

# Best Practices & Research Base

***National Geographic Reach*** has been designed by experts in language and literacy. In this section, program authors present the best practices for teaching—practices that are grounded in current research and built into the listening, speaking, reading, writing, and content instruction presented in this program.





# Big Questions and Big Ideas

## How can I develop learners?

Base your ESL instruction in the content areas.

## How can I encourage academic language?

Turn up the volume on academic talk!

## How can I support diverse learning and language levels?

Extend your students' *reach* and move them toward independence.

## How do I build a depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge?

Focus on words that matter.

## How can I monitor progress and adjust my instruction to maximize achievement and ensure all students succeed?

Know what they know.

## How can I accomplish achievement goals with limited time and diverse learners?

Make every minute count!

## How can I make teaching and learning relevant and impactful for all students?

Get to know your learners.

## How can I help students build listening and reading comprehension?

Build strategic thinking.

## How can I prepare students for life in a digital world?

Link to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and resources.

## How can I build strong writers?

Connect oral and written expression.

## What is the role of fluency in instruction?

Make fluency more than just reading quickly.

## How do I build foundational skills?

*Reach* into beginning reading.



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 Listen to Deborah Short share more information on content-based ESL instruction.

# Base Your ESL Instruction in the Content Areas *by Deborah Short*

Schools across the United States are composed of ethnically and linguistically diverse students, and a growing number of them speak English as a new language. According to state-reported data, more than 5 million English language learners (ELLs) were enrolled in grades Pre-K through 12 in the 2005-2006 school year. From 1995-96 to 2005-06, their enrollment increased 57 percent although total enrollment increased by only 3 percent (NCELA, 2009). Most of the ELLs are in the elementary grades (Capps, et al., 2005). Unfortunately, these ELLs as a group are not succeeding as well as native English speakers on national and state assessments. On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, the average reading score for fourth grade ELLs was 36 points lower than that for English speakers. Moreover, 70 percent of these ELLs scored “below basic,” the lowest level (Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). Similarly, ELLs on average scored 25 points lower on the fourth grade math test with 44 percent scoring “below basic” (Lee, Grigg, & Dion, 2007). ELLs clearly need support in acquiring academic English and in achieving success in content area classes.

**The challenge of content-area learning** Given the growth in the number of students who are not proficient in English, the language of instruction for most schools, classroom scenes like the following are common:

*Loan wants to tell the teacher what she remembers about forests in her country but she doesn't have the words to explain. She isn't sure how her experiences relate to her science text. She sees photos of forests and the trees have red, orange, and yellow leaves. In other photos the trees look dead and the ground is white. Birds and other animals look different too. These aren't like the forests in Vietnam. Why not? Loan sits quietly and tries to follow what the teacher says, but he speaks quickly and doesn't write words on the board or show other pictures. She hears the word fall, but the trees didn't fall down, and cycle, but there is no bicycle. Loan*

*fears the teacher thinks she is a poor student, but she just doesn't know how to express her questions or describe the forests of her country.*

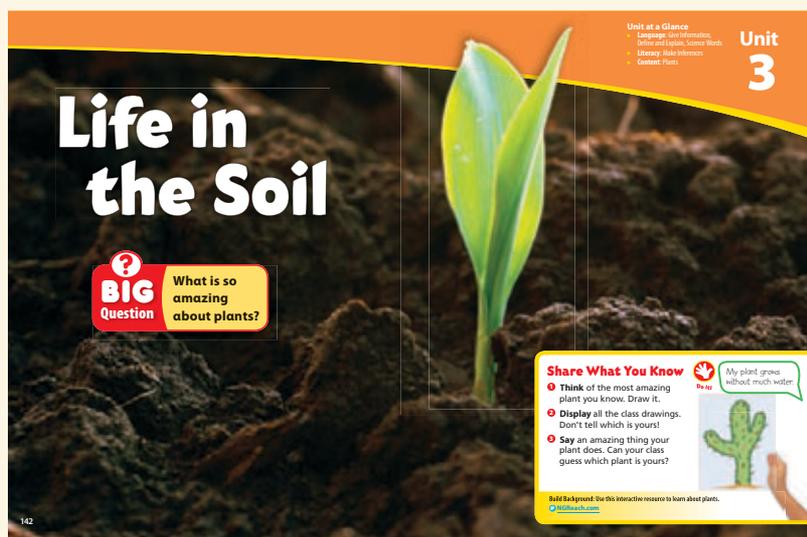
*Juan Miguel was born in the U.S. and is now in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. He is very social, speaks English and Spanish and contributes to group work in class. But when he has to read his social studies book and respond to teacher questions or write a summary, he falters. His writing consists of basic short sentences. He doesn't relate abstract concepts being studied to what's been learned. Juan Miguel was in a bilingual program for kindergarten and first grade and then moved to an English program for the past two years. He has been at the intermediate level of English proficiency since the start of third grade.*

Many second language learners like Loan and Juan Miguel want to do well in school but struggle to participate actively in their subjects. Even when these students learn to speak some English, they may not have the necessary academic language skills and relevant background knowledge to complete many academic tasks, such as comparing two historical events, solving math word problems, writing observations for a science experiment, and summarizing a story. After one year in school, most ELLs are tested on grade-level curricula in English even though they are not proficient in their new language. This situation is not only difficult for the students but also for their teachers, few of whom have had professional development on effective approaches for integrating language and content instruction for students who are not proficient in English. Language is the key to learning in schools; we primarily learn through language and use language to demonstrate our knowledge. This fact rings particularly true for educators who work with students learning English as a new language while they are learning academic content. Without oral and written English language skills, students are hard pressed to learn and demonstrate their knowledge.

**The solution: Content-based ESL instruction** Many schools have offered English as a second language instruction (ESL) to ELLs like Loan and Juan Miguel. But traditionally this instruction has focused on survival language, storytelling, grammar drills, and basic vocabulary. It has often been unrelated to what’s happening in other classes, and so hasn’t been sufficient to help students succeed in school. Instead, educators need to consider ESL instruction as part of an overall program that develops language skills alongside, and in conjunction with, content area knowledge. This solution is frequently referred to as content-based ESL (CBESL). Content-based ESL classes are taught by language educators with two goals (Lyster, 2007; Short, 2006; Stoller, 2004):

- to develop English language proficiency
- to prepare ELLs for success in mainstream classes, especially in the content areas

Content-based ESL teachers develop students’ English language proficiency by incorporating topics from the subject areas that students study in their grade level. This is often accomplished through thematic units, such as a plants or water cycle unit. Lessons can include objectives drawn from life sciences, social studies, language arts, and mathematics. Lessons target key content area vocabulary as well as the academic tasks ELLs need to become familiar with for the regular classroom (e.g., creating a timeline, taking notes from reference materials, making an oral presentation).



▲ Thematic units in National Geographic Reach link language skills to content area learning.

## Integrate language skills with content learning

Content-based ESL teachers are responsible for addressing all the state ESL/English language proficiency (ELP) standards. Teachers must provide explicit instruction in the language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and the elements of English (vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and conventions). However, CBESL teachers do not teach these skills in isolation, nor with a focus on conversational language. Rather they design lessons, select texts, and set assignments that reflect how those skills are applied in content classrooms. For example, if students are expected to record observations during a neighborhood walk in an upcoming social studies lesson, the CBESL teacher may teach descriptive adjectives, directional terms, and names of community resources beforehand. Or, if the students have to classify and compare animals, CBESL teachers may teach students academic language frames so they can use comparative expressions like “both . . . and. . . , neither . . . nor. . . ”; “. . . are alike/different because. . .”, and “on the one hand. . . , on the other hand. . .”

It is particularly important that CBESL teachers incorporate many opportunities for oral language practice. During much of the school day, as Saunders and Goldenberg (in press) point out, students are engaged in content area instruction and reading and writing tasks, so an emphasis on listening and speaking in ESL/ELD time is crucial. In contrast to traditional ESL instruction, this listening and speaking time should develop skills needed for content learning. Keep in mind that in many content classes teachers don’t take advantage of teachable moments for language development. They tend to correct students for content errors, not linguistic ones. They don’t ask students to expand on their ideas or use elaborated speech. They don’t encourage students to reformulate responses to negotiate meaning but provide the clarifications themselves (Musimeci, 1996, Swain, 1987). Effective content-based ESL teachers in contrast will do these things that advance second language acquisition.

Key Words	
blossom	produce
characteristic	root
conditions	seed
cycle	soil
depend	sprout
growth	

◀ Vocabulary lessons include Key Words that are essential for student success in the content areas.

### Language of the Day

What amazing thing do I know about plants?  
I know that plants \_\_\_\_.

▲ Daily oral language activities develop students’ ability to use academic language in talking about content area topics.

In content-based ESL, teachers spend time helping students apply their growing knowledge base in strategic ways. For example, CBESL teachers introduce language learning strategies to students (e.g., using cognates to determine meanings of unknown words, rehearsing sentences before speaking, previewing headings and illustrations before reading) to help them continue their language development on their own and to assist them in other subjects. They also focus on reading comprehension strategies (e.g., making connections, determining importance) through a variety of authentic and meaningful texts related to the content topics.

Content-based ESL classes offer valuable opportunities to build students' background knowledge, which is critical for conceptual understanding and reading comprehension. For ELLs who are not familiar with American culture or who have had interrupted schooling, CBESL lessons can introduce students to academic topics their classmates know already. By tapping into what ELLs know, teachers make connections to new or related concepts and clear up misconceptions. Through simulations, video clips, field trips, and hands-on experiences, teachers also build foundational knowledge for these learners.

**Science Vocabulary**

**Key Words**  
blossom  
cycle  
root  
seed  
soil  
sprout

**Life Cycle of a Pea Plant**

**Talk Together**  
What is amazing about a pea plant's life cycle? Use **Language Frames** from page 144 and **Key Words** to give information to a partner.

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◀ **Science features support English learners in building academic knowledge and skills.**

*National Geographic Reach* has been designed specifically to support content-based ESL classes. The content-rich materials, student activities, and lesson plans promote academic language learning that is connected to the other subjects in a student's school day. *Reach* emphasizes major topics of science and social studies through thematic units that incorporate academic and content vocabulary and subject-specific tasks. The program also includes suggestions for relating themes to students' own experiences, cultures, and personal lives. Within a unit, each lesson builds on prior lessons to reinforce and extend the information students are learning and the language skills they are acquiring.

*National Geographic Reach* uses standards-based instruction as the medium for teaching English. The program is aligned with national and state curriculum standards for ESL/ELD, English language arts, science, and social studies. It addresses students' language development needs by providing:

- Daily oral language practice tied to content concepts and target language functions
- Attention to academic and content vocabulary through multimodal activities
- Comprehensive grammar instruction
- Authentic content reading selections drawn from diverse genres with built-in support
- Writing tasks for fluency, interactive writing, and independent writing with tools and resources

*National Geographic Reach* prepares ELLs for English-medium classes by giving them practice with key academic language, tasks, and topics. *National Geographic Reach* lessons give students opportunities to read varied fiction and nonfiction texts, to understand narrative structures like cause-effect and problem-and-solution, and to use text features to identify important information in science and social studies articles. Key vocabulary is taught to younger children through songs, games, role-play, and colorful visuals. Older children learn key vocabulary through graphics, word webbing, and other research-based word-learning strategies. Writing projects, such as writing a science article or a persuasive essay, mirror the assignments found in content classes.

## Conclusion

Students need dedicated time for ESL/ELD instruction and that time needs to count (Saunders & Goldenberg, in press). Content-based ESL transforms a traditional ESL class into a forum for developing and applying subject knowledge, so CBESL instruction becomes an anchor for content classes. The material is relevant and meaningful to the students because it is aligned with their school subjects and standards. Infusing content in reading, writing, and oral language practice, as *National Geographic Reach* does, will equip our students with the academic language skills they need for success in school. And as ELLs strengthen these skills, they will interact more with English-speaking peers, demonstrate skills associated with academic uses of language, and improve their English reading comprehension.



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**MP3** Listen to Nonie Lesaux share more information on developing academic language.

# Turn up the Volume on Academic Talk!

by *Nonie Lesaux*

You might predict from this title that we are encouraging far more noise in classrooms across the country. In a way we are. But we're focusing on the other meaning of the word *volume*—the *amount* of talk we need in classrooms for optimal student learning. We need more talk and we need more productive noise—the sounds of students talking and working together; the sounds of learning.

One of the most effective tools in the classroom to promote learning and critical thinking is talk. Language reflects how we think, how we process and remember information; it is one of the most important ways that we represent and extend our thoughts and ideas (Vygotsky, 1978). Talk can be formal discussion or informal conversation. With language, we're able to go much beyond the here and now. We can discuss, compare, and justify present, past, and future events. We can describe what is happening around us or imagine what is taking place far away. Language opens up ideas and experiences that would otherwise not be possible to contemplate, understand, and learn about. We need to help learners to gain a curiosity and interest in language. They must become everyday language learners and users. We can do that by posing open-ended questions to our students and engaging in real dialogue with them, dialogue where we as teachers don't control all the turn-taking or know all the answers. By fostering and scaffolding academic talk, we will build language literacy and content skills and knowledge.

