Sveta consistently writes with any overall improvements in her writing occurring with her syntactic complexity and accuracy.

**Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy**

Figure 14 illustrates the measures for Sveta’s syntactic complexity and accuracy in writing as measured at six points during the year.
Overall, Sveta’s proficiency and accuracy in writing are increasing. What is unusual from the scores above is the sharp drop with measure 5 which required her to write an autobiographical composition about herself. This is a topic she has written on before for school yet her sentence syntax was dramatically simplified in this case.

**Holistic Writing Evaluations**

In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Sveta’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored all six of her writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in Figure 15.
These holistic assessments of Sveta’s writing demonstrate an overall steady writing proficiency throughout the course of the study. These scores reflect perhaps the somewhat erratic nature of her proficiency and accuracy scores as shared above. For such a young learner, these fluctuations, however, still seem to “even out” in overall assessment of the communicative nature of her writing.

**Reading**

**Accuracy and Overall Comprehension**

Figure 16 illustrates the measures for Sveta’s reading accuracy and overall comprehension on three reading tasks administered during the year.
Overall, Sveta’s accuracy in her reading has increased steadily over the course of the year. This may be attributed to increases in her vocabulary. Her teachers have clearly noticed an increase in her English vocabulary repertoire as well. “Her [Sveta] reading vocabulary has grown tremendously” (Final 4th Grade Report Card—). These word by word accuracy developments could conceivably be explained by Sveta’s ability to better decode meaning at lower word and sentence levels due to these increases in her reading vocabulary.

As to her overall comprehension, Sveta’s ability to generalize understanding about the text may be limited to topic and difficulty issues. As the texts that Sveta was reading and summarizing for the above measures were selected from a ninth grade proficiency test preparation book, these texts were undoubtedly higher than her regular grade level reading. Yet for the second measure she scored nearly perfect. This would seem to attest to her abilities to decipher difficult texts depending on the topic and her background knowledge. Her fifth grade teacher seems to confirm this saying “Sveta
understands reading on a fifth, and possibly even higher grade level. She has no
problems in this area cognitively” (Kovach 5/23/2001).

Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development

Despite some wild fluctuations in her writing proficiency and accuracy scores,
Sveta’s overall writing seems to have slightly increased over the course of the year with
her writing speed and fluency holding very stable. In comparison, however, her reading
seems to have improved more so in both her overall text comprehension and accuracy for
discrete point understanding.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies

To better understand what has helped Sveta’s literacy develop the most during
this study, in this section I present an overview of her opinions of what learning and/or
teaching strategies helped her in general with English and specifically in writing and
reading. I also share the opinions of some of her teachers on these matters and my
observations of these strategies in practice in her classes.

General Learning Strategies

The general language learning strategies that Sveta found to be most helpful in
learning English fall into four main categories: interaction, motivation, assignment
modification, and teacher/parent support.


**Interaction**

While Sveta admits that it was very difficult to speak in the beginning, she eventually began to speak more. When asked what general advice she would give to a newly arrived ESL student, she responded “Maybe like just talk” (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). This worked very well for Sveta because she interacts well with her peers (Markson 8/13/2000). Spending some initial time after her family arrived in the US immersed in the target language in a non-academic environment, which in this case was a summer camp for Sveta, may also have lessened any initial hesitation she may have had about speaking English in the beginning. This environment was in a way less of an “investment” for her unlike the important “business” of school and may have helped her cope with her initial hesitations about speaking with others, leading her to reveal her outgoing personality despite language troubles and learn to interact well with her peers in English.

**Motivation**

Sveta is a very enthusiastic learner who simply loves school. Her positive motivation shines in her every approach to tackling an assignment. In fact, she would rather go to school than miss it. Although she did not name this strategy “motivation” per say, Sveta suggests it saying that even though any new ESL student will feel uncomfortable when he/she first arrives in the new country, the student “should try to do homework” even if they do not understand anything because eventually they will (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01). What is important here is Sveta’s recognition of how difficult it can be for a student to gather enough motivation to attempt anything while
demonstrating herself that by letting her motivation to succeed drive her, she has in fact herself succeeded.

**Assignment modifications**  
Sveta does not in any way ever try to get out of doing an assignment even if it is too difficult at first. However, when she has had trouble, she has learned to ask for help and adapt the learning to situation to one that she can manage. As a result, she recommends new ESL students to ask the teacher for easier topics if the one assigned is too difficult and to ask for more time to complete the work if it will take longer to complete the task (Acculturation Interview. 2/9/01). These are very mature responses to managing a problem that might otherwise be too daunting.

**Teacher and Parent Support**  
One of Sveta’s strongest strategies has been to ask a teacher or parent for help if she did not understand something (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). While her older sister is often too shy to ask a teacher for help, Sveta is clear in her requests for help both of her school teachers and of her parents. She seems to believe that both teachers and parents are supposed to help and has found that they always do for her. An added bonus to this situation, as Sveta sees it, would be to “have teachers who speak Russian,” or more generally the ESL student’s native language (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01). Even though this is often not the case that the teachers speak the same L1, it is the case that the parents do. Sveta’s parents were both extremely supportive of her and her sister’s studying in the US even if at times they did not quite understand everything themselves. This parental support was bolstered too by regular communications between
Sveta’s parents and her school. As a result, working in a sort of partnership, both Sveta’s teachers and parents were prepared to offer her any extra academic support that she needed.

**Unhelpful Issues and Strategies**

While it was rare to see Sveta not performing above average in all aspects of language performance, her teachers did indicate two oral communication strategies which they felt were not helpful for her: halting and slurred speech. Especially at the beginning of our study, Sveta would often speak in halting sentences as she would not speak without first finding the exact correct word for what she wanted to say (Vanwinkle 11/16/2000). This resulted in lots of pauses. Obviously as time progressed, she was able to more quickly access the vocabulary to express her thoughts. However, in the meantime, her teacher recommended that she learn to risk not choosing the very exact word, perhaps to even circumlocute, for the sake of increasing the pace of her speech. Another teacher at the end of our study pointed out that in general Sveta needs to speak more clearly as often she would slur her words (Kovach 5/23/2001). Both of these non-productive strategies may simply be issues of becoming a more proficient speaker in English through time or they may be issues of age and maturity.

**Writing Strategies**

While Sveta pointed out two main groups of writing strategies, dictionary use and L1 planning, her teachers suggested that two more have been helpful to her, vocabulary expansion and the writing process.
Dictionary
Simply put, Sveta recommends using a dictionary if a student does not know a word (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Though not a major fan of dictionaries, she recognizes the value of this independent learning tool especially when writing.

L1
Although Sveta does not recommend first writing a draft or even prewriting in one’s L1 and then translating it into L2, she does advocate planning or thinking about topic ideas in the L1. She found that it was helpful to mull over ideas for her writing first in Russian and then move into writing in English. Sometimes she did this with an intermediary prewriting stage, sometimes not (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000).

Vocabulary Expansion
Several of Sveta’s assignments required her to learn new vocabulary. As our study progressed, her vocabulary did increase allowing her to expand her writing style in English. As her vocabulary base grew, Sveta was more willing to take risks—especially in writing summaries by using more of her own words rather than those of the original source text (Markson 6/13/2001). As Sveta became more confident in her vocabulary usage, she learned to use these new words to show off her creativity in her writing (Markson 8/13/2000). Both this risk taking and this creativity helped Sveta improve her writing in English.

Writing process
Although Sveta did not write multiple drafts of every assignments she wrote during this study, when she did, she wrote extensively. She would proceed through a
process of prewriting such as webbing, write at least one full draft, and finally usually polish off her final draft on a computer word processing program. Her teachers always encouraged her to proof read these later drafts (Kovach 5/23/2001). When using this process, Sveta often produced longer more polished writing.

**Reading Strategies**

There were three main strategies that Sveta used to navigate difficult reading in English: vocabulary development, careful text selection, and teacher assistance.

**Vocabulary development**

In the fourth and fifth grades, Sveta was often required to master new vocabulary lists right along side her peers. Sveta’s recommendation to a new ESL learner having trouble with reading was simply to “learn words and grammar” (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01) and “use a dictionary if you don’t know words” (Literacy Strategies Interview 12/21/2000). Teachers also required her to create vocabulary flash cards with correct spellings and definitions, to which she often added Russian translations of the words. These cards seemed to facilitate mastering larger volumes of new words for Sveta. Even so, when reading if she came upon a word she did not know, she would try to decode it using any cognates or similar L1 word roots (Markson 8/13/2000). She obviously recognized the importance of mastering new vocabulary to help with reading though she might not have recognized her own strategies of drawing on her L1 or even simply making and memorizing flash cards as strategies to help with this.
Text Selection
Another strategy Sveta used for reading in English was to start with easier rather than harder books (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01). As such she recommends that teachers have lots of easy books available for beginning students (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01). Besides offering a range of difficulty levels in the book selection, it is also important to offer students a range of topics among the texts which might interest and intrigue students. For instance, Sveta’s ESL teacher commented that Sveta enjoys books about art (Markson 8/13/2000) and so would read them during “down time” in her classes. This makes sense as Sveta has such an interest in drawing and art in general. Offering students a range of text difficulties and topics makes reading in the L2 more manageable and more appealing.

Teacher assistance
No stranger to asking for help, Sveta recommends asking a teacher to translate or explain any difficult reading passages in English (Acculturation Interview 2/9/01). Her ESL teacher also suggested that content area teachers allow extra explanation on content area tests (Markson 6/13/2001). Sometimes a student fails a question on a test not because of not knowing the content but simply because they did not understand the prompt or the test instructions. Allowing for more guidance and offering that to students in a non-threatening manner opens up possibilities for the student to really decode and understand more difficult language passages.

Overall Summary on Sveta
Sveta is a strong reader and writer in English. Over the course of our study, her literacy proficiencies steadily increased. One of Sveta’s main strategies in language
learning is to ask for help. As an extroverted eleven year old girl that may not be such a difficult tool to employ. Even so, Sveta’s abilities to interact with others and uncover the support that she needs as well as manage her learning context in such a way that it becomes “doable” for her are sophisticated learning strategies. For both reading and writing, Sveta takes steps to increase and expand her active vocabulary base. She requests texts, assignments, or extensions to deadlines in managing her own learning. Furthermore, she first employs global strategies in her approaches to reading and writing before focusing on word level decoding and editing. This combination of learning approaches and management of her learning context have served Sveta very well in improving her English literacy this year.

**Family Summary: The Pavlovas:**

As the three previous stories attest, the Pavlovas are highly literate and motivated persons. Reading and writing in both Russian and English are very much a part of the social environment of this family. Readings are shared, many communications with family and friends are written, and they turn to each other for help with writing assignments for school. The father and his daughters are successful in their acquisition of English literacy though at varying degrees. The family supports literacy in many ways and encourages continued reading and writing both in the L1 and in the L2. The parents are highly involved in their daughters’ education and have taught them to value literacy as part of their Russian cultural heritage. This cultural support for literacy enhances their overall literacy experience (e.g, Basham et al 1993, Eskey 2002).
Halima

**Individual Situation**

Halima is a 51 year old Somali mother of five children. Her youngest child is in middle school and her oldest children are off living on their own with their own families. She lives with her husband, her mother, and her two youngest children in a housing development near the center of the city. She maintains close contact, with her family with her children, sister, and nieces and nephews visiting frequently.

Halima does not currently work outside the home though she was participating in a workforce training program at the beginning of our study. A minor car accident left her with a neck injury and therefore she was no longer required to work until after our study. Before the war in Somalia, she worked in the financial department for the government. Her husband was a leading physician in the country so they enjoyed relative wealth. Now she stays home and takes care of her mother.

Although Halima does not work outside the home, she is a very busy person. Halima’s hobbies include cooking, sewing, and watching TV. It was always difficult scheduling to meet with Halima during our study as she is so busy with her family.

During the year our study took place, I was able to arrange to interview her only three times and test her English writing skills only three times. Part of this may have been due to cultural differences in understanding “appointments.” On numerous occasions I would arrive at her home to find that she was not there and only her children and her aged mother were. Reasons for her not being there for interviews or tests included her visiting a friend who has just had a baby, being in a car accident, taking her mother to the hospital, being ill herself, taking the car somewhere for repairs, shopping
with her son, shopping with her daughter, visiting an aunt, and meeting with INS. Unfortunately, I was also never able to observe Halima in any of her ESL classes as she finished one soon after we met and then never re-enrolled.

**Personality**

When I was able to meet with Halima, she was a kind and hospitable person who always made me feel welcomed in her home. I found her to have a laid back personality grounded in a lot of world experience, making it seem that very little could upset her. On the other hand, when matters of her family arose, she would do what she needed to take charge of a conversation, often via an interpreter, to be certain I understood what she was saying.

**Issues in Literacy Development**

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Halima’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of her literacy experiences as a child in Somalia and later here in the US. In addition, I present some of her memories of reading and writing in the context of her family and in educational settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure she experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of her during this time.

**L1 Learning, Family and Childhood**

Halima grew up in a very different Somalia than the war torn country of this decade. The country was generally divided by English speaking and Italian speaking
influences. Her mother does not know how to read or write but her father was literate in Italian. Halima was sent to school for twelve years where she studied science, math, geography, biology, and chemistry in Italian. As a child she recalls seeing her father read and having him read stories to her. Her mother would tell bedtime stories to her as well. Later, Halima told her own children stories and read stories to them in Somali.

Halima’s earliest memories of reading and writing are linked to religious studies. She remembers reading from and copying from the Koran in Arabic when she was 8 or 9 years old. Later she learned to read and write in Italian and then in Somali.

Somali ranking
When asked to rank her language skills in Somali, Halima self ranks herself at the top score of five (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) for reading, writing, listening, and speaking in Somali.

Foreign Language experiences
Halima’s foreign language experiences are vast. She learned both Italian and Arabic in school in Somalia. In fact she ranked her language skills in Italian with scores of five in all four skill areas and a level of two for all skills in Arabic. Italian functioned as a “lingua franca” for her schooling and Arabic as well for her religious studies. She asserts that these experiences with Italian have helped her a little in learning English (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).
General Literacy Issues:

Language input/ type
A typical week in Halima’s life is spent nearly completely in Somali. When our study began, Halima was enrolled in a workforce training program which was designed to train Somali women in child care skills with the aim of employing them with functional workplace English. She then spent nearly seven hours a day during the week at the child care center. A few months later she had completed the program and was able to show me photographs of her experience. However, she never took on a child care job but chose to spend the time at home taking care of her mother. She did have plans to begin taking adult ESL classes in a free city program, but she never followed through. In fact, near the end of the study she claimed some days to not ever speak any English (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

General Literacy functions
Halima considers “literacy” to be the “importance of reading and writing” (init. Interview 7/30/2000). She explained that in her view reading and writing are more important than listening and speaking in a language (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Halima also believes that reading and writing are important both in Somali and American cultures. She thinks the purpose of learning to read and write is to get a job (Final Interview 7/22/01).
**Writing**
Any writing that Halima does is really quite limited. She states that she occasionally writes letters in Somali (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Any English writing that she does is limited to writing bills (Literacy Duties Interview. 11/2/2000).

**Reading**
Reading is also quite limited for Halima. She says that she reads the Koran. A prayer in Arabic hangs on her living room wall. Occasional informational fliers from the city’s Somali Center are posted in the kitchen regarding notices about Ramadan and other religious events. Any reading that she does in English is deciphering school communications or bills. At the end of our study, she had begun reading some magazines in English.

**Summary**
Although literate in at least two other languages, Halima is not actively pursuing many literacy functions as an immigrant to the US. She has participated in some language and workforce training programs which could potentially elevate her English literacy skills but life seems to distract her from this with her many family obligations here in the US.

**L2 Development: Learning English**

**Goals**
At the beginning of our study, when I asked Halima how she wanted to improve her English overall, she responded that she wanted to improve her speaking and her reading skills (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). By the end of our study, she had focused her
objective to include that of being able to defend and help her children in English especially in matters dealing with school. She stated that she wanted to be an educated mother who could help her children with school work rather than feeling powerless to their situations and problems (Final Interview 7/22/2001). As her children—especially her youngest son—were often sent home with disciplinary letters and suspensions notices from school, I can understand Halima’s frustration with not being able to understand these communications and feeling rather helpless to take action in these cases.

**Academic Literacy Issues**

**Writing Tasks and Text types**

Having no real opportunities to observe Halima in any English language course, the only writing tasks which I have seen her complete were the writing measures for this study. She did at one point show me the beginnings of a portfolio of pictures and captions she was to complete for her workforce child care training course, but shortly after finishing it she lost the portfolio and so I was never able to examine it in detail.

The writing that I have seen Halima complete has been short responses to prompts which I invited her to write on for a 10-20 minute time limit. For the first she was given a choice of three topics but instead she wrote on none of the three and wrote a short autobiographical paragraph—a genre type I imagine she was already familiar with from previous English language studies. For the second prompt, she was again given a choice of three topics to which she “answered” two of the three with marginal sentence responses. For the last measure, she was asked to write an autobiographical paragraph, which she did. Interestingly, nearly one year later this autobiographical paragraph is
quite similar to the first except that it was written slightly quicker and her sentence length is on average a bit longer in the later measure.

**Writing process**
Since the writing I have observed Halima do has been shorter timed pieces, she did not employ any drafting procedures. Each was written in under ten minutes. She was, however, very deliberate and concentrated on her writing during this time. She did not in any of the three cases cross out or correct anything she wrote. In one case, she did go back and insert a word.

**Reading Tasks and Text types**
Although I was never privileged to witness Halima reading, as she so seldom reads, I did ask her to read two texts for me in English. One was The Giving Tree which is written on a 4-8 year old level for native English speakers and the other was a selection from The Lion and the Puppy which is ranked at a 9-12 year old level. The second was somewhat more difficult for her. As she read, I asked her to paraphrase back to me whatever she understood. She was able to though often needed the help of an interpreter. Some particular words that were difficult for her in these texts were: climb, cut, once, picked, scared, bright, mushroom, and fried.

**Reading process**
The occasions when I did see Halima reading she was very linear and methodical in her progression through the text. She read slowly word by word without ever reviewing the text or previewing the text for overall organizational clues. She never used a dictionary and instead either asked about unknown words or skipped over them.
Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development

Although the English learning goals for Halima do include being able to read better especially in order to help deal with family issues such as school communications and bills, she has not acted upon this goal herself nor have opportunities for her to focus on this goal been readily presented to her. Another one of her goals, speaking better in English, has also not been “attended to” in that by the end of the study she was spending nearly one hundred percent of her time in an L1 environment with the exception of television in her home. It seems that the business of Halima’s life and the lack of convenient access to English courses or environments—even in the US—prohibit her from attaining her learning goals.

Changes in Halima’s Literacy Development

To better understand how Halima’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of her opinions of how her writing has changed and her own self rankings of her English language proficiencies both at the beginning and end of this study. Furthermore, I present measures of her writing proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of her writing.
L2 Development

When Halima arrived in America three years before this study began, she reports that she knew absolutely no English (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). For one year prior to our study, she studied English informally in an adult ESL program in a local Somali housing development center. For that course work, she gave herself a “C” (Demographic Questionnaire 5/29/2000).

By the start of our study, Halima was able to communicate on a very basic level without help from an interpreter yet she often relied on one. She explained that everything was hard about English at first but then she began to better understand the language although she was still unable to say what she wanted to say (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). Almost a year later at the end of our study, she reported that she felt that it was easier to read and write in English and that she was even beginning to enjoy reading magazines in English.

Self Rank

When asked to rank her English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at both the beginning and end of this study, Halima initially ranked herself at a 2 for both reading and listening and a 1 for speaking and listening. By the end of our study, she ranked herself with a 1 each for reading, writing, and listening, and a 2 in listening.

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<th>Halima Start of study</th>
<th>Halima End of study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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Table 27: Halima’s Self Ranking of her English Skills

In general it seems that Halima’s self scorings are indicative of the minimal improvements which she made in English over the course of our study. The fact that she has lowered her score in reading may be the result of a sort of reverse “halo effect” where she does not want to appear to be stronger than she is in that skill, especially considering that I had asked her previously to read for me in English and she had found that somewhat difficult. That she has not changed her other scores may be somewhat illustrative of her recognition of the reality of not improving her L2 skills much if at all during the year.

Tracking Changes in Halima’s L2 Literacy Development

Writing

Speed

Figure 17 illustrates the measures for Halima’s speed in writing as measured at three points during the year.
As can be seen, Halima’s overall speed averages 3-4 words per minute. She does not write very fast in English nor has her speed improved much during this year.

**Fluency**

Figure 18 displays the measures for Halima’s writing fluency as measured at three times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.
While the total average word count for Halima hovers around 18 words as she wrote for about the same time period during each of these measures, it seems that based on her lower display of fluency for the second measure that her writing may be influenced by the writing topic or by some other factor affecting her that day. Overall, though, these measures indicate that Halima was not an extremely fluent writer in English at this point.

**Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy**

Figure 19 illustrates the measures for Halima’s proficiency and accuracy in writing as measured at three points during the year.

It is interesting to note that while Halima’s syntactic complexity remains rather constant throughout, her accuracy increases greatly at the end of the study. For the last measure,
half of her sentences are error free. Whereas in comparison, in the first measure none of her sentences were error free. As in both cases the topic is autobiographical, these accuracy improvements may be the result of heightened grammaticality awareness or topic familiarity. However, since the later measure now includes missing prepositions and verbs, it would seem that better grammar awareness is the case.
Holistic Writing Evaluations
In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Halima’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored all three of her writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in Figure 20.

Halima’s overall writing assessment scores are consistently low. The drop in the second score reflects the decrease in her proficiency and accuracy scores for this measure as well. While there is a slight increase in her scores, overall, these scores reflect a low level of writing for Halima in English with very little change.

Figure 20: Halima's Average Holistic Scores
Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development:

Halima’s reading and writing skills in English are quite low. Her writing scores were measurable with the same tasks that the other five participants performed; however, her reading was so low that it was not scored as part of this study. Though she demonstrated potential for increasing her writing ability, writing is still a laborious process for her which did not change much if at all during the course of this study.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies

To better understand what helped Halima’s literacy develop the most during this study, in this section I present an overview of her opinions of what learning strategies helped her in general with English and specifically in writing and reading. I also share the opinions of my observations of these strategies in practice in her life.

General Learning Strategies

Two of the learning strategies that Halima has employed to help her in learning English in general have been to ask for help from a friend, neighbor, or one of her children and to draw on her experiences learning other languages.

Help from others

Halima is constantly surrounded by people. At home she is surrounded by her family and in her community she surrounds herself with friends and neighbors. She finds help in dealing with difficult English language issues from these people. Already right
after she and her family first immigrated to the US, she recruited the help of a Somali neighbor who having already lived in the US for nearly a decade was able to help her with translating bills and other documents she did not understand (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). She continues to draw on help from friends and neighbors here in Ohio when she herself is unable to clear an English language hurdle. I have often observed myself how she will turn to one of her children or to her sister who are all a bit more proficient in English than she and ask them to help clarify something she wants to say. On one particular visit, her nephew was visiting and she had recruited him to help clarify problems with an auto insurance bill.

**Previous Foreign Language Learning Experiences**

Another strategy Halima reports to find helpful is to exploit her many experiences learning languages. English is Halima’s fourth language, having already learned Somali, Arabic, and Italian. She has found Italian particularly helpful in learning English because of some linguistic similarities and skill transfer, such as reading and writing (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

Unfortunately, it seems there are several issues or strategies that have proven to not be helpful to Halima. These include lack of time and structure, losing books and materials, inconsistent follow through, lack of exposure to L2, and health issues.

**Lack of time and structure:**

Halima seems to be the one of the busiest persons I know. She missed at least nine of our appointments because something else came up. Yet often when I arrived for a visit she was resting watching movies or sitting and seemingly just chatting with friends.
Perhaps if she had structured her time differently she would have been able to manage both taking care of her children and her mother and taking courses in English which she so often spoke of.

**Losing books and material**

Though this is obviously not a major hindrance to Halima’s learning, this disorganization and losing of books and materials seems to be a complicating issue for Halima. At one point early in the study, Halima was working on a performance portfolio for her workforce training program but shortly thereafter she lost it. Later she lost some English textbooks I had lent to her at her request. Often she claimed to never be able to call me back as she was never able to hold on to my telephone number. Simply keeping track of books and papers seemed to be a bit of a problem for her, which consequently would impact any literacy learning she might do.

