

LEARNING FROM STUDENTS: WHAT, WHY, AND HOW ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LEARNERS WANT TO READ AND WRITE

MARY AMANDA STEWART, KATIE WALKER, AND CAROL REVELLE

ABSTRACT

In various conversations regarding how to teach language and literacy to adolescent English Learners (ELs), students' voices are often lost. This article privileges those voices by surveying ELs in Texas high schools regarding what, why, and how they want to read and write in and out of school. The authors surveyed the students before and after an instructional intervention designed to increase students' literacy engagement by introducing culturally relevant reading and writing in their classrooms. The findings indicate that the participants want to read and write about relevant topics in order to affirm their identities, express themselves, or to learn about others. The authors encourage educators to maintain high literacy expectations for ELs while providing opportunities to select relevant literature and respond in authentic ways. Most importantly, this research suggests we should privilege student voices as we consider how to provide effective language and literacy instruction.

Despite growing standardization, secondary educators still have numerous curricular and instructional options available to them, especially when working with bilingual adolescents in the dynamic process of second language acquisition (Stewart, 2017a). Consequently, educators frequently debate the various ways that language and literacy acquisition should be approached when working with adolescent English learners (ELs) (Crawford & Reyes, 2015). Questions such as the following are frequently debated among professional educators in the fields of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Arts (ELA) instruction: What types of texts should be provided to ELs: novels within the canon, beginner level basal readers, picture books, young adult novels, or literature in their first languages (L1s)? Should texts be simple and predictable or should students engage in a variety of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction? Should students read to learn English, prepare for required tests, or explore their identities? Do they prefer to read independently or with teacher support? Do students prefer to write about topics that are personal or academic in nature? How much scaffolding and structure do students want or need when writing? Do students prefer to write for an authentic audience or only the teacher?

Though these debates are common among educators in professional settings, the voices of other educational stakeholders such as the community, families, and students are habitually lost.

Researchers and policy makers regularly speak for multilingual adolescents rather than allow adolescents a voice in the conversation. We believe that by excluding the voices of these young adults from the conversation of how to best teach them, we are missing out on our richest resource. This study was based on the understanding that adolescent ELs' voices are often missing from the conversation around effective literacy and language instruction. Therefore, we sought to include the voices of adolescent ELs by surveying students before and after an instructional intervention regarding their attitudes toward reading and writing. The intervention's purpose was to engage adolescent ELs in culturally relevant literacy activities in the classroom as guided by literature, as well as the pre-surveys (see appendix). In this particular article, we analyze the qualitative responses of student surveys collected post-intervention. The research questions guiding the study are:

After the inclusion of student input in pre-surveys and an intervention of culturally relevant reading and writing:

- a. What do students prefer to read and write?
- b. What are students' motivations for reading and writing?
- c. How do students prefer to engage in reading and writing within their ESL or ELA classrooms?

DIVERSITY IN SECONDARY ELA CLASSROOMS

It is important to consider literacy and language instruction for ELs due to the "new mainstream" of the secondary English language arts (ELA) classroom which abounds in cultural and linguistic diversity (Enright, 2011). The diversity in middle and high school ELA classrooms is astounding—diversity in students' personal biographies, family backgrounds, socio-economic status, previous schooling, ethnic and national loyalties, and literacy skills in their first, second, and additional languages are all visible in the modern classroom. We are remiss if we ignore these differences within the EL population.

At one end of the spectrum, newcomers have arrived in the country fairly recently and are often new to the English language acquisition process. These students may be dealing with recent trauma and frequently arrive with varying educational backgrounds. Some newcomers may have a strong educational background in their first language, while others may have experienced a limited or interrupted formal education. In the same classroom, a teacher may also be serving long-term ELs who may have stunted progress in language and literacy development due to subtractive bilingualism (Menken & Kleyn, 2009) or an educational experience that devalued their culture through subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). Some of these youth have checked out from their educational experience by the time they reach the secondary level due to years of feeling that their language, cultural traditions, and histories are not valued in the academic classroom (Stewart, 2014). In addition to newcomers and long-term ELs, other students might have been learning English for a few years. They could be progressing at a consistent pace or may be struggling with various aspects of literacy in their second language (L2). Secondary educators are tasked with meeting the needs of these unique students.