There are three guiding principles that teachers can incorporate in their classroom practices and curriculum to promote students' academic language.

- Students need more structured opportunities to talk
- Effective classroom talk is about more than asking questions
- Keep students reading for academic language skills

## 1 Students need more structured opportunities to talk

We know that children living in poverty, including many English language learners (ELLs), are less likely to participate in academic conversations at home than children of higher socioeconomic status. They are less likely to be engaged in conversation where they make predictions about an upcoming outing, justify their claims with

evidence, and articulate causes and effects. For these students to succeed academically, we need to teach these more sophisticated discourse patterns in classrooms. Yet when we look back on educational practices for hundreds of years past, we see that students have been taught to listen quietly as the teacher talked, so that they would learn. Unfortunately, that has not been a successful strategy for many children.

Across the nation, teachers dominate classroom talk (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1978; Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001), yet they are not the ones who need practice talking. If we are going to close achievement gaps and develop *all* students' critical thinking and oral and written language skills, we need to provide them with significant opportunities to do so. Despite national calls for instructional frameworks that focus on *Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking*, instructional research tells us very clearly that

speaking is the neglected standard. Students do very little speaking in classrooms and when they do, it qualifies as basic communication—it is not dynamic or engaging and it is not academic talk. Students answer low-level questions with one or two word replies, respond to directives, confirm information, and often repeat what the teacher says as part of a lesson. And if speaking is the neglected standard, listening is the misunderstood standard—*passive* listening, like

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following directions, is the norm. Developing *active* listening skills as part of our academic language requires instructional practices that force students into dialogue and debate that centers on rich concepts and builds up reasoning skills and background knowledge.



▲ Each unit includes a Big Question that spurs ongoing student discussion and dialogue and develops high levels of academic talk.

We need to infuse more opportunities for productive talk into our classrooms, especially in classrooms with ELLs and other at-risk students who need strong supports to develop their thinking and reading comprehension skills. *National Geographic Reach* is a program designed to address this need for ELLs and their classmates. In every unit, and across the lesson cycle, there are interesting things to talk about (i.e., big ideas on themes young learners can relate to) and structured opportunities to teach students how to participate in classroom talk effectively (i.e., language frames to help organize their thoughts and opinions, key vocabulary around the topic). *National Geographic Reach* presents, for example, collaborative learning activities to get students talking and practicing their active listening skills, and scaffolded support for teachers to lead effective discussions about big ideas. The wrap-up projects in each unit provide opportunities for oral presentation to practice academic talk.

## 2 Effective classroom talk is about more than asking questions

One of the most common scenarios where students are given opportunities to speak in the elementary school classroom is the whole-group lesson. Consider the commonplace read-aloud. The teacher reads a story, pausing every now and again to pose a question to the group. Some students raise their hands with a candidate answer, and the teacher calls on a student to respond. In this whole-group scenario, the teacher directs the lessons and the opportunities for talk by students are quite limited.

To change the balance of talk in the classroom we need more than whole-group scenarios where the teacher controls a question-answer discussion and students answer one at a time. That practice hits upon only a small group of students and often those who are most proficient and high performing (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008). We also can't rely almost exclusively upon the strategy of questioning

as a tool to promote classroom talk. Researchers have found explicit, “right there” questions—questions about the here and the now or questions where the answers are easily found in text—are used between 50 percent and 80 percent of the time in classrooms (Watson & Young, 1986; Zwiers, 2008). These questions serve primarily one purpose—to evaluate students' understanding about something relatively concrete and literal. Engaging students with talk that will promote their thought, language, and reading skills can't just be about assessment for the teacher's purpose (Cazden, 1988).

Effective instructional practices for classroom talk focus very seriously instead on dialogue to promote learning—it is the back and forth discussion that fosters critical thinking, develops verbal reasoning skills, and builds background knowledge. This discussion is also a way for students to work through and sharpen their ideas and informed opinions. Think about the times when you have sharpened and clarified your own thinking by talking something through with a peer. We need to provide similar opportunities to our students.

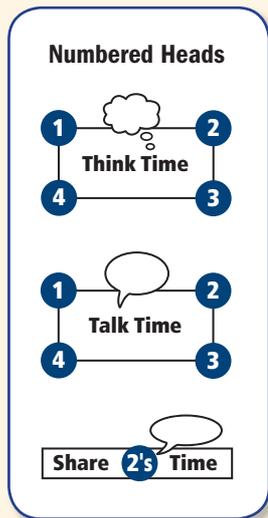
Good language instruction is at the core of the *National Geographic Reach* program. It is a program whereby instruction in academic language, including academic talk, centers on a big question featured in every unit. In order to grapple with big questions, students and teachers discuss the many answers to open-ended questions that ask students to imagine, plan, think, wonder, speculate, and articulate answers, which should lead to further dialogue. The program features instruction that draws significantly on the teacher's and the students' personal connections to the topic and promotes academic talk that is collaborative in nature. In many program lessons, students have to take a stance and debate a point of view, or do some research to role-play as part of a collaborative project, and report out to their peers as experts. In each one of these structured opportunities to talk, we ask students to learn from their peers by observing and listening, expose them to rich and engaging text that features academic language, and also use specialized language registers and vocabulary words to improve their academic language skills.

## 3 Keep students reaching for academic language skills

In planning instruction that will create classrooms filled with student academic talk, with dialogue and with open-ended questions that foster debate, deliberation, and wonder about big ideas and the world, we cannot simply meet students where they're at. We need to pull them along!

We need to teach the language of schooling through stimulating and challenging learning environments—classrooms filled with scaffolding opportunities to develop their language and thinking skills. Just as a toddler needs oral interaction with older siblings and adults who use more sophisticated language, language beyond the toddler's proficiency level, to develop his or her first language fully, so do our learners need exposure to more advanced levels of language use with scaffolding, modeling and frequent practice in the classroom.

Yet ironically just as the texts and the language needed for academic success become more difficult, less instructional time is devoted to student talk and oral language development.



◀ **Talk Together activities and Cooperative Learning Routines provide frequent opportunities for students to use academic language.**



*National Geographic Reach* aims to shift the trends we see in standard practice; its design was guided by the principle that students need ongoing structured and scaffolded opportunities to develop their academic language skills. Its success in developing academic language depends upon good peer interaction and scaffolded discussions (August & Hakuta, 1997; Ellis, 1994). That means we teach students how to take turns, respect one another's ideas, and confirm their understandings of what a classmate said. We model what good conversations look like and how one builds on the ideas of others. The *National Geographic Reach* Teacher's Edition focuses on designing effective lessons and learning opportunities to increase academic talk in our classrooms, encouraging teachers to take advantage of built-in

opportunities for peer scaffolding to push students forward, while paying careful attention to groupings. Every *National Geographic Reach* unit features multiple lessons and opportunities to foster academic language. At the end of each unit students participate in a collaborative project that encourages dialogue and discussion focused on the big question. Each unit also includes a writing project that provides opportunities for increased academic talk and scaffolded learning with peers, especially during the prewriting and editing phases when students share ideas with a partner, and when students edit each other's work and learn how to give feedback effectively. Throughout the program, language frames and Multi-Level Strategies provide scaffolded support to move students from forming basic sentences to making comparisons, giving opinions, and justifying choices to their peers.

## Conclusion

If we are to close achievement gaps and support *all* students' academic development, especially that of ELLs, our classrooms should be filled with talk that centers on big ideas and complex concepts that are worthy of discussion and debate and engaging for our students. To do this we need to strike more of a balance between teacher talk and student talk—increasing student talk and decreasing teacher talk to provide more meaningful language learning opportunities (Cazden, 2001; Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008; McIntyre, Kyle & Moore, 2006; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1992). It also means we need to expand teachers' repertoires to go beyond questioning and get students speaking. The lessons that promote students' academic and active listening skills are those that engage students to work and think together about a problem, see others' points of view, and better understand the knowledge and experiences they bring to the issue, as well as those lessons that engage students to think about big questions and ideas.

The collage displays two pages from the *National Geographic Reach* Teacher's Edition:

- Days 8-9:** Features a 'Language of the Day' section with a plant illustration and an 'Oral Language Project: News Report' activity. The activity includes steps for introducing the activity, planning roles, and performing the news report.
- Days 10-11:** Features a 'Rehearse' step for the news reports, a 'We're Live!' performance step, and a 'Debrief and Compare' step. It also includes a 'Differentiate' section with 'Multi-Level Strategies' for students to create and label a plant picture.

◀ **Each lesson cycle includes a Theme Theater or Oral Language Project that engages students in using and elaborating their language skills.**



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 Listen to Deborah Short share more information on scaffolding instruction.

# Extend Your Students' *Reach* and Move Them Toward Independence. *by Deborah Short*

When we get in our cars and drive away, we usually have a destination in mind. Furthermore, we have a route planned for getting there. Consider your students and your instruction. What is the destination you would like your students to reach at the end of their year with you? How far do they need to go to get there? How will you guide them along the way?

In the best of all possible worlds, our students would be proficient readers, writers and speakers of English after their time with us. That is rarely the case, unless we begin the school year with advanced learners. However, we can ensure that students make significant progress towards proficiency if we scaffold our instruction appropriately. And what is scaffolding? Simply put, it is meeting students where they are and leading them to where you want them to go.

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that students' language learning is promoted through social interaction and contextualized communication. Teachers can guide students to construct meaning from texts and classroom discourse and to understand complex content concepts by scaffolding instruction. When scaffolding, teachers pay careful attention to students' capacity for working in English. Teachers begin instruction at the current level of student understanding and move students to higher levels through tailored support.

Scaffolding strategies vary. One way they do so is by adjusting their speech (e.g., paraphrasing, giving examples, elaborating student responses) to help students comprehend and participate in discussions (Bruner, 1978). Another way teachers scaffold is by adjusting instructional tasks so they are incrementally more

and more challenging (e.g., preteach vocabulary before a reading selection, have students draft an outline before writing an essay) and students learn the skills necessary to complete tasks on their own

(Applebee & Langer, 1983). The acquisition of academic vocabulary also needs to be scaffolded. Many academic words are used infrequently, so teachers need to create motivating contexts in which students can use and become familiar with academic language (Corson, 1997). Teachers also scaffold by using visuals, context, gestures, and other ways of conveying information.

Without such teacher assistance, English language learners (ELLs) may fail to acquire fully their new language. It is important for teachers of ELLs to employ both verbal and instructional scaffolds to extend communication opportunities for students. Teachers need to be aware of students' proficiency and skill levels and plan instruction that provides comprehensible input yet moves the students further along the

second language acquisition path. Effective scaffolding can increase the students' independence in performing a task or learning a new concept through the gradual release of responsibility (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Teachers using *National Geographic Reach* have a wide array of scaffolding features to support students at their level of proficiency and to move them to higher levels of language use. These features enable teachers to:

- Adjust teacher speech to help students comprehend
- Support students in using language at increasingly higher levels
- Adjust instructional tasks so students are successfully challenged at their levels

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*Scaffolding is  
meeting students  
where they are and  
leading them to  
where you want  
them to go.*

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## 1 Adjust teacher speech to help students comprehend

Teachers play a critical role in language acquisition for students because they provide models of appropriate speech, word choice, intonation, and fluency. With *National Geographic Reach*, teachers use a variety of verbal scaffolds to help students understand new information and to advance students' English language use, comprehension, and thinking skills. They also regulate their speech according to the proficiency levels of their students, even when they have multiple levels in a class.

- **Think-alouds** By modeling and articulating their thought processes, teachers make their thinking apparent to children. They can explain the steps they go through to solve a problem, the reactions they have to a plot twist in a story, and the judgments they make to reject or accept possible answers to a question. Think-alouds are provided throughout the instructional plan; teachers can use them as provided or refer to them in developing their own think-alouds.

Think Aloud	Write
1. Plan	
I will make a RAFT to plan my writing. I will take the role of myself.	Role
Who is my audience? I will share my captions about sea turtles with the class.	Aud
Repeat the think aloud for audience (class) and form (captions). I'd like to draw a picture of a sea turtle. I will write a caption to go with about the picture.	

- **Rate and Amount of Speech** Teachers adjust their rate of speech to the students' proficiency levels—speaking more slowly to beginners and at a more normal pace to advanced and transitional learners. They also moderate how much they say at any one time, speaking in phrases with pauses as needed.
- **Sophistication of Speech** For beginning level students, teachers use simple sentences and repeated terms. For more proficient learners, they use complex sentences, more synonyms, and more pronoun referents.
- **Repetition** By repeating what he or she has said, the teacher adds processing time for the students and a chance to double check what they heard. By repeating for the class what a student has said, the teacher can project the comment or response more clearly, and model correct pronunciation.
- **Restatement and Paraphrase** Restating and paraphrasing utterances by the teacher or other students also has value. It is a way to confirm or clarify what has been said, for example, appending a definition of a term or explanation of a statement, or rephrasing a statement using better known words.
- **Elaboration** When teachers elaborate and extend student responses, they model more sophisticated language use and how to connect ideas through conjunctions, comparisons, causation, and the like. Elaboration promotes rich discussion among students.