**Inconsistent Follow-through**

While the reasons for this may vary, often any good intentions Halima had for enrolling in a course or being present for an appointment simply fell short. Soon after completing her workforce training at the start of our study, Halima intended to enroll in a free city adult ESL course. She never did. Similarly, she frequently missed appointments with me despite pre-arranged appointment times even with reminder calls. Though these specific missed events would not in any way directly jeopardize her English learning, not following through consistently on arranging and completing language courses, job events, etc. might certainly in the end adversely affect her learning.
Lack of exposure to the L2

As soon as Halima was no longer involved in the workforce training program that initially required a good seven hours of her day to be spent in an English environment, she lost really all access to English except via television and any mail that came to the house. Just living in the target language country is not sufficient to guarantee exposure to and immersion in the target language. Although Halima was spending more time in the US, her diminished time in an English environment was certainly not supporting her learning English.

Health issues

To no fault of Halima’s, health issues seemed to be plaguing her during our study. The minor car accident that she was involved in a few months into our study resulted in headaches and neck problems for—both of which seemed to distract her focus from learning English. Furthermore, as the main caretaker for her family and especially her elderly mother, she had to miss out on potential language learning opportunities outside the home as she cared for her family.

Writing Strategies

Previous Task Experience

One of the only writing tasks that Halima did regularly during our study was write bills. She said that she felt comfortable and capable dealing with them and that in any case if she did not understand something, she would ask for help from a friend or a family member. Having had some previous experience working for the financial department of her government in Somali (Initial Interview 7/30/2000), one can assume that she had some experience with the task of writing and accounting for bills. Perhaps transferring
these skills to an household situation even in another language facilitates the task for Halima here in the US.

**Inaccurate copying**

A basic task in beginning literacy is to copy words. Halima, however, often failed to copy the correct spelling of words. For example, in one case on her second writing measure, which she wrote for me, the prompt asked about her “favorite” food. She recopied the word in her answer as “fever.” This may simply be due to inattention to her spelling or perhaps even a lack of understanding of the importance of spelling in English.

**Reading Strategies**

**Access to informal reading materials**

By the end of our study, Halima reported that she was beginning to enjoy reading and looking through magazines in English (Final Interview 7/22/2001). Though not formal in structure, this exposure to colorful appealing texts like magazines may indeed be enough to motivate Halima to look more frequently at English printed text. Similarly, on one occasional earlier, Halima asked me to find some easy books for her in English. Gaining access to attractive manageable texts is certainly a beginning step towards reading in the L2.

Two of the less helpful reading strategies that Halima employed, though, were simply not reading very much and when she did read depending on translators too much for help. Halima did not read frequently, and there really is no way to improve reading without reading. Uncovering some of her reasons for not reading may help her in the
future to actually begin to focus on reading. Finally, when she did read, she often relied on translators—friends and family members around her—to translate and explain any unknown words. This allowed her to bypass any contextual guessing, vocabulary development, and simply dictionary use.

**Summary on Halima**

There is a lot of room for progress in reading and writing in English for Halima. She is very good at getting herself help when she needs it, so she does cope well enough with daily literacy tasks. Also, she is good at accessing her previous language learning experiences and background knowledge of certain task skills for the benefit of her “survival literacy” right now. However, for her to improve her literacy in English, she needs to eliminate some of the adverse learning strategies she has acquired which hamper her progress in English learning. As an adult with very specific responsibilities and restrictions this, however, will be difficult for Halima.
Fatima

**Individual Situation**

Fatima is now a 19 year old Somali young woman who spent most of her teen years as a war refugee in the US. She immigrated to the US from Somalia after her family fled the war in the early 1990’s. As a teen here in the US, Fatima has spent most of the past three years in Ohio with her mother, stepfather, grandmother, younger brother and sister. Her older siblings live in other states. At the age of 17, though, she moved out of her mother’s home and married an older Somali man. Together they set up a household about 15 minutes away from her mother.

During this time in Ohio, Fatima has attended three different public high schools. Though she never had a chance to attend school in Somalia before the war began, she did spend two years in one of the camp schools in her refugee camp in Kenya. She also attended high school for eight months in Florida before coming to Ohio. Fatima has had four years of documented formal schooling in her lifetime. At the close of our study she was finishing eleventh grade. As a result of this interrupted schooling, Fatima’s study habits are a bit shaky. She loves good grades when she gets them though that is not often.

She planned to graduate one year after our study concluded though she still needed to pass the reading and math sections of the Ohio 9th Grade Proficiency Test in order to receive a diploma. She attended and completed summer school after our study ended in hopes of passing these test sections. The summer before she had dropped out of summer school because of her summer job.
Fatima enjoys math and began studying in a vocational school accounting training program during her last year of high school. She hopes to graduate and maybe attend college. She would like to try to get a job as an accountant.

Through these teen years, Fatima’s school attendance has been quite sporadic. During her first year of school she missed nearly 14% of her classes but was tardy only once. During her second year she missed 23 days and was tardy six times. Her third year, she missed 30 days and was tardy 10 times. In her fourth year she missed 34 days and was tardy 19 times.

Discipline has also been an issue for Fatima at times. While her school records do not indicate any disciplinary problems her first year of school in Florida, her troubles seem to have begun in Ohio. For instance, her first year of high school in Ohio she was suspended for fighting. Two other times she was placed in in-school suspension for truancy and for class disruption. Her second year of school in Ohio, she was suspended one day for “gross insubordination” and another time she faced in-school suspension for arguing with a teacher over a seat assignment, not doing her work, and leaving class without permission. And she was suspended a second day for four tardies to school. In her third year she was suspended at least three times. Her disciplinary problems declined considerably that year after getting married though she occasionally still flaunted an arrogant attitude in the face of her teachers and fell prone to tardiness (Smithton 4/12/01 and 5/22/01).

Fatima’s hobbies include going to movies and shopping at the mall and chatting with her friends.
**Personality**

Fatima is an outgoing young woman. She has a curiosity about the world but a temper that sometimes causes her trouble. She is quick to stick up for herself and is often an outspoken leader in a group. She likes to perform—taking an acting class her first year of school in Ohio, posing for glamour pictures her second year, and dancing a traditional Somali wedding dance in front of her class mates for a school cultural festival.

**Issues in Literacy Development**

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Fatima’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of her literacy learning as a young child in Africa and later here in the US in her high school years. In addition, I present some of her memories of reading and writing in the context of her family and in school settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure she experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of her during this time.

**L1 Learning, Family and Childhood:**

As a child, Fatima’s mother reports that she read and told stories to Fatima in Somali though Fatima does not seem to remember this. Fatima says that currently she rarely ever sees her mother reading in Somali. She does, however, see her stepfather reading sometimes.

Fatima’s first memory of herself reading in Somali was when she was enrolled in the refugee camp school in Kenya and at about age 14 or 15 she was assigned to read a story about a boy and girl in love. One of Fatima’s earliest memories of writing is
learning to write her name and greetings in Somali when she was about thirteen years old (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Now when she writes in Somali it is generally for correspondence purposes—notes and emails to friends. In general, Fatima reads and writes more frequently now in English than in Somali.

As an older stronger English speaker in her family, Fatima is occasionally called upon by her mother to help with translating. This can entail helping decipher bills and other communications as well as interpreting for visitors like myself. Fatima explains that she does not like the responsibility of helping explain bills to her mother because sometimes she does not really understand them herself or if she has to call some place she sometimes does not understand the speaker and must ask him/her to repeat, which she also is not comfortable with (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

**Somali ranking**

When asked to rank her language skills in her native language, Somali, Fatima self ranks her reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in Somali all at the top score of five (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest).

**Foreign Language experiences**

Fatima’s experiences learning a foreign language began with the formal study of English when she was about 14 years old. She recalls reading the alphabet in the refugee camp school in Kenya. Later in school they read stories in English. She studied English there for two years before her family immigrated to the US where she began ESL classes. She has also learned informally to read in Swahili, a lingua franca, and Arabic, though mostly for religious purposes, while still in Africa.
General Literacy Issues

Language Input and Type

A typical week for Fatima includes five seven-hour school days immersed in English in courses such as those listed in Table 28.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Reading</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Career based intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry &amp; Algebra</td>
<td>Computer Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Management</td>
<td>ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Science</td>
<td>Global History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PC Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers Seminar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28: Courses Fatima took during the Study

Fatima, however, reports that she spends only about 50% of her school time communicating in English (Acculturation Interview 2/10/01). She has several Somali speaking classmates so she has several opportunities to speak Somali during the day in school. Her best friend is a Somali girl who attends her school too. In the evenings and weekends with the exception of TV, she spends most of her time speaking Somali though occasionally she and her younger siblings toss a few English words back and forth. Overall, Fatima reports that she spends on average about 70% of her week communicating in Somali and only 30% in English (Acculturation. Interview 2/10/01).
General Literacy functions

When asked about “what it means to be literate,” Fatima explained that it is when a person can read and write. She considers herself literate in both Somali and English (Initial Interview 8/27/2000).

Writing
Any writing that Fatima does is usually in English. She writes her school assignments and she writes emails about three times a week just to “say hi” to her friends. Once just for fun she copied down the words to a romantic song in English. Occasionally she also writes letters or notes in Somali.

Reading
Like her writing, most reading that Fatima does is in English. She reads for her school work assignments ranging from short novels in a fundamental ESL reading class to word problems in her math class. For fun, she reads notes from her classmates and email messages and sometimes a scary story in English. Some jobs that she has had have also required some form of reading such as when she worked in a clothing factory packaging catalog orders during the summer of our study and had to fill orders based on packaging slips.

Summary
Though literate in both her native language, Somali, and English as well as being somewhat proficient in reading and writing two additional languages, Fatima is not an
avid reader or writer. She reads and writes only what she has to and does not particularly enjoy either process in any language.

L2 Development: Learning English

Goals
At the beginning of our study, Fatima told me that she wanted overall to read, write, and speak better in English (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Her teachers at that point also agreed that she needed to work on these skills and especially on her reading and writing (Thorton 8/10/2000, Porter 8/10/2000, and Murphy 8/2000).

By the end of our study, Fatima’s teachers hoped not so much that she would improve in these basic skill areas as mentioned before but that she would work more on mastering abstract concepts in English (Sanger 5/2001) and learn to stay focused and motivated (Smithton 5/26/2001) in order to complete her school work. Fatima claimed to be motivated, saying “My goal is I want finish school. Then I want go college. That is my goal and leve [sic] a good life” (Literacy Measure #5 2/10/01).

Academic Literacy Issues

Writing Tasks and Text Types:
Most of the writing Fatima does regularly in English is for her school assignments. On different occasions when I asked her about what types of writing assignments or tasks she had to complete, her responses ranged from word level tasks to longer more complicated texts. For instance, she spoke about having to write her “math problems” (Initial Interview 7/30/2000) and writing new words (Literacy Duties
She explained that sometimes in her ESL class, she had to write practice timed writings in preparation for the state writing proficiency test (Text Interview 8/27/2000) and in history, she had to write a research report on a religion (Text Interview 11/2/2000).

Fatima’s teachers reiterated this range of required writing tasks. For instance, two of her teachers explained that Fatima was required to write vocabulary definitions for class, sometimes with sample sentences (Porter 8/10/2000, Smithton 5/26/2001). Her fundamental reading teacher required her students to write a weekly test “to check what they’ve learned during the week” (Murphy 8/2000). Other teachers required more elaborate written projects and presentations (Porter 8/10/2000). The ESL teacher she had at the start of our study, explained that he “asked the students to write about themselves or about an issue in the news that we had discussed. The students would also write about ways to improve their classes, their school and their society. Sometimes we would write mini-scripts for a role play illustrating such general topics as ‘stress’ or specific situations as a job interview or a parent/child discussion” (Thorton 8/10/2000).

In the numerous observations I made of her ESL and Reading classes, I saw that Fatima was required to complete several types of writing tasks for school. As shown in the table below, these samples of tasks I observed can be classified into six functional categories shown in Table 29.
Observed Class assignment task types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Information Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete sentence editing exercises</td>
<td>Describe an event or location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify parts of speech</td>
<td>Report on American Colonial Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetoric</th>
<th>Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer pre-writing questions for topic generation</td>
<td>Write a children’s story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe an object</td>
<td>Write an opinion essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe a process</td>
<td>Write letter to friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a movie review</td>
<td>Describe new invention/machine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study skills</th>
<th>Responding to Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create vocabulary flash cards</td>
<td>Summarize article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell names of countries, states, &amp; capitals</td>
<td>Write letter from one character to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copy dictionary definitions for vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate proficiency in spelling test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write comprehension answers about text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29: Assignment Task Types in Fatima’s Classes

Though this is a random sampling of writing tasks based on my class observations, there seems to be a clear pattern of requiring lots of vocabulary and spelling assignments in Fatima’s classes, some emphasis on presenting and creating information but little emphasis on responding to reading. Most of Fatima’s writing assignments were not linked to her reading assignments except for occasional comprehension questions. I also collected samples of the texts that Fatima actually wrote for her ESL, reading, and history classes. The samples of texts (see Table 30) Fatima wrote for her classes and I collected are illustrative of most of the same above literacy functions and tasks. The texts are examples of an end product for each category (see Table 29).
Although these texts were not randomly selected as they were chosen to show the variety of writing tasks that Fatima typically faced in school, they show similar patterns as in her writing task assignments in that there was more emphasis on basic vocabulary development, sentence punctuation, and information presentation and description. Though Fatima was assigned several creative writing assignments, she did not save any to present to me. In fact, very few of the texts that Fatima saved were longer text types such as essays or reports. Most of her writing consisted of short answer responses to tests. This may be indicative of her not completing longer assignments (as even if she did not give me a copy of her texts her teachers often would) and doing only the minimally required writing on assignments such as tests and vocabulary quizzes. As such, of the long writing texts of Fatima’s that I did collect, only one had one comment from her teacher telling her she had written a “good paragraph.” This would seem to
indicate that even if longer essays were written, students were not given lengthy feedback on these texts.

**Writing process**

In observing Fatima in the midst of composing a text, I have noticed that depending on her motivation to complete the task, she can put off writing for a while but then dive in and complete the assigned task rather quickly. Fatima usually writes without stopping in randomly organized paragraphs. Very rarely does she pause to cross out words. On one occasion, I observed her ESL teacher trying to get Fatima to stop and edit while writing even though in this case she was writing a first draft of an assignment (Observation 4/10/2000).

Fatima’s teachers have clearly noticed this same hesitancy to begin writing an assignment. In fact, when two of her ESL teachers were asked to describe Fatima’s composing process, their responses hint at a frustration to both motivate her to begin writing and then later to make revisions beyond the word level. For instance, one teacher responded “I did not often see Fatima write English in class. She tried as hard as she could on some days to wriggle out of working. She did not often use a bilingual dictionary, and was very reluctant to write more than one draft…there were some occasions in which she wrote a couple of paragraphs in which she asked me to spell several words” (Thorton 8/10/2000). In describing the writing process Fatima goes through to write, her second teacher (albeit a bit “lightheartedly”) describes this scene. “She looks in a small make up mirror while chatting with friends in Somali. After about four attempts by the teacher to coax her into writing, when he finally kneels down next to
her desk and gets mean, then she writes her text in large, uncontrolled handwriting to fill the page” (Porter 8/10/2000).

When asked about the drafting process, Fatima clearly articulated steps which she proceeds through each time when writing an assignment. “When I write, first I read the book. Sometimes I repeat myself in my mind to remember what I’m going to write” (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Next she explained she makes changes but usually either to spelling or to her handwriting, explaining that these both are indicators of “good writing.”

When faced with writing a longer text like a history report, Fatima lengthens this process of writing out the text without revising except for typing errors. For instance, on one occasion when she had to write a three page report about Judaism, Fatima spent one week in the library struggling with the reading for the assignment as she did not know many of the vocabulary associated with the topic. She described her approach to this assignment in this way. “I started to write down some ideas. Some of it I copied from the book. And some of it I did in my head and type it in” (Text interview 11/2/2000). The teacher did not give her any feedback on any early drafts and assigned her final draft a “D-“ for missing information, problems with paraphrasing, missing a works cited page, and typing problems. Fatima was quite distraught over the grade expecting a better grade, “because I thought I did what she wants and I did my best, so I try to get ‘A’. I was surprised when I get a ‘D’” (Text interview 11/2/2000). She also explained how hard the topic was conceptually because she had to learn all about Judaism and explain it all in English. She also felt she did not have access to the teacher to ask for clarification about issues like formatting a works cited page and creating a title page.
Reading Tasks and Text Types

Over the course of our study, I either observed Fatima directly reading the following texts or collected follow-up writing samples such as comprehensive test answers or worksheets about these texts. In general, the scope and level of texts that Fatima read (Table 31) depended on her class. Most texts were literature or narrative based.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s books:</th>
<th>Preschool Age 4-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Island Baby</td>
<td>Silent Lotus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooray! It’s Passover Baby</td>
<td>The Island below the star The Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basket Weaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sound the Shofar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Africa Brothers and Sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nim and the War Effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages 9-12</th>
<th>Juvenile/Young Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toto in France</td>
<td>Eyes of the Dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toto in Italy</td>
<td>The Cheater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounder</td>
<td>Dragon’s Gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift of the Magi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Retrieved Reformation</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Textbook</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Power in Reading</td>
<td>Columbus Dispatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World History Textbook (10th grade level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 31: Texts Fatima read in her Classes

During the first part of our study when Fatima was in tenth grade, she was enrolled in a fundamental ESL reading course in which she read numerous books at elementary grade or lower levels of reading difficulty. At the same time, her regular ESL class was involved more in writing than in reading yet she was also required to do tenth grade
science and history reading at the time. Her one ESL teacher recalls how difficult these content area texts were for her because, “She did not like the subjects very much and the reading level of a high school text books was way above her ability level” (Porter 8/10/2000).

Occasionally she did have reading in her ESL class though not daily and it was based on video scripts for an ESL contemporary language series (Thorton 8/10/2000 and Porter 8/10/2000). Her teacher recalled that she preferred these video scenes for reading to more traditional literature formats. “I remember that Fatima preferred reading the Connect with English [video] episodes more than the stories. I would think the scripts were easier because they were shorter and linked more to real life situations and language.... I did try to use the Heinemann [adapted literature] texts more as the year wore on because I wanted the students to get practice with a longer, more traditional kind of reading, one in which they would encounter often in other contexts” (Thorton 8/10/2000).

Later, when enrolled in eleventh grade, Fatima was reading higher level juvenile literature in her ESL course as well as grade level textbooks about reading and history. For instance, her teachers report that in addition to any reading or ESL course reading assignments, Fatima was required to do textbook reading in Health, Sciences and History (Porter 8/10/2000). Occasionally, she was pushed beyond “school” reading texts to “weekly health articles that students have to find in newspapers and summarize ‘in their own words’” (Porter 8/10/2000).

When asked about the kind of reading tasks or assignments she usually had for school, Fatima replied that she often had “a lot of reading” because of being in high
school (init. Interv. 8/27/2000). She explained that most of her reading assignments were in her ESL, reading, health, and history classes (init. Interv. 8/27/2000 and Lit. Duties 11/2/2000). When asked to self-report what she read during summer vacation when our study was in progress, Fatima claimed to have read one book about best friends but she could not recall the title or author of the book. She said she kept the book in her car so that she could read while at work (Text Interview 8/27/2000).

**Reading process**

When describing the process Fatima uses when reading a text such as her history textbook, Fatima described a very linear word by word process. She reads usually looking for specific information such as answers to comprehension questions. When she comes upon a word she does not know she looks it up in either an English dictionary or a bilingual Somali dictionary. She explained the process in detail saying that “the word I don’t understand, I write down on a piece of paper, look in the dictionary and write down in my language so I understand it” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

Fatima’s teachers seemed to think that overall when the topic is of interest to Fatima, she does enjoy reading. Their observations of her reading process mirror the description that Fatima gave as being very linear in procedure. She reads from start to finish without previewing or reviewing, stopping only for unknown words. Her reading teacher’s explanation of reading in her class illustrates this process. “Fatima likes to read, but mostly this year she read along with a [tape] recording” (Murphy 2000). This recording is in reference to following along with the text to a story while listening to it.
being read aloud on an audiotape, which was one of the primary ways of doing reading in Fatima’s reading class.

**Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development**

Fatima still struggles to complete many of the reading and writing assignments for her grade level. Writing for her is a “necessary evil” of sorts. She feels that she does plenty of writing in school when in fact most of her writing is in response to comprehension questions or in practice essay writing exercises. She does every little drafting and rarely receives feedback from her teachers. When faced with larger writing tasks like reports or projects for her content classes, she relies heavily on the source texts especially if she does not conceptually understand the topic she is writing about very well.

The discrepancy in reading level requirements for Fatima ranging from children’s literature to tenth grade content level reading seems a bit unwieldy. While her fundamental reading class was supposed to focus on very basic reading fundamentals, I am not entirely convinced that the level of reading for that course was sufficient enough for Fatima to transfer the skills learned in that course to her heavier main content area course reading assignments. Fatima does not use many reading strategies—other than checking unknown vocabulary in a dictionary—and in fact she reads linearly without reviewing causing her to have trouble comprehending entire text meanings and inferences. Overall, it seems that Fatima would benefit more from a process approach to both reading and writing and considerably more extensive practice in both at varying levels of difficulty.
Changes in Literacy Development
To better understand how Fatima’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of her literacy goals, her opinions of how her reading and writing have changed, her own self rankings of her English language proficiencies, and informal evaluations by her teachers and her mother. Furthermore, I present measures of her writing and reading proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and at minimum two to three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of her writing.

L2 Development
When Fatima arrived in America, she ranked her English at a 2 and 3 level (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest). Overall, she understood that her oral skills were much stronger than her literacy skills in English. At that point, having only informally attended school for two years in a Kenyan refugee camp, Fatima was placed into the tenth grade because she was fifteen years old (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). She felt quite overwhelmed as she did not know how to “play school” and her classmates recognized her confusion and called her a “monkey from the jungle” (Phone Conversation 10/22/2000). She said that at that point with her English, the hardest thing for her to do was “to ask the teacher questions” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

Almost a year later near the start of our study, Fatima felt her English was somewhat improved at a 3 to 4 rank level. She also felt completely comfortable asking teachers to repeat something if she did not understand it (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). Even so, she still wanted to improve her writing, reading, and speaking in
English (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Her teachers supported this goal for her at this point (Thorton 8/10/2000, Porter 8/10/2000, Murphy 8/2000).

By the end of our study, Fatima’s overall English had improved somewhat. However, what improvements she made seemed more to depend on whether Fatima was motivated to complete her reading and writing assignments and put effort into doing them well than on her ability. One of her ESL teachers commented, “Fatima has made some improvements [this year], but these were completely dependent on if she wanted to work and learn or if she didn’t. Her socialization with her friends seems to be the greatest deterrent.” This teacher further elaborated saying that Fatima improved slightly in both reading and writing when motivated, especially after about halfway through the school year after she married and began trying. “She began doing much better in her vocabulary, spelling, and definitions and also in her ability to contextualize these in her own sentences” (Smithton 5/26/2001).

**Self Rank**

When asked to rank her English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at both the beginning and end of this study, Fatima ranked herself at a 3 for both speaking and writing, a 4 for reading, and a 5 for listening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fatima Start of study</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 32: Fatima’s Self Ranking of her English Skills
Other rank

Fatima’s teachers were also asked to rank her language skills on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). In comparison, these rankings at the beginning of the study by both Fatima and her teachers are distributed as shown in Table 33.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>ESL-1</th>
<th>ESL-2</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 33: Start Comparison of Fatima’s and Teacher Rankings

It is interesting to note that overall, Fatima ranked her skills much higher than her teachers did and that only she felt that her reading skills were one of her stronger skills at the beginning of our study. Both of her ESL teachers and her reading teacher agree that her literacy skills are the weaker skills although they vary in degree of consistency. With the exception of her second ESL teacher, all three of her teachers rank her listening skills higher than her speaking skills, as does Fatima, which seems typical of most learners’ self ratings. One year later at the end of the study, Fatima’s teacher rankings are shown in Table 34.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global History</th>
<th>ESL-Smithton</th>
<th>Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34: End Comparison of Fatima’s and Teacher Rankings
Again, Fatima’s teachers’ rankings seem to indicate that her literacy skills are weaker overall than her oral skills. It is interesting to note the variance in ranking these skills her ESL teacher assigned her, seemingly indicating that her speaking and listening skills are twice more proficient than her reading and writing skills. Her ESL teacher for the second part of our study did not rank her English skills much higher than her ESL teachers did the previous year even though she worked with Fatima in a higher level class. Also somewhat perplexing is the fact that he first year she received a “B” in ESL and the second a “D.” Perhaps this shows that grades do not necessarily always reflect the teacher’s true assessment of the student’s language abilities because of other factors like attendance, late assignment penalties, etc. that may end up ultimately lowering a grade.