High stakes testing impacts the instruction for ELs as educators feel pressured to focus on basic skills or items that will be tested (Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010). As researchers have noted, standards-based educational reform in a test-and-punish model hurts all students (Au, 2011), particularly ELs (Luke, 2012; Menken, 2008). Thus, it is crucial for ELA educators to provide the necessary support to meet the needs of diverse student populations in an increasingly standardized academic world.

Because of the many strengths and unique abilities adolescent ELs possess (Stewart, 2017b), there is reason to direct attention to the limitless potential these students could have in our societies. Yet, in order for these multilingual and multicultural students to fully reap the benefits of their skills, we must ensure that their language and literacy instruction completely leverages their strengths to maximize learning in and out of the classroom.

RETHINKING SECONDARY READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION

This study is grounded in the belief that the best learning occurs when educators leverage students' cultures, languages, and lived experiences by valuing the knowledge that students bring into the classroom and empowering them to voice their unique perspectives. One of the most critical components of adolescent literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy is that students consistently report the importance of being heard and seen in the classroom (Francois, 2013; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006). It is particularly important that educators empower students from marginalized groups to take charge of their own educations and to voice their learning needs (Chang, 2013).

Listening to ELs' ideas, interests, and strengths, may lead educators to rethink some aspects of their curricular and instructional practices. Curriculum standardization is increasingly rampant (Enright et al., 2012; Gilbert, 2014) and often leaves little room for professional decision-making (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2014). Behizadeh (2014a, 2014b) strongly critiqued narrow writing assessments currently employed in the U.S., which perpetuate a monolithic form of daily classroom instruction. She advocates for using students' lived experiences when administering writing assessments, because "writing instruction that fails to connect to students' funds of knowledge is not only conceptually unsound but pedagogically impotent" (p. 133).

Furthermore, Rubin (2014) explained that we should question the canon that grounds traditional ELA curriculum and instruction, ensuring that the sanctioned literature is diverse and represents all students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Yet, young adult and multicultural literature is often marginalized within the secondary language arts classroom, where traditional canonical texts, most often written by White British and American authors, still dominate (Coats, 2011; Lewis & Dockter, 2011). The widespread reliance on this narrow selection of texts continues, even as the population continues to diversify, resulting in a curriculum that feels outdated, as it no longer mirrors the modern student population. Rethinking ELA curriculum and instruction requires that educators engage in purposefully working toward expanding the literature canon to include literature that privileges wide-ranging perspectives of family histories, lived experiences, and transcultural identities (Campano & Ghiso, 2011).

Some research has demonstrated great promise for ELs when educators purposefully select instructional activities and curriculum that connects to their lives. Athanases & de Oliveira (2014) noted ELs' increased levels of engagement and academic gains when presented with reading and writing tasks that leveraged their cultural knowledge. Studies also illustrate that adolescent ELs' reading engagement increases with the number of connections they make to a text (Araujo, 2013; Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010).

In order to give students' own lived experiences a place in the classroom, mentor texts can be used as a bridge to culturally relevant writing for adolescent ELs (Newman, 2012). Through using a culturally responsive reading and writing workshop model in one after-school writing program, literature became a resource that served as mentor texts for Latina adolescent writers (García & Gaddes, 2012). The goal of this project was to help students see their lives in writing and realize that experiences similar to their own were evident in classroom texts. Jacobs (2008) explained that long-term ELs benefited from writing short stories and poetry about their own lives because the project honored students' everyday experiences and brought a new level of authenticity to the writing curriculum.