## 2 Support students in using language at increasingly higher levels

Students also learn through interaction with one another and with their teachers. Students need extensive oral language practice to deepen content and vocabulary knowledge and to practice academic language functions, such as clarifying information, negotiating meaning, and evaluating opinions. *National Geographic Reach* provides a rich array of verbal prompts, language frames, and other scaffolds that support students in generating academic talk. These include:

- **Providing models of good speech** Students using *National Geographic Reach* have access to a wide variety of good speech models in the Language of the Day, read alouds, songs and chants, and many other listening activities.
- **Elaborating responses** Teachers too often accept a brief answer and then add to it themselves. *National Geographic Reach* encourages students to extend their thoughts with prompts like:
  - *Tell me more.*
  - *What do you mean by that?*
  - *Who can add on?*
  - *Who has a different idea?*
- **Providing sentence starters and academic language frames** Language frames help students organize their thoughts and use academic vocabulary in meaningful ways. They provide the support for students to articulate their ideas and can be differentiated with more structure (or less) as needed. Examples include:
  - Phrases to agree or disagree (e.g., I agree with you but. . . , I disagree with you and think that. . . )
  - Phrases to report on findings or evidence (e.g., We discovered that. . . , Our group found that. . . , The article explains that. . . )
  - Phrases to use to ask for clarification (e.g., Could you say that again?, Could you say that another way?)

**Differentiate**

**Academic Language Frames**

**Make Inferences**

■ I read \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I know \_\_\_\_\_.  
 And so \_\_\_\_\_.

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■ I read \_\_\_\_\_.  
 Because I know \_\_\_\_\_, I can infer \_\_\_\_\_.

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■ The text says \_\_\_\_\_.  
■ That relates to what I know about \_\_\_\_\_.  
 I can infer \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

NGReach.com eVisual 3.5

◀ Academic Language Frames provide multilevel support to help students express their ideas using academic vocabulary.

- **Cooperative learning** Proven cooperative learning techniques are embedded in lesson activities so students can discuss topics, accomplish roles, and apply their new knowledge collaboratively.

- **Providing extended speech activities** The amount of talking a student does can be adjusted by his or her proficiency level. Activities such as oral presentations, multi-day projects, and cooperative learning tasks generate richer, elaborated speech.

### 3 Adjust instructional tasks so students are successfully challenged at their levels

Instructional scaffolds help teachers make information accessible to students and teach procedures students can use to accomplish tasks.

- **Visuals** One of the easiest ways to convey information is through a visual format. *National Geographic Reach* makes extensive use of visuals including videos, whiteboard presentations, photographs, illustrations, tables and charts, and other graphics. This visual approach helps students with limited language proficiency to quickly assimilate new vocabulary, concepts, and processes.

**Academic Vocabulary**

**More Key Words**  
Use these words to talk about "Two Old Potatoes and Me" and "America's Sproutings."

<p><b>characteristic</b> (kair-ik-tu-ris-tik) noun</p>  <p>A <b>characteristic</b> is how something looks or what something does. A <b>characteristic</b> of this plant is white flowers.</p>	<p><b>conditions</b> (kun-di-shunz) noun</p>  <p>When <b>conditions</b> are right, good things happen. Clear skies and wind are good <b>conditions</b> for sailing.</p>	<p><b>depend</b> (di-pend) verb</p>  <p>To <b>depend</b> means to need something or someone for support. A baby <b>depends</b> on its mother.</p>
<p><b>growth</b> (groth) noun</p>  <p>The <b>growth</b> of something is how much bigger it gets.</p>	<p><b>produce</b> (pru-das) verb</p>  <p>To <b>produce</b> means to make something. This factory <b>produces</b> cars.</p>	<p><b>Talk Together</b></p> <p>Use a <b>Key Word</b> to ask a question. A partner uses a <b>Key Word</b> to answer.</p> <p>What is a <b>characteristic</b> of some plants? Some plants <b>produce</b> fruit.</p> <p>Add words to My Vocabulary Notebook. © iSearch.com</p>

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◀ Visuals support instruction

- **Process writing and writing frames** The writing process exemplifies scaffolded instruction (Rogers & Graham, 2008). In each unit of *National Geographic Reach*, students are assisted in creating their own texts. In the prewriting phase they generate ideas and talk them through with partners. When drafting, they begin to connect those ideas and often use writing frames for structured support. In the editing phase they receive feedback to strengthen their writing and they learn to give targeted feedback as well.
- **Peer tutoring** *National Geographic Reach* includes many opportunities for peer collaboration and tutoring. Students who have background knowledge about a topic can share their knowledge with classmates, explaining the content and modeling the language used to convey information. Students who have stronger literacy skills can assist others in reading and writing activities, explaining procedures or modeling tasks.
- **Cooperative learning** Cooperative activities are extremely useful for scaffolding instruction. Students support one another as they are learning the subject matter, and they practice their oral language skills as they interact verbally. *National Geographic Reach* provides many opportunities for students to interact using research-based Cooperative Learning Routines.

## Conclusion

For students to have full access to the core curriculum, they need to be proficient in the language of schooling. Yet, the development of academic English is a complicated endeavor that involves more than just additional vocabulary development and grammar practice. Academic language is used in different ways in different contexts. The writing of a scientific lab report is not the same as the writing and delivery of a persuasive speech. The reading process used to follow steps in solving a math problem is not the same as those used to interpret a poem. Students need semantic and syntactic knowledge and facility with language functions. In their various classes, English learners must join their emerging understandings of the English language with the content they are studying in order to complete assigned academic tasks.

Regardless of proficiency level, all students can make progress in their language development. To achieve this, classroom communication and instruction need to be scaffolded so that tasks and discussions consistently move students along the pathway to second language acquisition and literacy knowledge. Teachers who scaffold appropriately shift responsibility for using new skills and strategies to students as quickly as they are able. However, students are not expected to leap to a new level of understanding and language use. Instead they are supported and guided along the way, reaching forward one step at a time towards their destination.

- **Graphic organizers** Graphic organizers are used extensively as tools for comprehending text, learning new vocabulary and concepts, and identifying important information and key points.
- **Comprehension strategy instruction** *National Geographic Reach* provides explicit instruction, modeling, and practice in learning strategies with authentic text. Teachers should capitalize on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that students already use in their first language because these strategies will transfer to the new language (August & Shanahan, 2006) and students will use more effective strategies as they become more proficient in their second language (Riches & Genesee, 2006).



**Nonie K. Lesaux, Ph.D., Harvard Graduate School of Education**

Nonie K. Lesaux is Associate Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Her research and teaching focuses on reading development and preventing reading difficulties of children from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Lesaux has received recognition for her work in Language Minority Youth, English-language learners and received a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers.

[NGReach.com](https://www.ngreach.com) > Download Professional Development Podcasts

**MP3** Listen to Nonie Lesaux share more information on research-based vocabulary instruction.

## Focus Deeply on Words that Matter! *by Nonie Lesaux*

Vocabulary learning is an enormous task for all students; in order to be academically successful, students must leave high school with a working understanding of about 50,000 words. It's estimated that students reading at grade level learn 2,000 to 3,000 words a year in the context of reading print, which is not the case for students who are struggling. This relationship has major implications for instruction. For all learners, including English language learners (ELLs), vocabulary and reading comprehension have a reciprocal relationship—while greater vocabulary leads to greater comprehension, better comprehension also leads to learning more vocabulary words.

Research has found that academic vocabulary, the specialized and sophisticated language of text, is a particular source of difficulty for students who struggle with comprehension, especially ELLs. Many of these students have generally good foundational skills for word reading and many even read the print fluently, but don't understand deeply what they read. For example, a group of 8th grade Spanish-speaking ELLs enrolled in U.S. classrooms since the primary grades shows a common profile: grade-level word reading skills coupled with vocabulary and comprehension levels about two grade levels below.

Academic vocabulary is different from basic or conversational vocabulary and essential for academic success because it carries with it many important concepts that students need to know; but for many students, it must be explicitly taught. And in spite of the fact that gaps in reading performance are often associated with gaps in academic vocabulary knowledge and the conceptual knowledge that comes with it, deliberate, sustained instruction to develop students' academic vocabulary knowledge occurs infrequently in most classrooms across the U.S. and Canada. Estimates suggest that in kindergarten through second grade classrooms, only between 10 percent and 28 percent of academic

time focuses on explicit instruction in this area, while by the middle school years, this number is about 10 percent, and much of this instruction is incidental in nature, like providing a definition for a word in passing.

Much more instructional time is needed to build students' academic vocabulary skills, and during this teaching we have to give students lots of structured, planned opportunities to learn and use their oral language skills. Good vocabulary teaching involves a lot of talk and practice using language. It also involves giving students the language to talk about the concepts they know and to craft their explanations and arguments. Therefore, the problem for teachers and curricula to address, as soon as possible, is three-fold:

1. We need to spend more time on planned vocabulary teaching in our classrooms.
2. We need to focus carefully on the words we choose to teach.
3. We also need to teach word-learning strategies.

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*“Good vocabulary teaching involves a lot of talk and practice using language.”*

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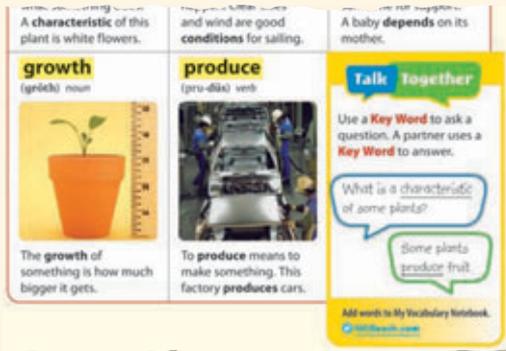
### **1** We need to spend more time on planned vocabulary teaching in our classrooms

Students need to learn how to think about language and how words work. And in learning new words, students need to have a deep understanding of the concept that the word represents. This learning process takes time; this means an instructional plan that builds in opportunities to learn words over an extended period of time, providing multiple exposures across the lesson cycle, and using the words in different ways—reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Our goal should be to help students attain the deep understanding that Beck and McKeown (1991) described as truly “knowing” a word: “a rich, decontextualized knowledge of each word’s meaning, including

its relationship to other words, and its extension to metaphorical use.” Many students have only a narrow sense of a word, or what Graves calls “narrow-context bound knowledge.” An example would be thinking that the concept of substitute is a teacher. These students need to develop a deep, decontextualized understanding of the concept behind the word to use it appropriately in academic discussion or writing. For example, understanding the concept of substitution and the many ways in which substitution can take place.

This means we need to carefully consider the number of words we teach and the time we allot to those words. In many classrooms it is common practice to teach a large number of words per week from a list or workbook, an approach that results in relatively shallow word knowledge that is rarely maintained for the long-term. Under these circumstances, students are often taught to look up words in the dictionary when they don’t know their meanings. However, research tells us that dictionary definitions are inaccessible to most students. ELLs and other learners who need strong support to learn words need lots of relevant examples and explanations that use familiar language, yet dictionaries are organized with abbreviated definitions to conserve space and fit as many entries as possible.



◀ **National Geographic Reach uses scaffolds word learning with**

- visuals
- context
- student-friendly definitions
- oral language activities

In contrast with these common practices, *National Geographic Reach* emphasizes a much deeper and more sustained approach to vocabulary instruction. This approach is appropriate for all students, but is particularly suited and designed for English learners, many of whom lack deep knowledge of academic words and how to use them appropriately in academic discussion and writing.

Vocabulary instruction in *National Geographic Reach* features extended and multi-faceted exposure to support academic vocabulary learning. The program focuses on thematic units that incorporate academic vocabulary and content vocabulary in the domains of science, social studies and math. Using these content-rich materials, lessons promote vocabulary learning through rich oral language instruction and repeated opportunities for students to use the words in listening, speaking, reading and writing. A strong focus on collaborative learning ensures that students have many opportunities to incorporate the words as part of their overall developing English language skills.

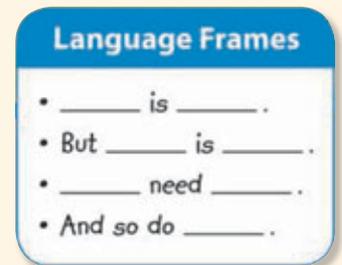
This rich vocabulary instruction follows a step-by-step cycle to ensure that it is a cumulative process that provides multiple scaffolded exposures, across contexts, to vocabulary words. Key vocabulary is presented in colorful and motivating formats in the student

Part 1 Vocabulary Skills Trace		Page
Day 1	Social Studies Vocabulary	T5
Day 2	Academic Vocabulary	T7
Day 3	Expand Word Knowledge	T10b
Day 4	Share Word Knowledge	T24b
▶ Day 5	Apply Word Knowledge	T25b
Day 6	Multiple-Meaning Words	T26
Day 7	Multiple-Meaning Words	T31
Days 8–9	Extend Vocabulary	T32e–f
Day 10	Vocabulary Review	T32h

◀ **A consistent 10-day plan provides frequent, varied opportunities for students to acquire and use vocabulary words and vocabulary strategies.**

books. These words are introduced at the start of the 10-day lesson cycle using predictable routines in which students gain an initial understanding of the words and assess their own knowledge of them. As the lesson cycle progresses, students gain increasingly deeper knowledge of the words as they use them in multiple contexts.