It is also important to note how much lower her ESL teacher’s rankings are at the end of the study in comparison to two of Fatima’s content area teachers’ rankings. Fatima received an “A” in her art class and received higher language evaluations from that teacher while she received a “D” from her history teacher and received average scale scores from her. She also received a “D” from her ESL teacher but substantially lower rankings—especially in her literacy skills. This may be because of her content teachers being a bit more lenient in their assessments or even be the result of Fatima’s performance in their classes. One could assume, for instance, that Fatima would not have to do so much reading and writing in an art class and consequently her teacher may rate her overall language skills much higher. Also, it is important to note that her history teacher assessed her listening comprehension at a score lower than her speaking score. This might be explained by the fact that traditionally a lot of information is conveyed in a
lecture-type format in a history class and Fatima may have had trouble comprehending all of this information.

Halima, Fatima’s mother, ranked her English skills fairly high both at the beginning and the end of the study. As Fatima’s skills are so much stronger than her mother’s in English, this might account for Halima’s high assessments of her daughter’s skills in English. It is interesting to note that Halima did lower her evaluation of Fatima’s reading skills at the end of the study, which is perhaps a sign that she recognized the trouble that Fatima had had with reading throughout the year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent ranking</th>
<th>Fatima Start of study</th>
<th>Fatima End of study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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Table 35: Fatima’s Mother’s Rank of her English Skills

Tracking Changes in Fatima’s L2 Literacy Development

Writing

Speed

Figure 21 illustrates the measures for Fatima’s speed in writing as measured at six points during the year. As can be seen, Fatima’s overall speed as measured in terms of words per minute averaged around thirteen words per minute and fluctuated just slightly over the course of our study.
Although this measure of speed does not attest to any measure of the quality of Fatima’s writing, it does show that she writes consistently at about the same speed and does not vary drastically even for different topic prompts.

**Fluency**

Figure 22 displays the measures for Fatima’s writing fluency as measured at six times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.
Fatima’s writing fluency averages around 141 for the measures in this study. While the first measure is not an accurate reflection of her writing fluency in comparison with the other scores as she wrote much longer during the first measure, overall she is a fairly consistent fluent writer. Her scores for syntactic complexity and accuracy, however, seem to indicate that although she is fluent, her writing lacks some grammatical and syntactic development.

**Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy**

Figure 23 illustrates the measures for Fatima’s proficiency and accuracy in writing as measured at six points during the year.
These scores above indicate overall that Fatima’s syntactic complexity and accuracy in writing are both steadily increasing. Her proficiency gains are more stable while her accuracy levels are more erratic, perhaps due to topic-induced syntactic demands. Overall, it seems that over the course of the year her overall writing proficiency in terms of fluency and accuracy has consistently improved.

**Holistic Writing Evaluations**

In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Fatima’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored all six of her writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in Figure 24.
The holistic scores for Fatima’s writing in English reflect a stable writing level with some fluctuations. It is interesting to note that while on some measures her fluency was quite high or her proficiency and accuracy were increasing, the raters still assessed her writing at a generally stable level. This seems to indicate that overall writing assessment such as holistic scoring does indeed consider a multitude of measures in the construct of what is evaluated as advanced writing. For Fatima these criteria such as speed and accuracy seem to “even out” in the eventual overall holistic assessment of her writing in English.

**Reading**

**Accuracy and Overall Comprehension**

Figure 25 illustrates the measures for Fatima’s reading accuracy and overall comprehension on three reading tasks administered during the year.
The texts that Fatima was reading, summarizing, and answering comprehension questions about for the above measures were selected from a ninth grade proficiency test preparation book. By the end of this study, Fatima had yet to pass the reading section of the Ohio 9th Grade Proficiency Test required of her graduation. As such, these reading texts should be reliable indicators of the types of reading tasks she faces on this test and as a high school student. The results of these particular measures seem to show that Fatima is better able to address specific sentence-level comprehension questions than she is able to understand a text globally. This lack of overall comprehension of a text and the contextual meanings it may impart, may be the cause of Fatima’s difficulties with reading on her school assignments and these types of proficiency tests. Since Fatima is not an avid reader in general she may not be making connections between textual organization or intertextual meanings or predictions as a more experienced reader might.
Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development

In general it seems that Fatima’s reading and writing have both increased slightly during this study. Her accuracy in her writing seemed to increase as she slowed down her writing and perhaps took more time to edit and check her grammar. Her reading comprehension increased less than her accuracy of understanding discrete points in texts which may be the result of the common type of reading comprehension question tasks which she often has to complete for her school assignments.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies

To better understand what helped Fatima’s literacy develop the most during this study, in this section I present an overview of her opinions of what learning and/or teaching strategies helped her in general with English and specifically in writing and reading. I also share the opinions of some of her teachers on these matters and my observations of these strategies in practice in her classes.

General Learning Strategies

The general language learning strategies that Fatima seemed to find most helpful fall into four main categories: socialization, finding a peer guide and friend, ask teachers questions and attend class, and help others.

Socialization

As an extrovert, Fatima found that “talking to students and teachers” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000) and learning to socialize in any new language or school
setting she might find herself to be the best way for her to learn English. Although her
love of socialization with her friends was often seen as a hindrance by her teachers to her
completing her other school work, at least one of her teachers did advocate for an overall
general learning to communicate with Americans as being one of the most effective ways
to learn a second or additional language (Murphy 4/19/2001). Even so, Fatima did find
this difficult to do when she first arrived in America but quickly learned to not be shy and
to even ask people to speak slower and repeat what they were saying if she could not
understand them (Acculturation Interview 2/10/2001).

**Peer guide**

When Fatima first arrived in America, she found that language was a problem as
well as figuring out how everything worked in school. She found she was completely
lost in school at first but a neighbor who attended her school and spoke Somali helped her
tremendously by showing her around and explaining words and procedures to her. His
having immigrated to the US years before proved to be a useful asset for understanding
what was most difficult for her. His kindness and help was especially appreciated by 15
year old Fatima who recalls that “he even ate lunch with me.” (Literacy Duties
Interview 11/2/2000 and Acculturation Interview. 2/10/2001). Smoothing this transition
to a new school, new culture, and new language with a peer was one strategy that Fatima
emphasized as being most helpful to beginning to learn English.
**Ask teachers questions and attend class**

Another strategy that Fatima recommended for surviving in school is to ask teachers questions about assignments (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). She felt more comfortable asking teachers questions about assignments and asking them to explain concepts as she felt more comfortable in her school environment. Still when there were moments when she was unable to ask the teacher about an assignment, she found it particularly frustrating. Some of her teachers commented that some of her lower grades were due to her not understanding the assignment requirements and recommended that Fatima be sure to attend class regularly to ask questions and complete assignments correctly so that she would progress as expected with her studies (Murphy 8/2000). Having survived a period of “trial and error,” Fatima seems to have learned that this strategy is most helpful though she does not consistently apply it.

**Help others**

As an immigrant student, Fatima is keenly aware of the gaps in her schooling background and often feels somewhat defeated at times about even attempting to “patch” these holes in her background. However, she did quickly discover that her talent and love for math could be an asset for her. Not long after arriving in the US, Fatima found that even with very weak English language skills she could help her Florida classmates with their math homework (Phone Interview 10/22/2000). Drawing on this strength made her feel a bit more confident in her struggles to learn English.
Unhelpful Strategies

In her struggles to learn English and to fit in to school here in the US, Fatima seems to have adapted several strategies for coping with learning tasks that have not been particularly productive for her. These include missing school and class, playing “dumb” and/or pretending not to understand English, cheating, and lost motivation/resistance to learning.

Missing school and classes

For various reasons and excuses, Fatima has missed many school days and skipped many classes. On average, during the latter part of this study, for instance, Fatima missed approximately 19% of her school days. Her teachers commented on this as being a potential problem with her studies. For a student who has already missed about six years of formal schooling in comparison with her classmates, missing nearly twenty percentage each year is certainly not helpful for her studies.

Playing “dumb” and pretending not to understand English

Fatima figured out early on during her first year of school in the US that if she was about to be scolded or harassed by her teachers or peers, she could play “dumb” and pretend to not understand any English and “wiggle” out of her situation (Phone Interview 10/22/2000). This strategy lost effectiveness as her teachers and classmates recognized that her proficiency in understanding English was improving though she admits to occasionally still playing with her accent if she needs help from Americans she meets in public (Acculturation Interview 2/10/2001).
Cheating:
Cheating has been another ineffective strategy for Fatima. She recalled for me how when she received an “A” for a math assignment in her first school in America and then allowed some of her classmates to copy answers from her paper, she was penalized. She was offended because she had known the material and it was the other students who did not (phone interview 10/22/2000). Later, during the course of our study the tables were turned for her, and Fatima was caught allegedly copying words off a desktop during a vocabulary test in a desperate attempt to pass a quiz in her ESL class (Observation 5/22/2001). In both cases Fatima faced consequences for her actions, neither helping her learning of English. In the one case, she was driven by a desire to fit in with and help her peers and in the other she was trying to save a potentially lost grade, which she was not prepared for.

Lost motivation/Resistance to Learning
One of the strongest detrimental strategies that Fatima seemed to use at whim was her resistance to any learning tasks by either refusing to complete the work or simply not motivating and disciplining herself to do it. Several of her teachers commented on this “attitude” problem. For instance, “On some days, Fatima has a technique of passive resistance- behind her sweet smile, a quiet but firm determination to do the minimum required….when I pointed out the gap between her ability and effort, she would temporarily bear down, ostentatiously proffering her homework or a raised hand to answer a question” (Thorton 8/10/2000). Two of her teachers commented on the only barriers to Fatima’s improving her English being her lack of dedication and self-discipline (Thorton 8/10/2000 and Porter 8/10/2000). Another commented that if she
learned “to stay focused and understand what her hard work will do for her,” she would succeed in her studies (Smithton 5/26/2001).

**Lack of explanation**

One unhelpful strategy that Fatima indicated some of her teachers inadvertently used was to gloss over general classroom management instructions such as “open your books” and “find chapter 5” without ever bothering to explain these seemingly simple commands to her. Soon after she arrived in America, she remembers, “The teacher was giving directions about using book, but I didn’t understand. She needed to stop and explain but didn’t” (Acculturation Interview. 2/10/2001). This was mainly an issue for Fatima soon after she arrived in the US both because she did not have the language to ask for clarification or to understand her teacher and also because she did not yet know the culture of the classroom and consequently was unfamiliar with such rituals. Her teacher, however, was unaware of this and did not help her. Timely explanations from her teacher would have eased Fatima’s transition into the classroom task at hand.

**Writing Strategies**

The strategies that Fatima employed to help her with writing in English fell into three main categories: copying text, accessing background knowledge, and accessing teacher input.

**Copying text:**

When faced with longer writing tasks such as reports or projects for her content classes, Fatima relied heavily on the source texts. Sometimes she would paraphrase,
other times she would copy the words from the sources. “Some of it I copied from the book. And some of it I did in my head” (Text Interview 11/2/2000).

**Accessing background knowledge**

When writing, Fatima found it much easier to write on topics in English which she already knew something about. For example, being a Muslim and having to write a report on Judaism, she found the task quite difficult. She explained how hard the topic was conceptually because she had to learn all about Judaism and explain it all in English (Text Interview 11/2/2000). Similarly, I have observed her completing chapter comprehension questions for her social studies class on Islam with a note of familiarity to the reading for her already before even reading the chapter.

**Accessing teacher input**

Although this was more difficult for Fatima when she had first arrived in America, gaining access to her content area teachers to ask for clarification about assignment requirements and to assess whether she was completing the task well became an important technique for Fatima. She learned to ask her teachers for input about her assignments and felt quite hampered in her final outcome on the assignments if denied this access. For instance, on one history assignment she lost points for not correctly formatting her title page or including a works cited page. In this case, Fatima felt she did not have access to the teacher to ask for clarification about issues like these (Text Interview 11/2/2000). In addition, more feedback from her teachers on drafts of longer assignments might help steer Fatima in the “right” direction for finishing her assignments.
Two strategies which Fatima’s teachers employed which helped facilitate her writing assignments included audience establishment and assignment modification.

**Audience establishment**
One strategy Fatima’s teacher used to motivate her students was to create a context where the student writer was writing for an authentic audience. In Fatima’s reading course, for example, she was to create and write a children’s story and then video tape it for an audience of children. Though this was an informal production, Fatima did well on it and seemed to enjoy this assignment a lot, especially knowing an audience would appreciate her work (Murphy 8/2000).

**Assignment modification:**
In terms of helping students with writing assignments and in particular with writing in test situations, one of Fatima’s content area teachers explained that depending on the student’s ability to write in English, she would modify assignments for students who can not write well. Some students, for instance, she would simplify the task or exempt certain parts of her test to suit the individual student’s abilities (Reisinger 6/2001).

**Reading Strategies**
The main strategies that Fatima employed to help her with reading in English fell into three categories: ask about unclear points, write down and translate unknown words, and use a dictionary.
Ask about unclear points
When asked what helped her the most with English reading, Fatima replied when she had problems she would ask for clarification. “When I finished book, if I don’t understand I would ask” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

Write down and translate unknown words
Another strategy Fatima would use to help with her reading is to write down any unknown words. “The word I don’t understand, I write down on a piece of paper, look in the dictionary and write down my language so I understand it” (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000).

Dictionary
Fatima uses both a English and bilingual dictionary to help with her reading (Literacy Duties Interview 11/2/2000). A common strategy for reading in a second or foreign language, her ESL teacher in particular encouraged using a dictionary to decipher high frequency words (Porter 3/29/01).

Topics that interest students:
Two of Fatima’s teachers strongly encouraged finding topics for reading that connect to students’ interests and real life (Thorton 8/10/2000 and Porter 8/10/2000). One explained, for instance, that Fatima did not like science and history and so found reading for them particularly difficult (Porter 8/10/2000).
Unhelpful Reading Strategies

In her struggles to learn to read in English, I have observed three particular strategies which seem to not be particularly productive for Fatima in facilitating the growth of her overall reading proficiency. These include reading level discrepancies, her reading only to answer comprehension questions, and audio recordings only.

Level discrepancies
As a sixteen and then seventeen year old young woman, reading books authored for children primarily from ages 4 to 12 could be seen as issue age inappropriateness. The simplified text and repetitions of children’s books are certainly helpful qualities for beginning language readers. However, for the majority of the course in which Fatima was reading these children’s books, this was the only reading. These were not often if ever supplemented with extensive texts at higher levels. While enrolled in this course, Fatima was also faced with deciphering high school level readings in science, health, and history in her other classes. The leap from one level to another in terms of difficulty was not ever addressed or bridged for Fatima. She needed to learn to decode and analyze texts at much higher levels than she was being taught in her reading course. Practicing consonants, vowels, and syllable counts based on children’s stories did not help her unravel the content in her main course textbooks.

Comprehension questions
In observing Fatima reading for her content area courses such as science and history, Fatima was almost always faced with the task of completing a set of chapter comprehension questions for each assignment. Very often, Fatima did not take the time
to preview and read through the chapter. Instead, she jumped immediately to the questions and sought only answers to them in the text. While these questions are often facilitative in pulling out important ideas from the texts, she often read only for answers and missed many contextual cues for gaining a more global understanding of the text.

**Audio recordings**

A creative approach to presenting readings to Fatima’s reading class was in the form of audio recordings of the texts. While this may facilitate multiple ways of learning—both aurally and visually—for Fatima this was often the only interaction she had with the texts. Her reading teacher explained, for instance that “Fatima likes to read, but mostly this year she read along with a [tape] recording” (Murphy 2000). Heavy reliance on this strategy left Fatima in a lurch when faced with reading for her other courses where there were no such audio recordings. Additionally, this removed the burden for decoding words entirely from Fatima and required her only to learn to spell and define certain decontextualized vocabulary words from the stories.

**Overall Summary on Fatima**

Overall, Fatima is rather proficient in her speaking and understanding of English. Her literacy skills, however, are still quite underdeveloped. Her minimal gains in reading and writing this year may be attributed to her dislike of both, as well as her minimized opportunities to do either as she was often able to “wiggle” herself out of assignments or at best compensate by doing the bare minimum required. Fatima might excel more in both reading and writing if she were required to do more of both at more
extensive global levels. She is currently overburdened by demands for specific reading answers and writing tasks, allowing little time or desire for more productive and creative fluency reading and writing exercises. The overall development of her literacy skills depends on her investment in reading and writing which may come only if the literacy tasks required of her become more meaningful and real to her own future life.
Abdi

Individual Situation
Abdi is a 17 year old Somali boy, who has spent the last 4 years in the US, after several years in a war refugee camp in Kenya with his family where they fled to from Somalia when he was a young boy in the early 1990’s. As a teen here in the US, Abdi has spent the past three years in Ohio with his mother, stepfather, grandmother, and two sisters, one younger than he. His older siblings live in other states.

Abdi has had four years of documented formal schooling in his lifetime. During his three years in Ohio, Abdi has attended one middle school and three different public high schools. He never had a chance to attend school in Somalia before the war began nor in the schools in his refugee camp in Kenya like his older sister, Fatima, as there was a monetary fee for the Kenyan schooling and his family did not feel he would benefit from it. He did attend middle school for eight months in Florida before coming to Ohio. There after he attended a middle school in Ohio for about one year and two years in a high school with a few months in a high school ESL Newcomer Welcome School which he requested his mother transfer him out of. At the close of our study he was enrolled in ninth grade for the second time in a regular high school. Abdi has completed and passed only four classes in those four years. He has not taken any sections of the Ohio 9th Grade Proficiency Test which is required in order to receive a high school diploma.

Abdi began studying in a high school vocational training/GED program after our study concluded. He enrolled in an electricians training program but then was removed to be tested for a program more suitable to his learning abilities. “He was given a one week assessment at the Career Center to see what program for which he would be suited
and they couldn't find one” (Clarence 11/16/01). Abdi consequently dropped out of the vocational school.

Through these middle and high school years, Abdi’s school attendance has been quite sporadic. His first year of school he missed nearly 28 days of his classes in eight months. His second year he missed 45 days and was tardy sixteen times. His third year, he missed 24 days and was tardy 6 times. His fourth year he missed 36 days.

Discipline has also been an issue for Abdi. For instance, during the course of our study he was suspended several times for reasons such as “fighting, being tardy to class more than 4 times, breaking school rules, running on the stairs during class time, being out of class for more than 15 minutes, class absences, etc” (CPS Discipline Records 2000-2001).

Abdi’s hobbies include playing soccer, basketball, and video games. He generally enjoys running around his neighborhood hanging out with other Somali middle school boys.

**Personality**

Abdi is a firecracker. At times he will sit quietly and work at his seat but never for very long as he often prefers to chat with his neighbors and friends. He often gets scolded by his teachers for talking and usually exacerbates the problem by arguing with his teachers. He becomes easily upset and his voice launches into a higher pitch of protest when he does so, which often annoys his teacher more. Initially my contact with the Omar family arose out of my acquaintance with Abdi when he was in middle school. Then he was an immature student whom I needed to discipline though we maintained a courteous, respectful relationship.
Issues in Literacy Development

To better understand the socio-historical and cultural issues affecting the development of Abdi’s literacy, in this section I present an overview of his literacy learning here in the US during his middle and high school years. In addition, I present some of his memories of reading and writing in the context of his family and in school settings. In this discussion, I survey the types of language exposure he experienced during the time of our study and the literacy tasks required of him during this time.

L1 Learning, Family and Childhood

As a child, Abdi’s mother reports that he read and told stories to Abdi in Somali though Abdi does not seem to remember this. Abdi says that currently he only ever sees his mother reading religious books in Somali. He claims that none of his sisters ever read but that he does sometimes see his uncle reading.

Abdi’s first memory of reading himself was when he was about fourteen years old and enrolled in middle school and read a story about Abraham Lincoln (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). His earliest memory of writing is learning to write the alphabet when he was thirteen and in school in Florida. He can not read or write in Somali. Any reading or writing that Abdi does now is in English for school.

Somali ranking

When asked to rank his language skills in his native language, Somali, Abdi self ranks his speaking and listening skills in Somali all at the top score of 5 (on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest) and his reading and writing at a 0 (Initial Interview 7/30/2000).
Foreign Language experiences
Abdi’s experiences learning a foreign language began with the study of English when he was about 13 years old and enrolled in his first school in eighth grade in Florida. He was enrolled in an ESL class then as well as Language Arts, Pre-Algebra, US History, and Physical Education although he had never before been formally schooled. He studied there for several months before moving to Ohio where he continued in both ESL and mainstream classes. For a few months he did attend his school district’s sheltered ESL immersion Newcomers high school but requested that his mother withdraw him as he thought it was too easy. He also reported to have learned to read in Swahili while still in Africa at a level three (out of five) though mostly for religious purposes (Initial Interview 7/30/2000).

General Literacy Issues

Language Input and Type
A typical week for Abdi during the course of our study theoretically included five seven-hour school days surrounded in English in courses such as those listed below. His older sister, however, reported that he only would typically only attend school three to four days a week (Fatima, Phone Conversation 5/6/2001).
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication/Reading</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>Career based intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World History</td>
<td>Computer Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unified Science 9</td>
<td>Unified Science 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Connections</td>
<td>PC Applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyboarding</td>
<td>Communication/Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writers Seminar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 36: Courses Abdi took during the Study**

Abdi also has several Somali speaking classmates so he has several opportunities to speak Somali during the day in school. In the evenings and weekends with the exception of TV, he spends most of his time immersed in Somali.

**General Literacy functions**

**Writing**

Any writing that Abdi does is in English and is for school. When asked directly whether he enjoys writing, Abdi claimed that he does (Initial Interview. 7/30/2000) although his resistance to all writing assignments and the opinions of all his instructors would seem to indicate otherwise. He does occasionally copy down information from the chalkboard in his reading and ESL classes with great concentration, but composing on his own is not something that he does willingly. His one ESL teacher explained Abdi’s resistance to writing as “Writing [his] thoughts is too thought out. He wants to just talk. Writing slows down the communication process” (Porter 8/10/2000).
**Reading**

Abdi also does not read anything for pleasure. Any reading that he does is for schoolwork during school as he rarely if ever does any homework. However, if the content of the text is of interest to him, Abdi does enjoy reading so long as he is guided by a teacher. For instance, his teacher explained, “We did very short stories when he first came to school. He enjoyed it as long as it was easy enough” (Porter 8/10/2000).

**Summary**

Although Abdi is not literate in his native language, he is somewhat literate in English. He understands the functions of reading books for information and religious purposes and the writing of letters and notes that he sees his family and classmates doing yet he does not participate in these acts. According to Haverson and Haynes (1984), his level of literacy might fall into a somewhat semi-literate category. As such, the level of reading and writing assignments he is required to do as a ninth grade student are beyond the scope of his abilities.

**L2 Development: Learning English**

**Goals**

At the beginning of our study when I asked Abdi what he wanted to improve about his English, he replied “Everything.” He elaborated saying that he wanted to read and write better and that he was going to learn to do that in school and later in the university (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). By the end of our study, these goals were still the same for Abdi.
His instructors also hoped that he would improve his literacy skills. “I'd like to see him have realistic goals based on his current ability level. I'd like to see him be able to write a paragraph, a good paragraph with the appropriate elements of writing included. I'd like to see him read a page of ESL text and get through it in maybe two minutes rather than stop and ask extraneous questions every five words” (Porter 8/20/2000).

**Academic Literacy Issues**

**Writing Tasks and Text Types**

Any writing that Abdi does in English is for his school assignments. In the numerous observations I made of his classes, I saw that Abdi was required to complete a limited number of types of writing tasks for school. As shown in Table 37, these samples of tasks I observed can be classified into four functional categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetoric</th>
<th>Information Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph writing with detailed support</td>
<td>Write a quiz on facts vs. opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writes paragraph on Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>Responding to Reading</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing out ordinal numbers (1-100)</td>
<td>Write letter from one character to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying names off chalkboard</td>
<td>Writing quiz (matching, true/false, and multiple choice) on chapter book)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying class agenda off chalkboard</td>
<td>Complete cloze answers about reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying vocabulary off board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeling places on map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate proficiency in spelling test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recopying 10 times each missed spelling words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying worksheet answers from classmate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create vocabulary flash cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 37: Assignment Task Types in Abdi’s Classes
Though this is a random sampling of writing tasks based on my class observations, there seems to be a clear pattern of requiring lots of vocabulary and spelling assignments in Abdi’s classes, some emphasis on presenting information usually in quiz or worksheet form and little emphasis on responding to reading. Most of Abdi’s writing assignments were not linked to his reading assignments except for occasional comprehension questions. The majority of his writing tasks required copying words and completing quizzes or worksheets.

