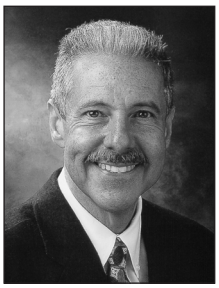
Vocabulary Instruction *for English Language Learners*



Alfredo Schifini, Ph.D.

Words are the way we express what we know. Words also help us learn new ideas and concepts. Because vocabulary knowledge is so closely tied to reading comprehension, students who are English language learners face special challenges. Unlike native speakers of English, they may have very limited listening and speaking vocabularies. And although they may learn to speak the new language quickly, they face a constant challenge–to recognize and understand new words in print. Many of these "book words" are not words that students hear or use in everyday conversation. Up until quite recently, educators had few resources to improve second language learners' vocabularies. With Avenues, educators can now help their students develop a rich academic vocabulary and thus motivate students to become avid, lifelong readers.

Effective Vocabulary Instruction

Scientific research on vocabulary instruction tells us two important points:

- Most vocabulary is learned indirectly through experiences with oral and written language.
- There is a need to teach some vocabulary directly.

Let's explore these two ways to carry out vocabulary instruction.

Indirect Methods of Teaching Vocabulary

Engage children in daily oral language.

Second language learners can benefit greatly from structured conversations with adults and peers who are more proficient in English. The daily vocabulary activities in ***Avenues*** provide opportunities for students to experiment with language in risk-free and meaningful contexts.

Students are introduced to academic vocabulary with a clear and colorful visual preview. As they sing songs and work with Picture Cards students have repeated experiences with the content area words. This interactive, hands-on approach makes new concepts and words come alive.

Read aloud to children.

Children learn new words when they are read to. For those who are in the initial stages of English, use pictures to "walk through" key story events and main ideas before reading the selection aloud. This gives children a basis for understanding the new words in the story. In addition to three powerful previews, ***Avenues*** includes suggested sheltering strategies to make the language of each selection comprehensible. For example, you can restate words and phrases; act out and summarize events; and convey meanings with gestures, real objects, and sound effects.

Have students read on their own.

Students who are able to read independently should be given ample opportunity to do so. The Leveled Books and Theme Libraries in ***Avenues*** are appropriate for a range of language proficiencies and literacy levels. The availability of books that students CAN READ and WANT TO READ is crucial. As with read alouds, English language learners benefit from structured talks with peers about what they have read.

Context Clues: *A Word of Caution*

When reading independently, English language learners may not be able to use context as efficiently as their English-speaking peers. There may be too many unknown words on the page to help them unlock the meaning of key words. Also, their knowledge of English grammar and syntax may be limited so those clues to word meaning may not be completely utilized. Ultimately, incidental word learning during independent reading may be limited.

This is not to say the use of context clues should not be modeled by teachers and practiced by students. Opportunities to encounter new words are helpful and as students' knowledge of English grows, so will their ability to make use of context clues.

Direct Teaching of Vocabulary

Preteach specific words.

Students also benefit from the explicit teaching of specific words before reading. Instruction is most worthwhile when it focuses on the words that are key to understanding a selection or are important because of their general utility. Idioms and multiple-meaning words are often confusing to English language learners. To reduce students' frustration, you can explicitly teach these terms and expressions prior to reading a selection.

In ***Avenues***, key selection words are introduced in memorable ways:

- with songs
- through role-plays
- in photo stories

To deepen word knowledge, the key words are reinforced in daily activities. Students will need repeated exposure in a variety of contexts to fully grasp the meanings of new words. This is especially true of words that are conceptually difficult or represent entirely new concepts for children.

Words that are abstract in nature will need to be taught by example and non-examples. Graphic displays, such as definition maps and semantics maps are helpful to show the relationship of new words and concepts to those previously learned. Graphic displays also can be used to help highlight connections among words and concepts.

For younger English language learners, illustrating the new word in a drawing, making up new sentences with the word, or acting it out will make the vocabulary items more memorable. It is essential to make these activities as interactive as possible and to make them fun!

Model the use of references aids.

Students need to know how to use dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses to expand their vocabulary knowledge. However, using these resources may be difficult for them. It is not sufficient to focus on the mechanics of finding an entry by using guide words and alphabetical order. Students often become confused when they look up a word and find many different definitions listed. Words with multiple meanings are especially problematic for English language learners since they may not understand that words with the same spelling can have several different meanings, depending upon context. Teachers need to model how to look up the meaning of an unknown word, choosing from among several definitions the definition that fits the particular context.

> ***"Students need to know how to use dictionaries, glossaries and thesauruses to expand their vocabulary knowledge."***

The built-in vocabulary support in ***Avenues*** encourages students to practice using reference aids. Key selection words are highlighted in the text and defined on the page. The on-page glossaries allow students to substitute an unknown word or phrase with a more familiar word or phrase and then continue reading. Each key word also appears in a Picture Dictionary at the end of the Student Book. This is another way to make the meaning accessible and encourage the use of helpful reference aids.

Help students become word detectives.

Students may know how to break a word into parts to sound it out, but may not know how to break a word into parts to unlock its meaning. Teaching students how to recognize units of meaning such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots can help them expand their content area vocabulary.

- A small number of prefixes (*un-, re-, in-,* and *dis-*) accounts for a large number of the prefixed words that appear in school texts. Teaching the meaning of these common prefixes is extremely beneficial.
- To teach suffixes and inflections you can draw on those that students have begun to incorporate in their oral speech (e.g., *-s, -ed, -ing, -ly*).

Spanish-speaking students already possess a clear understanding of the use of prefixes in their home language, and many Spanish suffixes are linked to common English suffixes.

Spanish-speaking students also should be encouraged to draw on the vast number of English-Spanish cognates. When students are new to the language, it is especially helpful to incorporate cognates and word derivatives in word study activities such as word webs and other graphic representations that show how root words and cognates relate to English words.

Again, a word of caution—recognizable word parts and cognates can sometimes be misleading for English learners! The ***Avenues*** **Teacher's Edition** includes a list of cognates as well as "false friends."

Conclusion

The vocabulary demands on English language learners are incredibly intense! The serious teaching of vocabulary is crucial if students are going to be able to comprehend increasingly complex texts. To help youngsters build strong academic vocabularies we must employ specialized strategies that have been proven effective for second language learners. Our goal as educators is to engage students in learning about words and to teach them how to unlock their meanings. ■

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The SIOP Model *for English Language Learners*

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More and more English language learners are entering U.S. schools with limited proficiency in English and gaps in their educational backgrounds. Yet most of our curricula and instruction build from the belief that students already know some English when they start their schooling, at least in terms of oral language skills. Without oral and written English language skills, however, English learners are hard pressed to learn or demonstrate their academic knowledge. The SIOP Model is a proven approach for sheltered instruction that helps English language learners develop oral language proficiency while building academic English literacy skills and subject area knowledge.

The History of SIOP

The SIOP Model is the product of six years of research sponsored by the National Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence and funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Originally a research instrument, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was modified into a lesson planning and instructional system by practicing teachers and researchers.

In the SIOP Model, language and content objectives are systematically woven into the grade-level curriculum that teachers present to students through modified instruction in English. Teachers systematically develop students' academic language proficiency as part of their lessons, paying careful attention to the English learners' second language development needs. The model is composed of 30 items grouped into eight components essential for making content comprehensible for English language learners: *Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice/Application, Lesson Delivery,* and *Review/Assessment*.

Training and Materials

Through special training, teachers can learn how to plan lessons using the SIOP Model as well as practice techniques that they can later apply in their classrooms. This type of professional development can be helpful, but effective sheltered instruction also requires high quality instructional materials for teachers and students to work with in class. ***Avenues*** and ***High Point*** have been designed for this purpose. The materials, student activities, and teacher lesson plans are aligned to the SIOP Model to support high quality sheltered instruction in English language arts and reading. The programs introduce students to major topics, vocabulary, and subject-specific activities in other content areas. The following discussion gives an overview of the eight components of the SIOP Model.

Preparation

SIOP lessons have language and content objectives linked to standards. In this way, students gain important experience with key grade-level content and skills as they progress

toward proficiency in academic English. The SIOP Model encourages teachers to share learning objectives with students so that students know what they are expected to learn each day and can take an active part in assessing their own progress. Well prepared SIOP lessons include activities that spark purposeful communication and integrate academic concepts with oral and written language practice.

Avenues and ***High Point*** use standards-based instruction as the medium for teaching English. The programs are aligned to national and state curriculum standards and address students' language development needs by providing:

- daily oral language activities
- comprehensive grammar instruction
- visuals that boost vocabulary
- reading selections with built-in support
- writing tools and resources

Avenues and ***High Point*** prepare English learners for mainstream and content area classes by giving them practice with the academic language, tasks, and topics they will encounter in those classes. For example, students have opportunities to read different types of fiction and nonfiction texts, use graphic organizers to analyze story grammar and text structure, and complete a variety of writing assignments.