Culturally mediated writing instruction is a framework which can help secondary ELs, among other populations of students, engage in personal and academic writing (Patterson, Wickstrom, Roberts, Araujo, & Hoki, 2010). Studies using this framework (e.g. Wickstrom, Patterson, & Isgit, 2012) advocate for secondary ELs having authentic writing experiences that build on their cultural and linguistic knowledge. Some of these writing experiences might also leverage students' full linguistic repertoires through translating or writing in the L1, as well as in English (e.g. Park, 2015).

The body of work discussed in this section demonstrates the promise of drawing from adolescent ELs' cultures and lived experiences through reading and writing. Subsequently, the present study used research presented in this section to explore students' perceptions of self-selected, culturally relevant reading and writing activities about students' own lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws from a larger study that took place over a period of two years in English Language Arts classrooms at five different high schools in Texas. A total of 80 students participated in the study who were classified as Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced English learners, according to the State's classification system. Most were born in other countries, but approximately 5% were U.S. born long-term ELs. Each classroom had a variety of ethnicities and languages represented as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.
Schools and Students in the Study

School	District	Mandy's Role (Author 1)	Number of Students in the ESL classes Place of Origin**	Time of Year	Type of School	Number of New Texts Introduced in the Class
1	A	Co-taught with teacher	1 Asia 23 Latin America	April-June 2013	Suburban	80
2	B	Teacher *	8 Asia 9 Africa 10 Latin America	July-August 2013	Urban	139***
3	C	Co-taught with teacher	2 Middle East 2 Asia 9 Latin America	February-May 2016	Rural/Suburban	65
4	C	Conducted PD with teacher-not in classroom	2 Asia 2 Africa 18 Latin America	February-May 2016	Rural/Suburban	50
5	C	Conducted PD with teacher-not in classroom	1 Middle East 2 Africa 9 Latin America	February-May 2016	Rural/Suburban	55

*Mandy acted as the sole teacher in this classroom.

**In a few cases, students were born in the U.S. but had parents born in the region mentioned.

***The other classrooms already had some texts available that were at various levels and about diverse topics. The 139 texts in Classroom 2 are the only texts available to the students.

After each student took the pre-survey (see appendix) which was used to guide the intervention, we provided multiple titles of culturally relevant literature for shared and independent reading (see examples in Table 2), aimed at connecting to the cultures, lived experiences, or interests of each student in the classroom. The literature was selected to be accessible for ELs at beginning through

advanced stages of English proficiency and included a variety of texts including picture books, graphic novels, short stories, poetry, and novels. Books were also included in all of the students' L1s: Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Swahili, French, Luganda, and Burmese. We paid special attention in selecting texts that were appealing to adolescent readers, as all of the students fell within this developmental range. This included the picture books, which were selected based upon topics that were appropriate for more mature readers, such as discrimination, the immigrant experience, or the ramifications of war. During the intervention, Mandy and the cooperating teachers leveraged the non-linguistic text available in picture books such as artwork, photography, and the universality of the topics (e.g. discrimination) to promote high level interactions with texts for students who were in the early stages of English acquisition.

Table 2.
Examples of Texts Added to the Classroom during the Intervention

Picture Books	Poetry	Novels	Bilingual Books**	Books of Short Stories
<i>Baseball Saved Us*</i> (Mochizuki & Lee, 1993)	<i>Red Hot Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Being Young and Latino in the United States.</i> (Carlson, 2005)	<i>Dying to Cross: The Worst Immigrant Tragedy in American History*</i> (Ramos & Cordero, 2005)	<i>I See the Sun in China*</i> (King, 2014)	<i>Santa Claus in Baghdad and Other Stories of Teens in the Arab World</i> (Marston, 2008)
<i>Peppe the Lamplighter</i> (Bartone & Lewin, 1993)	<i>Sonia Sotomayor: Supreme Court Justice*</i> (Bernier-Grand & Gonzalez, 2010)	<i>Fresh off the Boat</i> (De la Cruz, 2005)	<i>I See the Sun in Mexico*</i> (King, 2012)	<i>First Crossings: Stories about Teen Immigrants</i> (Gallo, 2004)
<i>Dia's Storycloth</i> (Cha, Cha, Cha, & Minnesota Humanities Commission, 2002)	<i>African Acrostics: A Word in Edgeways</i> (Harley, 2012)	<i>The Fault in our Stars*</i> (Green, 2012)	<i>Sonia Sotomayor: A Judge Grow in the Brox</i> (Winter, Rodriguez, & Palacios, 2009)	<i>Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth</i> (Manuel, Pineda, Galisky, & Shine, 2012)
<i>Roberto Clemente: Pride of the Pittsburgh Pirates</i> (Winter & Colón, 2005)	<i>To Swim in Our Own Pond: A Book of Vietnamese Proverbs*</i> (Tran & Dang, 1998)	<i>Habibi</i> (Nye, 1997)	<i>M is for Myanmar*</i> (Rush, 2011)	<i>Fitting in</i> (Bernardo, 1996)