**Text types collected**

Table 38 displays the types of texts Abdi produced during this study, as collected during class visits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Study skills</th>
<th>Responses to reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence writing using certain verbs</td>
<td>Notes from chemistry class</td>
<td>Cloze worksheet for social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search a word puzzle for Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Short answer worksheet for social studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quiz (T/F, multiple choice, and matching) on chapter reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 38: Texts Abdi wrote during the Study*

Although these texts were not randomly selected as emphasis was put on simply collecting any and all writing samples Abdi completed in school, which were very scarce at that, they show similar patterns in that his writing task assignments emphasized basic vocabulary development, sentence creation, note taking, and reading comprehension.
demonstration. Interestingly, none of the writing texts are “correctly” completed. For instance, the short answer worksheets for his social studies class have random answers written in and apparently copied from the book yet these “answers” have absolutely nothing to do with the questions. Similarly, for example, he randomly labeled answers on his reading quiz for both the multiple choice and the true false questions with the letters “a, b, and c.” He seemed to not even understand the concept of “true” and “false” answers. The search a word puzzle has ten strings of letters circled but only three of them are words.

**Writing process**

In observing Abdi composing a text, I have noticed that he writes only a few words at a time and is unable to sustain his writing for very long. Writing is a very erratic act for him with constant starts and stops. Abdi’s teachers have noticed this same erratic behavior exhibited by him when writing an assignment. “He writes something down, perhaps a sentence, and asks if it is good. Because his ability is so low, he is usually discouraged by having to re-write. Writing more than a sentence for a topic is difficult for him” (Porter 8/20/2000). One teacher commented that when required to produce a text of some sort for a class, Abdi “looks at someone else’s paper” to write his own (Murphy 5/2000).

When asked about the drafting process, Abdi explained that he first thinks about the topic, writes the whole text, and then changes a few words. He edits he says “If wrong [word] I change” claiming “I know what to change” (Initial Interview. 7/30/2000).
His writing samples, however, show no evidence that he does any prewriting, revising, or editing.

**Reading Tasks and Text Types**

Over the course of our study, I either observed Abdi directly reading the following texts (Table 39) in class or collected follow-up writing samples such as comprehensive test answers or worksheets about these texts. In general, most texts were literature or narrative based.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts observed read:</th>
<th>Preschool Age 4-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nim and the War Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Onion Tears</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages 9-12</th>
<th>Juvenile/Young Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah, Plain and Tall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abel’s Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing Down the Moon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Baby-Sitter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Baby-Sitter 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outsiders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Garden (Heinemann Guided Readers, Beginner Level)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High School Level</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship handout for social studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies text book: The American Journey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of 227 frequent words from easy literature books</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 39: Texts Abdi was to read during the Study**

During the first part of our study when Abdi was in ninth grade, he was enrolled in both a regular ESL course and a fundamental ESL reading course in which they read numerous books at elementary grade or lower levels of reading difficulty. At the same
time, Abdi was enrolled in both a history class and a science class that required ninth grade level reading. He failed both classes. He repeated the reading, ESL, and science classes during the second part of our study when he repeated ninth grade and was faced with reading similar texts. In addition to these books, Abdi also was required to do map reading and vocabulary list reading from the chalkboard.

**Reading Process**

Observing Abdi reading a text is a jolting experience of starts and stops. I have observed him in his ESL class following along very carefully with the class reading with a pencil to mark his place but this was soon interrupted by his chatting with his neighbor (Observation 5/22/2001). On the same day, I have observed him scanning quickly through a text and then turning to the multiple choice comprehension questions about the text with such speed that just about as soon as he circles an answer he erases it and circles another. In the first case, he was reading a simplified ESL text and in the second he was reading short grade level texts which seemed to unnerve him so much as both his knees jiggled up and down as he sorted through a seemingly haphazard process of reading, circling answers, erasing, and selecting another.

Reading does mean something to Abdi in terms of an esteem value. For instance, he was very upset near the end of our study when during his ESL class readings, his teacher never seemed to call on him to take a turn to read aloud to the class. He mentioned this to me several times. On one occasion when I did observe him reading to the class, he read from an abridged ESL reading text and stumbled numerous times
(Observation 1/11/2001). His teacher explained that he only called on him to read because this time Abdi “raised his hand and didn’t shout out for a turn.”

**Issues for L2 Development**

Based on recent literature in second language literacy, there would seem to be two main potential causes for the extreme reading and writing difficulties which seem to hinder Abdi’s literacy development in English, namely, L1 transfer and his illiteracy in his L1. Based on my observations of Abdi during this study as well as on the reading and writing tasks he did complete and input from several of his teachers, I propose that a third and more significant factor is more at work here, that is a learning disability.

Based on my observations and interactions with K12 teachers during the course of this study, there seems to be in general a resistance in secondary education to identifying ESL learners as learning disabled. For instance, the school psychologist at Abdi’s school claimed “. . . it is rare for a high school ESL student to qualify for special education. In the several years that I have served CHS, it has never happened” (Jones 4/11/2001). Instead, I have found that if an ESL student is having a particularly difficult time that this is often attributed to problems in learning the English language. With this in mind and considering particular problems of language interference which may arise, I performed an informal word identification exercise with Abdi (12/20/2000). This consisted of my showing picture dictionary pages of general vocabulary to him and asking him to name the objects shown. Abdi correctly identified 8 out of the 9 objects. He incorrectly identified the duck as a turkey, which may simply indicate a lack of experience with birds
rather than with English. As a result, based on my numerous observations of Abdi boisterously communicating orally in English and his ability to correctly identify vocabulary in English, I propose that his learning difficulties can not be solely attributed to the English language. Instead, I suggest that it is the literacy aspect, or rather the sound-grapheme correlation, of the language which Abdi is not grasping. For instance, in this same case, of these nine previously named objects, Abdi was able to write down the names for only three of the words as shown in Table 40.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Abdi’s spelling of the word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorcycle</td>
<td>Morscol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball</td>
<td>Peall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Sicgem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Dak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air plane</td>
<td>Laimerpekt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>Terro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40: Informal Reading Assessment of Abdi

While an immature language learner may use creative or phonetic spelling until they grasp more standardized spelling, in Abdi’s case he had had four years of schooling by this point which would normally be sufficient time for a pupil to master standard English spelling. Consequently, I believe that Abdi is dealing with more complicated learning challenges than “just” the English language.
Another issue considered in the literature is the ability to transfer literacy skills from a L1 to an L2. For instance, Carson et. al (1990), Canale et al. (1988), Goldman et al. (1984), Mace-Matluck et al. (1983), and Weinstein (1984) have all found support for transferring L1 literacy skills to L2 literacy development. However, in Abdi’s case, he is not literate in his native language. In general, as many Somalis have descended upon this city with limited literacy skills, teachers often consider this L1 illiteracy as an additional barrier to ESL students acquiring L2 literacy. While Abdi obviously cannot draw upon previous literacy experiences, all other factors being similar, I have considered his sister who is three years his junior and who is also not literate in their L1 but who is able to read and write much more proficiently in English than Abdi. I invited her to join us in one of the written literacy measures I proctored with Abdi. She demonstrated a much more fluent and accurate control of her writing in English as well as speed, as shown in Table 41.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Abdi</th>
<th>Younger sister</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speed (words/minute)</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency (average length of t-units)</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy (average length of error free t-units)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41: Comparison of Writing Scores of Abdi and his Younger Sister

Although this is not an absolute test of the impact of L1 illiteracy on the acquisition of L2 literacy, this does seem to indicate that for someone in the same family with the same literacy and similar educational background as Abdi, his younger sister is gaining L2
literacy at a much more successful rate than him. This demonstrates that while his L1 illiteracy may not be facilitating the acquisition of his English literacy, it is not necessarily a hindrance for his younger sister.

A more plausible explanation, I believe, for the difficulties Abdi has had in learning to read and write is that he suffers from a learning disability of some sort. I base this opinion primarily on the aforementioned data, his behavior in school, and comments from his teachers, mother and older sister. His demonstration of poor literacy skills and display of problematic behavior are in keeping with the findings from a study of Florida middle school students who displayed similar actions and problems until specialized intervention was designed to meet their troubled students’ needs (Taylor 2001).

I have observed Abdi’s behavior on numerous occasions in school and in his home. Some times he is a quiet seemingly well behaved student. Other times he is unruly talking back to his teachers and fellow classmates. He has been disciplined on numerous occasions at school. I have observed him jumping up out of his seat during class, roaming the halls, walking across table tops in class, and getting “in the face” of his peers. When he can, he gets himself out of class by taking a hall pass, getting a drink, leaving early to get his coat, or developing a sudden “ailment.” One year during his school cultural presentation, the ESL students presented a sign language version of a song. Abdi seemed to not follow the rhythm or any of the signs. The next year he did not participate at all but sat in the audience goofing off with his friends. At home he spends a lot of time watching television or lounging with video games. He never seems to help around the house and he is quick to argue back with his mother and even
grandmother. At his sister’s wedding, he was never involved in the group dancing or speeches but rather sort of stood off to the side.

Comments from several of Abdi’s teachers also seem to indicate an understanding that he may have a learning disability. For instance, already five months into our study, his ESL teacher commented to me that he thinks Abdi “needs intervention” (Observation 10/12/2000). His science teacher commented “When at school, he seems very lost and distracted. ADD?” (Greene 4/26/2001). His reading teacher echoed this idea saying “I think Abdi has some disabilities and should be in special education classes” (Murphy 5/2000). After our study was over when he started having difficulties at the vocational school he had transferred to, he was tested. “He was given a one week assessment at the Career Center to see what program he would be suited for and they wouldn’t find one. They recommended special education testing also. We are going to start the process soon” (Clarence 11/16/2001). In the end he was not tested as promised as he began skipping school too often for the school to agree to testing him.

Comments by Abdi’s mother and his sister also lead me to believe that they now recognize that his learning difficulties have not simply disappeared as his proficiency in oral English increased. Already halfway through our study, I attempted to meet with the mother about signing a request for the school to test him but was unable to track her down. Months later when we spoke, she indicated to me that she now understood that he needed special help and that perhaps the trauma of the war, which she indicated by mimicking the sound and motions of a machine gun, had been the cause of his difficulties. She thought he now needed special classes. His sister also indicated that she
did not think that his current school situation was serving his needs. “I don’t think his classes are good neither” (Fatima 5/6/2001).

Based on these opinions of Abdi’s family and his teachers as well as my observations of his classroom behavior and literacy measures, I suspect that Abdi does struggle with a learning disability. He was never tested during my study, however. While there are certainly potential problems with “labeling” students identified with learning disabilities, such as permanent tracking into lower ability classes and fragmented skill-based remedial pedagogical teaching practices (White 2002), at minimum testing for a learning disability interfering with Abdi’s literacy skills acquisition may have at least afforded him an opportunity for individualized needs assessment and potentially allowed his teachers to recognize and choose better pedagogical practices more suitable for his learning needs.

Summary of Issues in L2 Literacy Development

As a result of the above issues, I believe, Abdi is clearly struggling with reading and writing in English. He knows some English vocabulary but is generally unable to recognize it in print form to write words that he knows aurally. When possible his assignments have been simplified in his ESL and reading classes to help him cope yet he easily becomes lost in his other classes. His interrupted educational background and lack of L1 literacy skills seem to not be the only sources of his literacy challenges. Attempts to have him tested for more specialized services have been very slow in materializing and have often been shuffled and all but lost in the process.
Changes in Abdi’s Literacy Development

To better understand how Abdi’s literacy developed over the year during this study, in this section I present an overview of his literacy goals, his opinions of how his reading and writing have changed, his own self rankings of his English language proficiencies, and informal evaluations by his teachers and his mother. Furthermore, I present measures of his writing and reading proficiencies in English for the course of the year as evaluated by myself and three trained readers’ holistic evaluations of his writing.

L2 Development

When Abdi arrived in America, he knew very little English. He began school in Florida and spent part of a year there before moving with his family to Ohio. When I first met him during his middle school years here in Ohio, he was proficient enough in English to maneuver through school but depended a lot on his Somali classmates to clear up communication problems. He failed all but one class that year (and at that received a “D”) and then due to his age and his having already once before repeated the eighth grade was moved up to the high school level.

At the start of our study when he was ending his first year in high school, his overall English skills, especially in reading and writing were quite weak. When asked to comment on how often Abdi was required to read or write for his classes, his reading teacher simply stated “I don’t know if he can” (Murphy 5/2000). Having had Abdi in class for one year by the time our study began, his ESL teacher explained that “Actually, everyday we either read or wrote and I do not recall him getting better” (Porter
The fact that Abdi was not making any progress seemed to be the consensus among his teachers even at the end of our year’s study.

**Self Rank**

When asked to rank his English skills (on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 highest) at the beginning of this study, Abdi ranked himself at a 2 for both reading and writing, a 4 for speaking, and a 3 for listening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Abdi Start of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 42: Abdi’s Self Ranking of his English Skills

**Other rank**

Abdi’s teachers were also asked to rank his language skills on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). In comparison, these rankings at the beginning of the study by both Abdi and his teachers are distributed as shown in Table 43:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Abdi</th>
<th>ESL</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43: Start Comparison of Abdi’s and Teacher Rankings
According to this evaluation, Abdi seems to recognize that his oral skills are much stronger than his literacy skills. His teachers’ evaluations although differing in value also indicate a much stronger balance in his oral skills than his reading and writing proficiencies. It is interesting to note that his reading teacher after having him in class for several months clearly did not believe he could read or write.

One year later at the end of the study, Abdi’s teacher rankings are shown in Table 44.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Physical Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: End Comparison of Abdi’s and Teacher Rankings

Again, Abdi’s teachers’ rankings seem to indicate that his literacy skills are weaker overall than his oral skills.

Abdi’s mother initially ranked his English skills at an average level. However, it is interesting to note that by the end of the study she had lowered her assessment of all but his listening skills. Her scores would seem to indicate her frustration with Abdi’s poor performance in school during the year—especially in terms of reading and writing—yet show her feeling that he understands oral English.
Table 45: Abdi’s Mother’s Ranking of His English Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent ranking</th>
<th>Abdi Start of study</th>
<th>Abdi End of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tracking Changes in Abdi’s L2 Literacy Development:

Writing

Speed

Figure 26 illustrates the measures for Abdi’s speed in writing as measured at five points during the year. As can be seen, Abdi’s overall speed as measured in terms of words per minute averaged around three words per minute and fluctuated just slightly over the course of our study.

Figure 26: Abdi's Writing Speed
Although this measure of speed does not attest to any measure of the quality of Abdi’s writing, it does show that he writes consistently at about the same speed and does not vary drastically even for different topic prompts. Furthermore it shows that he writes very slowly taking around twenty seconds to write a word.

**Fluency**

Figure 27 displays the measures for Abdi’s writing fluency as measured at five times during the study. Fluency was measured in terms of total words produced during the writing exercise.

![Figure 27: Abdi's Writing Fluency](image)

Abdi wrote on average 27 words for each of the exercises. Generally, as expected, the longer he wrote the more words he produced. Overall, though for a student placed at the ninth grade level, his overall fluency in writing is quite low.
Syntactic Complexity and Accuracy

Figure 28 illustrates the measures for Abdi’s syntactic complexity and accuracy in writing as measured at five points during the year.

These scores above indicate overall that Abdi’s proficiency in writing is increasing, but his accuracy is not. His proficiency gains are more stable while his accuracy levels are more erratic, perhaps due to topic-induced syntactic demands or the rate at which he was writing. For instance, on the third measure he received one of his lowest speed scores yet the highest in his accuracy while on the fourth measure he received his highest proficiency score but none of his sentences were grammatical. Overall, it seems that over the course of the year his writing proficiency improved just slightly while his accuracy did not at all.

Holistic Writing Evaluations
In order to share an objective comprehensive assessment of Abdi’s writing, three ESL composition instructors trained in rating short text samples read and scored four of his writing samples. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time in general and 100% for Abdi’s writing assessments. The averages of their scores on a scale of 0 to 6 with 6 being the highest score are displayed in the Figure 29.

The complete agreement of the holistic raters on Abdi’s scores strongly indicate that his writing in English is consistently low. He made no observable progress in writing during the course of this study.

**Reading**

**Accuracy and Overall Comprehension**
Figure 30 illustrates the measures for Abdi’s reading accuracy and overall comprehension on two reading tasks administered during the year.

Figure 30: Abdi’s Reading Accuracy and Comprehension

The texts that Abdi was reading, summarizing, and answering comprehension questions about for the above measures were selected from a ninth grade proficiency test preparation book. These scores seem to indicate that he comprehends very little of the texts overall and at that this is possibly dependent on the topic. He is also completely unable to accurately answer specific questions about the texts. In fact, in some cases, he seemed to simply guess at his answers, often erasing and changing his answers without referring back to the text (Observation 5/22/2001).

**Supplemental Reading Tests**

Because of the difficulties Abdi was having with the reading measures I was administering for this study, I tried as I observed him in his classes to supplement this
information about his reading abilities with authentic school task measures. I present two of these observations below as well as information regarding an additional informal measure which I performed with him about halfway through our study.

On one occasion I was able to observe Abdi being tested in his reading class. The test was an individualized test which the teacher explained to me was designed for about a first or second grade level student (Observation 11/22/2000). The test consisted of four main parts: oral word reading, writing, prepositional identification, and spelling. I found his attempts at the reading section particularly interesting. The sample of his errors shown below seem to indicate a general understanding on his part of some phonics but that he generally rushes through and guesses at the rest of the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abdi’s Guess</th>
<th>Actual Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clock</td>
<td>Lock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bird</td>
<td>Blackboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sin</td>
<td>Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Rainy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud</td>
<td>Cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 46: Abdi’s Guesses during Reading Assessment

His teacher explained his poor reading in that he “guesses a lot and doesn’t know his phonics no matter how much we’ve gone over things” (Murphy 11/22/2000).

I observed similar patterns in his reading during one of his ESL classes a few months later. Abdi was reading aloud to his class from The Garden. Once again, his
pattern of sounding out some words correctly and others not seems based partially on a phonetic pattern he recognizes and partially on his guesses (Observation 1/11/01).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abdi’s Guess</th>
<th>Actual Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Felt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram</td>
<td>Arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow</td>
<td>Flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat</td>
<td>Dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kutchchen</td>
<td>Kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mell</td>
<td>Smell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw</td>
<td>Sadly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clan</td>
<td>Clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need</td>
<td>Needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her</td>
<td>Here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
<td>Went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat</td>
<td>Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If</td>
<td>at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 47: Abdi’s Reading in ESL Class

In this case, although Abdi was reading only for a few minutes, he again made several errors. This may be due to an inability to decode the words correctly or perhaps to difficulties contextualizing and thereby making false or inaccurate guesses. This particular day’s reading may also have been exaggerating a bit in the sense that he was reading aloud in front of his class and so may have committed more “performance” mistakes than actual errors. It would seem, though, that based on the fact that in the previous case in his other class where he was being tested individually he made similar errors and the fact that he was almost “begging” his ESL teacher this time for an
opportunity to read in front of his class that he really was not intimidated by this experience.

About halfway through our study when it became quite apparent based on my observations and comments from teachers that Abdi was struggling a lot with reading, I elected to administer and additional reading measure for him. While content is often a strong signal for comprehending or even guessing the semantic meaning of a word or text, Abdi was apparently not drawing on available contextual clues in his class readings nor in the measures I had previously administered. As a result, I elected to try a more decontextualized reading measure with him to see whether he was able at a more phonetic level to better decode words. This measure although informal was intended to evaluate how well he recognized words from a list of commonly used words taken from a study guide for tutoring dyslexic children as well as specialized lists such as short and long vowels (Baumer 1996). For each list, words were randomly selected for him to read. Each selected word was either marked as read correctly or not.

On the list of most commonly used words, Abdi read 65% of them correctly. Of the series of reading words with short vowels, he read 46% of them correctly. The same ratio held true for his reading of long vowel words. In pairings of short to long vowel shifts (such as “ten” to “teen”) he did not read any of the long vowel words correctly though he recognized 80% of the short vowel words correctly. From the list of consonant digraphs, he read 44% of them correctly and 57% of consonant blend endings correctly. On a list of diphthongs, he read only 50% of them correctly. As these words were based on elementary reading words, it would seem that Abdi’s inability to read only half of the words correctly, indicates that his phonetic decoding skills are not necessarily helping
him in his reading. Consequently, he needs even more contextualized support for his regular school readings.
Summary of Changes in L2 Literacy Development

Abdi consistently scored low in both reading and writing in English during the study. The continual lack of progress as well as continual difficulties in his classes alarmed several of his teachers though no district testing was implemented to diagnose him with a learning disorder. More than likely he will not progress in English writing unless intervention strategies are put in place.

Abdi is a weak reader. Further practice in global reading strategies to compensate for his lack of background knowledge may be needed to develop his reading proficiency. In addition, as he is not decoding very well on a more phonetic level, he needs additional instruction at this level as well as professional testing in reading disabilities.

Most Helpful Learning Strategies

To better understand what helped Abdi’s literacy develop the most during this study, in this section I present an overview of his opinions of what learning and/or teaching strategies helped him in general with English and specifically in writing and reading. I also share the opinions of some of his teachers on these matters and my observations of these strategies in practice in his classes.

General Learning Strategies

The general language learning strategies that Abdi seemed to find most helpful fall into six main categories: consistent reading and writing practice, motivational rewards, socialization, structured agenda, audience, and individualized tutoring.
Consistent reading and writing practice

At the end of our first interview, when I asked him about how he intended to improve his English, he replied that he was going to read and write every day and that that way he would get to go to college (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). Although Abdi does not follow through on this strategy, he clearly recognized the value of consistent regular reading and writing practice.

Motivational rewards

While point or reward systems for good behavior can sometimes be seen as controversial in the eyes of educators, Abdi was clearly motivated by the point reward system that his reading teacher was using in her class. He commented on this indirectly when on one occasion in complaining about another teacher he faulted him for among other things not giving Abdi any points. I have also observed Abdi rushing to finish an assignment to hand in to receive points by the end of a class period. I have also seen how he would with his classmates check to see how many points he had accumulated as posted on the class board.

Socialization/Pair work

Abdi is an extraverted young man who likes to chat and interact with his friends and classmates. In fact, in some cases, he can not keep himself from socializing too much with his friends—in Somali or in English. Occasionally, his teachers have been able to channel his socializing energies into productive class work such as pair work. For instance, on one occasion, Abdi was paired with a stronger non-Somali speaking student to put flash cards of parts of a sentence in order (Observation 3/13/01). Abdi benefited from the other student’s understanding of and knowledge about the task while at the same
time talking with his partner in rapid excitement in English about their completing the task.

**Structured Agenda**

Abdi seems more at ease in class when there is a set structured agenda for the day. This structure seems to help him focus. For instance, he is very careful to copy down a class agenda when it is written on the board (Observation 1/11/2001).

**Audience**

Although Abdi is not a flawless performer, he seems to really enjoy “performing” in front of a live audience—especially a captive group of his ESL classmates. While his English oral skills are not perfect, he is not afraid to get up and speak in front of his peers. For example, I have seen him on separate occasions beg to read aloud in class, spin a story about when he first arrived in America and nearly drown in ocean in Florida, and volunteer to stand in front of his class to read a paragraph about Islam. Abdi always seems so happy to present to his class which opens up even more opportunities for him to practice and get feedback on his English.

**Individualized Tutoring**

One of the privileges that the school district where Abdi studies offers is the opportunity for ESL teachers to have bilingual aides in their classes. The number of aides available is dependent, of course, on the number of students. Also, the language the aide speaks does not always match the native language of the students in the class. However, even so, having these aides allows students opportunities to have
individualized tutoring. Abdi benefited from this attention in that often during his first year of high school in Ohio his ESL aide would work with him individually on reading and writing tasks more focused on his own individual needs. They would meet privately during class time. His teachers recognized this benefit for him although only his ESL teacher had an option to send him for supplemental tutoring with an aide. The other content teachers did not have access to this tutoring. His reading teacher acknowledged this problem saying that “Abdi needs help from a tutor. The classroom does not work for him” (Murphy 5/2000). On the occasions when Abdi did have individualized tutoring from the bilingual aide, it helped him to focus and work through the material.