Building Background

Effective SIOP lessons connect new concepts with the students' personal experiences and past learning. The SIOP Model also incorporates findings from research on vocabulary development that underscore the critical importance of a broad vocabulary base in order for students to be effective readers. In the SIOP Model, teachers directly teach key vocabulary and provide opportunities for students to use this vocabulary orally and in writing.

Throughout ***Avenues*** and ***High Point*** there are suggestions for relating themes to students' own experiences, cultures, and personal lives. Within a unit, each new lesson builds on prior lessons to reinforce and extend information students are learning and language skills they are acquiring. Vocabulary development is particularly rich. For younger children, key vocabulary is taught through songs, games, role-play, and colorful visuals. Older children learn key vocabulary through graphics, word webbing, and other research-based vocabulary strategies. To deepen word knowledge, key vocabulary is reinforced throughout the unit activities. Selections in the Student Books include on-page glossaries that rephrase less essential vocabulary. This enables students to quickly access the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases and continue with their reading.

Comprehensible Input

Accomplished SIOP teachers use sheltered techniques to make content comprehensible. These techniques include:

- demonstrations and modeling
- gestures, pantomime, and role-play
- pictures, real objects, and graphic organizers
- restating, repeating, and speaking slowly

SIOP teachers explain academic tasks clearly, both orally and in writing, providing models and examples of good work so students know the steps they should take and can envision the desired result.

All of the lessons in ***Avenues*** and ***High Point*** include suggestions for making content comprehensible. ***Avenues*** introduces young learners to each selection with a picture walk and previews of the language, genre, and key events or main ideas. In ***High Point***, reading passages are supported with photos, diagrams, and summary statements; academic writing tasks are supported with models of real student work.

Strategies

To equip students for learning outside of the ESL classroom, the SIOP Model provides explicit instruction and practice in learning strategies. SIOP teachers scaffold instruction as well, beginning at a level that encourages student success and providing support to move students to a higher level of understanding and accomplishment. Teachers model important learning strategies and ask critical thinking questions that require students to apply their language skills while developing a deeper understanding of the subject.

Avenues and ***High Point*** teach children a repertoire of learning strategies. The **Teacher's Editions** provide a range of question types to check student comprehension and generate critical, reflective thinking. For example, questions prompt students to form opinions, analyze information, and make connections across texts. The Multi-Level Strategy features scaffold instruction for students with diverse proficiency levels.

Interaction

Children learn through interaction with one another and with their teachers. High quality SIOP lessons provide frequent opportunities for interaction so that English learners can practice these important skills:

- elaborating
- negotiating meaning and clarifying information
- persuading and evaluating

It is also important for students to interact with text in substantive ways, not just reading through a selection once and moving on. ***Avenues*** and ***High Point*** are designed for intensive interaction among students to practice oral language skills and construct joint understandings of content material. The passages help students understand text structures like problem-and-solution. Interactive journals and logs help students make sense of what they read and inspire students to see themselves as writers.

Practice/Application

Practice and application of new material is important for all learners. The SIOP Model research found that lessons with hands-on, visual, and other kinesthetic tasks benefit English learners because students practice the language and content knowledge through multiple modalities. Effective SIOP lessons, therefore, include a variety of activities that encourage students to practice and apply the content they are learning, AND practice and apply their language skills, too.

Avenues and ***High Point*** support students in practicing all their language skills. In addition to high quality reading selections, each unit includes academic writing projects. Guidance for setting up learning centers is provided so teachers can help students explore related thematic information across multiple content areas. All of the readings are supported with extension activities that can be organized according to the students' individual language and literacy levels.

Lesson Delivery

Successful delivery of a SIOP lesson means that the content and language objectives were met, the pacing was appropriate, and the students had a high level of engagement. The art of teaching and classroom management skills play a role in effective lesson delivery.

Avenues and ***High Point*** offer clear directions for each activity to support the lesson objectives, and the meaningful activities keep student interest high. The **Teacher's Editions** have pacing guides to keep teachers and students on track during lessons and during learning center time.

Review/Assessment

Each SIOP lesson wraps up with time for review and assessment. English learners need to review key vocabulary and concepts, and teachers need to use frequent comprehension checks and other informal assessments to

measure how well students retain the information. Accomplished SIOP teachers also offer multiple pathways for students to demonstrate their understanding of the content.

Avenues and ***High Point*** include an array of assessment tools that make student progress visible. Each lesson ends with a "progress check" or "close and assess" section. Scoring rubrics for speaking activities help teachers monitor students' oral language development and their progress through the stages of language proficiency. The programs include formative and summative assessments as well as test-taking skills practice.

Using multi-level assessments, teachers measure mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills at each student's level. Tests have been adapted to Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced proficiency levels by means of the item formats, language level, text density, and amount of teacher support during administration.

Conclusion

The SIOP Model is a proven, research-based approach for teaching content standards and promoting language development in English learners. The lessons in ***Avenues*** and ***High Point*** incorporate all the key features of the SIOP Model. The **Teacher's Editions** provide the professional plan for delivering each lesson and the Student Books, supplementary readers, and practice books provide all the materials needed to engage students in standards-based, active learning. ■

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Diversity and Differentiated Instruction

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Diversity can become a benefit for learning and teaching rather than a hindrance. It requires a change in our awareness, a change in our attitude, and a change in the way we teach and test. We need to realize that each student brings a unique set of assets and experiences and that there are differences among second language learners. We need to believe that diversity enhances the learning environment. And we need to differentiate instruction and assessment so that all students are able to contribute, learn, and show us and themselves what they know.

My First Day of School

On the first day of Kindergarten—or so the story goes—my mother pulled the teacher aside and asked if she could attach me to another child. My mother explained to the somewhat alarmed teacher that I didn't speak or understand a word of "the language of school." She worried that it would be too traumatic for me to have no idea what was going on, while the rest of the children clearly did.

So they chose a girl (who was *not* screaming for her mother) and asked her to take me by the hand. My mother told me not to let go of that hand and to do everything the hand did until she came back to pick me up later that afternoon. Or, so the story goes.

This is how I started my academic career as a diverse learner. It is an experience I have carried over to my teaching of diverse learners, and most recently to helping other teachers meet the challenge of working with students who come from varied backgrounds. In the next few pages, I would like to share what I have learned from being a diverse learner myself and what I have learned from both failure and success in teaching diverse learners.

Diversity as an Asset

I realized early in my career in education that diversity enhances our world in such a way that I cannot help but think of homogeneous classrooms and schools as impoverished environments! We learn from seeing different ways of approaching everyday life and from catching a glimpse of different values and norms. We learn to understand, appreciate, and perhaps even assume other peoples' perspectives. We learn that people interact with their environs differently, and our lives are enriched by that realization.

A Change in Awareness

How can we as educators transform student diversity into a benefit? Three things need to happen for diversity to become a benefit for learning and teaching rather than a hindrance. The first thing we need to do is to recognize that students are unique and that learning happens in all sorts of ways. Most of us in the field of education think primarily of two characteristics when we think of the word *diversity* as it applies to the classroom:

- different rates and styles of learning
- linguistic and cultural diversity.

But it is essential to understand that each one of us is unique. We learn and we interact with our surroundings differently due to our gender, the socioeconomic status of our family, the education of our parents, our occupation (yes, teachers see things differently than engineers or carpenters), and many other factors. As teachers, it is important for us to remember this because at any moment in the classroom, we must be aware of the fact that some students are approaching the learning task differently than the rest of the class.

"Even among second language learners, there are many differences."

The need to recognize that each student is unique is especially relevant to a classroom of English language learners (ELLs). They arrive at our doorstep with linguistic and cultural diversity and they are learning to function in a second language. Even among second language learners, there are many differences. Invariably and at any given grade level, some English language learners will be at a beginning level of proficiency in English as a second language; others will be at an intermediate level; and yet others will have more advanced proficiency.

Second language learners also differ in the level of proficiency in their home, or first language. Some students will have received years of schooling in their primary language, whereas others may not have even the most basic literacy skills in that language.

We must plan our teaching so that students at every level of proficiency are able to advance in their language development. If an activity is too hard for students who are at the beginning proficiency level, or if it is too easy for students who are at intermediate or advanced levels, then those students are not likely to be learning at their optimal level.

As for cultural differences, ELLs come from varied backgrounds. Some students may have gone through traumatic experiences in their home country, and as a result of political situations may have experienced interrupted schooling. Others may come from a community that is vastly different from the one they have settled in here in the United States.

A Change in Attitude

The second thing that needs to happen in teaching successfully for diversity is probably the most difficult one to accomplish because it has to do with our attitudes: we need to believe that diversity enhances the learning environment in fundamental ways, and that it provides enrichment for all. But as hard as it might be to change others' attitudes, we must understand that without peers, teachers, and administrators who genuinely value diversity, it will be difficult for ELLs to feel at home and to take the risks that are part of second language learning.