*Book was available to students in English and another language such as Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Swahili, or Burmese.

** For this study, bilingual books refer to books with text in both English and another language presented parallel to one another. We also include books available in two languages such as a separate English and Spanish version.

All authors are current or former secondary ESL/Reading teachers who have devoted their careers to supporting students from minority language populations. Author 1, Mandy, played active, yet diverse roles in each of the schools in the study. In two schools, she co-taught and planned instruction with the existing ESL/ELA teacher. In these classes, she joined the class one to two times per week for the duration of the study to support literature circles, writer's workshop, or to lead shared reading. In two other classrooms, Mandy conducted professional development sessions with teachers focused on using culturally relevant reading and writing in the classroom, then continued her support of these teachers through on-going correspondence after the professional development sessions had ended. In School B, Mandy was the teacher of a small group of students in a summer literacy program, acting as both the teacher and researcher. Throughout the study, co-authors Katie and Carol provided input on literature while assisting in iterative data analysis to inform subsequent curricular and instructional decisions.

The goal of this study was to measure students' attitudes and engagement with literacy activities before and after introducing culturally relevant reading and writing, mainly through the inclusion of different genres of culturally relevant literature in each classroom. The students had increased access to culturally relevant texts during the study, as well as increased opportunities to engage in literacy activities designed by the authors and the cooperating teachers to utilize these texts (Table 2) to develop reading, writing, and oral language skills.

DATA COLLECTION

The data set utilized for this study was the post-intervention survey data set. We analyzed this data set according to the research questions. Each of the students completed a survey with open-ended questions after the intervention (see the appendix for the portion of the survey analyzed for this study). The questions measured what students liked to read and write about, their purposes for reading and writing, and how they preferred to engage in literacy activities within the classroom. This data allowed the researchers to look for patterns in students' preferences for what, why, and how to read and write when presented with culturally relevant texts.

The pre-intervention survey data set was used to guide the intervention by driving text selection and writing activities, but was not analyzed to answer the research questions. Efforts were made during each intervention to provide students with literature, language, and literacy opportunities that differed from their traditional curriculum, therefore allowing them the opportunity to provide feedback on the two different approaches to ESL/ELA instruction pre- and post-intervention. Guided by the studies cited in the literature review, we wanted the students to experience culturally relevant reading and writing in an ELA classroom that centered on their interests, backgrounds, cultures, and languages.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data were analyzed using the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1968) to identify themes for the post-surveys. The pre-surveys were used to guide the intervention, but the analysis draws from the post-surveys after students had the opportunity to experience multiple forms of culturally relevant reading and writing.

Examples from the open coding of the data regarding what students stated they wanted to read post-intervention are: Real People, True Events, and Love Stories. Codes were then collapsed into larger categories. For example, during the process of axial coding, the themes of Real People, True Events, and Love Stories were collapsed into the larger category, What Students Want to Read. The data yielded from the before- and after-surveys provided the researchers with a deeper understanding of student interactions and reactions to two different types of ELA curriculum, as well as their overall preferences for what, why, and how to read and write.