Language learning is rich in songs, games, role-play, and colorful visuals. Older children learn key vocabulary through graphics, word webbing, and other research-based word-learning strategies. Oral language development and discussion plays an integral role in this teaching; *National Geographic Reach* focuses on oral language development to give students the words to talk about their ideas and about key academic information. Throughout the program, language frames are taught so students can use comparative expression. This practice using language helps with vocabulary learning and academic success.



In order to engage students with meaningful learning, throughout *National Geographic Reach* teachers are asked to encourage students to share what they already know about each word and how it relates to their experiences, while also asking teachers to model their own personal connections to words. By allowing students to practice using words in many contexts, in their speech and in writing, students will better understand all the ways that the words can be used and have time to grapple with shades of meaning.

## 2 We need to focus carefully on the words we choose to teach

When we do spend time on vocabulary instruction, we need to make sure that we’re making the most of that time to improve students’ language and comprehension skills for success in all content areas. A crucial step to achieving this goal revolves around the words we choose to teach. This is especially important when teaching students, such as ELLs, with low vocabularies who need to learn lots of words deeply. Because truly knowing all levels and meanings of a word is a complex process, there is a growing consensus that vocabulary instruction should focus on deeply understanding a relatively small number of words.

We can't possibly "cover" or "teach" all the words students need to learn, but we can choose a set of words students need to be academically successful and then use those as a platform for teaching word-learning, for increasing academic talk, and for promoting more strategic reading of text. We call these words high-utility words.

This focus on high-utility words often represents a shift from current or past classroom practice and educational programs. Often these approaches have emphasized low-frequency, rare words (e.g., glint, burrowed) that appear in a given passage. These words can be relatively unimportant when we stack them up against all of the words that our ELLs and their classmates need to read for understanding.

For that reason, effective vocabulary instruction, such as that featured in *Reach*, must focus on high-impact academic words (e.g., debate, characteristic, observe) that are required for comprehending content and concepts. Spending precious instructional time on the deep learning of general-purpose academic words is much more valuable than targeting the low-frequency, rare words. In every unit, *Reach* focuses on teaching three sets of high-impact words, all of which represent key concepts:

- **Content vocabulary** The content words correspond with the unit's theme and are classified by subject area and are central to effective standards-based instruction. Examples of science vocabulary include habitat and root; examples of social studies vocabulary include immigration and globe; and examples of math vocabulary include equation and sum.
- **General-purpose academic words** These can be thought of as "delivery" words—the words that surround or are used to "deliver" the content. Examples of these words include balance, evidence, and solution.
- **Classroom vocabulary** In addition to high-utility academic and content area words, *Reach* focuses on important words that are specific to classroom procedures and skill instruction and that are essential for students to know for success in the classroom. Examples of these words are sequence and inference.

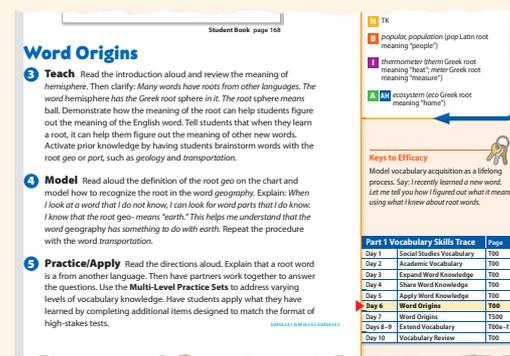
In addition to these three categories, *Reach* also provides support for teaching basic English words and concepts to newcomers and other students who are at the beginning levels of English acquisition.

### 3 We also need to teach word-learning strategies

As noted above, we can't possibly "cover" or "teach" all the words students need to learn, so we also need to equip them with strategies to try to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word they encounter while reading. Students need to be directly instructed on how to figure out unfamiliar words. They are constantly coming up against words that they don't know in texts. They could skip them and potentially lose overall meaning, or be more constructive and pull the words apart, dig deeply enough to find a helpful context clue, think

of a related word that looks the same, or think about when they have heard the word before. What the student does at those crossroads will be determined by the strategies she has in her toolkit.

Teaching ELLs word-learning strategies provides them with an opportunity to develop their academic vocabulary skills and, in turn, to work through challenging text. *National Geographic Reach* texts, lessons, and student activities were designed with these principles in mind; the program includes a strong focus on word-learning strategies, so that students will gain the cognitive tools they need to learn a large number of words independently. The instruction focused on word-learning strategies takes many forms, including using context clues, analyzing word parts and root words for meaning, and practicing working with suffixes, prefixes, and affixes. These strategies need to become part of our ELLs' toolkits for oral language development and, ultimately, promote their reading comprehension skills.



Word learning strategies give students the skills they need to learn a large number of words independently.

## Conclusion

In order to be academically successful, students must leave high school with a working understanding of about 50,000 words; greater vocabulary leads to greater comprehension, better comprehension also leads to learning more vocabulary words. Therefore, if we are to equip our ELLs for school success, a central part of instruction must focus on vocabulary learning. In the 21st century classroom, vocabulary teaching has to play a greater role and take up more instructional time than it has in years past (or than it typically has); this teaching must focus on a combination of direct instruction in high-utility words, across contexts and across a multi-day lesson cycle, and instruction in word-learning strategies. Good vocabulary teaching involves a lot of oral and written practice working with words, and it also involves giving students the language to talk about the concepts they know and to craft their explanations and arguments.



## Jennifer D. Turner, Ph.D., University of Maryland

Jennifer D. Turner teaches reading education, and multicultural literature and instruction for reading specialists. She has published on exemplary literacy teachers and teaching for African American elementary students. Recently, Turner received the Elva Knight Research Grant from the International Reading Association for her work with new reading teachers in urban elementary schools. Jennifer serves as a co-editor of the Literacy Leaders department for *The Reading Teacher*.

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 Listen to Jennifer Turner share more information on assessment.

# Know What They Know *by Jennifer Turner*

We all know that good assessment is the cornerstone of good instruction for English language learners (ELLs). Lately, however, teachers seem to have become increasingly frustrated with their current assessment systems. Teachers often collect huge amounts of data on their ELLs, but they don't know how to interpret it. Other teachers are overwhelmed by the data they collect, and they spend hours trying to figure out how the scores relate to the lessons that they are planning. It's not uncommon for teachers to say that they feel as if they are literally "drowning" in assessment data. So what can teachers do?

## Conduct purposeful assessments

Assessment is not a one-size-fits-all process, so teachers need to know how to use assessment data for a number of different purposes. First, teachers use assessment data to diagnose students' needs and strengths (Schumm & Argüelles, 2006). Teachers can use assessments to determine areas of difficulty for students, including language, reading, and writing development, or to identify gaps in their content knowledge. In addition to identifying student needs, it is important that teachers gather and interpret assessment data in ways that illuminate the strengths that ELLs bring to the classroom (Au, 2006; Schumm & Argüelles, 2006). Dong (2006/2007) reminds us that ELLs are often extremely bright; however, they may have some difficulties expressing their knowledge because they are still learning to speak, write, and think in English. As a result, teachers must be careful not to interpret assessment results in ways that undermine ELLs' cultural background, or underestimate their cognitive, literacy, or linguistic capabilities (Au, 2006).

Second, and related to this first point, teachers need to use assessment data to inform their instructional planning and decision-making (Afflerbach, 2007; Edwards, Turner, & Mokhtari, 2008). Teachers assess students' background knowledge and strategies to make appropriate choices about materials and to form groups. Teachers use frequent, in-the-moment assessments to adjust their instruction based on students' understanding and engagement.

Teachers may also assess students' understanding after instructional lessons to determine if particular skills or concepts need to be retaught. Using assessment to guide classroom instruction is critical, because all students, including ELLs, learn within different zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers work with ELLs in their zones of proximal development by starting with children's independent level and moving them to higher levels of performance through scaffolding. To understand ELLs' learning levels, and the kinds of scaffolding needed to help them expand their reach, teachers must conduct comprehensive and systematic assessments.

Finally, teachers use assessments to monitor ongoing student learning. Teachers use a variety of formal and informal assessment measures to document ELLs' growth in English language, literacy, and content knowledge, as well as to highlight areas for improvement. Teachers use this data to provide useful information to parents about their child's achievement and development, which can strengthen home-school connections (Schumm & Argüelles, 2006). Teachers can also use this assessment data to communicate more effectively with ESL teachers and other specialists, and to create greater instructional coherence for ELLs across general and English language education programs.

## How can teachers find out what ELLs know?

The *National Geographic Reach* program has been built on six research-based principles that help teachers assess what their English Language Learners know and need to learn:

1. Integrate English language and literacy assessments
2. Look at and listen to ELLs
3. Pair process and product measures to assess content knowledge
4. Identify learner differences
5. Integrate authentic and test-oriented assessments
6. Orchestrate opportunities for ELLs' self-assessment

## 1. Integrate English language and literacy assessments.

Assessing children's proficiency in English provides critical information for classroom teachers. Second language development is uneven, and teachers need to make certain that the learning environment and instruction are comprehensible to ELLs at their own proficiency levels (Au, 2006; August & Shanahan, 2006). Crosson and Lesaux (in press) recommend that teachers use English oral language proficiency assessments to generate an understanding of ELLs' development rather than to develop broad profiles based on skill level (e.g., students having "low" or "high" language skills).

In the literacy domain, teachers can use the same effective measures to assess ELLs because all children, including native English speakers, are developing phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Au, 2006; August & Shanahan, 2006). Assessing foundational skills with multiple measures is important because English literacy learning is both multidimensional and complex (Crosson & Lesaux, in press). For example, teachers may use early literacy assessments to gauge ELLs' print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter-word identification, but these measures do not provide adequate information about their oral language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, and/or listening and reading comprehension levels (Crosson & Lesaux, in press). In addition, recent research has shown that text-reading fluency is not a reliable indicator of reading comprehension for ELLs, so teachers need to supplement fluency measures with vocabulary assessments to create a more comprehensive profile of students' English literacy skills (Lesaux & Kieffer, in press).

*National Geographic Reach* offers an English language assessment which teachers can use to determine ELLs' proficiency levels (i.e., beginner, intermediate, advanced, or advanced high) for differentiated instruction. By administering the language proficiency assessment as a pre- and post-measure, teachers can also evaluate the gains that ELLs make in their English language proficiency within a particular unit. In addition, every unit in *National Geographic Reach* incorporates a rich array of English literacy assessments. For example, the Comprehension Coach is an online tool which enables teachers to monitor students' oral reading fluency in English. Most importantly, teachers have multiple opportunities to gauge ELLs' comprehension and vocabulary knowledge before, during, and after the text is read. Because these literacy skills are embedded within rich, academic conversations and writing activities, teachers can also monitor ELLs' conversational and academic English language development.

2. **Look at and listen to ELLs.** Teachers can gather a wealth of information about ELLs by simply observing them and listening to them in the classroom. Goodman (2002) uses the term "kidwatching" to characterize the kind of ongoing, interpretive professional observations made by classroom teachers. By

watching a young child who is learning English read a book, for example, teachers can determine his or her knowledge of concepts of print (e.g., reading from left to right, title). Teachers can also attain substantive information from ELLs by talking with them (Frey & Hiebert, 2002). Questioning, for example, is one form of assessment that many teachers are familiar with and constantly use in their classrooms. Research has shown that questions which are intended for specific purposes, use simplistic language and sentence structure, and provoke critical thinking are highly effective for assessing ELLs (Dong, 2006/2007; Schumm & Argüelles, 2006).

*National Geographic Reach* helps teachers to maximize the information obtained through observation and dialogue with ELLs. Each lesson includes questioning frameworks which support English language, literacy, and content learning. By asking a rich array of literal, inferential, personal and critical questions in the Talk Together sections, teachers can gauge ELLs' comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and critical responses to fiction and informational texts. *National Geographic Reach* units are also structured to provide teachers with the flexibility to observe ELLs working independently, in pairs, small groups, and in whole group settings, and to listen in on their discussions.

3. **Pair process and product measures to assess content knowledge.** According to Afflerbach (2007), students' content knowledge can be gauged using two types of assessments. *Process assessments* help to illuminate the processes of student learning and development. Elementary teachers may use a K-W-L graphic organizer as a process assessment because it helps them to determine students' background knowledge about a topic, their interest level and motivation to read, and the reading strategies for comprehending and attaining new information. *Product assessments* demonstrate students' learning and mastery. Unit tests, written compositions, and projects may serve as product assessments because they help teachers to evaluate student learning.

*National Geographic Reach* offers a number of process and product assessments. Each unit incorporates process assessments, such as the Thinking Map and the Concept Map, to help teachers understand how ELLs are organizing and learning new content, and communicating their understanding in verbal and written form. Process assessments related to the Strategic Reading component give teachers information about the skills and strategies that ELLs are using to understand content-rich selections. In addition, Unit Wrap-Up projects serve as product assessments which highlight ELLs' mastery of important academic content and language.