A Change in Instruction and Assessment

The third thing that needs to happen is for educators to differentiate instruction so that it allows all students to learn as closely to their optimal level as possible. At the same time, we need to differentiate assessment so that all students are being given the opportunity to show what they have learned even as they move through the various stages of language acquisition. Providing differentiated instruction and assessment requires skill, but it is certainly something that teachers can learn to do by:

- recognizing and integrating students' assets into the classroom
- becoming familiar with their values, norms, and family traditions
- learning about their prior experiences and current interests
- aligning assessment with instruction.

All students bring important resources to the classroom, including their primary language skills, concepts of print and literacy experiences, and developing English language skills. We can learn about their backgrounds and interests by seeking out what makes each student unique, by noticing commonalties across groups of students, and by becoming familiar with our students' home lives.

To get to know our students better we can also take advantage of teaching strategies such as:

- Interactive discussions that tap prior knowledge
- Daily journal writing
- Assigning activities that involve family members

In ***Avenues*** you will find daily opportunities for students to express themselves orally and in writing, allowing you to learn about their likes and dislikes, about their home life, and about their beliefs and values.

Two Important Tasks

Once we recognize the assets that each student brings with him or her to the classroom, we have two important tasks ahead of us:

We must find ways to integrate these assets into the everyday workings of the classroom.

One way to integrate student diversity into the curriculum is to incorporate different cultural perspectives into lessons on a regular basis. The ***Avenues*** **Teacher's Edition** includes Cultural Perspectives activities to help you bring students' home cultures as well as other cultures into the lesson. For example, before students read Gary Soto's story "If the Shoe Fits," they interview their family members about the importance of extended families, then share and compare their findings in class. Teachers can also give students' primary languages a prominent place in the classroom by including books in different languages in class libraries and labeling various classroom objects in both English and students' home languages.

We must differentiate instruction and assessment to optimize learning and performance.

The second task is a bit harder. To differentiate instruction and assessment for diverse groups of learners teachers must plan their teaching so that students at all levels of language proficiency are able to participate and learn. Teachers must also plan their assessment so that even students who have very little oral proficiency in English can show what they have learned.

I have noticed that oftentimes teachers plan their lessons for a middle range of learners and then, almost as an afterthought, modify the activities so that they become more appropriate for students who are at lower or higher

proficiency levels. Instead, I believe that it would be much more effective to plan in such a way that instructional strategies and assessment activities are differentiated from the very beginning. In other words, it is more effective to create differentiated lesson plans from the start.

In ***Avenues***, this differentiation is built right into each lesson in the **Teacher's Edition** with Multi-Level Strategies. When, for example, you model how to record key events in sequence on a time line, you will see questions for Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced proficiency levels. This allows all students to contribute to the activity, to show what they have learned, and to learn from their more proficient peers. The Multi-Level Strategies in ***Avenues*** enable you to differentiate instruction and allow each student to participate within his or her ability. In this way, every student has opportunities for success and is motivated to participate.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I must admit that it is challenging to teach second language learners. It is even more challenging when students in a given classroom are at different levels of English proficiency. However, the difficulty of teaching these children does not excuse our failure to do so. We must bring out the richness that comes from having students of different languages, different cultures, and different learning potentials, so that all the students in our classrooms may take the roads and avenues to a successful future. ■

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Writing Instruction *for English Language Learners*

Erminda García

Writing is more than just a means of expression—it is a stepping stone to fluency and literacy. My colleagues and I have come to view writing as a "language of learning": a way to process information, to birth and develop ideas, and to internalize the rules of discourse. We as teachers understand the critical role writing plays in our students' success, and this viewpoint informs the approach we take toward writing instruction.

Shattering the Myth

It's all too easy for anyone who works with English language learners (ELLs) to assume that they aren't capable of producing written work, at least not well enough to participate in writing instruction and extended writing activities alongside their native-English speaking peers. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Rather than sheltering these students, we need to immerse them in the writing experience. This starts with recognizing and drawing upon the knowledge and skills all children bring to the table, including linguistic awareness of alphabets and cognates from students' first languages. Then, if we provide appropriate learning supports and *lots* of opportunities to practice, we can help English learners succeed as writers. They can, in turn, experience the accelerated language development that results from writing.

Frequent and Varied Writing Opportunities

A beginning English language learner needs to do more than complete sentence starters and fill in cloze sentences. While these types of patterned-writing activities are helpful, a recent study comparing the writing of ELLs and native-English speaking children found that too much patterned writing prevents ELLs from improving their writing fluency. We need to include the following kinds of writing in our instructional repertoire as well:

- **Daily Writing** Students should write for a few minutes each day to reflect, record ideas, express feelings and opinions, and use new vocabulary.
- **Writing in Response to Literature** After reading a published work of fiction or nonfiction, students can write about a topic springing from the literature. For example, after reading an article about seasons, students might write a story about spring. This type of writing activity provides the kind of rich context that supports English learners.
- **Writing Projects** At regular intervals during the year, students should use the writing process to publish a longer piece of writing. In ***Avenues***, for example, there are four Writing Projects, each focusing on a different writing purpose, mode, form, and trait of good writing (e.g., organization). During these extended projects, students become immersed and invested in honing their craft and fully developing a piece of writing.

Appropriate Support

It often appears as though English language learners "can't write" because they haven't been given appropriate second-language supports. For students to be successful, they need:

- **Multi-Level Strategies** A teacher who wants to teach informative writing, for example, to a multi-level group of language learners can adapt the stages of the writing process: Beginning ELLs can produce an informative poster with illustrations, photos, captions, and a title to convey information, while more advanced ELLs can develop paragraphs or entire articles.
- **Graphic Reference Tools** While all elementary students need help learning writer's craft, writing forms, and the writing process, ELLs in particular need oral and visual ways to learn the conventions of English. A student handbook such as ***English at Your Command!*** makes grammar, vocabulary, and writing accessible through simple language, graphic aids, and plenty of picture support.
- **Software Support** A software tool such as ***Kidspiration*** allows all students to express their ideas through pictures, graphic organizers, and a tool that converts the content of graphic organizers to outline form.

The Reading-Writing Connection

Simply put, to become a reader, you must read; to become a writer, you must read *and* write. When it comes to teaching writing, one of the most important tools we have is literature—the published work and other examples of well-crafted writing that we share with our students.

Literature as a Model

When English language learners, particularly those in the early stages of writing proficiency, produce a written piece, they often mimic the reading selection they have just finished—proof of the aspirational effect of published writing and its power to provide a safe starting place for students. Through reading, students begin to internalize genre characteristics, literary styles, language patterns, written conventions, and principles of print.

For example, I recently engaged first graders in a unit about grandparents, in which we read everything from once-upon-a-time stories to poems to factual pieces to first-person stories about the theme. Students then wrote letters to their own grandparents, modeling the use of first-person, or "first voice," as I call it with primary students. After writing to his grandfather, one child, Tómas, was surprised and delighted when he received a letter back!

Literature as Motivation

Perhaps more importantly, Tómas's experience demonstrates the power of literature and other well-crafted writing to model self-expression and voice; students see the *purpose* for writing. The works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that we share with our students inspire children to write about their own interests, life experiences, family histories, and cultural beliefs. By reading what other people have written, students realize that they, too, have something to say. Being an audience gives students the desire for an audience of their own.

Integrated Instruction

Students learn best when they read literature that has been carefully chosen to speak to their personal experiences and interests and to cover a wide range of genres, forms, and purposes for writing. The writing instruction can then grow directly out of these reading selections.

In ***Avenues***, for example, after reading "My Rows and Piles of Coins," a story about a boy trying to save money to buy a bicycle, fourth-grade students write a realistic fiction story of their own. The Writing Project includes lessons on the features of realistic fiction, the purpose of "writing to entertain," focus and coherence as traits of good writing, and using conjunctions in sentences—all of which are modeled in "My Rows and Piles of Coins." The result is a truly integrated literacy experience in which the finished work serves as evidence of what the students have learned.

Teaching the Traits of Good Writing

Literature, of course, must provide more than just reason and opportunity to write. We must use it to teach our students to write *effectively*, by exploring what makes a piece of writing "good."

Discussing Literature

Once again, the best way to start is by reading a selection that creates personal meaning for ELLs. A discussion about the selection can highlight what helped the reader create meaning: Was it the development of the main idea, or perhaps the way the piece was organized? How did the coherence of the piece enable the reader to extract meaning? Did the author's voice show passion and commitment to the topic in a way that helped the reader "connect"?

Out of these discussions, students begin to recognize and appreciate the following characteristics, or traits, of good writing and incorporate them into their own work:

- **Focus and coherence** is the "tightness" of a piece—how well a writer stays on one topic, how the beginning and conclusion hold the piece together, and whether the piece feels complete and makes sense as a whole.
- **Organization** is the structure and progression of ideas—how the information is grouped or ordered and whether there are logical transitions from one thought to the next.
- **Development of ideas** is the "depth" of content—whether the topic is meaningful and interesting and how the ideas are supported or elaborated.
- **Voice** is the style of the piece, or how the author expresses his or her individuality through word choice and tone.
- **Written conventions** encompass grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling, as well as sentence fluency.

