

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Deborah L. Saari for the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages presented July 1, 2005.

Title: Selection of Reading Material by Adults in a Modified Sustained Silent Reading Program in Beginning Level ESL Classes at Portland Community College.

Varied opinions exist about the use of children's literature, particularly children's picture books, in adult ESL classes. Instructors and others involved in selecting materials often voice concerns about whether adult students will find them too juvenile or uninteresting. Some instructors and program administrators believe that children's picture books only appeal to certain kinds of adult ESL students. Others involved in ESL pedagogy believe that children's picture books can be useful for reading instruction because students may be able to comprehend text without a large sight vocabulary.

This study is a secondary analysis of data collected in the Adult ESOL Lab School and examines what kinds of materials beginning level adult ESL students at a community college choose to read when given free choice of reading materials during in-class modified Sustained Silent Reading sessions. The first aim of the study was to determine whether students in these classes chose to read children's picture books, based on student-recorded logs of what they read. Then the study

determined if there were certain characteristics (among age, gender, first language, years of formal education, hours of instruction or class level) associated with a preference for children's picture books. Finally, an examination of comments on all students' reading logs and video recordings of reading sessions of students who preferred children's picture books was done to look for reasons why students chose children's picture books.

Results indicate that beginning adult ESL learners will choose, and many prefer, to read children's picture books even when there is a broad selection of other materials available. Thirty-three percent of students in this study preferred children's picture books: preference was not predicted by age, gender, first language or level of education. However, students who attended a greater number of hours of instruction were less likely to prefer children's picture books. Examination of reading logs and video did not reveal the reasons for student choice of picture books. This study confirms that children's picture books have great potential to fill the pressing need for reading materials in beginning level adult ESL classrooms.