Although we analyzed the data for each question in the post-surveys, we present an overall view of the students' responses in the section below. This serves to provide a general view of their attitudes toward reading and writing. Because we did not note a distinction of students' attitudes based on the school, analysis from all of the participants are presented together.

RESULTS

In this section, we present findings from the post-surveys to generally describe: 1) *What* students want to read and write; 2) *why* they read and write; and 3) *how* they want to accomplish reading and writing.

WHAT STUDENTS WANT TO READ AND WRITE

The goal of this research study was to better understand what students wanted to read and write in a general and specific sense. Far too often, the decisions of what to read and write are made for adolescent ELs by their teachers. The researchers encouraged students to be honest and share their preferences through the surveys.

WHAT STUDENTS WANT TO READ. Students wanted to read to discover more about themselves and others. One student wrote: *"I want [to read] maybe stories about love, about my life, the problems, reflections and things like that."* Students were particularly interested in reading about themselves and exploring the way in which their experiences fit into the broader human experience. Students stated that they wanted to read about *"my culture and the history of the Mexican culture."* On the surveys, students mentioned enjoying books about people like them, young people with whom they could identify in some way. They stated: *"I did like it [the book] because it talks about immigrants"* and *"I like this book, because it is about the Mexico and the immigrants and it is interesting."* When discussing why they liked reading a specific book, Than¹ wrote: *"The person of the book get to united states without english²."* As a student who immigrated to the U.S. as an adolescent, this was an experience that resonated with Than.

Although students reported wanting to read about adolescents like themselves, they also reported a desire to read about others. Isela stated: *"In the future I want to read about other cultures."* Many students explained that they wanted to read about *"life"*, referring to the importance of authentic

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

² Student writing appears exactly how the students, who were all acquiring English, wrote it on the surveys.

reading, such as “*teenage suicide, drama, problems*” as one student explained. Students also stated that they were interested in the biographies of famous people and informational texts.

Students had varying opinions on whether they preferred the format of novels or picture books. Some responded that they preferred to “*read the big book*” referring to novels while others felt that the picture books supported their comprehension. Similarly, two students preferred reading manga, because, as Yoko explained, “*I can understand the pictures.*”

WHAT STUDENTS WANT TO WRITE. The students primarily wanted to write about themselves and their cultural knowledge. Juan wrote: “*I would like to write about my country how it is and how they are.*” Aye Cho wanted to write about everyday occurrences: “*I would love to write about my weekend.*” Nala stated that she enjoyed writing during the intervention, because “*I got to describe my culture.*” She was the only student from the Congo in her entire class, and writing enabled her to develop relationships with the other students in her class as she shared her cultural knowledge. Many other students stated that they were proud of their essays and poems about their own lives, memories, dreams for the future, and family.

WHY STUDENTS READ AND WRITE

During the intervention, students were encouraged to self-select the form that reading would take for the day, often voting for shared or independent reading time. The students were also highly encouraged to take books home to read outside of classroom assignments and exercised choice in writing by choosing what they wanted to include in their journals. Writing prompts were provided as supports for students who struggled to find an idea for a writing assignment, but students were regularly encouraged to write about any topic that interested them. This choice extended into published writing in class anthologies, in which students selected what they wanted to include, while the general format itself was assigned (example: poem or essay).

PURPOSES FOR READING. Enjoyment was one of the most frequently identified purposes for reading. Students wanted to be entertained by a story, or as Miguel wrote: “*get into a book ... [to be] part of it.*” Marisela explained that she reads “*because I feel relax and happy.*” Other students stated that they chose to read on their own because the book kept them in suspense, they forgot about other things while reading, and because the book was funny. Myine reported that she liked to read a particular book “*because was so funny like HAHAAAA.*” Antonio explained that he liked to “*imagine about the book and forget about other things,*” while Ana stated, “*I couldn’t stop read it that book it was good all the things it had was interesting.*”