Even as early as kindergarten, students can begin to understand and talk about these traits. At my school, kindergarteners are introduced to concepts such as "ideas" (what you start with), "voice" (the words you use), and "conventions" (from squiggles to correctly formed letters).

Using Student Rubrics

English language learners need to receive explicit instruction in each of the traits of good writing, and that includes making sure students know what marks they're striving for. In ***Avenues***, students are given their own "kid-friendly" rubric for each writing trait. After learning about the trait, students practice applying the rubric to others' writing (since it's much easier to see the merits and flaws in someone else's work first!), and then use the rubric to improve their own writing.

Written in accessible language, these rubrics make the traits comprehensible to all students. The rubrics level the playing field by providing a shared vocabulary and common set of benchmarks. Thus, they allow students to take ownership of the process and pride in their own growth as a writer.

Assessment That Informs Instruction

Writing is the "language of learning" not only for our students but for us as teachers. By assessing our students' writing, we learn what they know and what they need to know.

The Good Writing Traits Rubric in the ***Avenues*** **Assessment Handbook** is an effective tool for scoring each trait individually within a particular piece of writing, yielding both trait-specific data and a holistic picture of the work. ***Avenues*** also provides a Writing Progress Form that allows teachers to track scores for each trait across different pieces of writing over a period of time.

Traits-based assessment tools provide insights into students' growing mastery of composition skills and conventions of English. I use these tools to diagnose problem areas and tailor instruction accordingly, allowing me to design appropriate whole-group instruction, mini-lessons for small groups, and specific lessons for individuals.

A Writer's Community

No matter how carefully we craft our instruction, it's not enough just to "teach" writing; we must live it. Our classroom must be a place where students have the physical space and materials to write—a place where children can create, experiment, and explore freely.

I once walked into a classroom and saw the most intriguing door. It was covered with paper scraps, creating a patchwork quilt of students' writing. In the room was a table covered with paper and an assortment of pencils, crayons, word cards, thematic lists, and other writing tools. Children were invited to write on the paper "tablecloth," and once a month the teacher would tear off a section, date it, and add it to the door. The children's progress was clearly visible.

To truly foster a writer's community, though, our classroom must be a place where we as teachers are fellow writers, and we speak the "vocabulary" of writing: we use literary terms, such as *character*, *dialogue*, and *fiction*; words about books, such as *author*, *chapter*, *caption*, etc.; words about the writing process, such as *plan*, *conference*, and *revise*; and grammar and mechanics terms, such as *verb* and *capital letter*. When students hear us using these words on a regular basis, in meaningful contexts, students begin to internalize the concepts and use the vocabulary themselves.

Conclusion

Effective writing instruction for English language learners begins with a recognition of the assets all students bring to the table, and the realization that writing helps students learn English.

By using literature and other well-crafted writing as both models and motivational tools; by providing appropriate support, frequent opportunities to write, and the proper environment; by teaching students the traits of good writing; and by using assessment rubrics to inform instruction, we can help our students write *well*. We can raise not only our own expectations but our students' expectations about what they can accomplish as writers. ■

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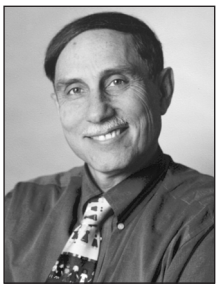

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Approximately one in six schoolchildren speaks a language other than English at home, and one in ten is born outside the U.S. Educating children from immigrant and ethnic-minority families is a major concern in school systems across the country. Too often, we have viewed these students only from the perspective of what they need to learn and from what they don't have. We need to move from this needs, or deficit, approach to an asset-inventory approach. This new view argues for the respect and integration of students' languages, values, beliefs, histories, and experiences. It argues for increased rigor and higher expectations–all supported by specialized instructional strategies. And it recognizes the active role that students must play in their own learning process.

English Language Learners Today

As we look at the students in our classrooms, we see a picture much different from the classrooms of our childhoods. According to the 2000 U.S. census, approximately one in three schoolchildren is from an ethnic or racial minority group, one in six speaks a language other than English at home, and one in ten is born outside the U.S. The linguistic and cultural diversity of the U.S. school population has increased dramatically during the past decade and will continue to increase. The concept of "minority group" will soon become obsolete, with no one group being a majority.

Educating children from immigrant and ethnic-minority families is a major concern in school systems across the country. Administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers urge each other to do something different—change teaching methods, adopt new curricula, allocate more funding. Such actions might be needed, but they will not be meaningful until we think differently about English language learners.

A New View of English Language Learners

We are acutely aware that many English language learners come from families that are poor and non-English speaking. Too often, we have viewed these students only from the perspective of what they need to learn and from what they don't have. We need to move from this needs, or deficit, approach to an asset-inventory approach. That is, we need to perceive students' native language and culture as resources, or assets, instead of as problems. Students acquire language, culture, and accompanying values in the home and community environment and bring these assets with them to school.

In the past, when we have focused solely on the teaching of the English language, students received instruction to improve their English with the false understanding that learning English was all they needed. English language learners are capable and deserve the same access to the content standards as mainstream students.

These students do, however, need specialized instructional

strategies that will ensure both their access to the standards and their success in achieving those standards. Specialized strategies for English language learners include:

- an interactive environment in which students constantly communicate for authentic purposes
- frequent opportunities to share and connect their prior knowledge and experiences to their peers' knowledge and to academic content
- multi-level activities and sheltering techniques to allow students at every level of English proficiency access to grade-level concepts and vocabulary
- assessment that tests students in the way they have been taught. That is, teachers assess student progress at benchmark proficiency levels—Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced—in order to see progress on academic standards even as students move through stages of language acquisition.

Developing an Asset Inventory

My wife, Erminda García, put this new view into practice in her third-grade classroom at Alianza Elementary School in Watsonville, California. At the beginning of the year, she asked students to consider this thematic study: "Three R's: Resourcefulness, Responsibility, and Respect." Students considered how they could become resourceful, responsible, and respectful in relationship to each other and to what they had to accomplish in the classroom.

Students' languages were immediately identified as resources. Students then articulated the ways in which other resources (parents, family, books, computers, etc.) could be used to enhance their academic pursuits.

For example, Rigoberto came to Erminda's classroom in September, after having arrived from Mexico in the last two months of the preceding academic year. A note in his file indicated a set of academic weaknesses. Erminda's first set of inquiries addressed what Rigoberto brought as resources. She asked him to talk about himself, his family, his community, and his educational experiences orally with her and in an interactive journal using his languages.

This asset inventory allowed her to place Rigoberto in the best academic circumstances, so that he could serve as a resource to others, and to maximize the classroom resources that could be made available to him. That made him an immediate participant in his own and his peers' education.

Knowing Rigoberto's resource portfolio allowed Erminda to modify instruction in ways that would support his learning. She began moving him from his native language in his journal into comfortable and skilled writing in English. Knowing what he could do in one language gave her a set of possible instructional "avenues" that she could use to develop English expertise.

Promoting Interactive Learning

Erminda also structures her classroom for interactive learning. She organizes desks in ways that promote the sharing of students' language resources: children sit in groups of four, with desks facing each other. Even in whole-group instruction, children are paired for interactive response. During instruction, students select from resource materials in English and native languages, often using each other for assistance in selecting those materials. Examples of learning are always put on display in whatever language the learning was accomplished, whether those resources are published works, brainstorm charts, or actual student products.

Establishing Content Benchmarks

Finally, Erminda and all of her school colleagues established content benchmarks for each grade level and then assessed student work on a regular basis. The teachers used these ongoing assessments to identify both strengths and weaknesses; then, they could use specific instructional links to increase student learning. In this classroom, like other effective classrooms we have studied, there is always a concern for instruction focused on the articulated standards and ongoing assessment of student learning.

Guiding Principles for Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction

The theory, research, and practices described above can be summarized in a set of North Star principles that can guide the work of educators serving English language learners. The North Star does not tell a traveler the precise way to travel. It does, however, provide an unwavering and ever-present indicator of the traveler's location in relation to the journey. The following guidelines are meant to inform your classroom journey toward academic success for your English language learners.

The languages and experiences of the student and her or his family and community are recognized and respected.

Curriculum and assessment sometimes ignore students' primary languages, even when primary language instruction is a major aspect of the program. And too often instruction based on a mainstream curriculum suffers from a mainstream approach. For example, English language learners are sometimes asked to write about vacations or travel; many students—especially those in urban or poor schools—cannot meaningfully participate in such an activity. Teachers need to choose reading material and instructional activities that are more intrinsically interesting, relevant, and motivating for English language learners.