Unhelpful Issues and Strategies

In his struggles to learn English and to fit in to school here in the US, Abdi seems to have adapted four general strategies for coping with learning tasks that have not been particularly productive for him. These include missing school and class, cheating, lacking an attention span, and keeping company with false friends.

Missing school and classes

In a given school year, Abdi has lately had a pattern of missing school nearly 25% of the time. His reasons for missing include legitimate excuses, suspensions, and feigned illnesses. A confounding factor for this is that often when he misses he never catches up with the assignments that he has missed which in turn “snow balls” into his being even more behind in his work (Observation 11/22/2000). He tends to exaggerate this problem by choosing not to attend or pretending to be sick in order to get out of class, a strategy
he was still using even after our study to get himself out of a GED course at the career center.

**Cheating**

Another strategy that Abdi would use to navigate some of his school assignments was simply cheating. I suspect that on several occasions he has copied homework assignments from his friends and peers. On one very interesting occasion, I observed him trying to cheat his way through a spelling test. On this particular day, his reading teacher was administering a series of three spelling tests each testing 15 different spelling words (Observation 3/13/01). Each time the teacher distributed blank paper to the students and asked them to number 1-15. Then she read through the first series of spelling words and then stopped. To check the students’ answers, she asked the students to trade papers with a classmate. She then wrote the correct answers on the board and presumably the classmate who was checking the paper was to write the correct spelling on the test for any missed words and then return the papers to the original student. The students were then to tell her in front of their classmates how many words they missed. Any student who missed more than 10 words was to write each misspelled word ten times for homework. Three times she repeated this process.

Using this process, the first time Abdi had 9 incorrect words. The second and third times he and his partner did not even bother to trade papers and instead wrote the correct answers on their own papers. Consequently, the second time Abdi reported that he only had 5 wrong and the third time only 4. The teacher seemed to doubt him when he reported these higher scores but never bothered to collect or check the papers or who was
“grading” them. Abdi seemed to take advantage of this process as soon as he figured it out and thereby save himself some homework as well as “save face” by not having to report such low scores in front of his classmates. This strategy seemed to work well for him excepting that he was not accurately tested on this particular series of 45 spelling words.

**Short attention span**
Abdi has a difficult time staying focused and on task. His attention and motivation rise and fall very quickly sometimes during class. Generally he is unable to sustain a continual quiet activity without direct teacher or tutor intervention for very long. Unless the topic is of interest to him or he is the focus of attention, he is quick to change his activity—reading to chatting, chatting to walking around the room, etc. He often would shout out an answer without being called on or simply call out “I’m done” in class (even in high school) announcing that he had finished an assignment. I have observed him several times during his last period class leaving the room early to go to his locker to get his coat to be ready to dash out the door the second the last bell rang. He had no patience for school and the act of simply sitting and working quietly on reading and writing seemed to always be a struggle for him.

**False friends**
Another issue affecting Abdi’s overall learning is his habit of making friends with the “wrong” crowd who then in turn lead him astray discipline wise. His increased frequencies of discipline related issues has risen over the past year though he is not a malicious boy. His own sister commented to me that he was having to spend so much
time in in-school suspension because his friends get him in trouble a lot (Fatima 5/6/2001). Later after our study, his choice of friends seemed not to be improving as he was taking to skipping school more frequently and hanging out with other boys who were getting into trouble for stealing cars and doing drugs. This all in turn exasperates his basic issue of getting to school and to class and learning in general.

**Writing Strategies**

The strategies that Abdi employed to help with his writing in English fell into three main categories: copying text, accessing teacher input, and “making changes.”

**Copying text**

Whenever the writing task for Abdi involved copying text such as copying down notes from the board or repetitive writing such as rewriting spelling words, he was generally able to focus. I have observed him on many occasions quietly almost dutifully copying down outlines, agendas, or spelling words from the board. This repetitive task—especially when short in length—seemed to be a focused writing task that Abdi could often manage.

**Accessing teacher input**

When composing text (as opposed to copying it), Abdi was generally more uncertain about his own abilities. One strategy that he would use when writing in school was to frequently check with his teacher that he was writing the assignment correctly. “He writes something down, perhaps a sentence, and asks if it is good” (Porter 8/10/2000). While this left Abdi very dependent on his teacher, this seemed to assure
Abdi at least somewhat so that he could continue writing his assignment at least for some short duration of time.

**Making changes**
A third strategy that Abdi mentioned himself to me about his writing is that he “makes changes” when he needs to to his writing (Initial Interview 7/30/2000). When I asked him how he knows what to change during this editing process, he simply replied that he knows what to change. Although his writing showed very little evidence of revising or editing, he seemed to understand that changes are made during the writing process and assumed that as the writer he himself knew how to make those changes.

**Unhelpful Strategy**
One of the least helpful strategies which I observed in Abdi’s classes was the overextension of one writing task—in this case, the administration of three spelling tests in one day (Observation 3/13/01). Abdi is a very unfocused learner who is weak in writing to begin with especially in sound-grapheme correspondences. Asking him to sit for over an hour to write words was not a particularly productive task for him.

**Reading Strategies**
The four main strategies that Abdi employed to help with reading in English fell into the following categories: read on topics that interest student, guided reading, reading aloud, and ask teachers for help in explaining text.
**Topics that interest students**
Focusing on a reading task was always difficult for Abdi. When the topic interested him, however, he too became interested in the reading. For instance, I recall on one occasion watching him surf the internet and look at news sites. Nothing—not even the novelty of the internet—seemed to encourage him to stop and read until he got to a site about Mohamed Ali, his favorite boxer (Observation 10/12/2000).

**Guided reading**
Another strategy that I have observed Abdi using to help with his reading is careful guided reading with a pencil which he uses to follow the text as he reads (Observation 5/22/2001). This strategy seems to help him stay focused and mark his place although he uses this strategy infrequently.

**Reading aloud**
A seemingly very motivational strategy for Abdi to read is to vie for and get a chance to read aloud in class. He mentioned not being able to read aloud a few times to me and indicated that he found this very disheartening, and when he did read aloud though he often stumbled over mistakes, he was quite pleased with having had the opportunity to read to his classmates (Text Interview 11/2/2000). This indicates to me a sort of social process of reading for Abdi where he reads and communicates with others rather than it being an isolated individual process. This preference for sharing reading and reading aloud is similar to Heath’s (1983) observation of the readers of Trackton.
Get teachers to explain reading
A recommended strategy for reading help which Abdi explained every teacher must be willing to offer is a chance to simply stop and ask for clarification while reading (Text Interview. 11/2/2000). He felt much more able to approach and get help in understanding a text from his one teacher than he did from another and this seemed to make a world of difference to him.

Unhelpful Reading Strategies
The two most unhelpful strategies that I observed Abdi using with reading in English included trying to sort out reading level discrepancies on his own and copying “answers” from his textbook.

Level discrepancies
As Abdi was enrolled in other content classes such as social studies and science while simultaneously taking ESL and his ESL reading class during our study, he was often faced with the challenge of sorting through basic primer level reading for his ESL classes yet juggling the assigned readings for this other classes on a much more sophisticated level. Abdi struggled with the basic readings and found no way to successful bridge to the more advanced readings and instead “drown” in the complicated texts required of his grade level.

Copying “answers” from text
Several of Abdi’s classes would require short answer reading comprehension questions to be answered at the end of a chapter or text section. While Abdi observed his classmates paging through the readings and copying down answers, he mimicked this
behavior though the text he copied down on his worksheet “answers” were often just chunks of nonsensical words lifted from the chapters. In a sense he was “playing” the part of the studious pupil writing down answers but most often none of them would make sense. If his teachers did not collect and carefully check his work, he would appear to be completing the assignments well though he was not understanding any of the reading or of his so-called “answers.”

Overall Summary on Abdi

While Abdi does have a set of helpful learning strategies which he uses to improve his English, in general, overall his strategies are more harmful than helpful. He has nearly mastered a “show” in that despite his low abilities he can appear in class to be reading and writing quite well but a closer look at his efforts reveals that he is not reading or writing well in English. He lacks both the language background as well as the tools or strategies to propel him forward in English literacy—which both in the end leave him stalled with little or no notable literacy progress.

Family Summary: The Omars:

As the three previous stories attest, the Omars are struggling in their acquisition of English literacy. While Fatima is succeeding to some degree, her mother and her younger brother, Abdi, are both making little if any progress and neither is very motivated to improve their English reading and writing. There is little support for
English literacy in the home environment and the support at school is inadequate. Abdi’s learning struggle is obviously complicated by a learning challenge of some sort though the schools have yet over the three years I have known him to find support for him nor has his family been able to help him. In general, this family does not read or write much in Somali or English except in cases of instrumental or academic needs. Literacy is not a shared experience in the home. The Omars will most likely stall in their progress to acquire English literacy skills and find their own means to cope without these skills in this society.
Issues in their Literacy Learning

Having reviewed the individual literacy histories of all six participants from this study, I continue this chapter with a discussion of the issues that most influenced the participants’ L2 literacy progress. Following this section, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the most salient changes in their L2 literacy development and present the learning strategies which the participants felt helped them the most in this development.

Research Question #1:

*What were the issues in the lives and environments of the participants influencing domestic ESL learners’ literacy development?*

The following discussion enumerates the issues as shown in Table 48 that were identified in this study to be potential influences on either the participants’ direct literacy development or even indirectly on the opportunities for or occasions supporting L2 literacy advancement.
| Community          | Size and Strength of L1 Community  
|                   | SES and Status                    |
| Family            | Length of Residency              
|                   | Mobility                          
|                   | Child/Parental Roles             
|                   | Parental Involvement             
|                   | Environment—Home vs. School      |
| School            | District/Program Wealth          
|                   | Size of L1 Community within district |
|                   | L1 vs L2 immersion in school     
|                   | ESL Program type and length      
|                   | Types of Classes and Literacy Demands |
|                   | Teacher Relationships            |
| Individual        | Previous Schooling               
|                   | Cheating                         
|                   | L2 immersion: formal vs. informal |
|                   | Previous reading/writing experience |
|                   | Self-Rankings of L1 and L2      
|                   | Future Goals                     
|                   | Personality                      
|                   | Age                              
|                   | Diagnosing a learning disability |

| Literacy: Writing | Writing functions                 
|                  | Types of writing tasks           
|                  | Rhetorical Structures            
|                  | Writing Process                  
|                  | Access to technology             |

| Literacy: Reading | Reading functions                 
|                  | Reading methods                   
|                  | Types and availability of texts   
|                  | Topic interest                    
|                  | Reading process                   
|                  | Access to technology              |

Table 48: Overview of Issues Influencing Literacy Development

Although no causal links could be determined from these issues, each issue discussed either directly arose as part of the data for two or more participants or strongly influenced at least one profoundly.
Community

Size and Strength of L1 Community:
One of the issues to consider influencing a NNS literacy development is the size and strength of his/her own L1 community within the new American community. In the case of this study, the two cultural groups of concern were the Somalis and the Russians. While the total population of the city where this study took place is 711,470, the Somalis number around 17,000 and the Russians around 2,000. These numbers can be interpreted as an indicator of the strength of these respective communities or what Schumann (1978) calls the “cohesion of the L1” group and Giles (1982) considers L1 members’ perceptions of the “permeability” of their ethnicity. In the case of the Omars the community where they live includes several other Somali families whereas the neighborhood where the Pavlovas live includes very few if any other Russians. The stronger the L1 influence in the community the more influence this may have on the L2 literacy demands of the learners, which in turn may affect the language standard of both the L1 and the L2 as used in the community L2 (Beebe 1985, Chambers & Trudgehill 1980, Eistenstein 1982, Fishman et al. 1968).

SES and Status:
Another issue within the community is the both the perceived Social Economic Status (SES) of the L1 community group and also of the individual families within their social environment. Being from a war-torn country, the Somalis are often presumed by the general public to be of a lower-economic status while the Russians who have immigrated to this city as a result of religious and economic reasons are perceived to be slightly better off. In this study, while both families were on welfare, the Russian family
lived in a large rented house in a quiet residential community while the Somali family lived in low-income housing just off a major highway, not more than 5 miles away from the Russian family. While studies (Burstall 1985, Shohamy 1991) have shown that wealthier students in foreign language classes perform better, the same correlation seemed to be true in general for both families in this study with respect to the wealth of their school districts (e.g. the wealthier district students seemed to perform better overall) although as individual families neither was significantly wealthier than the other.

**Family**

**Length of residence and Mobility:**

While the Omar family has spent only about one more year in Ohio than the Pavlovas, their overall length of residency in the US is nearly two years longer than the Pavlovas’ and their rate of mobility overall is much higher. Length of residence in the target language country is sometimes falsely assumed to be an indicator of increased L2 proficiency. This, however, has been shown to be false in considering the phenomena of “fossilization” which may be caused by lack of formal instruction, language varieties, and other issues (Fishman 1968, Scarcella and Lee 1989, Pica 1983). Consequently, the Omar family was not necessarily advantaged in comparison to the Pavlovas simply by virtue of living in the US longer. In fact, their high rate of mobility or changing their domicile as well as the children’s schools, has probably disadvantaged them to some degree. Two years before the study began, the Omars moved to Ohio, where they resided at at least two different residences. Prior to that, they lived in Florida for almost a year. Before that they lived for five years in the war refugee camps in Kenya to where they had fled the war in Somalia. This lack of stability was not conducive to laying a consistent
educational foundation for the children. In comparison, the Pavlovas led a relatively quiet life in Moscow where the girls enjoyed uninterrupted schooling before moving as a family to Ohio. While this “lost” time can never be recaptured, this interrupted schooling is certainly an issue to consider (see for example Faltis and Wolfe 1999, Harklau et al 1999, and Mace-Matluck et al 1998) when assessing and educating a child who has not been privileged to have had a steady reliable schooling.

Child and Parental roles
One of the distinctive characteristics of immigrant and refugee families is that children often quickly surpass their parents’ proficiencies (e.g, Rodriquez 1982) in the new target language and as a result are called upon to help translate for family issues which they might not normally have ever been involved in because of their young age. This was the case for both the Omar and the Pavlova families. None of the children enjoyed dealing with these situations although they were willing to help their parents navigate the linguistic hurdles in their new homelands. While this did not necessarily affect the children’s L2 literacy skills, this assistance did offer the parents an informal support system for dealing with bills, letters, and other English communications. While Ivan and his wife tried to call on their daughters only minimally for this help, for Halima this support became in some cases more of a “crutch” in that not needing to do as much on her own as her children could translate for her, Halima read and wrote only minimally.

Parental involvement
Stemming from a similar issue as the child-parent role changes as noted above is the issue of the amount of involvement the parents in the new land are able and willing to
be involved in their child’s education. Two main issues seem to arise from this. The first is the amount and type of communication the schools are able to sustain with the parents and vice versa and the second is the general influence of the parent in the home environment in terms of creating a learning environment.

School communication with parents tends to range from either positive and praising of the student to negative and informing parents of disciplinary or learning issues. In the case of the Pavlova family, most all communications sent home to the parents were positive about the girls. The opposite was true with the Omars with most messages sent home being about disciplinary actions to be taken against Fatima or Abdi. These communications were sometimes muddled in that they were sent home with Fatima or Abdi and so often did not reach their mother or when they did they were written in such language that Halima had to still rely on the children to honestly translate the content for her. Occasionally the Omar’s schools did provide more common announcements in translated forms though these were sporadic and so there was no guarantee that these made it to Halima either. In the Pavlova’s case, especially when the girls were both in elementary school, they knew to expect weekly memos about the coming week’s homework assignments. As such the Pavlovas maintained open positive lines of communication with the schools and were able to keep track of most of the assignments required of their children. This, however, was not the case with the Omars, leaving a gaping communication divide between Halima and her children’s schools to be transversed mostly only with negative messages. As such, this supports studies by Blakely 1983, Burstall 1975, Gardner 1985, and Morrow 1989 that have shown how
parents can have a positive influence on their children’s learning of a L2 and so should be informed by any means possible by the schools of ways to assist their children.

In terms of the family home being specifically supportive for developing L2 literacy skills, the nature and intensity of the reading and writing exposure in the home is also important. Positive parental support was found to be facilitative in L2 learning. In the Pavlova home, reading and writing in both the L1 and the L2 were common. Reading, in fact, had been common starting with reading to their girls as infants. Meanwhile, as the girls attended school both parents took active roles in impressing upon them how important reading and writing were and both modeled this through reading and writing in Russian in English. Both parents read and wrote for household duties like dealing with mail and writing letters. Both also read books for pleasure and wrote letters to stay in touch with friends and family. In the Omar home, Halima occasionally read and wrote bills in English and composed letters to friends and family in Somali but at a much less intensive level than the Pavlos. The extremes are illustrated in Marina’s mother taking steps to hide Russian books from her to encourage her to read in English and Abdi’s not even acknowledging that either his mother or sisters ever read or wrote beyond religious reasons. Somewhere in between lies a more complete picture which realistically shows that indeed the Pavlova home was more conducive to learning to read and write in English and that the Omar home did not focus as much on this “school” learning as much. One might say that the Pavlova children are able to “transfer” their “home” literacy practices more readily to their “school” literacy. It is not surprising then that the Pavlovas were stronger readers and writers.
Environment—Home versus school

Another issue to consider is the role of parents in creating a learning environment in the home. Studies have shown that a “home-school gap” can develop when school learning is not reinforced at home (Cook-Gumperz 1993, Mace-Matluck et al 1998). In terms of developing L2 literacy this issue seemed to hinge on three main opportunities: access to books and/or technology, structured study time, and intensive reading and writing exposure. In this regard, the Pavlovas and Omars differed greatly. For instance, while the Pavlovas provided the girls with numerous books and texts both in Russian and in English as well as computer access to the internet, the only print material found readily in the Omar home were scattered mailings and magazines. As the Omar children were considerably older than the Pavlova children, they were often left unsupervised in the home with the exception of an ailing senile grandmother. Consequently, the children rarely ever spent time at home studying or doing homework but rather preferred to watch TV, talk on the phone, or play video games. In contrast, in the Pavlova home, the girls had a designated time to do homework when they arrived home from school. Often the mother and/or father would sit down and help them with their homework. While Halima understood that it was important to be able to help her children in this manner with completing their homework, she felt disempowered due to her English language struggles to help them and flailed her arms helplessly during our final interview to indicate this frustration to me (final interview 7/22/01). As such, the environment in the Pavlova home seemed far more conducive to learning.
School

District and Program Wealth
With the current school funding structure in the state of Ohio, richer communities most usually entail richer school districts. While both school districts in this study are considered urban districts, the district where the Somalis studied spends approximately $1,000 less per pupil than the district where the Russians studied (ODE Website 6/22/02). Funding realistically translates (or does not) into materials, methods, and opportunities for literacy education in the schools.

Size of L1 Community within School District and L2 versus L1 immersion
The size of the L1 community within a given school district directly affects the number of same L1 speakers enrolled in the schools. This in turn may affect the number of opportunities for students to speak in their L1 while at school. For instance, for the Omar children, they were able to spend approximately 50% of their time at school speaking in Somali. However, for the Pavlovas children although there were other Russian children enrolled in their district, the numbers were proportionately so much smaller and as a result the Pavlovas were immersed nearly 100% of the time in the target language. Similar situations were seen in the cases of both Ivan who in studying at the community college found few other Russian native speakers as well as for Halima who when enrolled initially in the workforce training program had several other Somali “classmates.” More exposure to the target language would seem to facilitate L2 literacy proficiency, as found by Genesee (1984) for instance, yet in a “guarded sense” in that immersion alone has not been found to be entirely facilitative of more formalized

**ESL Program Type and Length**

While there are several types of L2 language program format (e.g. immersion, sheltered, pull-out, bilingual, etc.) for both districts involved in this study, the format was a pull-out approach which either resulted in students being tutored individually or in classes of no more than ten students, as in the Pavlova’s case or pull-out classes ranging from about 10-18 students as in the Omar’s case. The variances in these types of programs have been studied (Collier 1999, Cummins 1988) to find which are most facilitative of L2 learning. Overall, the Omar’s district serves 3,049 ESL students out of a total enrollment of 63,629 while the Pavlova’s district serves 26 out of a total of 2,246 (Ohio Department of Education, 6/25/02). Each district assesses their ESL students annually to review the need for the continuation of ESL services for each student. The Pavlova children exited from their district’s ESL program after two years of support while the Omars continued in their district’s services after three years of ESL. With more individual attention, smaller classes, and faster program exit time, at first glance, it would seem that the Pavlovas’ district’s ESL program was better; however, there are simply too many other confounding variables to make such a claim.

**Types of Classes and Literacy Demands**

The types of classes which the participants were enrolled in also affected the demands for L2 literacy proficiency placed upon them. For instance, in the case of Fatima and Abdi who are high school students and had some flexibility in selecting the
courses they would take, they or their guidance counselors elected when possible to schedule them for classes with less demanding reading and writing assignments (Porter 1/5/2001). As a result they took classes like Career Connections, Keyboarding, Physical Education, and Life Management. However, for both Marina and Sveta, with the exception of their ESL classes, they took all of the regular mainstream content courses as their peers. Their father, however, when possible, also elected to take classes which required less reading and writing at the community college level. For instance, he preferred computer classes and speaking classes when possible. Avoidance of classes which require more reading and writing certainly does not enhance one’s reading and writing proficiencies.

**Teacher Relationships**

The relationship between a teacher and his/her students and parents can work to either facilitate or hamper scholastic support for a student. In the case of both Fatima and Abdi they both on occasion voiced strong dislike and even distrust for one or more teachers. Likewise, although their mother did occasionally visit the schools, it was generally only to represent her children in discipline hearings or inquire about truancy issues and not for pleasant parent-teacher meetings. Marina and Sveta both seemed quite fond of most all of their teachers just as their parents generally respected and visited with them in parent-teacher conferences. Although positive relations between teachers and their students and parents are generally desired by all parties, the circumstances under which this may or may not happen vary greatly. In cases when positive rapport is fostered, learning takes precedence (Fu 1992). The teachers in this study who were able
to motivate their students most via positive relations with the participants were able to use that rapport to motivate their students integratively, supporting the classical study by Gardner and Lambert (1959).

Writing Functions
The types of writing tasks that the six participants in this study encountered during this study ranged from writing bills to writing reports and fictional stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of writing</th>
<th>Pavlovas</th>
<th>Omars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>• bill writing</td>
<td>• bill writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recording dates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• writing down telephone numbers, email addresses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>• letters to family</td>
<td>• letters to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• notes to school</td>
<td>• notes to friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• notes to friends/family</td>
<td>• emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• emails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>• journals</td>
<td>• picture captions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/School Writing</td>
<td>• essays</td>
<td>• essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• tests</td>
<td>• tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• spelling words</td>
<td>• spelling words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stories</td>
<td>• reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 49: A Comparison of Types of Writing Functions in Both Families

Similar to what Heath (1983) found in her ethnographic study, in both families the parents wrote more “pragmatically,” that is bills in English as well as letters generally in their native languages to maintain contact with friends and relatives or occasionally in
English to deal with school, work, or household issues. The children wrote more often and usually more than their parents in completing every day assignments in their classes and the types of writing tasks varied greatly.

An interesting issue in terms of the amount of writing that was required of the participants developed depending either on age or proficiency level. In terms of the children, for instance, the younger the participants were the more extensive their creative writing tasks were, as recommended by Edelsky (1986). For example, when Sveta was in the fourth grade she composed long fictional stories—sometimes up to eight pages in length—compared to Fatima in high school, for instance, whose longest document was a three page typed report of which most of the language was copied from an encyclopedia. This pattern of more extensive writing focused more on fluency development seemed to hold true among most all of the samples of writing that I collected. Both Sveta and Marina from their respective elementary and middle school classes wrote extensively. However, in high school, Fatima and Abdi were writing much shorter texts. This would seem to indicate an overall trend of older students being asked to write less except in the case at the community college level when Ivan was in some of his courses required to write more than, for instance, Fatima and Abdi at the high school levels. Although Fatima and Abdi were both weaker writers, they were required to do less writing while the more proficient writers continued to write more. These findings would seem to support those of other researchers (e.g., Larsen-Freeman and Strom 1977 and Reid 1990) who have found a correlation between fluency of the text created and overall writing proficiency.
**Types of writing tasks**

The nature of the types of writing tasks that the participants were engaged in suggests that the degree of interaction (Table 50) that the participants experienced during these acts varied. For example, acts of copying spelling words from the board or copying down a telephone number were acts of imitation which engage low levels of interaction between the writer and the text while writing a critical evaluation or self assessment of one’s own class portfolio is an act of reflection which engages the writer more with the text. The participants who were more advanced in their writing skills practiced writing tasks which were more interactive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Act</th>
<th>Copying</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Composing</th>
<th>Critical Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Imitation</td>
<td>Information Production</td>
<td>Creative text</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 50: Continuum of Participant Writing Interaction

Inherent in this issue of the quantity of required writing and degree of interaction with the text is how the task for each writing assignment was structured. Consider, for instance, grammatical or editing tasks which are generally shorter. While Sveta as a fourth/fifth grader was rarely required to worry about grammar and editing, her older sister, Marina as well as Abdi and Fatima and even Ivan at the community college level were all required at some point to focus on grammatical exercises and editing practice.