A secondary purpose for reading reported by the students was to learn something new. Like other adolescents, many of the ELs in this study learned about romantic relationships through reading. They were able to learn, specifically, about American dating norms through literature, which is why Lay mentioned she most enjoyed reading love stories. Emilio responded that his reason for reading about sports was because “*I want to learn more,*” and Alan said that he chose to read about soccer because “*the world cup is so important.*” Other students stated that they read to acquire important and helpful information regarding things like careers: “*I wanna read... something the hospital or for instruction for a nurse.*”

These young adults were in the dynamic process of acquiring English, a language they know they need to master in order to successfully graduate from high school and navigate many worlds outside of school, such as their jobs. Consequently, many mentioned they read to improve their second language skills. María said she reads *“because it helps me to learn more English,”* and Tomás wrote that he reads *“to get more skills and learning English.”*

Students also wanted to read to relate to others—to see their own lived experiences reflected back to them. Perhaps this is validation of who they are or a way for them to make sense of their own worlds. The students stated that they sometimes chose books because they *“related to my own life”* and *“they talk about immigrants and I am a immigrant.”* Myine said she read about the U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, because her situation was similar to Sotomayor’s as someone learning English. Khine stated that he wanted to read more books with immigrant youth protagonists because *“I’m almost like them because we came from other countries and sometimes we feel different.”*

PURPOSES FOR WRITING. The students wanted to write to share their learning or to demonstrate their knowledge to others. Students wrote to learn and make sense of their own learning. Some students stated that they wrote to improve their English and understand what they were learning in class. Sometimes the learning was personal, as students wrote to understand their own feelings about issues such as discrimination. Camille said she wrote to *“express feelings”* and Alex stated that he wrote *“poems about my feelings or about some situation that I’m [going] through.”* Most of the students wrote about their countries and/or migration journeys during the intervention. Karina wrote about her past so she could *“know what I want for the future.”*

Most importantly, students reported that they wrote to be known. Win explained that he enjoyed writing during the intervention, because *“my classmates start to know me, what I like, and what I don’t like.”* In classrooms with students from very different backgrounds, the students wanted to share what made them unique. Ana wrote: *“I like to write about my daily experiences. To express my daily life to other peoples.”*

During the intervention, students wrote poetry and essays about their childhoods which took place in many different countries. On the post-survey, most students stated that they enjoyed writing to tell others about themselves. Nadia said her purpose for writing was to explain to others how hard it is to learn another language. Ale stated that she liked to teach other people about her culture, specifically Mexican music, through her writing. The following quote sums up students’ reason for writing: *“I want my friends to know about me.”*

HOW STUDENTS WANT TO READ AND WRITE

There are many different ways reading and writing activities can be structured in and out of the classroom. Even within best practices, there are options such as a teacher-led read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, or independent reading. In writing, options include writing for oneself in a journal, writing on the Internet, writing for the teacher to provide feedback, or writing for publication in various outlets. Students were exposed to all of these forms of reading and writing

before or during the intervention and they expressed their preferences and which forms they perceived to be most beneficial in helping them to learn English.

READING PREFERENCES. Students preferred independent or shared reading. For many ELs, teacher-led shared reading, when the teacher models fluent reading and stops frequently to clarify concepts while students follow along in their own texts, helped make the content comprehensible for students at lower levels of English proficiency. However, students also stated that they wanted to be able to choose their own books and read independently. Myine, a student who was at the Advanced stage of English proficiency, stated: *"I like the books that I read by myself."* Even though she read on her own, she enjoyed discussing her reading with others. In general, students closer to the beginning stages of English language acquisition preferred for the teacher to read aloud, but strongly suggested that they also have a copy of the text, so they can follow along, providing them with simultaneous oral and visual cues. Students with higher levels of English acquisition preferred independent reading time in class. None of the students preferred a traditional read aloud, when the teacher read, but they could not see the text.