High standards are the basis for curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Most school districts and states have articulated English language arts standards. Standards make clear the expectations for students' skill level at each grade. Therefore, curriculum, assessment, and instruction for English language learners must reflect and be aligned with the standards; specialized instructional strategies, delivered by quality materials with built-in supports, must provide these students access to those high standards.

Assessment is on-going and makes progress visible even as students move through the stages of language acquisition.

Standardized tests given to students in the spring are not intended to inform instruction, since results of such tests are not distributed or discussed until the fall. Standardized tests have their place in an accountability system, but they are not and should never be understood as the best way to assess specific student needs or to indicate instructional changes required to address the needs.

Instruction needs to provide feedback that informs instruction; therefore, it is imperative that such assessments occur at regular and strategic times during the year and that teachers test what they are teaching and in ways that reflect that teaching. Since most classrooms have students at varying levels of language proficiency and since teachers must use specialized strategies to teach those students, it follows that assessing student learning must be a multi-level activity. Teachers then have access to rich information regarding students' learning on a continuous basis.

Moreover, instruction can be modified to target specific student needs, which have been made visible by the multi-level assessment. Of significance, too, is the development and growth information that becomes available. Theoretically and empirically, we have come to understand that language and literacy development is not linear, that it can be unique to each student. Regular assessment allows us to maximize instructional opportunities.

Teachers are able to use assessment results to inform, adapt, and maximize language and literacy instruction.

Assessment that is "usable" provides information about performance on specific standards in language and literacy. It provides multiple products—authentic products as well as numerical scores—that allow teachers to verify students' language and literacy engagement. Usable

assessment also makes progress visible and lets the teacher see and explore trends for an individual student, as well as for groups of students. And finally, usable assessment identifies specific instructional strategies for reteaching, which helps individual students develop in specific areas.

Students are actively involved in the development and implementation of the instructional process.

The older and more mature the student gets, the more that student is able to be a partner in the teaching and learning process. Students can meaningfully participate in their own education by:

- contributing their prior knowledge to the study of new topics
- examining their own work and sharing their reflections
- reviewing and even expanding on their mastery of the local and state standards. Teachers should always consider it important to let students know the expectations and to provide them with numerous models of student work.

In this manner, students become part of the process and assume a role in assessing their own learning.

Conclusion

These guiding principles, much like the North Star directs a night traveler, can give important insights into curriculum design, instruction, and assessment. Following these principles is beneficial to all learners, but imperative in the delivery of high-quality, standards-based instruction to our linguistically and culturally diverse students.

You will find that the curriculum design and instruction in ***Avenues*** reflects these North Star principles, and the ***Avenues* Assessment Handbook** provides assessment tools that yield usable results, across the many domains of literacy. Use these tools to monitor student progress across the year and use the results to inform your teaching. ■

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Comprehension Instruction *for English Language Learners*

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English language learners are a diverse group, with varying educational experiences, primary language literacy skills, and levels of English proficiency. All of these factors have an impact on students' ability to read and comprehend materials in English. There are many things that educators can do to support second language readers' comprehension. Our primary task is to ensure that students have the necessary background to be effective, fluent readers. This includes helping students develop a broad vocabulary base, knowledge of English grammatical structures, familiarity with text content and text structures, and ensuring that every student has solid foundational literacy skills.

Second Language Readers

Today educators are faced with the challenge of providing appropriate instruction to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Within this context is the special challenge of teaching children who are non-native speakers of English to read in English, while simultaneously developing their oral language proficiency and other skills necessary to succeed in school. Although the reading process is essentially the same for all students, second language readers bring different resources and unique needs to the task, with important implications for instruction.

While it is impossible to categorize all English language learners (ELLs) into a single group that can be addressed with one instructional approach, all of them, by definition, need to develop proficiency and literacy skills in English. Fortunately, an evolving body of research, theories and experiences, point to some promising practices for improving reading comprehension for second language readers.

Background Knowledge

Reading is an interactive process directed toward the sharing of meaning. To engage in this process effectively, second language readers must be able to draw on their own language, literacy, and socio-cultural knowledge to reconstruct the author's message. In other words, comprehension is directly related to what the reader already knows.

We readily recognize that the more one knows about something, the easier it is to talk, read, and write about it. We also know that comprehension is enhanced when students have opportunities to connect new concepts with their personal experiences and past learning. It follows then that the more familiarity students have with certain aspects of a text, the easier it will be for them to comprehend it. Among these critical aspects are

- Vocabulary and Language Structures
- Text Content and Text Structure
- Decoding Demands

Vocabulary

Because vocabulary knowledge is so closely tied to reading comprehension, English language learners must develop a broad vocabulary base in order to be effective readers. When students encounter a large number of unknown words while they are reading, their comprehension is disrupted. English learners may misinterpret a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire reading selection if they do not know the meaning of one or more key words.

For this reason, it is extremely important for teachers to directly teach key vocabulary and provide opportunities for ELLs to use this vocabulary orally and in writing. Students acquiring English need many opportunities to hear and use English, to take risks, and try out their knowledge of the language.

In ***Avenues*** each unit begins by building important background and using clear, colorful visuals to introduce students to theme-related, academic vocabulary. Students have repeated opportunities to use the content area words as they sing and innovate songs and work with Picture Cards.

Avenues also includes direct instruction in key selection vocabulary—the words that are key to understanding each reading selection. The new words come alive for students as key vocabulary is introduced

- with songs
- through role-plays
- in photo stories

To deepen word knowledge, the key words appear in the Picture Dictionary at the end of each **Student Book** and are continually reinforced in daily activities. To further support comprehension, on-page glossaries rephrase less essential vocabulary. This enables students to quickly access the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases and continue with their reading.

Language Structures

In addition to developing vocabulary, teachers must also help second language readers learn the structures of the new language. Grammar instruction supports reading comprehension by helping students:

- recognize types of sentences
- understand parts of speech
- predict word order
- identify verb forms that cue tense
- recognize function words

Understanding how English works helps readers predict and fully grasp the author's message. For example, knowing how to identify nouns, verbs, and descriptors can help students separate important information from unimportant information. And to be able to use context clues effectively a reader must have strong intuitions about English word order.

Avenues supports reading comprehension with powerful previews of each selection, including a preview of the selection's language structures. First, students hear the language model and, with prompts from the teacher, are led to explore how English works. They then experiment using the language structures in a risk-free and meaningful context.

With each selection in ***Avenues***, teachers will find support to build their students' language skills. In grade 3, for example, nouns are introduced in a preview of "The Fox in the Moon." As students work through the unit, sequential lessons give them extensive practice in reading and writing a progression of language structures: nouns and articles, plural nouns, possessive nouns, specific nouns, and irregular plurals. This type of comprehensive grammar instruction builds important background for reading and leads to oral and written fluency.

Text Content

We know that background knowledge affects reading comprehension—familiarity with the topic greatly enhances a student's comprehension. Research suggests that this may be even more significant for second language readers. Studies have shown that when students read passages reflecting their own cultural traditions, their memory and comprehension were better than when they read equally difficult passages about unfamiliar topics. When ELLs are familiar with the content of the text, their limited language proficiency doesn't have as great an impact on their comprehension.

The challenge for teachers is to build sufficient text content background for ELLs and to support them during the reading process. ***Avenues*** helps educators accomplish this in several ways:

- The program presents authentic, multicultural literature that speaks to students' own lives and experiences.
- For in-depth theme study, each unit pairs fiction and nonfiction readings connected to grade-level content.
- The **Student Book** uses strong visual support to preview the selection's genre and the story elements or text features.
- The **Teacher's Edition** includes a "picture walk" to preview key events or main ideas.
- Sheltering strategies such as the use of role-play, demonstrations, real objects, and restatements help make the selection content fully comprehensible.

To support students during reading, the selections in ***Avenues*** include built-in comprehension support. Each one is divided into manageable chunks with an introduction that sets a purpose or prompts a prediction. There is strong picture support for the selection content, and the Before You Move On features provide frequent comprehension checks. In addition, suggested Reading Options tailor the reading experience to students' language and literacy levels.

Text Structures

Familiarity with different text structures—the ways a piece of writing can be organized—also enhances students' reading comprehension. Because text structures vary across cultures and languages, ELLs benefit from explicit instruction in a variety of English text structures commonly used in fiction and nonfiction writing. For example, once students know how a problem-solution story is structured, they can anticipate, search for, and locate key story elements.

Instruction in expository text structures is especially important because as students move through the grades, content area texts become longer, more complex, and more conceptually demanding. Text structure knowledge has the added benefit of helping students to organize their own thoughts and ideas when writing in English.

To support comprehension, ***Avenues*** includes a preview of the text structure of every reading selection. During the Read and Map activities the teacher models how to complete a graphic organizer that reveals the underlying organization of the selection. After students read the selection, they complete their own graphic organizers and use them to retell the story or summarize main ideas. This type of mapping of text structures has been shown to contribute to readers' comprehension and recall.