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3 Distance between text and the writer
4 Interaction between text and the writer
This seems quite logical in that typically grammatical instruction is reserved for more mature or adult learners (Ellis 1994). It is interesting to note, though, that of the six participants, Sveta’s final literacy measure scored the second highest of the group for accuracy, following her older sister. Meanwhile, Fatima, Abdi, and Ivan who were required to do more local level grammar editing and spelling exercises than longer fluency writing ranked lower than both girls. Even though Fatima generated almost the same amount of text as Marina, her accuracy was not as high.

In considering longer fluency writing tasks which the participants were assigned to write during the study, both Marina and Sveta generated more text than the other four participants. Even though they are two grade levels apart from each other, both girls were required to write extensive texts which emphasized composing and fluency rather than accuracy. For instance, both girls wrote journals, book reports, stories, summaries, and extensive projects for classes such as social studies and language arts. Fatima wrote a few texts of this nature but did not generate as much text as the younger girls. Abdi was occasionally assigned similar tasks but never completed them. Ivan, however, in his community college classes was asked to keep a reading journal as well as compose a series of compositions but which were more closely evaluated for rhetorical structure than his daughters’ assignments were. The fact that the Sveta and Marina were writing more extensively and more accurately may be the result of the more creative nature of the assignments they were assigned in their lower grade levels. As they, however, were generating more text more accurately even with less grammatical focus in their instruction, this may suggest that L2 learners should be encouraged to not focus only on limited structural dimensions of the language but more on generating text in order to lead
to more fluency (see Harklau et al 1999 and Losey 1997). This suggests also that there is a symbiotic relationship between the amount of writing a learner does and the improved accuracy of his/her writing. In addition, this leads one to consider how the types of writing tasks assigned to a student may eventually affect his/her overall writing proficiency.

**Topic Interest**

Writing on a topic that was of interest to the participant seemed to be an important issue to most of the participants. Ivan, for instance, preferred when given an option to connect his writing to his life here or in Russia. Fatima, in struggling to write about Judaism, claimed that she would have much preferred to write on a religion familiar to her. Having to learn about a new topic while simultaneously writing about it in English seemed to be a “double burden.” Halima also reverted to writing about her own life when given an option even if it was not relevant to the topic—perhaps because this eliminated one of these two burdens for her. Of the writing topics that I observed which were assigned to Abdi during the course of this study, none seemed in anyway related to anything of interest to him, resulting, perhaps, in his being less motivated to write than he already was. Finally, generating a topic seemed to be one of the most difficult aspects of writing for some. Marina explained, for example, that when she struggled to figure out what to write about she would ask a parent for ideas and that once she had a topic idea she was ready to write. It would seem pertinent then that in teaching L2 writing that teachers guide students toward writing about topics that are of genuine interest to the
students as this topic just might be the “spark” that pushes a student beyond what seems to many to be a “burden” when writing in an L2 (e.g., Tedick 1990).

**Rhetorical Structures**

Another issue to consider in L2 writing development is the difficulty of the rhetorical task. For instance, four of the six participants were assigned some sort of descriptive task. Narrative and process descriptions were also common. Definitions were also assigned regularly but often isolated in vocabulary building exercises. Only Fatima was required to write an opinion essay arguing for her viewpoint. More complicated and sophisticated rhetorical patterns were not outrightly demanded of these L2 writers. Not over taxing the participants with complex sophisticated rhetorical requirements seemed to make the issue of writing in English more bearable for these learners.

**Writing Process**

Process writing has been advocated for both L1 and L2 writing in the past years (e.g., Chelala 1981, Raimes1985, Zamel 1983). In this study, only three of the participants used a drafting process with their writing for which they would make substantial revisions and changes to their writing—often guided by their instructors. Marina, however, explained that she really did not “subscribe” to the writing process and preferred not to be required to do drafting. Her father, Ivan, was able to name all of the “official” stages in the writing process yet on some assignments failed to implement them and was occasionally requested by his teacher to “back-up” and craft an outline or other pre-writing to go with his draft. Sveta seemed to use a drafting process more than the
other participants but this too depended on the type of writing assignment she was working on. For several of the participants, a final “polishing” stage was their version of drafting—following a first draft by recopying it correcting spelling, handwriting, and some grammar in the final copy. Thus, overall, it is interesting to note how little drafting was used by these six participants, despite recommendations by researchers to use such an approach with domestic students (e.g., Harklau et al 1999 and Losey 1997). Perhaps the value of the writing process has still not been as widely accepted by our students as it has by educators.

**Reading**

**Reading Functions**

The reading functions which the six participants engaged in during this study varied from reading mail, magazines, and story books to textbooks, a range similar to the subjects in studies by Heath (1983) and Fu (1992).
### Table 51: A Comparison of Types of Reading Functions in Both Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of reading</th>
<th>Pavlovas</th>
<th>Omars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>• bills</td>
<td>• bills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• shopping labels</td>
<td>• shopping labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• official letters of notification</td>
<td>• official letters of notification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>• letters from family</td>
<td>• letters from family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• letters from school</td>
<td>• letters from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• notes from family</td>
<td>• notes from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• friends/family</td>
<td>• notes from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• emails</td>
<td>• emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>• newspapers</td>
<td>• internet sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• internet sites</td>
<td>• announcements from mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure reading</td>
<td>• magazines</td>
<td>• magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• novels</td>
<td>• Koran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• short stories</td>
<td>• video game commands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• biographies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• art catalogs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/School Reading</td>
<td>• essays</td>
<td>• stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stories</td>
<td>• textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• textbooks</td>
<td>• spelling lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• spelling lists</td>
<td>• novels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• novels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All six participants were engaged in some form of reading in English during the study though the level and amount varied greatly. Halima read only documents such as mail, bills, or correspondence from the schools initially but at the end of the study claimed to be reading magazines. Ivan, also in a parental role, read bills and news items as well as his texts for his community college classes. Sveta and Marina read extensively in English and in Russian during the year. Readings that they completed were also occasionally just for fun as well as for their classes. For Fatima, reading was part of her
school work which she dutifully attempted to complete. Her reading assignments varied dramatically from one class requiring children’s stories to others requiring high school level textbook reading. Abdi read only when in class or working with a tutor and at that it was minimal reading. Overall, the more proficient the reader, the more the participant read during the study.

The nature of the types of reading tasks that the participants were engaged in suggests that the degree of interaction (Table 52) that the participants experienced during these acts varied. For example, acts of reading and remembering shopping labels or brand names were acts of imitation which engage low levels of interaction between the reader and the text while reading a novel to critically evaluate its use of non-standard American dialect is an act of evaluation which engages the reader more with the text. The participants who were more advanced in their reading skills practiced reading tasks which were more interactive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Act</th>
<th>Memorization</th>
<th>Skimming/Scanning</th>
<th>Deduction/Inference</th>
<th>Textual Wading</th>
<th>Critical Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Recitation</td>
<td>Information retrieval</td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Pleasure reading</td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 52: Continuum of Participant Reading Interaction

While for some of the more proficient readers in this study, their level of reading engagement may have depended on reading experience and enjoyment of reading,

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5 Distance between text and the reader
6 Interaction between text and the reader
the minimal level of reading for the Somali women seemed to depend more on gender-
defined expectations for readership than on reading ability in the L1 or another language. For example, both Halima and Fatima are able to read in their L1 though they read minimally in the L1 during the study and very little in the L2 for pleasure. An informal discussion with a Somali colleague of mine explained that this minimalist reading behavior may be more the result of cultural expectations not defining Somali women as readers. Abdi seemed to confirm this when asked about who reads in his family, he noted that his mother reads only religious materials and Fatima read nothing at all (Initial Interview 7/30/2000) while naming his uncle, whom neither Halima or Fatima mentioned as a family reader, as the most prolific reader in the family. This cultural behavior, however, if “true” disputes the general findings by Burstall (1975) and Nyiko (1990) that women are in general more successful in SLA.

**Reading Methods**

The methods used in teaching reading to the participants in this study were generally either a combination of top-down/bottom-up reading for both fluency and accuracy or only bottom-up word level reading. Teachers working with more proficient readers required the participants to predict, summarize, and paraphrase readings while less proficient readers like Abdi focused on decoding words or shorter sentence or paragraph level texts, generally. Readers like Marina and Sveta were required to read and maintain reading journals as well as write book reports and summaries of articles as well as complete extensive readings of texts for class projects on topics such as pioneer history, tropical jungles, and Mayan civilization. Both Marina and Sveta did extensive
reading in their grade level content while Abdi and Fatima, depending on the class, either read children’s or juvenile literature or made attempts at decoding some high school level text book readings. Once again, as with the writing methods, less proficient readers were required to do less reading than the proficient readers. In a limited manner, this sort of double “penalty” of less proficient readers and writers becoming less proficient illustrates the potential risk in losing access to content knowledge, as noted by Mace-Matluck (1998).

**Types and Availability of Reading Texts**

The types and kinds of reading texts available to the participants were also varied. Part of this may have been due to school district or familial economic sources available for purchasing texts. However, considering the wide variety of free materials available through library and other educational loan services, it would seem that the types and amounts of texts available depended more on the choices made by instructor or district curriculum supervisors. Both Sveta and Marina were surrounded by wide choices of reading texts both in their classrooms, school libraries, and home environment. The ESL classrooms where Abdi and Fatima studied also offered several selections of books though not as many as at the elementary and middle school levels. For their reading classroom, which was extremely small, the choice of texts was quite limited. Ivan, functioning in a more autonomous college environment where he was not located in one classroom, still had access to college and city libraries as well as an extensive book and text collection at home.
**Topic Interest**

As with topic interest for writing, topic interest was a motivator for reading as well. Ivan commented that courses and readings in a topic that is of interest to the student, which in his case was computer science, make learning more meaningful. Additionally, drawing on students’ background knowledge seemed to facilitate reading for the participants, as found by Losey (1997). For instance, I observed this with Fatima who in reading about her own religion in English seemed more engaged with the familiarity of the topic than when she needed to read about a religion completely foreign to her. Making this connection between the learners’ own lives and their reading was recommended and implemented by her ESL instructors as they had observed how difficult it could be for the students to read about topics completely unknown to them.

**Reading Process**

The processes that the participants used in reading an actual text seemed to start with either more cyclical skimming and previewing techniques or move right into linear word by word decoding. Of the six participants, Marina’s reading skills were stronger followed by her sister, Sveta. Both used a combination of skimming and reviewing reading processes with decoding. The weaker readers like Abdi and Halima read in a very fixed linear manner. This would seem to confirm support for multiple approaches to reading rather than just singular word by word decoding (Eskey 2002, Johnston 1983).

In terms of reading support strategies, four of the stronger readers used dictionaries or asked others for explanations about the reading. All three Russians depended on translations for some support while only Fatima did of the Somali readers. Marina noted that translating only helped initially with reading. Overall, this seems to
support Bernhardt’s (1996) finding that L1 reading can facilitate L2 reading, at least in this case at minimal levels.

**Individual**

**Previous schooling**

Previous experience in school and with the expectations for behavior in the classroom were issues for individual participants which affected their overall experience learning in the L2 classroom. For instance, in terms of school readiness, neither Fatima nor Abdi were very well prepared, a common finding among domestic students with interrupted schooling (Mace-Matluck 1998). Fatima had had a few years of schooling in the refugee camp in Kenya yet upon arrival in the US was greatly confused with basic classroom instructions. Abdi had no concept of expectations as he was already twelve years old when he started school for the first time in Florida. In comparison both Marina and Sveta had experienced a few more years of schooling in a stable environment as well as in a formal instructional setting learning English and both enjoyed school. Similarly, Ivan had studied in tertiary school settings in Russia so despite the linguistic challenges of studying in a community college in the US was able to readily adapt to the American college classroom. In addition, previous experience studying a foreign language such as German for Ivan or Italian for Halima, helped facilitate their expectations for the process of learning English in the classroom in the US. This seems to support findings by Bosher (1998), Collier (1989) and Muchinsky and Tangren (1999) that previous schooling can facilitate L2 learning.

While academic skills were obviously cultivated during previous school experiences, so too were behavioral norms. For instance, regular attendance at school is
necessary and expected. The Pavlovas all attended school regularly in the US as they had in Russia except for a few illnesses. Both Fatima and Abdi missed and skipped school on numerous occasions. Abdi even once asked me what the minimum number of days of school would be that he would have to attend in order to pass to the next grade. His attitude so staunchly contrasted with that of Sveta or Marina’s who hated to miss school even when they were sick. A cause for many of the days that Fatima and Abdi missed school was suspension for discipline issues. Both were caught fighting with classmates, skipping classes, and talking back to their teachers at various times during the study. In contrast, Sveta and Marina’s teachers had generally only glowing comments about their behavior.

Cheating

Cheating also developed as an individual issue that manifested itself in terms of how it affected three of the participants’ literacy development as a coping strategy. Interestingly, all three participants cheated in writing vocabulary and spelling tests. Two of the three were “successful” in their attempts to manipulate the classroom management system for their own purposes, but one participant was caught and reprimanded. In Ivan’s case, he copied words and definitions from his neighbor during a class quiz. He was even so bold as to trade papers with the classmate during the quiz as the proctor was not paying any attention to the test-takers. In Abdi’s case, he was supposed to trade with a neighbor to check answers and score a series of three spelling tests. As soon as he figured out that he could instead “score” his tests himself, he no longer traded with his neighbor and graded his own tests. And in Fatima’s case, she was writing a vocabulary
test for which she had previously copied the words onto her desk and was then caught copying the “answers” off her table top. In all three cases, the participants cheated not to be devious but because they felt unprepared to successfully pass the tests without assistance. The participants’ “unpreparedness” was rooted partially in the issue that they did not know or understand these words. Often they felt that there was no real need to know them and so they had not invested the time and energy into memorizing them for the tests. Consequently, cheating became a sort of “face saving” strategy to help them navigate the actual test. Obviously, however, this resulted in false assessments of their comprehension of the words and moreover a lack of understanding as to their motives behind this cheating strategy. On a broader level of academic misconduct, Ivan also admitted to submitting essays for one of his writing classes which he had not written himself but had in fact “borrowed” from a friend. He justified this saying that he had no need for writing essays in his life but rather that he needed to spend his time and energies on developing his spoken English skills instead. However, rather than fail the class or not submit anything for the assignment, he was willing to risk misconduct charges in favor of preserving his reputation as a good student. Overall, as prevalent as these were in this study, these “dubious” strategies for completing L2 literacy tasks should be reconsidered by L2 literacy educators as authentic learning strategies, such as copying as discussed by Collins (1998) for L1 writers. L2 composition instructors in particular should raise learners’ awareness of how to best “manage” these strategies and teach students perhaps more “acceptable” means of avoiding plagiarism and being better prepared for quizzes and other stress-inducing events that seem to evoke these strategies.
We should also consider how we as teachers and task designers might be provoking these strategies.

**Diagnosing a learning disability:**
An issue that arose primarily only for Abdi but one that permeated his academic life was the possible interference of a learning disability. Although several teachers commented throughout the study that he needed to be tested and given additional “special needs” support, he never was. As he had been a student for three years already in the district and was not making any progress, teachers were beginning to recognize his learning issue as not an ESL or “English problem” but one that was more complex than that. Periodic attempts to reach Halima to officially request that her son be tested also proved futile until after the study had ended and even then he was not tested and formally diagnosed because he was missing too many days of school because of suspensions and skipping school. Instead Abdi became lost in the shuffle. His story seems faintly reminiscent of Taylor’s (1991) study of Porter, a boy whose family also became lost between their struggles with the public schools, special education testing bureaucracy, and the evaluation of Porter’s needs.

Both the complication of demonstrating that his learning problems were not English based and navigating the tangled bureaucracy of implementing a formal testing situation seemed to barricade Abdi from a potentially helpful diagnosis which might have eventually made English literacy obtainable for him. The resistance to having him tested on the part of school counselors and administrators was particularly baffling for me. While there are potential negative consequences of receiving a learning disabilities
diagnosis, such as tracking, labeling, and fragmentary remedial skills-based teaching (White 2002) as well as the cost of testing for the school district, I do not believe that these were costs greater than the potential “damage” this inaction would have on Abdi as he would venture on in his life. Even if other factors, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of his experiences in the war in Somalia, were to be greater factors in contributing to these learning issues for Abdi, I believe at minimum testing by the district and their recognition of his learning struggles may have afforded him better learning opportunities as well as minor “perks” such as an exemption from the state proficiency test. Simply acknowledging this need for attention to Abdi’s learning struggles may have helped redirect his learning. Either way, in Abdi’s case, the lack of a family advocate who was able to articulate his needs to the schools makes his own story “sting” even more.

**L2 immersion: Formal and Informal**

Studies have shown that L2 learners who are exposed only to informal L2 language experiences tend to fossilize and not progress as much syntactically as those who are exposed to formal instruction (Klein & Dittmar 1979, Schumann 1978, Pica 1983). This study seemed to confirm these findings in that four of the participants made gradual improvements in their overall proficiency and accuracy in writing, for instance. Abdi seemed to not make as much progress but this is probably more due to his potential learning disabilities. However, Halima also did not make much progress but she was only minimally exposed to the target language and not enrolled in any formal ESL classes. This would seem to support the issue that L2 literacy development is more
expedient and successful when formal instruction is a component of the overall L2 immersion experience.

**Previous Reading and Writing Experience**

Previous experience in reading and writing seemed to also be an issue of importance to this study. While studies have shown that reading and writing skills transfer from the L1 to the L2 (Carson et al. 1990, Canale et al. 1988, Goldman et al. 1984, Mace-Matluck et al. 1983, and Weinstein 1984), this seemed to be partially true in this case. For instance, Ivan, Marina, Sveta, and Fatima who are all literate in their L1 were the more successful readers and writers in English. Similarly, Abdi who is not literate in his L1 did not progress in reading and writing in English during this study. However, Halima, who is literate is her L1, also did not improve significantly in her English literacy skills during this study. Thus, it would seem that L1 to L2 literacy skill transfer is not automatic but rather one layer in a multidimensional phenomenon that includes linguistic transfer (Odlin 1989), cognitive skill transfer (Roberts 1994), social (Bernhardt (1996), and cultural (Heath 1983).

Perhaps issues such as whether a person enjoys reading and writing or is motivated to do so is important as well as their previous experiences with literacy. Also, the maturity of their reading and writing skills and processing strategies which they may have acquired while learning to read and write in the L1 may also bolster their development in L2 literacy (e.g., Leki 1991). For example, Marina who is a sophisticated reader in Russian already applies multiple approaches such as skimming, scanning, and reviewing, to reading in English while Fatima, who is literate in Somali but not as proficient as Marina is in Russian, applied very basic linear reading strategies in English.
Thus, overall, previous reading and writing experience in the L1 did seem to contribute to the development of literacy skills in English but was certainly not the only factor to consider contributing to this progress.

**Self-Rankings in the L1 and L2**

Self-assessing one’s own literacy skills is a difficult measure as one really needs to know what standard he or she is measuring against. In this study, the participants were asked to first rank their skills in their native language and then in English on a scale of 0 to 5 with 5 being the highest. With this, I wanted to ascertain, albeit informally, a sort of measure of the participants’ self-confidence about their own reading and writing in their L2 as compared to their L1, which I expected to be ranked higher. In the case of three of the participants, who were three of the stronger readers and writers in English, they ranked their L1 literacy skills at a level 5 and their English skills at a level 4 at the start of the study. Based on this informal input, one might assume these stronger readers and writers were more proficient in reading and writing in the L1 and therefore were able to transfer these same skills to English reading and writing at higher levels. It is interesting to note, however, that Halima who self-ranked her L1 literacy skills at a five ranked them at a level two for reading and one for writing in English. This illustrates that although a learner may be confident in reading and writing in the L1 this does not necessarily transfer to the L2. In fact this indicates a gap in her skills which she seemed to be realistically aware of. Conversely, her son, Abdi self-ranked his L1 literacy skills at zero and his English literacy skills at two. While his teachers, ranked his English skills at lower levels, his assessments do at least indicate an awareness, like his mother, of an extreme difference in skill levels from one language to the next. In his case, his being
aware of his illiteracy in his L1 may help him understand on some level the difficulties he now faces in learning to read and write in English. Finally, it is interesting to observe from these self-rankings how the participants’ levels of confidence varied over the course of the year. For instance, Ivan lowered his score for writing in English one level, perhaps as the result of lessened self-esteem about his writing in English after taking several courses during the study. Similarly, Halima lowered her ranking in reading one level, maybe because she had encountered readings during the year that she felt unable to understand on her own without various family members translating for her. Ivan’s daughters, however, both increased their levels of confidence in their English reading and writing overall. The variations in confidence levels in self-ranking one’s own literacy skills reflects the varied esteem levels in relationship to L2 literacy tasks, as found by Losey (1997).

**Future Goals**

Goals and motivations for learning a second or foreign language can vary dramatically. For these participants, their goals fell into three main categories: college bound, family goals, and general goals. For the three participants with the stronger literacy skills, their eventual goals for learning English and improving their reading and writing in English included wanting to go on to university to study for a career. Fatima explained she wanted to learn accounting, Marina stated she wanted to study to be a scientist and her younger sister, Sveta, to be a teacher. For the three of them, developing their English literacy further will be of primary importance to reaching these goals. For Ivan and Halima, the parents in this study, the learning goals included specific objectives
for helping their families. For Ivan, he wanted to improve his English so that he could get a job as a computer programmer to improve his family’s living standard. Halima claimed that she hoped to improve her English enough so as to be able to defend her children when matters arose. While both these goals for Ivan and Halima are quite specific, neither were inherently linked to reading and writing in English but more to oral communication skills. Meanwhile, Abdi’s goal was extremely broad in that he stated he wanted to improve “everything” about his English. While being more uncertain about his future, it is understandable that he was not able to define more specific goals. Overall, though, it seems apparent from the goals these participants chose that the closer their goals fall towards college or university studies, the more important developing English literacy becomes for them. This seems to reveal that their levels of “investment” (see Norton 1997) in their L2 literacy acquisition were focused on specific learning desires.

**Personality**

While a learner’s personality may seem more directly linked to L2 oral skills development and not literacy development, the ability to make oneself comfortable in a learning environment and focus on a learning task do affect literacy learning. Studies have shown that an individual’s personality may directly affect his acquisition of the L2 (Chapelle and Roberts 1986, Guiora et al 1972, Naiman et al 1978). Initially arriving in a new country and especially in a new school for children can be an overwhelming experience. Both Marina and Fatima recalled how uncomfortable they felt upon first arriving—despite having nearly opposite introvert and extrovert personalities. Three teachers for both Marina and Sveta commented on how important it was for new ESL
students to be able to form friendships early on to help adjust to the new schools and feel comfortable (Brandt 2/14/2001, Heinemann 2/15/2001, and Markson). Being more of an introvert, Marina, however, was still struggling somewhat by the end of the study to make close friends although her literacy skills were quite strong. On the other hand, Fatima, an extrovert, was having no trouble making friends but struggling more with her English literacy skills. This is not to say that introverted personalities have more success in developing reading and writing skills, as, for example, Sveta is quite extraverted as well as making great strides in her English reading and writing, but that extreme personalities may be an issue for acclimating to a new learning environment and settling in and learning. Abdi and Fatima are both super charged extroverted personalities for whom sitting and reading and writing is a difficult task. For Marina, a more reticent girl, sitting and reading a book without being bothered by others is a treat. So while outgoing personalities may be more clearly linked to developing speaking skills which comprise BICS, a more introverted personality may afford a learner to focus on reading and writing, as found also by Griffiths (1991).