WRITING PREFERENCES. How students prefer to write is perhaps the area with the least amount of consensus. Some students enjoyed sharing their writing with others through publishing in class anthologies and sharing for peer editing, but other students preferred to keep their writing private. Marco stated that he wanted to share his writing with others because *"I want to other persons read it and they will tell me what I'm wrong,"* indicating that he valued shared writing experiences as a way to improve his writing and second language acquisition. Marco specified that he preferred to work with someone who spoke his language and could help him express exactly what he wanted to communicate in English. Other students expressed similar sentiments, wanting to share their writing with classmates in order to improve it. They also valued shared writing as a way to hear other students' writing and generate ideas. Many of these students were also eager to share their final writing products with family members to demonstrate what they had learned in school.

However, this position was not agreed upon by all students. Some students did not like to share their writing, particularly when it was personal in nature. Victor wrote that he did not want others to read his writing *"because what I write is personal."* Ana stated *"I don't like telling people my thoughts."* This indicated that shared writing may not be appropriate for all contexts and that students should be allowed the opportunity to determine for themselves if their writing is appropriate text for others to read. Students also expressed appreciation when teachers let them know in advance if their writing was intended to be read by others.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

The findings implore us to take an asset-based perspective (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) of multilingual youth, in which educators value the knowledge, skills, language, culture, and background students bring to the classroom as a foundation upon which to grow language and literacy skills. Most of the youth in this sample stated that they wanted to read and write. Indeed, Nathan, a student from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said he wished that students had

more opportunities for reading and writing in class. Additionally, these youth are committed to acquiring language and literacy skills. Many of these students engage in literacy activities outside of school, such as reading to younger siblings, for the explicit purpose of improving their own language skills. Other students actively seek literature in their L1.

Our job as literacy researchers and educators is to set conditions in which students can develop first and second language literacy skills through authentic engagement with reading and writing. Through the iterative data analysis and modifications made during the interventions, we conclude that there are four main areas that contribute to adolescent English learners' engagement in reading and writing. The conditions for engagement may be set through providing students with 1) high expectations, 2) culturally relevant, self-selected literature, 3) authentic response opportunities, and 4) the opportunity to share their voices.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

In general, our findings show that high school ELs do indeed want to read and write, yet the expectations for them must remain high. Some students indicated that they never wrote in class prior to the intervention and were shocked that their teacher expected them to write in a notebook. Most of the students indicated they did not have reading and writing homework requirements for their language arts classrooms. In general, prior to the interventions, students did not take home books from the classroom, signifying that they were not expected to read outside of class. However, survey responses indicate that students are interested in reading and writing enough to do so outside of class, particularly if that is an expectation. We encourage teachers to expect students acquiring English to be engaged in reading and writing in and out of school every day, making these practices a life-long habit.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT, SELF-SELECTED LITERATURE

Students are clear about what they want to read, although the things they want to read are not the same across the board, demonstrating that adolescent ELs are not a homogenous population. It is important that students have the agency to choose books based on their interests and language levels. Many students indicated that they wanted to read about other youth from their countries or those who shared the immigrant experience, but they also wanted to read about fantasy, sports, and American culture. Educators should provide literature that connects to the many different worlds these young adults inhabit, purposefully providing texts in various languages and genres.

Rosenblatt (1978) wanted all students to have the experience of "living through" a book, not just to read the text, but to have a transaction with it that changes the reader in some way. This desire was highlighted by Isela, who said that a book she read during the intervention "*touched my heart.*"

Students need access to a wide variety of literature, but providing access to these texts goes beyond developing a classroom library. Access alone will unlikely impact student reading, unless it is accompanied by high expectations. In some of the classrooms, the shelves were replete with a large variety of literature that represented various levels, genres, and cultures before the intervention. However, students did not begin reading them until access was accompanied by high expectations—the notion that they will read in and out of class regularly. Books cannot just sit on shelves but need to frequently find their way into students' lockers, backpacks, and hands.

Additionally, teachers should be prepared to make recommendations to students and suggest books they will be able to comprehend while attending to their interests. This requires that teachers themselves model active reading habits—taking part in independent reading and sharing with students what they are reading at home. It is also useful if teachers stay current in their reading of young adult literature and other accessible texts for all levels of ELs, facilitating purposeful and impactful text recommendations.