Decoding Demands

In order to unlock the meaning of words on a printed page, readers must be able to recognize the words automatically and group them into meaningful phrases. Knowledge of the English writing system requires that students have a solid foundation in phonological awareness, concepts of print, and letter-sound correspondences.

Each English language learner brings a unique set of experiences and skills to the classroom. Some have strong academic backgrounds and know how to read in their home language. Others may have had years of interrupted schooling and lack even the most basic understanding of

how print works.

Even students who are able readers in their home languages will encounter entirely new sounds and new letter-sound correspondences when they begin to read in English. The assessment tools in ***Avenues*** provide a clear picture of students' concepts about print, phonological awareness, knowledge of English letter names and letter-sound correspondences, and basic decoding skills. For beginning readers ***Avenues*** includes a comprehensive strand to develop concepts of print and phonological awareness. Teachers will also find systematic, sequential phonics instruction at all grades. *Phonics Street* and *Reading Basics* teach children strategies for reading multisyllabic words and words with affixes.

Conclusion

The purpose of reading is comprehension. Reading is deriving meaning from the printed page, and this process is closely tied to what readers know. For ELLs this means that they must develop the basic background that will allow them to understand what they read. Factors other than lack of English proficiency may contribute to their reading difficulties. Familiarity with text content and text structures associated with the new language is also important.

A relevant curriculum for ELLs must be built on what students need to know, while honoring their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Prior literacy experiences and background knowledge determine the extent to which readers can interact with information in a text. Thus, we must design instructional materials with the strategies to enhance the language and literacy skills of ELLs. ■

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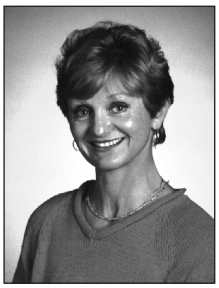

Lada Kratky

Reading is much more than simply breaking a phonetic code and deciphering the sounds of letters. To understand what we read, we have to understand the meanings of most of the words on the page. This is why language development plays such a crucial role in literacy instruction for children who are English language learners. The best way to get children on the road to reading is to make language memorable, build important foundational skills, and introduce literature that speaks to children's own lives and sparks their imaginations.

Literacy and Language Development

As teachers, we want to teach reading so our students can arrive at the underlying message or meaning of the selection. Imagine reading something in a language you do not speak or understand. If it is an alphabetic language you may be able to sound out most of the words, but the message will have no meaning for you. It will be a senseless string of sounds. The individual words, phrases, and word order will hold no clues for you.

This is the principal challenge for both the teacher and the student when teaching an English language learner to read in English. It is why language development plays such a crucial role in literacy instruction for second language learners. To help children catch up to their peers who are native English speakers, we need to provide comprehensive instruction that includes structured oral language activities, the direct teaching of selection vocabulary and high frequency words, and instruction in English grammar, language structures, and patterns.

Reaching Young Learners

We know that language is acquired through constant repetition. A young child learns words after hearing his or her parents say them over and over again, and he or she in turn repeats them over and over again. In foreign language instruction, learning has traditionally depended on the memorization of dialogues in order for the learner to internalize language structures and vocabulary, followed by drills and more drills. But such methodology is not appropriate for a young child entering school.

The most effective method of second language instruction for a young learner is through:

- poetry
- songs and chants
- stories

These engage children immediately, making them want to listen, speak, and even improvise! With the support of audio models, children can have fun experimenting with the sounds,

rhythms, and patterns of English. Games and role-plays are other ways you can motivate children to use language. That is why ***Avenues*** uses poetry, songs, and stories to develop language and why the program includes tabletop scenes and colorful manipulatives. Above all, language development activities must be meaning-based and purposeful. Long-term retention of vocabulary only occurs when children are exposed to situations in which real communication takes place.

The effectiveness of this method can be seen in the following example of a Kindergarten song in ***Avenues,*** which is sung to the melody of "Skip to My Lou":

Blue, blue, I see blue.
Clap your hands and
Point to blue.
Blue, blue, I see blue.
Show me something blue.

A catchy tune and game-like activity make the language memorable, engage children immediately, and allow them to try out new language in non-threatening, choral singing.

Children begin to use color words in a natural context, begin to name classroom objects, and learn useful phrases such as *I see* _____ and *Show me* _____. All the while they are actively engaged, happily joining the community of learners in the classroom.

Understanding Diverse Backgrounds

As English language learners enter our classrooms, each one brings a unique set of experiences and skills. Some students may have strong academic backgrounds and know how to read in their home language. Even if their home language uses a non-Roman alphabet such as Russian, or if it is non-alphabetic such as Cantonese, children will be able to transfer many skills and strategies to reading in English.

Other children, however, may have had years of interrupted schooling and lack even the most basic literacy skills. They may, for example, not understand that print carries a message or know how to turn the pages of a book. All children, regardless of their backgrounds, have strengths that we can build on. As teachers, we need to know precisely what skills each child controls and plan instruction accordingly. The assessment tools in ***Avenues*** will give you a clear picture of your students' concepts about print, phonological awareness, knowledge of letter names and letter-sound associations, and basic decoding skills.

Teaching the Foundational Skills

Concepts of Print

As I mentioned, some English language learners may have had few experiences handling books. When you preview and share stories, you can introduce children to concepts such as how to hold a book, where to find the title and author's name, and how to turn the pages. Because of differences between English and other writing systems even children who are literate in their home language may need to learn:

- the difference between letters and words
- how to recognize word boundaries
- how to track print from left to right
- where to continue reading when they reach the end of a line

In ***Avenues*** you will find many suggestions for creating a print-rich environment in which children learn and immediately apply concepts of print. These concepts are continually reinforced in shared and independent reading activities.

Phonological Awareness

Researchers have found that children can transfer phonological awareness from one language to another. Your students may be able to sing the Kindergarten song about colors and count the number of words in each line, or tell you that the words *see* and *me* rhyme. The real challenge comes when English learners are faced with sounds that are completely new for them. For example, the /sh/ sound does not exist in Spanish, and there are no *r*-controlled vowel sounds in Hmong. See the "Phonics Transfer Chart" in the ***Avenues*** **Teacher's Edition** for more information about sound and sound/symbol transfer issues across languages.

> ***"The real challenge comes when English learners are faced with sounds that are completely new for them."***

Before students can begin to read words with new sounds, they need practice hearing and producing each new sound.

- To make the practice meaningful, show them objects with names that begin with the sound.
- Explain how to use their lips, tongue, and teeth to form the sound.
- Demonstrate the sound several times and have children echo it.
- Ask children to notice how the sound "feels."

Phonological awareness activities can be fun and interactive. You can engage children's attention and enhance their recall by prompting them with puppets and using Elkonin boxes. By placing a color chip in each box you can help children distinguish the sounds in a word.

Letter/Sound Associations

All children need basic phonics skills to help them sound out words in print. To become automatic with words, they need to connect letter patterns to sounds, and sounds to meanings. English language learners also benefit from systematic phonics instruction, but there are additional considerations. First, we need to preteach vocabulary to ensure that children understand the meanings of the words they are asked to hear, say, read, and write. That is why every phonics lesson in ***Avenues*** begins with a preview of language to develop oral vocabulary.

Also, problems may arise because a particular sound does not exist in a child's home language or a given letter represents a different sound. In ***Avenues*** children have repeated opportunities to practice blending words with new sounds and reading these words in connected, meaningful text.

High Frequency Words

Being able to automatically recognize the most frequent words in print helps children become fluent readers. ***Avenues*** introduces children to high frequency words in the context of big books, songs, chants, and role-plays. A proven, multimodal method helps them commit the words to memory.

Listening Comprehension

Reading aloud to children is of enormous benefit. They hear the sounds, rhythms, and patterns of English; learn about story structure; and discover new information. In addition, children develop important comprehension skills that they can then apply to text they read on their own. When literature is relevant and reflects students' home cultures, they become engaged as active learners and peer teachers.

Interactive Writing

Interactive Writing is an excellent way to bring together all of the literacy skills that young readers need. The teacher first leads a group discussion on a subject of interest. The group then selects a message to write and agrees on the correct phrasing. Children repeat the message, counting the words, writing them in sequence sound by sound, and then reading the words they write. The Interactive Writing activities in ***Avenues*** allow children to write meaningful text at their level of proficiency, while practicing literacy and language skills.