4. **Identify learner differences.** ELLs are not a monolithic group. Children who are learning English often represent a number of cultural and ethnic groups. For example, while a number of children in a classroom may speak Spanish, they may have emigrated from countries as diverse as Mexico, Argentina,

and Spain. Research has demonstrated that students' English language and literacy attainment are shaped by a number of sociocultural factors, including family experience and schooling in the home country, immigration experiences, and heritage language proficiency (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006). In addition, children who are learning English have personal interests, preferences, and attitudes which shape their engagement in language and literacy learning (Krashen, 1987). Consequently, teachers can determine which instructional materials and activities are motivating for ELLs by using assessments to learn about their cultural and personal backgrounds.

*National Geographic Reach* helps teachers to learn more about ELLs' cultural and linguistic heritage. Units and lessons feature high-quality fiction and informational texts which focus on diversity. Global perspectives are also highlighted in a number of selections. As ELLs discuss these diverse texts, make personal connections, and share their family and community experiences, teachers can discover new insights about their cultural backgrounds. Affective measures in the *National Geographic Reach* program, such as interest surveys, also provide multiple opportunities for teachers to gather information about ELLs' reading preferences in and out of school.

**B I A AH**

### Home Connection: Recipes

Explain that potatoes were developed thousands of years ago by native peoples of South America. Today potatoes are an important food everywhere in the world. Remind students about **Family Newsletter 3**, which asked them to collect favorite recipes for potatoes. Gather the recipes in a class Potato Cookbook.



◀ **Home Connection features help teachers understand students' cultural backgrounds and family experiences.**

**5. Integrate authentic and test-oriented assessments.** Teachers can glean a substantial amount of information about ELLs' language, literacy, and content development through authentic assessments. Authentic assessments are not only aligned with the curriculum, but they also emphasize real-world learning and task performance (Au, 2006). At the same time, ELLs need additional exposure to the "culture of testing" because they may not be familiar with the materials, procedures, and language demands related to high stakes testing (Afflerbach, 2007).

*National Geographic Reach* offers teachers a number of authentic measures, such as rubrics for performance-based projects (e.g., Theme Theater, writing projects), which help teachers gauge ELLs' reading, writing, and grammar development. Children who are learning English also have

multiple opportunities to engage with electronic print (e.g., emails, blogs), which teachers can use to ascertain their familiarity with technology. Equally important, teachers can evaluate their ELLs' knowledge about the questioning formats common in formal testing using the test-taking strategy components within each lesson, as well as the end-of-unit tests.

Scale	Content	Language
<b>B</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Misses many characters <input type="checkbox"/> Does not give details about characters	<input type="checkbox"/> Frequently hard to hear or understand <input type="checkbox"/> Often seems uncomfortable with the describing task
<b>I</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Covers some story characters <input type="checkbox"/> Gives some details about characters	<input type="checkbox"/> Can be understood some of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Seems somewhat comfortable with the describing task
<b>A</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Covers most characters in the story <input type="checkbox"/> Gives details about characters	<input type="checkbox"/> Can be understood most of the time <input type="checkbox"/> Seems comfortable with the describing task
<b>AH</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Covers all important story characters <input type="checkbox"/> Gives many details about characters	<input type="checkbox"/> Speaks clearly and is easily understood <input type="checkbox"/> Seems very comfortable with the describing task

◀ **Rubrics help teachers evaluate students' development in multiple areas including reading, and language. Rubrics also can be used to help students assess their own progress as learners.**

**6. Orchestrate opportunities for ELLs' self-assessment.**

Sometimes teachers forget that students also need to assess their own learning in school. Self-assessments hold many important benefits for students. When ELLs and their classmates use self-assessments, they take control of their own language and literacy learning, and they achieve greater ownership of critical skills and strategies and build their confidence (Johnston, 2005; Turner & Kim, 2005).

Tools embedded within the *National Geographic Reach* program provide students the opportunity to document their growth in English language, literacy, and content. Each unit provides students with a rubric which enables them to determine what topics they know well and where they need continued support. Also, *National Geographic Reach* lessons include a number of activities (e.g., Writing Projects, Respond and Extend) and artifacts (e.g., Thinking Maps) which help ELLs develop metacognitive awareness.

## Conclusion

It is not enough for teachers to assess ELLs for accountability purposes. Teachers not only need to know how to collect pertinent data on students' learning and development, but they must understand how to interpret the data and use it to make appropriate instructional decisions. Using the *National Geographic Reach* program, teachers can responsively assess the ELLs in their classroom, and use the information to design tailored and effective learning environments and instruction.



## Lada Kratky, M.A.

Lada Kratky is a bilingual educator and featured national speaker. She has authored several Spanish reading programs including *Alfarrimas*; the phonics programs, *Phonics and Friends*; and the ESL series *Avenues*.

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 Listen to Lada Kratky share more about effective teaching routines and strategies.

# Make Every Minute Count! *by Lada Kratky*

One great difficulty facing today's teachers of English language learners (ELLs) is lack of time. Juggling curriculum demands, which include large blocks of time for language arts, math, science, and social studies, teachers may find they have little time left to address the needs of their ELLs. However, if ELLs fall behind, the gap grows wider, making it difficult for them to catch up. How can teachers find enough time to teach everything their ELLs need? They can

1. Integrate ESL with content-area instruction
2. Use predictable routines
3. Plan and maintain the pace of instruction

## 1 Integrate ESL with content-area instruction

Today's educators and districts have recognized an urgent need for a shift from traditional ESL programs to one that addresses concept and vocabulary development, especially in the content areas. Teaching social language basic English is not enough to improve student achievement. ESL programs must address the vocabulary needs that will enable ELLs to succeed in mainstream and content area classes. Language and literacy demands permeate every aspect of the school day. Instruction in language development must address the range of subjects and contexts ELLs experience to truly support and enhance their performance in the mainstream classroom.

*National Geographic Reach* features robust science and social studies units that also address the language needs of ELLs, with a strong concentration on vocabulary development. This content-based ESL approach merges needed language instruction with the content areas. Using *National Geographic Reach*, standards for language and for science or social studies can be addressed together during ESL time or during the content area block. Covering these standards together saves the teacher valuable classroom time and supports improved achievement for ELL students.

## 2 Use predictable classroom routines

Teaching time is often lost in classrooms when transitions and organizational tasks take more time than necessary. If students are unready to line up for lunch, the lining up process takes extra time. It may take five or six minutes for students to get ready for a writing task, when they could possibly be ready in a minute or two. These

kinds of transitions may cost only a few minutes each, but over the course of a day or week they can add up to significant amounts of time lost. One way for teachers to save time is to establish consistent procedures or routines for transitions, so that when the teacher signals the transition, students know what is expected and can be ready promptly for the next activity.

Instructional routines also offer many opportunities to streamline classroom procedures and save time. When instruction follows predictable patterns, students can prepare themselves quickly for lessons. They don't need to spend time or attention figuring out the lesson process, so they are more able to focus on the content being taught. The instruction in *National Geographic Reach* follows predictable patterns. Lessons are consistently organized in the following steps:

**Teach:** The teacher explains what is to be learned

**Model:** The teacher models the skill students are expected to learn

**Practice:** Students practice the skill with support

**Apply:** Students apply the skill on their own.

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*How can teachers find enough time to teach everything their ELLs need?*

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*National Geographic Reach* also makes extensive use of instructional routines. These are simple learning procedures that follow a series of regular steps. Vocabulary, for example, is taught using a series of specific routines on successive days of the lesson cycle. As noted, *National Geographic Reach* emphasizes academic and content vocabulary. This focus implies a natural shift in methodology. It is no longer enough for students to simply hear the word followed by its definition and then use it in a sentence. Vocabulary instruction includes introducing the words, expanding word knowledge, sharing word knowledge, reteaching vocabulary, and providing additional vocabulary experiences.

Part 1 Vocabulary Skills Trace		Page
Day 1	Social Studies Vocabulary	T5
Day 2	Academic Vocabulary	T7
Day 3	Expand Word Knowledge	T10b
Day 4	Share Word Knowledge	T24b
Day 5	Apply Word Knowledge	T25b
Day 6	Multiple-Meaning Words	T26
Day 7	Multiple-Meaning Words	T31
Days 8–9	Extend Vocabulary	T32e–f
Day 10	Vocabulary Review	T32h

◀ Vocabulary instruction makes use of a consistent set of research-based routines.

- **Introduce the words** To introduce a word, the teacher pronounces it and points to a picture or diagram that depicts it. Immediately, students are asked to react to the word by rating it; they show if they know the word well, a little, or not at all, by showing one, two, or three fingers. They then share what they know about it. The teacher will give students a friendly definition of the word and use the picture dictionary to further illustrate the word. He/she then further elaborates the meaning of the word, relating it to personal experience, and encouraging the students to share their own experience. The students are motivated through questions or comments to discuss the word. This discussion will help students understand the word and its uses even further. In addition, the word will be analyzed by pointing out its parts and spelling patterns that will help the students recognize the word. Finally, the students can connect the word to other content areas, and the teacher can put it up on the Word Wall.
- **Expand word knowledge** On the next day, the students expand their word knowledge through the use of discussion, graphic organizers, drawing, and writing. The students are grouped in pairs, and each pair will become an expert on one word. The teacher then shows how to complete a graphic organizer. The graphic organizer is displayed, the teacher writes the word, adds a picture, definition, and content sentence. Each pair of students then completes the task using their Key Word and a similar graphic organizer. Becoming an expert builds depth of word knowledge, enhances word-learning strategies, and builds confidence and collaboration.

- **Share word knowledge** On the following day, students share their knowledge of the word they have been studying. Each student is paired with a partner who has been working on a different word than their own. They take turns reading to each other from their Graphic Organizers. As partners, they proceed to discuss and write a sentence using both words they are studying. They write the sentences in their journal and underline the Key Words. The teacher forms cooperative learning groups and the activity is repeated until each Key Word has been entered into the students' journals. Once again, the activity provides opportunities for academic talk, practice with word-learning strategies, and increased opportunities for collaboration and a sense of ownership for learning.
- **Practice and reteach vocabulary** The words are then reviewed or retaught to students who did not master them. Content and Academic Vocabulary is embedded into reading, discussion, and teaching activities throughout the unit providing multiple exposures. During reteaching, the teacher says each word and asks the students to repeat it. Then he/she will teach the meaning, read the definition and use different words to elaborate on the meaning. He/she will make connections, giving examples of when the word can be used. The students record the word in their journal, discuss the sounds and spelling, and work further on the word by making a word map, drawing a picture to illustrate it, writing a definition, writing a sentence with the word, or writing its translation in the student's home language.

In addition to these steps, students can participate in a number of additional vocabulary practice and extension routines, including games such as Bingo! and activities such as word sorts and vocabulary skits.

Beyond vocabulary, *National Geographic Reach* uses consistent routines for reading, writing, structured responses, and cooperative learning. Many other steps in the lesson plan also follow predictable patterns; for example, **Language of the Day** and **Preview and Build Background** follow the same steps each time they occur. Features such as **Multi-Level Strategies** and **Academic Language Frames** appear in consistent places in the lesson plan. The content changes according to the instructional objective, but the format is consistent. Here again, because students know the format, they can concentrate on the content, and they need less time to get oriented to the task.



◀ Day-by-day pacing and planning guides provide a clear pathway.

### 3 Plan and maintain the pace of instruction

Teachers of ELLs sometimes tend to slow down the pace of classroom instruction, thinking that their students need extra time. However, current research and practice suggest that most ELLs respond positively when teachers maintain an energetic classroom pace. Maintaining an energetic pace conveys valuable messages to students, including:

- The work of learning is important and engaging.
- The teacher has confidence in students' ability.
- There is a lot to cover and no time to waste.

Teachers who shift to a more energetic classroom pace frequently find that:

- Their ELL students are much better able to keep up with the pace than the teacher expected.
- Students who were disengaged often become more involved and interested.
- Teachers themselves enjoy the more rapid pace.

Picking up the pace of instruction means that there is more time to cover all the standards that ESL teachers are responsible for. It also often means a more enjoyable classroom experience for both students and teacher.

Planning a daily schedule is an important part of maintaining an appropriate classroom pace. The Lesson Planner in each unit of the *National Geographic Reach* Teacher's Editions clarifies the sequence of instruction and provides suggested time frames for each part of the lesson plan. Daily activities are related, and instruction flows naturally—which supports teachers in planning efficient use of time. For example, songs or chants introduce concepts and vocabulary. These lead to a formal introduction of vocabulary. Students work with graphic organizers and thinking maps to expand their understanding. They read, discuss, and further develop concepts. With teachers or

peers, they engage in activities that improve academic and oral language proficiency, content knowledge, and reading comprehension.

The Online Planner makes it even easier for the teacher to organize and schedule lessons to suit the needs of her or his particular classroom. Using this tool, teachers can select specific activities, adapt the sequence of the lesson plan, or reorganize lessons to align with what students are learning in other classes.



◀ The Online Planner includes pre-made lesson plans for various instructional models and can be personalized.

## Conclusion

Most ESL teachers face the challenge of having too much to cover in the available class time. This article suggests three ways class time can be maximized:

- integrate ESL instruction with the content areas
- use predictable classroom routines
- plan and maintain the pace of instruction

*National Geographic Reach* provides resources to support teachers in each of these areas. With *Reach*, teachers are able to use class time more efficiently to achieve their ultimate goal: the academic success and growth of their students.