**Age**

While studies have shown that younger learners master speaking and pronunciation skills better than older learners, the same does not seem to be necessarily true for developing reading and writing skills (Neufeld 1978, Scovel 1988). Ivan, for instance, an adult much older than Abdi, had mastered English reading and writing to a much higher proficiency level. This may be true because of the fact that Ivan is a much more mature learner who has had previous experience in reading and writing while Abdi
has not. Also, Ivan has more experience and access to a broader range of learning strategies as an adult than as a child, who would utilize different learning strategies (Ellis 1994, p. 556). However, younger learners seem more quick to overtake and increase their literacy skills than older learners as well. For example, Sveta’s reading and writing skills improved more dramatically over the course of the year than her older sister’s. As a young learner in general, Sveta may have had more “space” for maturing her literacy skills. Overall, the literacy gains that the participants in this study made seem to confirm studies that show that initially older learners are more efficient in learning the L2 but then eventually greater gains are made by younger learners who spend more time exposed to the target language.

**Summary of Literacy Issues**

The responses to the question about the issues influencing L2 literacy development can be classified according to family and social issues, school, and finally individual issues. Some of the most salient family issues included the size and the strength of the L1 community and the population of speakers and family mobility or transience, which often resulted in interrupted schooling. Parental involvement in monitoring their children’s academic progress as well as establishing a supportive home environment for studying were also important. In terms of school issues, district wealth was an issue to the degree that it affected the types and amounts of additional materials and program support that could be afforded the students. More important, though, were the issues of the types and kinds of reading and writing assignments that the participants
were to complete both in ESL classes as well as mainstream content area classes. For example, if the level and content of the courses that the participants were enrolled in were too difficult for the participant, he or she often did not learn much from the class. Discrepancies in the demand for reading ability versus the student’s actual reading ability level often left the student lost in the reading material and unable to navigate the level gaps.

Finally, the individual issues most effecting literacy development which transpired during this study were numerous in focus. While it was expected that prior L1 literacy might “set the stage” for the development of L2 literacy, this was not always the case. Individual need and motivation to read and write in the L2 seemed to override L1 literacy although previous experience reading and writing did seem to benefit more advanced learners. Gender also did not evolve as major issue. Only one of the six participants mentioned a gender-based issue in terms of role expectations, and none of the teachers did. Other individual issues identified as being potential issues influencing literacy learning were behavioral expectations for school, degree of immersion in the L2 environment, metacognitive awareness of one’s own literacy skills, and age.
Literacy Measures Comparisons and Facilitative Strategies

Having reviewed the issues which influenced the participants’ L2 literacy progress, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the most salient changes in their L2 literacy development (research question #2) and present the learning strategies which the participants felt helped them the most in this development (research question #3). I divide the discussion into two primary sections: writing and then reading. In both, I first discuss changes comparatively across the individual cases and then describe the strategies for that skill area.

Research Question #2:
What were the changes in the participants’ literacy over the course of one year?

Research Question #3:
What strategies helped the participants the most to progress in their English reading and writing proficiencies?

Although the actual developments in the participants’ literacy skills were not the focus of this study, the progress that each participant made does reflect certain levels of helpful strategies in promoting their progress as well as the issues which potentially influenced their progress. Therefore, periodic reading and writing measures were assessed throughout the year to observe changes in each participant’s literacy levels. These findings help “thicken” the data description for comparing the L2 literacy
development across individual cases. These are discussed and compared in the following section, so as to illustrate the nature of the literacy developments observed and provide more insight into which strategies and issues seemed more productive for developing this literacy. Following each discussion is a review of the learning strategies which the participants used for writing and reading that were found to be the most helpful in facilitating the development of their literacy.

Criteria for Quantifying Writing Measurements
Each participant wrote at periodic moments during the study. Each time the participant was given a new prompt (see Appendix D) to write on for a given amount of time under my direct observation in order to minimize compounding variables of outside help or topic-effect. The following criteria, as defined in Chapter 3, were used to quantify various aspects of the participants’ writing: speed, fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy. The scores were assigned based on analysis and calculation of word count and t-units.

Speed
Figure 31 shows the trends in writing speed during the course of the study. While ease and speed of speaking a second or foreign language, compared to reading and writing in the L2, may increase quickly over a short period of time (Cummins 1983, Collier 1989), the data indicate that overall the participants writing speed did not vary greatly for any of the participants during the year.
Fatima ranks highest in speed of writing by the end of the study while Marina often consistently outpaced her during the study. However, speed does not equate with accuracy and quality of writing. For instance, while the sudden peak in speed for Marina seems to indicate a faster tempo in writing, this being the only great variation is most probably due to some factor affecting that particular measure such as topic effect. These minimal changes in writing speed seem to support studies which have found, for instance, that oral skills (i.e., BICS) develop more rapidly than literacy (i.e., CALP) skills which changes slowly over time (see Cummins 1981, 1988). This slow change in developing speed lends support to Cummins (1983) and Collier (1989) who have found that literacy skills tend to be slower developing than oral L2 language skills.

**Fluency**

Figure 32 displays each participant’s total word count during a given writing measurement. Total word count was used as an indicator of general writing fluency. However, as the participants each wrote as much as they felt they could endure for each
measurement, times and consequently total wordage varied. For example, total word count is generally higher for more proficient writers—especially during the first measurement—as all participants were given a maximum of twenty minutes to write but some, such as Halima, were only able to sustain writing for six minutes.

![Figure 32: Comparison of Writing Fluency](image)

Overall, Marina is generally a more fluent writer though Fatima does occasionally produce more text than her depending on the topic or writing situation. This supports the findings by Muchinsky and Tangren (1999) who found that domestic students often have greater fluency in their writing than grammatical or rhetorical control.

**Syntactic Complexity**

The average lengths of the t-units for each individual shown in Figure 33 display each participant’s fluctuations in syntactic complexity during the study.
In general, Marina is once again more proficient in the syntax she develops although her younger sister, Sveta, albeit a bit more erratically, does surpass her on one occasion. With their seemingly complex syntax patterns, both girls, although they have been in the US for less time than Halima, Fatima, and Abdi, exhibit more complex syntactic structures in their writing. This behavior supports the findings of Scarcella and Lee (1989) who found that ESL students who have spent more time in the target country may become more proficient lexically than syntactically. Even though they have spent more time in the US, it seems that Halima, Fatima, and Abdi, have not attained as complex syntactic structures as Marina and Sveta. Any fluctuation on Sveta’s part may potentially be the result of topic effect or of age and lack of maturity. It may have also been caused by “leaps” in lexical output available to Sveta for these particular topics, similar to Tedick’s (1990) finding that background knowledge will affect text production. Similar causes may have affected Abdi’s proficiency as well. Fatima’s syntactic complexity does steadily increase during the study; however Ivan’s and Halima’s do remain constant—
perhaps indicative of constant but slower rates of progress for adult learners, as found by Gibson (1987), Patkowski (1980), and Tarone et al (1993).

**Accuracy**

Figure 34 displays the levels of accuracy in writing error free grammatically correct text for the participants. The somewhat erratic and lower levels of grammatical control by the participants supports the general findings by Muchinsky and Tangren (1999).

![Figure 34: Comparison of Participants' Accuracy in Writing](image)

Overall, Marina is again the strongest in this criterion. While Fatima scored higher than Marina a few times in the aforementioned scores of writing speed and fluency, this shows that accuracy may sometimes be forfeited when writing quickly. This lack of grammatical control seems to be an issue for domestic ESL students who have little understanding of grammar overall yet who may be able to rapidly produce language orally, where grammatical errors are less obtrusive and often overlooked, as found by
Ferris (1999), (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998 and Reid 1997), Mace-Matluck et al (1998). Consequentially, overall measures of writing proficiency must encompass more than one quantifiable measure in order to gain a more complete picture of the writer’s abilities.

**Holistic Scores**

In order to give a fuller view of each participant’s writing proficiency in English, as well as to allow more objective evaluations of their writing abilities, three trained evaluators assessed each participant’s writing measures on a standard holistic ESL writing rubric ranging from 0 to 6. Holistic scores potentially reflect a more complete assessment of the writing encompassing all of the previous four criteria in a more complete manner. This allowed for objective evaluation of their writing as each was evaluated anonymously thereby eliminating potential for bias. The three evaluators assessed scores within one unit of agreement from each other 88% of the time. Figure 35 displays the participants’ average holistic scores throughout the study.

![Figure 35: Comparison of Participants' Average Holistic Scores](image-url)
Overall, the holistic rankings for Marina are consistent with the independent measures of fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy for which she scored the strongest among the six participants. Generally, she is followed by her sister, Sveta. Their father, Ivan, and Fatima follow closely with overall scores fluctuating, due again perhaps to topic effect or other compounding variable during those measures. This would seem to show that L2 writing that is more favorably evaluated encompasses both syntactic complexity and accuracy. L2 writing teachers need to focus on both in instruction and not disregard one or the other criterion. Writing speed and fluency may contribute to overall writing development but as such are not as highly valued.

**Summary of Writing Changes:**

While BICS have been shown to develop relatively quickly for L2 learners in a target language environment, CALP has been shown to take much longer to develop and to develop at a slower pace (Cummins 1983). Overall, this seemed to be confirmed in this study in that the participants, having already experienced one to two years in the US, made slow but steady progress during the course of this year except for the two most basic readers and writers. More specifically, speed and fluency were generally consistent. Ivan, Marina, Sveta, and Fatima all slightly increased overall in their syntactic complexity and accuracy of writing. This is consistent with the slight gains expected in L2 literacy acquisition over longer periods of time. Only Halima and Abdi remained completely stable, perhaps because their reading and writing were the least supported and/or motivated of the group.
In terms of overall writing proficiency changes, most striking were the overall increases in the average length of a t-unit that the participants were producing. Very similar trends were seen with the development of their writing error-free t-units. Finally, similar changes were also reflected in the holistic assessments of the participants’ writing which in general increased slightly during the course of the study. These increases indicate an overall lengthening in the average text that the participants were producing as well as a higher degree in producing grammatically correct text.

**Qualities of Writing and Corresponding Helpful Writing Strategies**

Based on these previous quantitative measures of writing, the six participants can be roughly grouped into three levels of writers: basic, intermediate, and advanced according to Table 53:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Halima Abdi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Ivan Fatima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Marina Sveta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 53: Participant Writing Levels**

While this level grouping is based on the comparison of the above scores for writing and apply only to this particular sample of writers, this type of classification can be applied to other learners who display similar qualities of writing strengths and weaknesses for the
purposes of understanding which learning strategies were more helpful for particular ability levels.

**Basic Writers**

The writing by Halima and Abdi may be considered “basic” for this group of participants because it is extremely underdeveloped in that it often does not address the writing prompt topic and lacks examples for support and is rhetorically disorganized. Syntactically, their writing was limited to simple sentences often repetitive in pattern. Words were often omitted. Grammatically, their writing exhibited verb form and word form agreement errors. Samples of their writing can be found in Appendix E.

The writing strategies that the basic writers in this study found to be most helpful for facilitating their writing in English included drawing on previous task experience, copying text, accessing teacher input, and making changes. Halima found that using knowledge from past experiences in completing similar tasks in English helped her navigate the tasks she faced in her daily life in the US that required any writing on her behalf. Accessing background knowledge and experience like this has been found by other researchers to facilitate SLA (e.g., Berhardt 1996, Tedick 1989). Copying text rather than composing it was a strategy that Abdi used though mostly for completing basic learning tasks such as learning vocabulary definitions or spelling words. He also occasionally paired the two strategies of getting help from his teacher before writing too much in order to learn what changes might need to be made while he was writing as he often became frustrated if he wrote and had to make many changes later. Although the strategies, which Abdi utilized, did not necessarily help him gain independence as a
writer in English, these approaches seemed to help bolster his confidence to write anything at all in English. While these strategies may not be terribly sophisticated, they seem appropriate for the basic level of these writers. Until they gain more proficiency and control of their English writing, they will more than likely not be able to use more complex writing strategies.

Intermediate Writers
The writing by Ivan and Fatima may be considered “intermediate” for this group of participants because while they addressed the topic at hand the focus of their writing was at times slightly off topic and lacking detailed support. Syntactically, their writing ranged from simple sentences to compound sentences though often not punctuated correctly. Grammatically, their writing exhibited verb form and word form agreement errors though considerably fewer than in Halima and Abdi’s writing. Samples of Fatima and Ivan’s writing can be found in Appendix E.

The writing strategies that these intermediate writers found to be most helpful for facilitating their writing in English included four main categories: copying text, using background knowledge, accessing responses from others, and using grammatical and rhetorical knowledge. Copying text as a strategy for these writers was very similar to that for the basic writers except that they focused on larger “chunks” of language rather than word level copying and penmanship which were the focus for the basic writers. While the basic writers used their experiences with similar tasks to help them with approaching the mechanics of writing in English, the intermediate writers tapped deeper into their background knowledge and with the help of new vocabulary and both bilingual and
English dictionaries, they were able to draw on this background knowledge to help with their English writing, especially in terms of content and development. Getting feedback from others—either teachers or family members—was a strategy that these writers found to be helpful. This seemed to help them become aware of audience issues in their writing as well. Although Abdi, for instance, would get input from his teachers about his writing, his quest for feedback was on a more mechanical level while for the intermediate writers, this strategy helped them to tease out ideas and understand their audience’s potential responses to the content and presentation of their writing. As an intermediate writer, Ivan, in particular, also drew on the linguistic strategies he had for formulating grammatically correct syntax and rhetorically appropriate organizational patterns. While he was not as quick a writer as Fatima, he methodically considered the mechanics of his writing which often resulted in his producing more error free text than her. As intermediate writers, these strategies supported Ivan and Fatima in a more sophisticated manner than the strategies for the more basic writers yet still offered enough support for them during this developmental phase of their L2 writing progress.

**Advanced Writers**

The writing by Marina and Sveta may be considered “advanced” for this group of participants because it clearly addressed the writing prompt topic, included examples for support, and was adequately organized. Syntactically, their writing included simple, compound, and complex sentences. Grammatically, their writing exhibits occasional errors but generally not severe enough to impede meaning. Samples of their writing can be found in Appendix E.
The learning strategies that more advanced writers in this study used to support their L2 writing included dictionary use for vocabulary development, knowledge of the L2 linguistic structures, and prewriting support for the writing process. One strategy that the more advanced writers used in facilitating their writing in English that was similar to that for the more intermediate writers was the use of dictionaries to facilitate vocabulary expansion. This strategy was less evasive in that it is something that the writer can do on his/her own without seeking the help of someone else. Learning about the structure of the language and modeling this in her writing was a strategy that Marina advocated. Part of her knowledge for how writing in English works came from copying text structures. For Sveta copying text was more an information management issue though it indirectly modeled writing structures for her as well. In either case, both writers, like the other four participants, copied text at some level to help develop her own writing in English, Britton et al (1975) and Collins (1998) similarly found such strategies to be developmental.

Generating ideas for writing was an issue for both Marina and Sveta. Marina sought help from others in generating a topic for writing. Sveta recommended limited use of the L1 to facilitate initial idea generation but cautioned against becoming trapped in a translation exercise. Krapels (1990) describes several studies that investigated the fragility of this very strategy. Sveta often followed up this initial topic generation process with further drafts as would Marina when required to do so. This revision process engaged by Marina and Sveta, two of the more sophisticated writers in this study, supports the findings by Zamel (1983) which purports that more skilled L2 writers revise more than unskilled writers (Krapels 1990, p. 41).
Summary of Writing Strategies

In general as the level of their writing proficiency in English advanced, the participants in this study used more sophisticated strategies. All six participants looked for feedback from others as a strategy to improve their writing. The more basic writers sought more mechanical input, the intermediate level writers looked for idea and organizational guidance while the more advanced writers looked mainly for idea generation input. All levels depended to some degree on copying text whether it was for more basic word formation issues or more sophisticated rhetorical patterning. Accessing previous task experience and background knowledge was also helpful for many of the participants in establishing an approach to topic content development. Additional strategies the participants used were making changes and editing, learning and applying grammatical and rhetorical knowledge, using a dictionary, and requesting help in topic generation.

Reading

Criteria for Quantifying Reading Measurements

Each participant read at periodic moments during the study excluding Halima whose reading comprehension fell below the range of these assessment measures. Each time the participant was given a series of increasingly difficult texts to read, respond to discrete questions about, and then summarize. Reading comprehension and accuracy (as defined in Chapter 3) were used to quantify various aspects of the participants’ reading. The scores were assigned based on percentage of correct responses to reading comprehension questions and analysis of summary descriptions of the reading texts.
Reading Accuracy

Figure 36 displays the rate of accurate responses to discrete questions about the reading texts that the participants read.

Both Marina and Fatima seemed to gradually become more accurate in their reading. Both Sveta and her father Ivan peaked during the second reading measurement indicating perhaps that the topics of the texts for this measurement were more accessible for them allowing them to draw on background knowledge. Access to background knowledge was found by Johns (1991) and Bernhardt (1996) to facilitate overall text comprehension. On average, Sveta’s accuracy in reading seemed to improve during the course of the study while the opposite is true for her father. As an adult reader his reading skills were potentially less likely to improve dramatically. Although the same reading assessments
were administered with Abdi, he was unable to accurately understand any of the texts despite the fact that all of the texts were part of a battery of ninth grade level test preparation guides and he himself was a ninth grader.

**Overall Reading Comprehension**

In order to access the participants’ overall understanding of the reading texts, they were asked to write short summaries of the texts they read. The summaries were scored based on the accuracy of the main idea presented and a general demonstration of overall comprehension of the text. The scores for these summaries are illustrated below.

![Figure 37: Comparison of Participants' Reading Comprehension](image)

While again Marina and Sveta proved to be the stronger readers in this measure, it is interesting to note the scores for Fatima and Ivan compared with their accuracy scores. For instance, while Fatima remained solidly stable in her overall comprehension of the texts as shown above, looking back at her scores in accuracy for the final measurement,
though her general understanding of the whole text was lacking, she was able to draw out more discrete points in the reading accuracy comprehension assessment. This was also true for Ivan for the second measure but then contrarily not for the final measurement. These discrepancies should indicate to educators that neither discrete comprehension questions nor general summarizing alone are sufficient for assessing a learner’s complete comprehension of an L2 text. In addition, this raises support for a multidimensional theory of L2 reading, which combines both intensive and extensive reading (Day and Bamford 1998). Students interact with a text cognitively (both decoding discrete points and connecting more global meanings) and socially (in terms of context and topic and cultural understanding). As educators and testers, understanding this integrated view of reading is important to understanding our students overall reading experiences.

**Summary of Reading Changes:**

In terms of reading proficiency—especially in terms of accuracy of reading for discrete points as well as overall comprehension—changes were more dynamic for accuracy reading but more steady for overall comprehension. For four of the participants, initial and final measures of accuracy do indicate increased proficiency. While similar steadiness appeared in the measures of reading comprehension, their scores were less dynamic and more stable. Overall these changes, slow and steady like the writing measures, reflect the current understanding of slow yet methodical progress in L2 reading.
Helpful Reading Strategies

The strategies that these four more advanced readers found to be most helpful in facilitating their reading in English included tactics to develop vocabulary, prepare readings, seek help for comprehension problems, and choose texts carefully. All four readers mentioned vocabulary development as a source of support for improving their reading in English. The three older readers occasionally turned to translations for help in developing their vocabulary and decoding texts in English, a common reading strategy as found in other studies (e.g, Roller 1988, de Suarez 1985 in Bernhardt 1996). While Ivan advocated preparing readings before class, his older daughter’s strategy of practicing reading and reading as much as possible illustrated a similar view of being well prepared to read a text. Interestingly, of the four stronger readers in this study, only Ivan did not rely on getting comprehension help from other persons. Perhaps as an adult he felt confident enough in his own skills to decipher most English texts on his own. Similarly, Ivan did not mention careful text selection as a strategy helpful for reading while Marina, Sveta, and Fatima did. Perhaps reading texts for assignments geared towards younger readers or simply having an option to influence the choice of text was more available for the girls than for Ivan. As an adult reader, for instance, deciphering a letter from the Immigration and Naturalization Service is not optional for him while the girls recommended selecting texts on topics of interest to them and written at appropriate levels.
Summary of Reading Strategies

In general as the level of their reading proficiency in English advanced, the participants in this study used more sophisticated reading strategies. The strategies which most facilitated reading in the L2 for the participants were developing vocabulary, preparing readings before class, practicing reading, asking for help with comprehension problems, and choosing texts carefully.
Chapter 5

Implications and Future Research

Overview

In this final chapter, I review the general parameters of this study and summarize the major findings. In addition, I consider potential limitations of this research and propose possible future research directions.

Review

This study was a collaborative examination of the issues influencing the development of L2 literacy in the lives of six participants from two different families, including one parent from each family and an older and a younger child. Both families had recently immigrated to the US yet have experienced very different opportunities for learning to read and write in English. In order to ascertain changes in the participants’ literacy development, periodic reading and writing measures were collected throughout the study. During the study, interviews and observations with the participants and their teachers and parents as well as samples of the texts they had written in English were collected as data to investigate the factors potentially influencing their literacy development. Finally, comparisons were made to reveal the most effective learning strategies for promoting literacy development for these participants.
Limitations of the Findings

Although several measures were taken to insure that the most authentic and valid as well as reliable data were obtained in investigating the answers to the primary research questions in this study, there are several limitations to this study which must be considered.

First and foremost, there were only six participants in this study from only two cultural groups. While the data on these six participants were collected over the period of one year and from several sources to ensure better “triangulation” of results, this does not in any way guarantee that the ethnographic stories of each participant is representative of other second language learners in similar situations as individual contexts and learning needs can vary greatly.

Second, the reading and writing measures that were administered are assumed to be accurate and valid measures of the participants’ true English reading and writing proficiencies. However, confounding factors of topic effect or time pressure may have in some cases skewed results. Consequently, these measures can not be depended on as single measures of their literacy proficiencies but rather components of a larger measure which includes analysis of texts that the participants read and wrote during “naturally” occurring contexts although these were not always readily available to the researcher.

Finally, while care was taken to gather data from multiple sources including the participants’ themselves, it is assumed that the data presented to the researcher were truthful and accurate based on the availability of sources.
Significance of Findings

While the case study methodology of this study does not allow for generalization of results to large populations, this study does make unique contributions to the fields of second language literacy pedagogy and research. In reference to the four major investigation areas, as outlined at the end of Chapter 2, this study addresses all four in addition to contributing to the methodological knowledge of ethnographic inquiry.

First and foremost, this study focused on domestic ESOL learners. While many studies have focused on foreign language learners or international students, the need for understanding the domestic student as a uniquely situated learner was addressed in this study. The complex nature of these learners’ situations stipulates that even more studies are needed to address this topic. This study was one of the first to pursue the domestic ESL student as the research focus at such deep levels of analysis as well as one of the first to explore literacy skill acquisition of this population.

In addition, this study underscores the important role the family has as a unit in forming a “home” literacy context, substantially grounded in the L1, which facilitates L2 literacy acquisition. While previous studies have investigated the role of the family in influencing L1 literacy (such as Heath 1983 and Purcell-Gates 1995), this study presents a fresh look at the importance of the family in L2 literacy achievement. Furthermore, as two families were studied in this inquiry, the results present a bolder richer view of L2 literacy learning, which is more encompassing than the study of one single family. In addition, the range in age of the participant members of these two family units provides a broader base from which to compare different learner perspectives within an intergenerational context (Gadsden 2000).
The role of native language literacy in facilitating L2 literacy acquisition was also explored in this study. While studies have indeed shown that L1 language skills may transfer to the L2 (see Olshtain 1990, Skehan 1990), this study suggests that the transfer is not an “even exchange” but rather one layer of a highly complicated phenomenon. While five of the study participants were literate in their L1, the acquisition of L2 literacy for the three of those five, who participated more in literacy events—both in the L1 and L2—in their family context, came as less of a struggle. This finding supports Cummins’s (1988) theory of interdependence that greater emphasis on providing a learning environment that is supportive of the L1 will result in more proficient (and perhaps more accurate) L2 learning. However, this study uniquely shows that the nature of that support can vary greatly and that simply being literate in the L1 does not automatically pave the way for L2 literacy acquisition and in fact perhaps suggests a threshold level at which point the L1 does become facilitative.

This study also explored the potential impact of the role of previous schooling, at sufficient as well as limited levels, on L2 literacy development in conjunction with the family context. When access to schooling disintegrates or collapses due to political or economic reasons, the family may be the only remaining pillar of consistency for a young learner. While this study indicates what intuitively educators might surmise, i.e., less interruption of schooling is facilitative of learning, this study also shows that a family which is able to support more academic learning tasks at home may help bridge the disjointed histories of interrupted schooling, especially when those interruptions are not terribly severe. This study is one of the first to explore how schools can reach out to and collaboratively work with parents to ease these dramatic transitions in younger learners’
learning backgrounds, which is especially important for recently arrived immigrant students, as well as to show how schools failing to create this communication lose important advocates in the parents of their students.