Conclusion

Early literacy instruction for English language learners must provide a strong foundation for continued learning. The starting point for all literacy instruction is the development of children's listening, speaking, and reading vocabularies. Children also need explicit and systematic instruction in phonological awareness and phonics to help them become successful, independent readers. With culturally appropriate literature we can engage young learners, develop comprehension skills, and motivate them to participate and learn. ■

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Teaching the Fundamentals:

Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Decoding, and Spelling

by Dr. Josefina Villamil Tinajero

EFFECTIVE READING INSTRUCTION must incorporate the most current, scientifically based reading research, such as that reviewed in the National Reading Panel report (2000), as well as other highly regarded reports and research analyses (e.g., Gambrell, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007; Moats, 2000: Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). These findings show clearly that for striving readers, the content of instruction must be rigorous and the presentation of that content must be direct, systematic and objective. These findings are reinforced by studies of effective reading teachers, which reveal that the classrooms of these teachers are "characterized by high academic engagement, excellent and positive classroom management, explicit teaching of skills, large amounts of reading and writing, and integration across the curriculum" (Cunningham, 2007, p. 176). In addition to these sources, the recommendations in this paper are based on reports of research-based best practices for students who are English learners (ELs) (August & Shanahan, 2006).

"Some striving readers in the middle grades need additional support in the fundamental skill areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and spelling."

Teaching Fundamental Skills in Middle School

The National Reading Panel report and other research summaries emphasized the five essential components of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. At the middle school grades, teachers often assume that their students have acquired the fundamental skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and spelling in the primary grades. However, some striving readers in middle school need to begin with foundational skills and learn the entire sequence of phonics and decoding skills. Others need support in only a few of the fundamental skill areas.

Teachers may be surprised to realize this—as indicated by these recent comments from experienced teachers in Texas:

"I always thought that teaching phonemic awareness and phonics was something that teachers in the early grades worried about—maybe K through 2nd grade—not 7th grade teachers like me! As I learned more about the kinds of things I could do to help my striving readers, my students began to respond in positive ways. For the first time, I felt that they were making progress—and that I was making a difference."

"By combining best practices for teaching phonemic awareness and phonics with those of second-language acquisition, for the first time in my 12-year career as a teacher, I began to see my striving readers thrive."

Who are the students who need to begin at the beginning? Some students are new arrivals to our schools from countries that may have no written language or a non-Roman alphabet. Some have never been enrolled in school, and others have had interrupted schooling. Still others may have been in the U.S. school system, but have not yet learned basic blending and decoding skills or how to recognize words automatically.

If students are English learners, they need a complete

language and literacy program that develops oral language, vocabulary, and the patterns and structures of English for use in oral and written communication as well as phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding. In fact, oral language is the foundation of reading proficiency (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1995; Hiebert, Pearson, Taylor, Richardson, & Paris, 1998). Oral language is critical in the development of phonemic awareness because students who are able to recognize large numbers of spoken words can focus more easily on recognizing the individual sounds in those words (e.g., Goswami, 2003). In addition it provides support for students' acquisition of the alphabetic principle: When readers have a large store of words in their oral vocabularies, they are better able to sound out, read, and understand these words when they see them in print (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Not all middle school striving readers, however, will need intensive instruction in all of the fundamental skills. Many students in the middle grades have acquired basic decoding skills but read with difficulty because they struggle with word analysis skills (especially with multisyllabic words) and fluency.

Therefore, teachers of striving readers at these grades should carefully diagnose student needs and provide direct, explicit, and systematic instruction that fills the gaps students have in phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and spelling, including the delivery of a complete sequence of the fundamentals, if necessary.

What Skills Make Up the Fundamentals?

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words is known as *phonemic awareness*. *Phonics* refers to the understanding that a predictable relationship exists between phonemes and the spellings that represent those sounds in written language, or the *alphabetic principle* (National Reading Panel, 2000). Students' levels of phonemic awareness and phonics skills both predict initial reading success and relate strongly to their reading success throughout the school years (e.g., Calfee, Lindamood, & Lindamood, 1973; Ehri & Nunes, 2002; Snow et al., 1998).

The research reviewed by the National Reading Panel (2000) indicates that the best method to ensure that readers develop both phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge is to provide them with direct, explicit, and systematic instruction. The basis for effective direct, explicit, systematic instruction is a carefully articulated and sequential progression of skills that begins with the most basic tasks and moves with appropriate pacing to more difficult tasks. This curriculum is best presented through consistent teaching routines that let students know up front what they are expected to do and learn in specific activities. The teacher clearly models the skills and provides ample structured and guided practice with immediate corrective feedback when needed.

Decoding and Spelling An essential part of phonics and decoding instruction is blending, in which students are explicitly taught how to blend sounds to decode words. Decoding should begin with simple 2- or 3-letter words and then move gradually to more complex words.

As students learn to decode sound/spellings to blend words, they must also learn and practice spelling, or encoding—the process of hearing sounds in words, relating the sounds to their spellings, and writing those spellings to form written words. This encoding process is an essential part of learning the alphabetic system and becoming proficient in its use.

High Frequency Words These are words that occur frequently in running text and have at least one spelling that is not phonetically regular. Students need to recognize these words automatically for fluent reading.

What Is the Role of Decodable Texts?

Decodable texts are passages in which a high percentage of words can be blended by applying the sound/spellings students have been taught. In addition, up to 10%–15% of the words in these texts may be previously taught high frequency words.

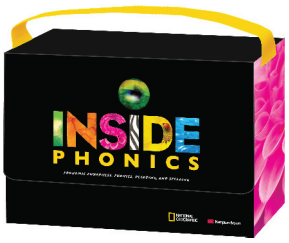
As students learn each new sound/spelling, they need ample opportunities to decode words with the new spelling in decodable text. Using a research-based instructional routine for teaching the decodable text gives students multiple experiences reading the text to build fluency and allows teachers to provide immediate corrective feedback.

Applying the Research:
Inside Language, Literacy, and Content

Placement Proper placement into a program level is the first step in meeting students' needs. The program's Placement Test includes a Phonics Test and a Reading Level Lexile® test. Students first take the Phonics Test. If they do not show mastery of phonics and decoding skills, they are placed in either Level A or Level B of the program, depending on their performance. Here they will receive explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding, spelling, and high frequency words throughout the instructional plan.

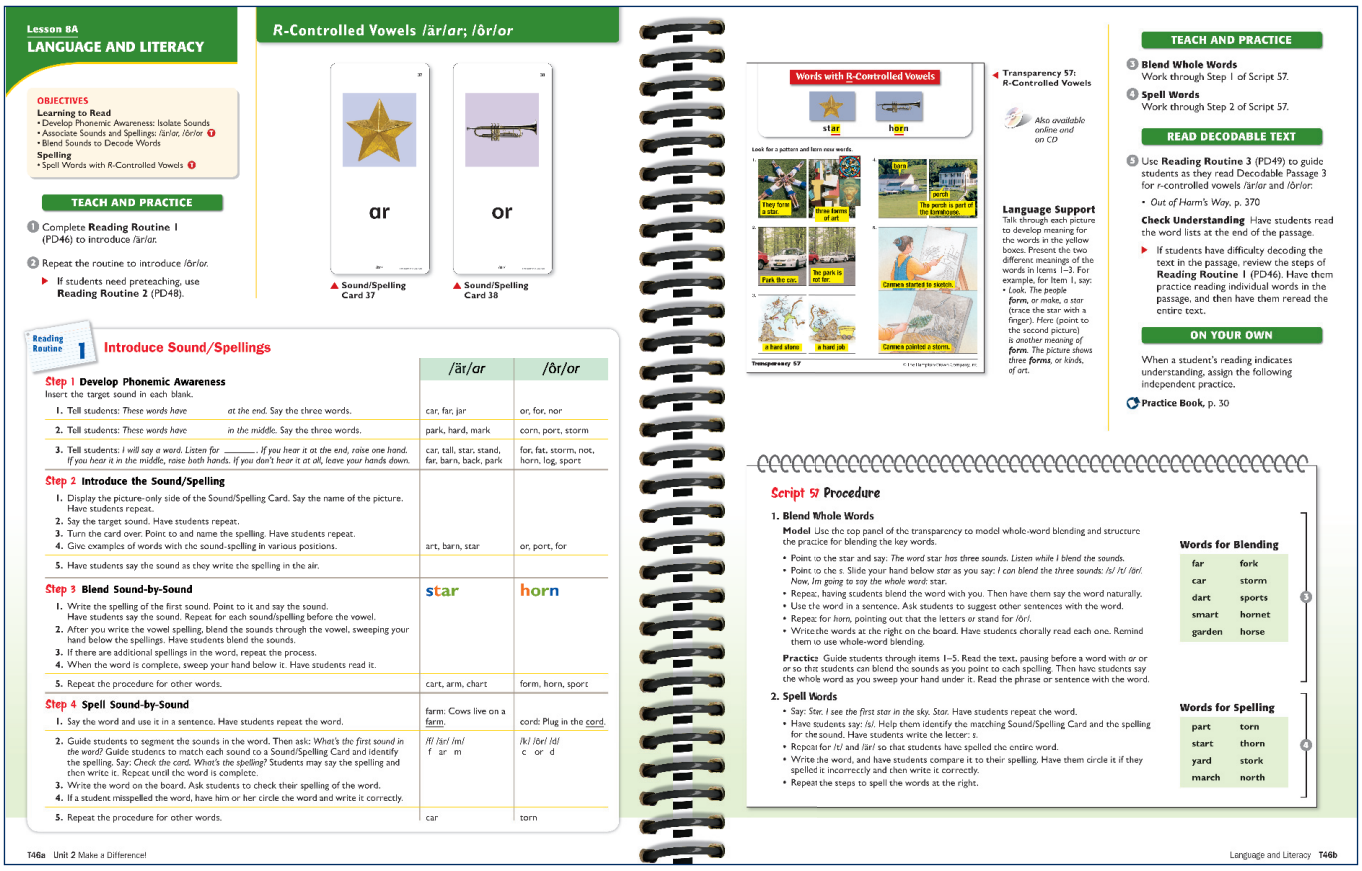
At these levels ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*** teaches phonemic awareness and phonics skills in a carefully ordered scope and sequence that reflects scientific research findings. This sequence features a strong emphasis at the beginning on blending CVC words with short vowels, and then moves gradually to more difficult skills, including digraphs, long vowels, inflected endings, *r*-controlled vowels, and multisyllabic words. All essential phonics skills are covered.