## Jennifer D. Turner, Ph.D., University of Maryland

Jennifer D. Turner teaches reading education, and multicultural literature and instruction for reading specialists. She has published on exemplary literacy teachers and teaching for African American elementary students. Recently, Turner received the Elva Knight Research Grant from the International Reading Association for her work with new reading teachers in urban elementary schools. Jennifer serves as a co-editor of the Literacy Leaders department for *The Reading Teacher*.

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Listen to Jennifer Turner share more information on meeting individual needs.

# Get to Know Your Learners *by Jennifer Turner*

Every year, thousands of children who are learning English stream into elementary classrooms across the country. But not all classrooms are created equal. In some classrooms, English language learners (ELLs) seem to be lost; these students sit by themselves, rarely talk or interact with other students, make few attempts to open their books or join into classroom discussions, and gaze silently at the teacher during instruction. In other classrooms, however, ELLs seem to “fit into” the flow of classroom life; they are willing to communicate with other students and with the teacher, they take risks to participate in classroom conversations, and they are much more engaged with books and other reading materials during instruction.

What makes some classrooms inviting for ELLs and not others? A key factor is the classroom community that teachers and students work together to develop throughout the year. Classroom communities are dynamic learning environments that are rich in social relationships, promote collective agency and responsibility in learning, and foster collaborations involving talking, listening, reading, writing and thinking (Rousculp & Maring, 1992). Research has shown that while classroom communities are effective environments for all learners, they are particularly critical for the language and literacy development of ELLs. Classroom communities provide a safe environment for ELLs to take intellectual risks and to “play” with language (Fitzgerald, 1993; Turner & Kim, 2005). Consistent instructional routines, such as choral reading or interactive writing, help elementary ELLs to become familiar with the kinds of reading and writing valued within the classroom community, and to take ownership of those literate practices (Au, 2006; Kim & Turner, 2006). As a result, ELLs often want to “get into the action” of the classroom community, because they feel a sense of responsibility for their classmates’ learning as well as their own (Day, 2002).

Personal relationships are the heart of vibrant classroom communities. To build classroom community, elementary teachers must take the initiative to establish and maintain strong social relationships with students (Kim & Turner, 2006). In these classrooms, teachers don’t just learn about their ELLs on their first day of school; rather, they are committed to getting to know all their students throughout the year. Research has shown that teachers must get to know the ELLs in their classroom in five important ways:

1. Get to know them as **Language** Learners
2. Get to know them as **Literacy** Learners
3. Get to know them as **Content** Learners
4. Get to know them as **Cultural** Learners
5. Get to know them as **Digital** Learners

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*To build classroom community, teachers must take the initiative to establish and maintain strong social relationships with students.*

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## 1 Get to know them as language learners

It is important for elementary teachers to recognize that ELLs are acquiring proficiency in two forms of English language in classroom communities (Cummins, 2000). Conversational language enables students to communicate in a variety of informal ways, and represents the kinds of “social talk” that students use in the lunchroom and on the playground. In contrast, academic language is formalized English that is conceptual, abstract, and content-oriented. For ELLs, learning academic English language is much more cognitively demanding. Research has shown that while children can acquire conversational English language in 1–2 years, it can take 5–7 years for them to acquire proficiency in academic English (Collier, 1989).

Teachers not only need to know about their students’ conversational and academic language knowledge, but they need to understand how these children have developed English language knowledge in schools. Some children may have been in Sheltered

English Immersion (SEI) classrooms, some may have been in English pullout programs in their schools, while others may have participated in bilingual programs that foster development in their home languages as well as English. Teachers may also discover that some of their students have had very little formal schooling in their home countries, or that their schooling in the United States has been extremely fragmented. As elementary teachers get to know the language histories of their ELLs, they can use this information to strategically build connections to these students' prior linguistic knowledge.

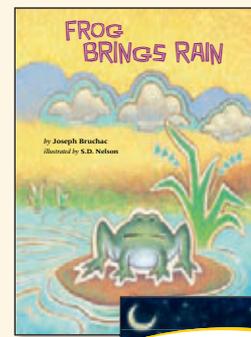
*National Geographic Reach* can help teachers to enhance their students' English language development. Instructional activities are implemented through a rich variety of collaborative formats, such as partner work, small groups, and whole class discussion, which build ELLs' conversational and academic English proficiency. *Reach* also provides scaffolding for students with a range of language proficiency levels in order to build their confidence and to support active participation within the classroom community.

## 2 Get to know them as literacy learners

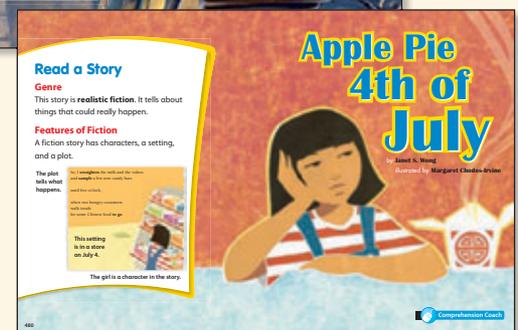
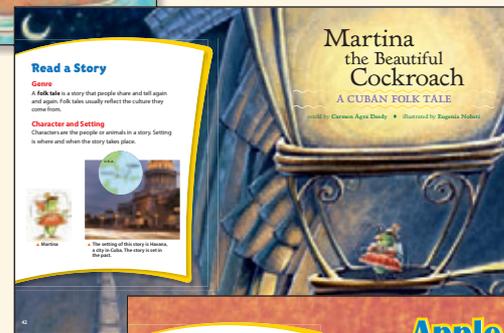
Good readers, including those who are learning English, need a variety of literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, comprehension, writing, and spelling (August & Shanahan, 2006; Shanahan & Beck, 2006). Elementary teachers, then, must get to know their students as literacy learners in order to orchestrate multiple opportunities for learning, developing, and mastering English literacy skills. For example, teachers must adjust their literacy instruction to accommodate children who are biliterate and can read and write in their primary language as well as those whose literacy skills are emergent in their home language (Fitzgerald, 1993).

We know that all elementary students have varied literacy preferences, learning styles, and literacy strengths and needs, and ELLs are no exception. Children may share similar home languages, such as Spanish or Korean, and yet their literacy backgrounds may be completely different. Some children who are learning English, for example, may prefer to read fairy tales or mysteries, while others may become engrossed with informational texts about volcanoes or insects. Outside of school, some ELLs may avidly read video game manuals, while others may enjoy writing letters to family members back in their home countries. Teachers must get to know the literacy interests of all children, including those who are learning English, in order to understand how to address their unique literacy strengths and needs, and to enhance their motivation to read, write, and talk within the classroom community.

*National Geographic Reach* offers elementary English learners a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. Genres highlighted in *Reach* include realistic fiction, science articles, photo essays, poetry, and folktales. Lessons provide ELLs with multiple opportunities to experience the process of "becoming readers and writers in English" through text-based activities embedded within rich oral language contexts, such as singing songs, joining in choral reading, and composing texts. *Reach* also offers Libraries for additional



◀ Literature includes a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction.



reading. Providing students with the ability to choose texts and extend reading and learning enhances motivation and accelerates the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. At the same time, lessons feature Language Frames, which offer children ways of thinking about and understanding higher-order comprehension skills and reading strategies, such as summarizing or visualizing, in English. Importantly, *National Geographic Reach* encourages ELLs to not only acquire new literacy skills that will help them to become strategic readers and writers, but this program encourages them to actively use these skills through performances like Theme Theater and other dramatic skits, and through collaborative writing projects.

## 3 Get to know them as content learners

Schools have not traditionally viewed children who are learning English as "content learners." In fact, the curriculum for children who are learning English has often emphasized low-level content, language, and literacy skills in English (Au, 2006). A number of programs for ELLs have focused on discrete parts of the English language (e.g., nouns, verbs) and/or isolated grammatical skills rather than on higher-order processes such as comprehension, summarization, or composition (Fitzgerald, 1993). Often schools have provided ELLs with a less demanding curriculum because their expectations for these children are extremely low, given that these students may have limited content knowledge or vocabulary knowledge in English (Fitzgerald, 1993).

However, students who are learning English need and deserve a curriculum that covers basic language and is content-rich and rigorous. Research has shown that ELLs can learn academic content when teachers effectively build their background knowledge and enhance their content vocabularies (Fitzgerald, 1993). When teachers get to know their ELLs, they begin to realize that while these students may have difficulty expressing their thoughts and ideas in English, they do have strong critical thinking skills, and are fully capable of mastering material in the content areas (Dong, 2006/2007).

The units in *National Geographic Reach* are designed with a strong content focus that integrates science and social studies topics with English language and literacy skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening). Each unit centers on a Big Question that not only aligns with core content standards, but also encourages elementary ELLs to think critically about new ideas and concepts, express their ideas and interests, and inquire about their world.

#### 4 Get to know them as cultural learners

Although students may be learning English in our elementary classroom communities, they do not come to us as “blank slates.” Rather, these students do have cultural knowledge and experiences that may serve as resources for their English language, literacy, and content learning (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006). Teachers must get to know what ELLs and their families are doing in their homes, because many daily activities, including cooking, paying bills, and making grocery lists, support young children’s knowledge about the purposes, meanings, and uses of language and literacy (Anderson & Stokes, 1984). Even if families are not primarily speaking English, the home language and literacy environments that they create for their young children are still important. Research has shown that using their first language does not confuse young children who are learning English in schools, and may have positive contributions to their English language and literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006).

##### Cultural Perspectives

Explain that haiku is a form of poetry that started long ago in Japan and now people from many countries write them. Ask students to find words in these haiku that tell the reader they are from a modern time and place. Possible responses include modern words (*yum*); foods from different countries and cultures.



◀ Cultural Perspectives highlight the rich variety of cultures and emphasize the positive value of cultural diversity in the classroom.

*National Geographic Reach* features high-quality literature that represents people and places within a wide variety of cultural, racial, and ethnic communities. Primary languages are often incorporated into the selections in ways that affirm students’ linguistic backgrounds, and multiethnic characters and storylines build on students’ cultural funds of knowledge. By tapping into students’ cultural knowledge and home literacy experiences, units are designed to enhance students’ English language proficiency, literacy acquisition, and writing development. Importantly, *Reach* also helps children who are learning English to expand their understanding of the world by including a number of fiction and nonfiction texts written from a global perspective.

#### 5 Get to know them as digital learners

Like many elementary students, children who are learning English are often exposed to and use technology in a variety of ways, including surfing the internet, using computers, and communicating through email, text messaging, and other electronic formats. However, for young children who are learning English, technology may be a particularly useful educational tool. Researchers have found that technology can enrich ELLs’ language, literacy, and content knowledge (Medina-Jerez, Clark, Medina, & Ramirez-Marin, 2007; Ybarra & Green, 2003). Case and Truscott (1999), for example, observed that when students used computers for reading instruction, their sight word vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension improved. Using technology enabled students to engage more actively with texts, to receive immediate feedback on reading performances, and to gain additional practice.

Children who are learning English have extensive access to technology through *National Geographic Reach*. The online Comprehension Coach offers ELLs opportunities to practice fluent reading. *Reach* units also include a rich digital library and Build Background videos, which teachers can use to build students’ background knowledge and to promote interest in the topic. Games and the Vocabulary Notebook create personalized, interactive learning and practice opportunities. In addition, many lessons feature technology-based texts, such as emails and blogs, to promote student engagement and to help students understand how English language and literacy skills can be used to communicate diverse perspectives to diverse audiences.

### Conclusion

Children who are learning English are not a homogenous group. They come to elementary classrooms with varying critical thinking skills, different instructional histories, and varied interests, cultural backgrounds, and family experiences. Elementary teachers must get to know their ELLs as individual learners with diverse language strengths and needs, literacy interests and preferences, content knowledge bases, and cultural and technological resources, and use that knowledge to build classroom communities which inspire children to learn English language, literacy, and content. *National Geographic Reach* provides a rich array of resources to help teachers accomplish this goal.



## Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Ph.D., University of Texas

Sylvia Linan-Thompson is an associate director of the National Research and Development Center on English Language. She has developed and examined reading interventions for struggling readers who are monolingual English speakers, English language learners and bilingual students acquiring Spanish literacy. Linan-Thompson has authored articles, and books on literacy instruction and teacher professional development topics.

[NGReach.com](https://www.ngreach.com) Download Professional Development Podcasts

 Listen to Sylvia Linan-Thompson share more information on comprehension.

# Build Strategic Thinking *by Sylvia Linan-Thompson*

We engage students in comprehension-building activities because we know that to learn and succeed academically, students must be able to actively construct meaning on a regular basis—while talking, listening, viewing, doing activities, and while reading. Comprehension is more than just understanding what you read; you must transform that understanding, communicate it, and use it to build new knowledge. Therefore, students have to be aware of their own understanding and they must possess strategies for accessing and organizing information that is presented in text. Further, to be able to communicate and build knowledge, students need to acquire not only new content or information but also the vocabulary and language and text structures associated with it. This is true whether we are reading for information, to perform a task, or for literary experience.