AUTHENTIC RESPONSE OPPORTUNITIES

Students want authentic ways to respond to reading via writing, yet they prefer scaffolded writing opportunities. During the intervention, students engaged most in writing when they were provided with mentor texts (Calkins, 1986) that showed that their own lived experiences were worthy of appearing in stories. Students needed to know that they could, indeed, write about their everyday life, such as the students in Newman’s (2012) study. Scaffolding was further provided as students took advantage of linguistic support in the form of sentence frames to create “Where I’m From” poems (Christensen, 1994; Lyon, 1999) and graphic organizers to write their migration journeys (Stewart, 2015).

Students also need a genuine reason to write and to know they are writing for someone other than their teacher. They should be able to take ownership of their writing by writing for reasons that move beyond getting a grade or receiving credit for an assignment. Sharing their writing with the class, the principal, other teachers, or their families gives them purpose. Students might be eager to teach others, including teachers, about their knowledge—their countries, traditions, abilities, and interests. Authentic writing to teach, inspire, persuade, or entertain others can be shared with a specific audience. Responding authentically might also entail creating products in response to reading through technology (Danzak, 2011) or the arts (Verner & Faltis, 2013).

OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THEIR VOICES

Finally, despite language and cultural barriers, adolescent English learners have much to tell us that could and should affect our literacy research and instruction. When we listen to student voices to guide literacy curriculum and instructional practices, we are not only more effective in engaging students, but we send the message that their voices matter. Essentially, we are telling them that they matter. We need to let them tell us what interests them and how they would like to read and write in the class, instead of deciding ourselves. It is also important to not stick with just one strategy or method, but continually evaluate what might prompt further engagement, positive attitudes, and literacy achievement while responding to student feedback.

CONCLUSION

Acquiring academic language and literacy takes time (Cummins, 1979; Faltis & Arias, 2013). Therefore, adolescent ELs need multiple encounters with self-selected literature (Krashen, 2004) that provides them special insight into the stories (Brooks & Browne, 2012). They need books they can comprehend and enjoy in and out of class in order to acquire necessary academic language in the short amount of time they have to meet academic requirements for graduation. We believe that students will read when they are expected to be readers and when they are provided with

interesting and accessible literature that they select. Secondly, students need to write regularly, for fluency and not just accuracy, which might occur through daily, ungraded writing in a journal or notebook. They need authentic opportunities to write what is meaningful to them in a variety of settings such as shared writing and for publication.

As advocates of adolescent ELs, we are encouraged by many of the results of this survey. Students want to read. They want to write. They have purposeful reasons for engaging in literacy. The imperative for us is to rise to the challenge and listen to our students, rather than listening to the voices that speak for them, and provide them with second language and literacy instruction that will most impact their engagement and abilities. We should privilege their voices as we consider how to provide them with effective second language and literacy instruction.

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AUTHORS

Mary Amanda (Mandy) Stewart, Associate Professor of Reading Education, Texas Woman's University; email: MStewart7@twu.edu @drmandystewart

Katie Walker, Assistant Professor of Literacy and ESOL Education, Coastal Carolina University; email: MWalker2@coastal.edu @k_walker6

Carol Revelle, Ad Interim Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University – Commerce, email: carol.revelle@tamuc.edu @drrev

Appendix

Excerpts from Pre- and Post-Surveys Relevant to This Study

(There were multiple lines under each of the open-ended questions for students to write in their responses.)

Pre-Survey (Used to guide intervention)

1. Have you read a book in school you enjoyed? If so, why? What is the name of the book?
2. Have you ever read a book about someone you could relate to? If so, what book?
3. Do you ever share your writing from school with anyone?
4. What would you like to read about in this program?
5. What would you like to write about in this program?

Post-Survey (Data analyzed for this study)

1. What did you read in the program?
2. Did you like it? Why or why not?
3. Could you relate to any of the characters in the books you read? If so, which ones?
4. What is something you wrote about?
5. Did you enjoy writing it? Why or why not?
6. What do you want to read and write about in the future?