If students answer 80% or more of the items on the Phonics Test correctly, they will take the Reading Level Lexile® test to place them into Level C, D, or E of the program according to reading level. Studying the item analysis for the student's performance on the Phonics Test, however, is still helpful in indentifying gaps in decoding, which teachers can fill by selecting appropriate lessons from the ***Inside Phonics*** kit.



The *Inside Phonics* kit covers all essential skills for use with students at Levels A and B who need sequential instruction in the fundamentals and for use with students at Levels C–E who have gaps to fill.

Instructional Routines ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*** uses research-based reading routines to teach sound/spellings, blending, spelling, high frequency words, and the reading of decodable texts. These routines allow teachers to *scaffold* instruction, first making sure that students grasp the skill, and then gradually shifting and releasing responsibility for completing a task from themselves to students (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978).



Phonics and decoding phonics lessons follow consistent instructional routines based on principles of direct, explicit instruction.

For example, **Reading Routine 1: Introduce Sound Spellings** moves through four steps:

Step 1. Develop Phonemic Awareness

- The teacher models the target sound in a consistent word position (e.g, initial position); students produce the sound.
- The teacher models the sound in another (e.g. final) position; students produce the sound.
- Students listen and show hands to indicate whether they hear the sound and what position they hear it in.

Step 2. Introduce the Sound/Spelling

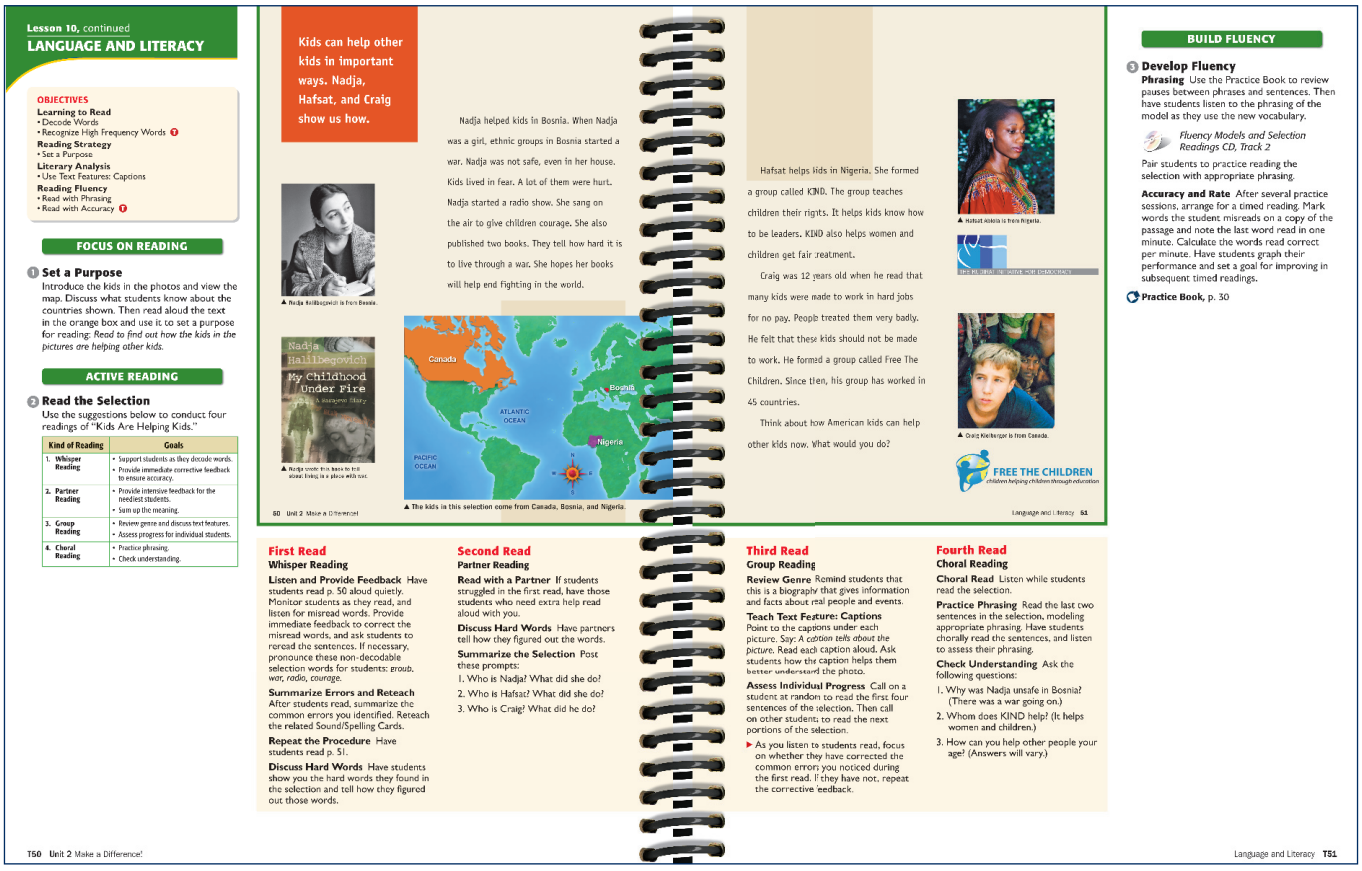
- The teacher introduces the sound with the Sound/Spelling Card; students repeat the sound.
- The teacher then uses the Sound/Spelling Card to introduce the spelling; students repeat the spelling.
- The teacher gives multiple examples of the sound/spelling in various positions as students say the sound and write the spelling in the air.

Step 3. Blend Sound-by-Sound

- The teacher writes the spelling of the first sound in a word and models the sound; students repeat. This is repeated for each sound up to the vowel.
- The teacher writes the vowel, and then models blending the sounds through the vowel; then students blend the sounds.
- The teacher repeats the process for any additional spellings in the word.
- The teacher models blending the complete word; students blend and read the word.

Step 4. Spell Sound-by-Sound

- The teacher says the word; students repeat it.
- The teacher guides students in segmenting the sounds in the word and matching each sound to its Sound/Spelling Card. Students say each spelling and then write it.
- The teacher writes the correct spelling on the board; students check their spelling and correct it if necessary.



Students apply their skills in decodable passages and Read on Your Own selections. An instructional routine for four readings provides essential practice.

This instructional routine includes the essentials of exemplary phonics instruction: direct, explicit teaching of sound-spellings and the application of this phonics knowledge to blend the sounds together (Shanahan, 2002).

Similarly, high frequency word instruction follows a consistent research-based routine including these steps:

Step 1. Review of previously taught words

Step 2. Introduce new words

- Look at the word
- Listen to the word
- Listen to the word in a sentence
- Say the word
- Spell the word
- Say the word again

Step 3. Practice reading the words

Step 4. Practice spelling the words

After they are taught using this routine, students read texts on their own to develop automaticity in recognizing these high frequency words. The words are then reviewed regularly throughout the instructional plan.

Applying Skills and Developing Automaticity Student books include decodable text selections that are designed to apply phonics, decoding, and high frequency word skills immediately after instruction. These texts are engaging and age appropriate for middle school readers. They are taught using a consistent routine in which students read the text four times, first using whisper reading, then partner reading, then group reading, and finally choral reading with the whole group. Teachers monitor during each reading and provide corrective feedback and other support, including discussion of hard words, teaching text features and genre, summarizing, and practice with phrasing. After several practice sessions, students do a timed reading of the text. The teacher notes misreads and calculates words correct per minute. Students graph their performance and set a personal goal for improvement in subsequent timed readings.

These repeated readings provide essential practice for students in applying phonics and high frequency word skills and in developing automaticity and fluency—a key step on the path to becoming proficient readers.

Conclusion

Some middle school students need intensive intervention in the complete sequence of decoding skills, and others have gaps in their knowledge that need to be filled. ***Inside Language, Literacy, and Content*** provides, through careful placement, appropriate instruction for all students.

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