## What makes comprehension a challenge for ELLs?

Because the ability to comprehend text depends on language, English language learners (ELLs) often experience difficulty with comprehension tasks even when they are able to decode and have adequate reading speed. August, Francis, Hsu, & Snow (2006) identified the following challenges faced by ELLs when they are learning to read for understanding:

- smaller English vocabularies
- less background knowledge relevant to the texts they encounter in U.S. schools
- less familiarity with mainstream language patterns
- reduced motivation and limited interest in school-assigned reading materials

The good news is that these areas that can be addressed by robust instruction and the use of materials that tap into ELLs' interests and reflect their cultural background. *National Geographic Reach* is designed to address these specific needs of ELLs and enable them to reach high levels of comprehension.

**Vocabulary Development** Earlier papers in this section have emphasized the importance of vocabulary development for ELLs. In addition to needing foundational reading skills, and decoding skills in particular, students need to be able to access word meaning quickly (Perfetti & Mezynski, 1983). They must be able to recognize words, retrieve word meanings, and identify and use affixed word forms quickly. ELLs' limited knowledge of word meanings may make it difficult for them to comprehend what they read. *National Geographic Reach* focuses on developing important academic and content vocabulary through a systematic lesson plan and instructional routines that provide repeated exposure to key words, their varying meanings, and the contexts in which they are used.

**Background Knowledge** Comprehension may also be impacted by limited background knowledge. Our knowledge of specific topics and of the words used in talking about them facilitate our understanding of texts on those topics. Like many English-speaking striving students, ELLs may have limited knowledge of some academic and content area topics. *National Geographic Reach* fosters exposure to a wide range of topics and provides students with multiple opportunities to develop background knowledge in the process. These opportunities include

- multimedia resources for building background
- kinesthetic and cooperative activities that tap prior knowledge and experience
- concept-focused, visual, and contextualized vocabulary resources
- frequent opportunities to listen to and engage in oral language activities
- frequent use of graphic organizers to organize, build, and share knowledge

**Visual and multimedia resources build background.** ▶



**Mainstream Discourse** The way language is used in school and in academic communication may be unfamiliar to ELLs. They may need explicit and systematic instruction to learn how English is used in academic conversations, discussions, presentations, and similar contexts. *National Geographic Reach* includes an extensive oral language strand that models the conventions of mainstream discourse and supports students in learning to use them. Lessons include a wide variety of language frames that demonstrate the appropriate use of academic English and coach students in developing these skills.

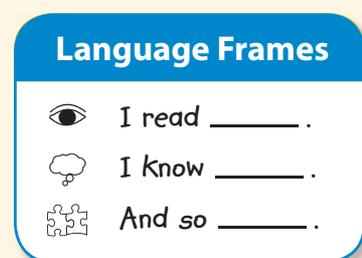
**Motivating Materials** ELLs need materials that expose them to new cultures and ideas through engaging text using rich vocabulary. With its emphasis on expository text and attention to diversity, *National Geographic Reach* provides reading material that will engage students, give some an opportunity to see their cultural background, and give others a chance to learn about new cultures, all the while exposing students to big ideas and rich vocabulary that build conceptual knowledge. To ensure that students engage with and understand the texts they read, lessons include collaborative oral-language and writing activities that are implemented prior to, during, and after reading.

## Designing instruction to meet ELLs' needs

In addition to addressing the issues discussed above, an effective program for ELLs must provide instruction that meets these students at their level and moves them forward in ways that develop their confidence and success. Scaffolding must include:

- pre-teaching of key vocabulary and concepts
- the use of think-alouds that show students how to monitor their understanding
- questioning strategies that engage and extend learning
- teaching students to use graphic organizers as frames for thinking about and organizing information
- explicit instruction and extended practice in reading strategies

*National Geographic Reach* incorporates all of these scaffolding strategies in the lesson plans for each unit. Key vocabulary is concept-driven. Words are selected that relate to key ideas that underlie all activities, including reading. By selecting words based on the concept rather than on a particular text, knowledge schema are developed before reading and revisited throughout the unit. Ideas and words encountered through reading can be integrated into that larger schema. Students have multiple opportunities to explore and revisit words and ideas, expanding their understanding across the unit. Academic vocabulary extends that understanding beyond the unit, focusing on high-utility words that are commonly used across a range of subject areas. Instruction consistently uses think-alouds to model for students the thinking processes that expert learners use. Questioning strategies are explicitly taught, and graphic organizers are used throughout the program to support students in thinking about and organizing information they are learning.



◀ Scaffolds support ELLs

## Focus on strategies

Strategies are plans we use and apply when hearing text that is read aloud or when reading independently. Strategies are not skills that can be taught by drill. They are complex procedures that provide an approach for completing a task. To use strategies effectively, students need to develop an awareness and understanding of the process, and then practice using the strategies with teacher assistance until they internalize the strategy and can master its application in reading, listening, viewing and other academic activities. They also need to learn when to use each strategy. *National Geographic Reach* focuses on seven key strategies to promote comprehension:

1. **Plan and Monitor Reading:** *Setting a clear purpose, predicting, checking predictions and understanding, and using “fix-up” strategies, if necessary*
2. **Determine Importance:** *identifying essential ideas and information*
3. **Ask Questions:** *interrogating texts for a variety of purposes*
4. **Visualize:** *forming sensory images*
5. **Make Connections:** *connecting information to yourself, the world, and connecting texts with other texts*
6. **Make Inferences:** *connecting ideas or information that the author does not explicitly link*
7. **Synthesize:** *putting ideas together to draw conclusions or make generalizations*

In the final unit of each level, *National Geographic Reach* focuses instruction on when and how to select strategies. Students who are strategic have tools that allow them to learn independently. Furthermore, strategic students learn to trust their own perceptions and to evaluate the quality of their products and the extent to which they have learned something. When they identify mistakes, they have tools to rectify them.

In addition to focused teaching of comprehension strategies, students need to learn about texts in order to understand them. Comprehension requires a full understanding of text structures, literary analysis skills, genre characteristics, and awareness of text features and how to use them. Building understanding of these skills before reading helps students know what to expect and better use the text to unlock key ideas and build understanding.

## Teach with a gradual release of responsibility

According to Swanson (2001), successful teaching of strategies involves the following steps:

1. Explanation (systematic explanations, elaborations, and/or plans to direct task performance)
2. Modeling by teachers (verbal modeling, questioning, and demonstration)
3. Reminders to use specific strategies or procedures (cues, tactics, or procedures)
4. Step-by-step prompts or multi-process instructions
5. Dialogue (teacher and student talk back and forth)
6. Teacher asks questions to assure that students are applying the strategy
7. Teacher provides assistance or coaching only if necessary

As Fisher and Frey (2008) noted, this gradual release process involves a focus lesson (“I do it”), guided instruction (“We do it”), collaboration (“You do it together”), and finally independent application (“You do it alone”).

Strategy instruction in *National Geographic Reach* follows these steps consistently.

Before reading, one strategy is introduced, helping students focus and develop the language and thinking to support strategic reading. They are connected to real-world examples to tap prior experience. They are then modeled by teachers. Clear instructions and language scaffolds are provided along with collaborative opportunities for students to practice and apply the steps of the strategy in short passages that integrate key vocabulary words. As students begin to read the selection, they are reminded to apply the strategy to the text.

As they read, supports are provided to build and apply reading strategies. **Before You Move On** questions scaffold the application of the strategy to the text. The gradual release model supports and scaffolds the application of the strategy through the Teacher’s Edition. First the teacher models the strategy again, then he or she guides

students in applying it, and finally students apply the strategy on their own, with support from the teacher only if needed. These steps include opportunities for students to discuss the application of the strategy with the teacher; further discussion takes place at the end of the unit when the class revisits the strategy learning experience. Companion selections and Leveled Library books are provided for further work with the strategy to help students apply strategies across multiple genres. In *National Geographic Reach*, strategies are taught in each level, so students’ ability to use them grows increasingly sophisticated as they deal with more complex texts.

*National Geographic Reach* also uses the gradual release model for instruction in literary analysis skills and text structure. Before reading, concepts in literary analysis or text structure are tied to students’ prior knowledge or experience and thinking maps (graphic organizers) are introduced, providing clear tools to scaffold the application of the skill. Guided practice and an opportunity for collaborative practice using a read aloud are provided before reading. During reading, the same scaffolds appear in the Student and Teacher materials, promoting gradual release of responsibility. After reading, students reread and use graphic organizers demonstrate their understanding of the literary analysis skill or text structure.

## Conclusion

Reading comprehension presents significant challenges for many ELLs, who may have limited vocabulary and language knowledge that makes it harder for them to focus on the meaning of texts. Instructional materials for ELLs must be designed to provide the vocabulary, background, and language knowledge they need in order to comprehend their reading. In addition, materials must provide extensive instruction to help students develop reading skills and strategies that they can apply independently. *National Geographic Reach* provides motivational texts on a variety of topics, with rich vocabulary development and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies to assure that all ELLs can develop into skilled strategic readers and thinkers.

**Part 1 Strategic Reading**

### Learn to Make Inferences

Look at the picture. Diego does not say what he forgot to do. Look for clues to figure out, or **make an inference** about, what he forgot.

I guess I forgot again.

You can **make inferences** when you read, too.

#### How to Make Inferences

1. Look for details in the text. I read \_\_\_\_\_
2. Think about what you already know about the details and the topic. I know \_\_\_\_\_
3. Put your ideas together. What else can you figure out about the details? And so \_\_\_\_\_

**Language Frames**

- I read \_\_\_\_\_
- I know \_\_\_\_\_
- And so \_\_\_\_\_

**Talk Together**

Read Diego's retelling of a fairy tale. Read the sample inference. Then use **Language Frames** to tell a partner about the inferences you made while reading.

#### Jack and the Beanstalk

Jack went to buy some food. He met a man on the road. "Buy my **SUPER SEEDS**," cried the man. "It's true! In just a week, you can feed your whole family with the food from just one bean seed!"

Jack bought the dried seeds and planted them in his backyard. It was a perfect **environment** for growing beans.

In just a few days, the plant had **spread** across the yard. It was out of **control**! The garden wasn't big enough to **contain** the huge stalk, which began to climb high into the sky.

Jack decided to **investigate**. So he climbed the plant lightly, careful not to crush the stalk. Finally he reached a cloud. There, he found a box filled with bright shiny gold. Jack grabbed the gold and climbed quickly down the stalk.

Then Jack heard a rumble in the sky. The beanstalk started to shake.

Jack took an axe and chopped down the stalk. He heard someone shouting in the clouds. Jack sighed with relief. Then he used the gold to buy some real food for his family.

Sample Inference: I guess the man's promises are not true.

I know that plants can't grow that fast.

And so I think the man wants to trick Jack.

← A good place to make an inference

Reading strategy instruction includes explanations, models, and scaffolded practice opportunities.



## Nancy Frey, Ph.D., San Diego State University

Nancy Frey teaches in the San Diego State University teacher-credentialing and reading specialist programs focusing on reading instruction, content area literacy, and diverse student support. Frey has published in *The Reading Teacher*, *English Journal*, and *Educational Leadership*. Frey also co-authored *Checking for Understanding*, *Scaffolded Writing Instruction*, and *Learning Words Inside and Out*.

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 Listen to Nancy Frey share more information on technology.

# Link to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and Resources

by Nancy Frey

Peer over the shoulder of an elementary-aged child who is working on a computer and prepare to be amazed and a little intimidated. The children in today's classrooms have never known a time when the Internet did not exist, and have been raised in an environment where information is just as likely to be presented digitally as it is in print. When presented with an interesting question, they are as likely to turn to a computer or other device with a web browser as they are to look in a book. But this shift in learning is not confined to school-aged children. Increasingly, teachers of these same students have themselves experienced curriculum development as a digital process.

Professional organizations have united in their calls for a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to education that broadens our approach to teaching, learning, and literacy. The International Reading Association (IRA) in 2009 called for literacy curricula that emphasize the use of print and digital technologies in learning. The IRA statement said that “students have the right to... teachers who use ICTs [information and communication technologies] skillfully for teaching and learning effectively” (IRA, 2009). The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills, a consortium of education and business organizations, states that the 21<sup>st</sup> century content must include “global awareness, financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy, civic literacy, and health and wellness awareness” (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills, 2009).