Finally, this study uniquely contributes to and begins to puzzle through several methodological issues in ethnographic research on L2 literacy acquisition. While the longevity of this study is not entirely unique, the extended exposure to the participants’ cultures in this study is distinctive in family literacy studies. The exposure to the family culture is extended by exploring school environments as well as by simultaneously studying two families. Comparison of the two families allowed for reflection of the two unique situations in light one another. Two additional methodological contributions pertain to both the participants and the researcher as instruments of data collection. In the case of the participants, this study grappled with the unique issue of representing participants’ voices but having to rely on a translator in some cases or a participant’s weak language skills to accurately project those voices. Additionally, my role as researcher with an initially more “insider” perspective into one family’s cultural context but not the other’s allowed for the intriguing complexities of “insider membership” to be explored while developing an emic view of both families.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings from this study underscore how difficult a task it is for any level ESL instructor to recognize what can and what can not be changed in the circumstances in a learner’s life in order to best promote L2 literacy development. None of our students arrive without some sort of learning experience although the degree may vary wildly, and
it is this variation that seems to both enrich and complicate our ESL reading and writing classrooms. Perhaps the greatest finding from this study is that fact that each learner comes to us with an individual “story” to tell and we as educators must be both the archaeologists who “unearth” these treasures of experiences and the architects who build a foundation for literacy learning from these individual clues. The difficulty comes, though, at times when the pieces we expect to “unearth” are insufficient or when our “construction” fails to take the form that which we expect. It is then that in collaboration with our learners, we must step back and realize how to best approach this task of L2 literacy development.

From this study, it is evident that there are certain factors which the learner may bring to the L2 literacy learning context which we as educators simply can not change. These include individual factors such as age, intelligence, and educational histories. Nor can we impose changes in our students’ home environments or the literacy functions which our students’ families engage in. Similarly, we can not change the socio-economic status of our participants, nor the wealth of our school districts or communities. In fact, the data from this study merely reflect the complexity of these issues and their influences on L2 literacy development, yet leave educators powerless except in the role of advocates for our learners in helping them when possible to change these factors.

The findings from this study, however, do show that there are certain issues in teaching, testing, program development, and teacher training that educators from all K-adult levels can change to facilitate our students’ L2 literacy development. In teaching, for instance, we need to develop methods of teaching reading and writing which both promote academic readiness in general for our students as well as enrich our students’
reading and writing experiences by immersing them in content based topics. The learners themselves, however, have to be part of developing these methods in order to test and use their own learning strategies which have worked well for them in promoting reading and writing in the L2. Like a guide, we can help lead them in directions we know to have been productive for other learners yet we must be careful not to shroud our students in unauthentic tasks or strategies which do not suit their individual needs. At the same time, we need to request authentic writing and work of our students. For some, this requires teachers to not repeat but invent new topics and/or tasks so as to prohibit the “passing down” of writing assignments from one level class to another as well as to demand all evidence of their work—especially in terms of the various components of a drafting process—so as to authenticate their “ownership” of the task. In other cases, this might require more frequent measures of reading and writing completed in the presence of a proctoring teacher so as to both observe the processes through which the student travels to complete the task and to insure their complete and present participation in the task, as well.

In choosing the materials for our students’ learning tasks, we need to consider the topic and difficulty of the texts we choose for them to read and how these texts will be received by our learners in terms of motivating continued interest or quite possibly in defeating them. Finally, we must create realistic learning goals for our students which both challenge and “push” our students yet which incorporate if not match the learning objectives of our learners. Promoting L2 literacy is a long arduous process which requires periodic motivational prompts to continually engage a learner as well as on-going re-evaluation of how well we are meeting their needs. In testing and re-assessing
our students, however, we must choose appropriate topics and tasks which assess our learners from multiple positions over multiple measures of time. Not only do the findings from this study indicate that different topics at different times may engage learners differently but also that allowing supplemental time, formats, and strategies may facilitate the writing and reading process for our learners. Finally, both parents and students need to be informed of the pedagogical “stakes” potentially at risk with some tests in terms of the influence they may hold over the future of individual learning program designs.

The results of this study also indicate that as L2 language educators, we must play active roles in developing programs which promote access to texts and technology which in turn develop literacy skills. When possible, particularly for learners who have endured spells of interrupted schooling, we need to provide supplemental study opportunities through tutors or after school programs. Finally, we must engage parents and students in partnerships with us to promote and motivate students to advocate for their own literacy development which is both culturally relevant and facilitative of their overall learning experiences. This study underscores the importance of the family unit in L2 literacy learning. As such, we as educators, must invite families into this learning process.

In terms of teacher training, it is important that teachers at all levels be trained in some SLA background. In this study, of the fifteen plus teachers who were directly involved with the education of the participants, only four had specific TESOL background training. Teachers relied on their own brief experiences learning a foreign language or traveling abroad to inform their teaching and approaches for working with these students. Some, especially at the lower grade levels, were able to build on their
concrete elementary methods training to help their ESOL students. However, others at secondary and post-secondary levels were trained only in special education, reading, or L1 English and who, while master teachers in their own domains, lacked the knowledge and approach to deal with some of the issues specific to L2 literacy learning. This L2 training, however, needs to be continually updated with professional development opportunities which consistently make teachers aware of, if not even engage teachers in, current research trends. Finally, teachers need to be able to navigate the treacherous waters of the long process of L2 literacy development by being informed about the longevity of the process as well as being skilled at constantly motivating students who may become disenchanted or frustrated along the way.

Recommendations for Future Research

Understanding the realistic daily issues that L2 learners face in developing their literacy skills in a L2 environment is a complicated issue. Marrying these issues with the resources of the classroom, be it at the elementary, secondary, or adult levels, can be quite a challenge. As such, one of our best tools is inquiry to gain knowledge into the actual learning situations of this population. While this study has addressed to some degree the gaps in the research pointed out in the literature review, seven major directions for future inquiry evolve from this study.

First of all, more long term qualitative studies need to investigate how to improve school readiness, especially if the learners have had little or no previous schooling. This is especially critical for older children and adults. We also need to learn how to better encourage parental/family cooperative involvement with the community schools,
especially if the parents are not literate themselves. More studies also need to be conducted in better and more appropriate ways to evaluate these learners’ general literacy learning needs as well as to diagnose potential learning problems which may require special education services. This point is especially poignant for older learners who at both secondary and post-secondary levels are more vulnerable to “falling through the cracks.” Along with this general need for finding more appropriate testing measures, we must learn to apply these results in placing students at levels that are both practical and obtainable for them. Students, for example, who consistently fail a ninth grade reading proficiency test should not be placed in a ninth grade science class and be expected to keep up with the reading without additional services.

More theoretical future research directions might include more studies of the nature of “transfer” and how it applies to L2 literacy achievement, methodological techniques, and general longitudinal qualitative studies. An additional research direction to explore includes methodological inquiry. While previous studies (e.g., Odlin 1989) view language transfer as a linguistic phenomenon, this study shows how complex the nature of literacy development is and that it exceeds the mere mechanical movement of similar linguistic phonemes and morphemes from a L1 to a L2 and must consider the greater “totality” of the issue, i.e., the social and individual issues and home/school literacies influencing this development. As to data collection, future researchers using ethnographic research techniques to explore these L2 learning phenomena need to consider the appropriateness and best ways of using data collection tools such as interviews with less proficient ESOL speakers, with or without translators, as well as the reliability of document analysis in examining literacy development in cases where
learners may use another persons’ writing to represent their own. Finally, overall, more qualitative studies with domestic ESOL students need to be conducted for longer periods of time in order to construct a broader and more in-depth foundation of research that informs teachers, researchers, and learners of the realities of L2 literacy learning. Collaboratively, we have the tools and insight to craft a more complete picture of the research landscape of L2 literacy learning for domestic ESOL learners. Together, we can explore and cultivate this landscape and finally learn to nurture it for the benefit of all learners.
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN LONGITUDINAL FAMILY LITERACY STUDY

By signing this form below, I consent to my family’s and my own participation in the research study called: “Exploring the literacy development of domestic ESL learners: A collaborative ethnography.”

Researcher, Suzanne Panferov, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected involvement of my family. I understand the potential benefits to this study and agree to this assuming confidentiality of my family members is maintained by both the researchers and language translators.

I acknowledge that I have had an initial opportunity to ask questions about the study and understand that at any time during the course of the research, I may raise more as well as inquire about the findings of the study. Furthermore, I understand that I or any member of my family is free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation without any negative consequences.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read this consent form (or have had it translated for me) and I fully understand this agreement. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: __________________________ Signed: _____________________________
(Parent/Guardian Participant)

(If age applicable)
I am between the ages of 14 and 17 and agree voluntarily to participate in this study. I understand the purpose of the study and all terms described above. My parent or guardian has signed in agreement before me.

Date: __________________________ Signed: _____________________________
(Youth Participant)

I, ____________________________, have accurately translated the above document for the parent/guardian and youth participants. I agree that they each individually understand the terms of this agreement and have willingly signed this form. I agree to the principles of confidentiality of this study.

Date: __________________________ Signed: _____________________________
(Translator)

The above signatures are true and accurate. All persons signing above have understood this consent agreement and have voluntarily signed in my presence.

Date: __________________________ Signed: _____________________________
(Researcher)

Date: __________________________ Signed: _____________________________
(Witness)
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Initial Demographic Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date of Birth:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrival in U.S.:</td>
<td>Birth Place:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reason for relocation to U.S.:</td>
<td>Grade in school (if applicable):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home address:</td>
<td>School (if applicable):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home telephone:</td>
<td>Teacher (if applicable):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work address:</td>
<td>Total years of schooling:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work telephone:</td>
<td>Native language:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English Language Study History

Describe below the history of your study of English. Question #1 refers to where you took the classes or learned the language (i.e., in elementary school in your native country, after school tutoring in my home, etc.). Question #2 refers to how long the class met and how long the classes were (i.e., 1 semester for 4 hours a week). Question #3 refers to the topics studied (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, conversation, writing, etc.). Question #4 refers to how well you performed (i.e., do you feel you did well, were your grades poor, etc.).

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</table>
Current Language Self-Assessment

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank your skills in each of the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Languages</td>
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</table>

Time Expenditure

How do you normally spend your time each day? For example, if you work, where and for how long? Or are you in school or both? Briefly describe:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Hobbies/Interests

Please list three hobbies or interests (past times) you have.

1. 
2. 
3. 

Do you have computer access? Yes / No  If so, do you have access to email? If so, please write your email address here: _________________________________

Please return this questionnaire directly to Suzanne Panferov.
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Initial Literacy Interview

Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to assess the participant’s general literacy background and history. They will be administered as appropriate to age of interviewee.

1. Tell me about your educational background. How long did you study in your home country and what subjects did you learn? When you came to America, what was different about school and what did you study?

On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank your:
- basic English skills,
- ability to read in English,
- ability to write in English,
- ability to speak in English,
- ability to listen and understand English?

Likewise, how would you rank your:
- native language skills,
- ability to read in your native language,
- ability to write in your native language,
- ability to speak in your native language,
- ability to listen and understand your native language?

Do you know any other languages? (If so, repeat questions appropriate to language).

This study is about literacy. How would you define “literacy?” Do you consider yourself literate in your native language? In English?

2. When do you remember first reading in your native language? In English? What do you like to read? Do you read more in English than in your native language?

3. And what about writing? What are your earliest memories of writing? Do you write in your native language? In English? Why do you write (for what purpose)? Do you like to write?

4. When you sit down to write something in English, what is the process you go through as a writer to produce your text?

5. Tell me about your family’s literacy background? Do you often see your mother/father/brother/sister [as appropriate] reading or writing? If so, what kinds of reading and writing do they do? And in what language?

[For parent participants]: On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank your: son/daughter’s (participating children)
- basic English skills,
- ability to read in English,
- ability to write in English,
- ability to speak in English,
- ability to listen and understand English?

Likewise, how would you rank his/her:
- native language skills,
- ability to read in your native language,
- ability to write in your native language,
• ability to speak in your native language,
• ability to listen and understand your native language?

6. Tell me about your job/school. Do you need to read/write a lot there in English?

7. What do you do in your free time? Do you like to read/write for recreation? Do you write letters?

8. How would you like to change/improve your English language skills?

Acculturation Interview

Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to assess the participant’s understanding of their own acculturation and adjustment to America how well he/she feels this adjustment has been made as well as the amount of exposure he/she has to English on a regular basis. This interview will follow the “Literacy Strategies Interview” and potentially other issue-based interviews. Questions will be administered as appropriate to writing task and age of interviewee.

1. Tell me about your job/school. Which language do you speak at work/school? (Do you ever use Russian/Somali)? If so, about how much of the time?

   Whom do you speak English with? Russian/Somali with?

2. What do you do in your free time? Do you socialize more in Russian/Somali/English?

3. Tell me about your family. Which language do you speak at home? Do you ever use English? If so, about how much of the time?

4. How comfortable do you feel living in America? Speaking English?

5. If you were to meet someone who has never been outside of Ohio, how would you describe what it is like to leave your home country and come here? What was the hardest part?

6. Describe your first day here at school/work. Were Americans helpful to you?

7. What would you like American teachers to know about you/your children?

8. What would you like Americans to know about people who move here? And who are learning English?

Literacy Duties Interview

Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to understand how the participant’s view of responsibilities for various literacy tasks are divided among family members and to learn who “enables” their literacy development. This interview will follow the “Initial Literacy Interview.” Questions will be administered as appropriate to age of interviewee.

1. Remember back to when you first arrived in America. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank your English skills then? And now?

2. When you arrived was there someone to help you with English translations/interpretations? If so, how did they help you?
3. What were some of the most difficult English “problems” you had in the beginning? Are these still difficult for you? Why?

4. In school, who has been the most helpful in facilitating your (your child’s) development in learning to read and write? (And at your work?)

What kind of homework do you/your children bring home? Do you/they do it at home or somewhere else? If you/they have trouble with it, who helps you/them?

5. When your family faces difficult English issues (such as business communications, setting up appointments, etc.), who helps resolve them? Is one person in particular in your family responsible for dealing with tasks like communication with the schools, bill paying, doctor visits, etc.? How do you feel about his/her doing these tasks?

6. Would you like to change your own role and responsibilities in such family literacy tasks? If so, how do you think you could do that?

How about for your children?

**Literacy Exploration Interview**

*Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to assess the participant’s general attitudes towards appropriate literacy tasks, objectives, and issues. This interview will follow the “Initial Literacy Interview.” Questions will be administered as appropriate to age of interviewee.*

1. When you write in English, who are you writing for? Does your audience change depending on your task or assignment?

How is this different for you when you write in your native language?

2. Why do you write in English? What goals does this fulfill for you?

How does writing in your native language benefit you?

3. Can you describe for me exactly what you do when you sit down to read an assignment for school or a form or text for work, etc.? What do you do first, second, third, etc.? How long does it take? Where do you read? Can you show me a sample of a text you might typically read?

4. Tell me about the most difficult writing/reading task you have ever done in English. And in your native language? How did you feel writing each of them? How did your experience writing them differ?

5. Can you describe for me the progress you have made in English since you began studying it? And since you arrived in America?

6. How do you feel about the English language? What does English mean for you? And how do you feel about your native language?

**Literacy Strategies Interview**

*Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to assess the participant’s learning and coping strategies when faced with various literacy tasks. This interview will follow the “Literacy Exploration Interview.” Questions will be administered as appropriate to age of interviewee.*
1. You know at least two languages now. What do you think is the best way to learn a foreign or second language? For example, if you had a friend who wanted advice on the best way to learn English, what would you tell him to do? Do you think you follow your own advice?

2. Then specifically what do you think is the best way to learn to write in another language like English? How about the best way to learn to read in another language?

3. When you read/write in English, do you ever translate from your native language? Do you think translation is helpful in learning English?

4. If you are having difficulty understanding a reading text in English, how do you get help?

5. If you are having difficulty writing something in English, how do you get help?

6. How could reading and writing in English be made “easier” for you?

**Sample Writing Text-Based Interview**

*Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to assess the author-participant’s understanding of a particular writing task, how and how well he/she completed it, and how he/she evaluates the finished product. This interview will follow the “Initial Literacy Interview” and potentially other issue-based interviews. Questions will be administered as appropriate to writing task and age of interviewee.*

1. Describe this text to me. What was the writing assignment for it? What were you supposed to write? Who were you writing this for?

2. Was this a difficult task? Why/why not?

3. Tell me what it was like to do the assignment. What were the steps you took to complete it? How long did it take you?

4. How well do you think you completed the task? What are the strengths of the text? What are the weaker areas?

5. If you were to rewrite this text, would you do anything differently? If so, what?

6. If you were to “grade” this assignment, what grade would you give it?

7. Did you enjoy writing this? Why/why not?

**Final Issues Interview**

*Directions: These structured interview questions have been created to capture any remaining questions about the participants reading and writing and their progress over this past year. This interview will conclude the data collection process. Questions will be administered as appropriate to writing task and age of interviewee.*

1. At the beginning of this study last year, I asked you to give yourself a sort of “grade” for your English skills. I’d like to ask you to do that again. Based on your current English skills, on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank your:
• basic English skills,
• ability to read in English,
• ability to write in English,
• ability to speak in English,
• ability to listen and understand English?

2. How do you feel your English writing has changed this year?

3. How do you feel your English reading has changed this year?

4. You’ve done a lot of reading and writing this year. I’ve seen several samples of your work and I’ve asked you several times to read and write for me. Can you tell me please overall what has been your favorite writing experience this year? And your favorite reading experience? (Did you have a favorite book?)

5. Tell me about reading and writing in your culture. How important do you think reading is? How important do you think writing is?

6. With each interview I’ve done with you, you’ve watched me write notes and record you at the same time. Can you explain to me how written words are different from spoken words?

7. What do you imagine are the different “functions” of written or print words?

8. I’ve also come to visit you in school. Can you tell me what do you like the most about school? What you like the least about school? How important do you think school will be in your life in the future?

9. Finally, what are your future goals in life? What do you hope to be doing a year/5/10 from now?

PARENT QUESTIONS:

1. I’ve asked your children, and I’ll ask you too. Based on their current English skills, on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest, how would you rank their:

   • basic English skills,
   • ability to read in English,
   • ability to write in English,
   • ability to speak in English,
   • ability to listen and understand English?

2. Do you help your children with homework? If so how? Is there anyone else around who can help them with their homework?

3. Are there any tutoring programs that you send your child to for extra assistance with homework?

4. When your children were younger, did you read to them? If so, explain.

5. In general, how do you think your own educational experience is different from the “American” education that your children are now receiving?

6. Overall, how satisfied are you with the education your children are receiving?
APPENDIX D

WRITING PROMPTS
WRITING PROMPTS

1. Name ____________________________ Date ______________

You will have 20 minutes to write as much as you can. Write quickly. Stop and correct any mistakes you see, but do not recopy the whole text. Ask Suzanne if you have any questions.

Choose one topic:

A. Tell about your first day in America. OR

B. Explain what you do everyday or in a typical day. OR

C. Describe someone you love.

Write here:

2. Name ____________________________ Date ______________ (Lit2)

Look at the two pictures below. Choose one and write about the picture. Try to write for ten minutes. Suzanne will time you as you write. Write as much as you can. Please ask Suzanne if you have any questions.

3. Name ____________________________ Date ______________ (Lit3)

Write for 10 minutes on one of the topics below. Suzanne will time you as you write. Write as much as you can please. Ask Suzanne if you have any questions.

Choose one topic:

A. Describe a favorite food. OR

B. Tell about a friend. OR
C. Describe a trip you once took.

4. Name _______________________________ Date ____________ (Lit4)

You have ten minutes to write as much as you can. Write on the topic below. Ask Suzanne if you have questions. Try to write as long as you can.

The schools are now closed for winter vacation. Tell me about what you will do during this break. Will you travel? Will you celebrate a holiday? Will you eat special foods?

5.
Your name:_________________________  Date: ________________ (Lit5)

This is a timed writing exercise. Write for as long as you can but no longer than 10 minutes. Suzanne will tell you when to stop. Write in the space below on this topic:

Tell me about yourself. Imagine you are meeting me again for the first time. Tell me who you are, where you come from, what your hobbies are, and perhaps even how you ended up in Columbus.

6. Name _______________________________ Date ____________ (Lit6)

You have ten minutes to write as much as you can. Write on the topic below. Ask Suzanne if you have questions. Try to write as long as you can.

The weather is getting hotter. The schools will soon close for summer vacation. Tell me what do you like to do in the summer.
APPENDIX E

SAMPLES OF PARTICIPANTS’ WRITING
I like driving a car, and work with stock exchange. I see how change cost stock every work day. I drive a car every day on the work, on the study. Every weekend my family and I drive on the car of suburban Columbus. We have been living in Columbus only 10 month, but we have gone in Cleveland 2 times. We have attended the Cleveland Art Museum. The Cleveland Art Museum is beautiful and nice museum. It is very big and has nice exposure. We have gone in Columbus Art Museum, too. We have attended it six time. I liked the Columbus Art Museum, too.
I have a friend. His name is Sergey. He lives in Moscow, Russia. I've known Sergey since 1986. I met Sergey when I worked in the auto transport depot as a senior engeneer. We were friends since that time. Now I am in the USA, and my friend lives in Moscow. He's worked as chairman of real estate department in the Moscow Bank.
During my winter vacation my family and I are going to celebrate Christmas. After the celebration we are going to give presents to each other and eat treats at our dinner. Usually my sister and I will make a cake and make something for each other and parents. We never went shopping with our parents always do. When we lived in Russia we always had a Christmas tree standing in our biggest room. We used to dance around the tree as kids. In America we don’t have it. We use a real tree in our front yard instead of buying one I always liked putting on garlands of lights and little glass balls on it. And when the tree was lit up it looked like in a fairy tale. My parents put our presents under the tree, and when we woke up on January 1st, it began the whole morning busy with our gifts. New Year was always fun and we always looked forward.
I don't have a lot of friends. My best friend is Brittany. She is one year older than I am. Brittany is 13, while I am 12. I often help her with homework, for she doesn't understand math and some other subjects. We have only two classes together: math and science. She sometimes explains me how to play games such as wiffleball and baseball because I have never played them before. Even though we are best friends, I don't like working on projects with her. We always end up arguing and don't have time to finish the work on time, so I avoid making big projects with her. I don't think that we can be friends.

Figure 41: Marina Sample 2
Samples of Sveta Pavlova’s Writing

One day old man went to the shop. In that country where he lived, nobody had cars so they used bicycles. His bicycle was old and he was poor so he can’t by a new one. He was trying to get his old one in good condition. The shop was near downtown so the man can’t walk to the shop. He has to ride his old bike for a long time. Than he saw a stranger and lock what it is but it has a regular car.

Figure 42: Sveta Sample 1
This winter break I’m going to do is homework. I have science project and I want to be almost done with that one. Then I have reading project. My sister and I will draw New Year cards to my mom, dad and to me or to Roza. On the December 29 or 30 we will decorate our house. Today, December 21, Roza and I did a parrot, Macaw and a giant bird-eater spider for my science project. I also want to sew some clothes for my doll and write a letter to my friend in Moscow.
Samples of Halima Omar’s Writing

Figure 44: Halima Sample 1

my name [redacted]
I live in Columbus, Ohio.
I am 2 years old.
I come from Somola.
I have 7 childrens.
I took toldles and tree lin ofe.

Figure 45: Halima Sample 2

Choose one topic:

A. Describe a favorite food. OR
B. Tell about a friend. OR
C. Describe a trip you once took.

food
my favor banana's, chicken
my friend she's good
I will like to do! I want to go summer school and full time job. The reason I want to go summer school is Provestion test I didn’t pass for reading and math so I have to pass for those. So that is the reason. When is to gonna close for school I have one week free then I’m gonna start summer school. So that week I want to go Boston to visit my husband family. Then I’m gonna came back. I will start the summer school. So that is all I want to do is for the summer.

Figure 46: Fatima Sample 1
I want talk about myself.

My name is [redacted]. I'm from Semiliya which is East Africa. I been here 8 years and have. The first place I came was Florida. School in here. I meet girl in school and then I moved to Ohio. Then I start we become best friends. She is nice girl. My goal is I want finish school and help each other. Then I want to go college. That is my goal and have a good life.
C. Describe someone you love.

Write here:

The rest day corn in America

I like to America

America same time be crossed

I like to bus it

I like other

I like to Columbus

I like to Indiana

I like to Missouri

I don\'t like American

Figure 48: Abdi Sample 1
My friend is good
my best friend is very good
All my friends is good
My friend is name is Zulk
All my friend is good
LIST OF REFERENCES


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