However, the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners who are also learning English can be complicated. Black (2008) asserts that “developing such proficiencies can pose an extra challenge for certain populations of students such as ELLs, if they are relegated to classroom contexts where the primary focus is mastery of traditional forms of print-based literacy.” Access to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning experiences is also limited by access to the Internet. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, access to broadband is significantly lower in poorer households, among Hispanics, and in homes where English learners live, and access has declined in the last two years among this population due to cost (2008). This means

that for English language learners (ELLs), the curriculum they use in school must focus on building the types of critical literacy needed for global communication. *National Geographic Reach* is designed to address this need in these important ways:

- building students' capacity for learning with technology
- supporting teachers' efforts in utilizing technology
- accentuating the content knowledge needed by 21<sup>st</sup> century learners

## Student Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Literacy and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is shifting from an emphasis on the tools (e.g., computers, handheld devices, podcasts, networks) to processes. We know that the tools teachers and students use will continue to change at breathtaking speed. In fact, it is likely that by the time you read this paper, there will be new tools that did not exist when it was written. Today's educators understand the need to focus on the processes used by learners when utilizing technologies. All learners must know how to:

- search for information
- listen to and view information
- produce information
- store information
- share information
- present information (Fisher & Frey, in press)

*National Geographic Reach* is designed to develop these process skills with ELLs. Students using *Reach* search for information using both print-based and digital texts. They use print and technology to view and listen to information in a variety of formats, including videos, Digital Library images, eVisuals, interactive animations, digital and print versions of the Student Books, the Comprehension Coach, and other resources. Throughout the lessons in *National Geographic Reach*, students produce and store information through

writing, graphic organizers, journals, tables, and charts. Writing genres include those needed for digital communication, such as emails and blogs. In each unit, students have many opportunities to share and present information with both small and large groups, in both formal and informal situations.

## Social Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Noted literacy researcher Paul Gee (2007) states that learning is socially constructed between people and requires them to probe, hypothesize, reprobe, and rethink. This process occurs in both face-to-face and digital environments. Evolving technology has made digital spaces increasingly interactive; users now expect to be able to dialogue, confer, and debate on any topic of interest. Whether in a classroom or a digital environment, students need the skills to ask questions, form opinions, ask more questions, and draw conclusions. Therefore, a curriculum designed to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century learners must include ample opportunities for students to converse with their peers, ask questions, disagree, and formulate their own opinions.

The lessons in *National Geographic Reach* continually promote this kind of active learning and engagement. Students are involved daily in verbal and written discourse about ideas and information that impact their local communities and the world at large. *Reach* focuses on developing the academic language skills students need to discuss and exchange ideas, express opinions, and understand and present important concepts, in oral, written and digital formats.

## Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Both on- and offline experiences are necessary for students to become thoroughly literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *National Geographic Reach* emphasizes the skills necessary for students to communicate and collaborate in both face-to-face and digital environments. Lessons include a variety of features that support ELLs in developing the academic language and academic vocabulary needed in effective verbal and written communication. These features include Academic Language Frames, Multi-Level Strategies, multiple exposures to important content area and academic vocabulary, and a scaffolded writing strand that models for students how to develop their ideas and express them in writing.

As Leu and colleagues (2009) note, “[o]nline reading and writing are so closely connected it is not possible to separate them; we read online as authors and write online as readers”. The ability to do this requires that learners be immersed in the rich oral and written dialogue with others that *National Geographic Reach* embodies.

## Reading and Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Leu et al. (2009) state that the “self-directed text construction” of online reading experiences represents a shift from traditional print-based literacy. Students in an online environment move freely between texts to form understandings. Today’s students need experiences with moving among a group of texts in order to develop the ability to synthesize information.

Each unit in *National Geographic Reach* is organized around a Big Question. Students explore this question as they move through a set of informational and narrative texts to construct understanding. The Big Questions are designed to defy easy answers, and learners are prompted to use both their background knowledge and what they have learned from their readings to draw conclusions and formulate answers.

Print and online resources are available to explore these questions. The robust print materials build print-based literacy. Multimedia resources support the new skills and formats Leu referenced. These include

- Build Background Videos and Interactive animations
- Multimedia resources in the National Geographic Digital Library
- Audio resources in multiple formats including MP3s
- Online games for learning
- Interactive eEditions
- Hypertext supports and guides in the Comprehension Coach

This organization encourages students to engage in the kinds of nonlinear multi-text explorations needed when reading and researching online.

## Conclusion

It is imperative that we prepare students for their future as members of a global community where information is shared, produced, and understood across space and people. The challenge is great, especially because the past decades have taught us that we are not able to predict the tools students will be using as adults. Rather, our best approach is to ensure that students know how to communicate and collaborate with one another in both face-to-face and digital environments. They must be provided with daily opportunities to read, write, speak, listen, and view using many kinds of visual and written texts. Students must become increasingly comfortable searching for information, storing it, sharing it, producing it, and presenting it to a variety of audiences. Learners who are able to do these things are well prepared for a new century.



## Nancy Frey, Ph. D., San Diego State University

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MP3 Listen to Nancy Frey share more information on writing.

# Connect Oral and Written Expression *by Nancy Frey*

The ability to read and write to convey information, provoke thought, and inspire others has long been considered a hallmark of an educated person (Manguel, 1996). More importantly, reading and writing are tools for empowerment, providing a voice and a forum for those who would otherwise be silent (Freire, 2000). For English language learners (ELLs), the ability to be heard, both verbally and in writing, is especially vital. Children who are learning to write while learning another language are challenged to acquire both the skills and the academic vocabulary and language necessary for effective writing. Recent research emphasizes that writing is a social act, not just a strictly cognitive one, and that the social act of writing is fueled by the conversations that occur among writers (Au, 1997; Dyson, 1989).

*National Geographic Reach* capitalizes on this interaction of oral language development and writing development. Students regularly engage in research-based instructional routines that invite them to compose orally in the company of their peers (Lapp, Flood, & Tinajero, 1994). In addition, teachers deliver writing lessons designed to scaffold student learning using a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Students using *Reach* write daily to build writing fluency and skills. The intensification of learning that comes from daily writing is key to consistent growth in students' writing skills.

## 1 Talk is Essential to Writing

*Using a scaffolded approach to writing instruction, children learn not only what and how to write, but why we write.*

Writing researcher James Britton stated, "writing floats on a sea of talk" (Britton, 1983). Indeed, the art of written composition invariably arises from the conversations we have with others. These acts of oral composition are an essential, yet often overlooked, element of writing. In their study of the writing practices of elementary ELLs, Bicais and Correira (2008) noted that "[c]hildren used peer talk to share their experiences, abilities, skills, and knowledge in interactions that contributed to their learning" and further observed that some students who were quiet during whole class instruction became engaged when discussing their writing with peers.

The challenge in any classroom is to establish an environment where spoken language is fostered in ways that contribute to learning. This is accomplished first psychologically, in a classroom

that honors the homes and cultures of the children (Turner, 2007). Toward this end, the literature featured in *National Geographic Reach* highlights the experiences of people from all over the world. In addition to creating a sense of psychological safety, these readings provide students with a bridge to write about their own experiences as well as those of others. In addition, *Reach* provides a framework that encourages students to speak, listen, read, and write in the company of others. While some of this is accomplished in a large group format, much student talk and its associated writing occurs with partners and in small groups. These frequent small group interactions promote language development and provide young writers with the opportunity to compose orally before doing so on paper (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008).

### Language Frames

#### Tell Your Ideas

I think \_\_\_\_\_ would be interesting.

A story about \_\_\_\_\_ would be \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ would make a great \_\_\_\_\_ for my story.

#### Respond to Ideas

I like that idea because \_\_\_\_\_.

The main character should be someone who \_\_\_\_\_.

A better \_\_\_\_\_ might be \_\_\_\_\_.

Language frames support peer conferences.

## 2 Scaffolded Instruction Builds Writing Skills

Scaffolded instruction is a principle of teaching dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vygotsky's (1938/1978) observations of the interactions of children who were learning together gave him insight into the possibilities of what could occur when a competent other (teacher or peer) was present to offer support. Over time, Vygotsky's insights about a learner's zone of proximal development were reinterpreted as the teacher practice of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding in turn has been further explained in reading as a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). More recently, this model has been expanded for reading and writing instruction to include a collaborative learning phase where students engage in productive group work in the company of peers (Fisher & Frey, 2007, 2008). Students benefit from time to write together through guided instruction as well as from skill-building exercises such as writing specific types of sentences, power writing, and close examination and replication of writing models (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

Writing instruction in *National Geographic Reach* is scaffolded through writing routines that are used consistently throughout the lesson cycle. These routines include:

- **Modeled Writing** In Modeled Writing the teacher uses a think aloud approach to model and explain the decision making process used by a writer (Davey, 1983). Students are able to observe what the teacher writes as she explains how she decides what to include and how to express it. For many students, witnessing and participating in the modeling process is essential for understanding the act of writing.

Say	Write
The girl and her father planted the sprouting potatoes in soil.	I think the girl learned that you can plant sprouting potatoes in soil.
The potato plants produced many new potatoes.	She also learned that potato plants produce many new potatoes.

- ▲ **In Modeled Writing, the teacher first thinks aloud, showing students how she decides what to write. She then models how to turn her thinking into written text.**

- **Interactive Writing** In Interactive Writing the teacher and students work together to discuss what they will write, and then students take turns adding to the written product on the board or chart paper. This discussion may proceed one word at a time, with frequent rereading of what has already been written, so that students have extended opportunities to think about and take part in the construction of a piece of writing.
- **Independent Writing** Students using *National Geographic Reach* also have many opportunities to write independently. They write in response to literature or to class discussions of

Big Questions, and in many other contexts. However, they are not asked to write independently without support. The lessons in *National Geographic Reach* consistently provide teacher models, language frames, sentence starters, or other supports so students can write successfully on their own.

- **Power Writing** Writing fluency is critical to the development of young writers. Students including ELLs may find it difficult to begin and continue a writing task. As with reading instruction, where it is understood that a steady daily diet of texts nourishes young readers and contributes to fluency, so it is with writing. *Reach* uses an approach called Power Writing (Fearn & Farnan, 2001; Fisher & Frey, 2007) to build the writing stamina of young writers. These brief, timed writing events encourage children to put their ideas down on paper in order to build writing fluency. Over time, as they track the amount they write, students can see their own developing fluency and writing skill. Other approaches, such as specific sentences, invite students to use newly acquired vocabulary to create grammatically and semantically correct sentences (Fisher & Frey, 2007). Importantly, these original sentences are further extended into longer pieces so that students move quickly from word, to sentence, to paragraph.

**Daily Writing**

**4 Writing Fluency** Use the **Power Writing** routine. (See page PD00.)  
Write the word root and prompt: *What does a root do? Think about this word and write about it.*

**Power Writing Routine**

1. What do you know about the word or picture?
2. Take one minute to write as much as you can, as well as you can.  
E words   I sentences   A paragraphs
3. Check your spelling and grammar. Circle mistakes.
4. Count your words.

NGReach.com eVisual 3.4

- ◀ **The Power Writing Routine encourages students to put their ideas down on paper to build writing fluency.**

- **Writing on Demand** *National Geographic Reach* lessons also include opportunities for students to write on demand. These activities resemble the kinds of writing students frequently encounter on tests. *National Geographic Reach* lessons provide models of how to analyze and interpret writing prompts and how to write effectively in response.
- **Developing Vocabulary for Writing** Schleppegrell and Go (2007) examined the writing of fourth and fifth grade English learners who had generated lists of possible academic language and vocabulary prior to writing and found that the young writers utilized these lists to strengthen the structure and content of their writing. Vocabulary instruction in *National Geographic Reach* includes multiple opportunities for students to explore, list, and write about new academic and content vocabulary, and they are consistently encouraged to use these new words in discussion and in their writing.

- **Writing Projects** In addition to daily writing activities, *National Geographic Reach* includes more extended writing projects, in which students the writing process to create and publish a more developed piece of written work. Students study a model, plan, draft, revise, and edit their work, and then publish it for their peers. The writing projects include many opportunities for students to learn from each as they collaborate, share, and review each others' work. Writing projects include a wide variety of writing forms, including narratives, articles, persuasive essays, descriptive writing, and others.
- **Unit Wrap-Up Projects** Engaging, creative projects connect many modes of communication—oral, visual, kinesthetic—and connect learning back to the central idea via the Big Question.

## Conclusion

While writing is often viewed as an independent activity, the research on the importance of collaboration before and after writing is compelling. Writing is ultimately about audience, so conversation

and response are integral to the process. As noted earlier, writers typically begin to compose orally before they put pencil to paper. Therefore, it is essential for young writers to convey their own ideas, listen to the ideas of others, and dialogue about both. Children also need opportunities to discuss what they have written with fellow writers in order to obtain peer responses. Students meet the authors of many of the readings in *National Geographic Reach* and learn how these professionals approach their craft. These author conversations are intended to model the kind of thinking that writers of all ages engage in. And finally, the act of writing is far too important to leave to chance. We know that merely “causing” writing through writing prompts is not enough. Young writers must be taught about the structures and conventions of the language, as well as the craft. Purposeful attention to building the fluency, content knowledge, and art of writing are woven together into a compelling program. Using a scaffolded approach to writing instruction, children learn not only what and how to write, but most importantly, why we write. In discovering the art of writing, they also discover themselves.

Writing Project

### Write Like a Scientist

**Write an Article**

Write an article that explains what you think is so amazing about plants. Add your article to a class science magazine to share with others in your school.

**Study a Model**

An article includes facts and details about a topic. Read this article that Mariah wrote about plants.

**Plants Are Everywhere**

by Mariah Ruiz

Plants are amazing because they can grow in so many different places. We know that plants grow in soil, but they pop up in other places, too. Did you know that seeds can sprout in tiny cracks on sidewalks? Some daisies, for example, grow big enough to break the pavement!

Other plants, like seaweed, live completely underwater. There are even plants, like mistletoe, that grow on other plants!

So, the next time you're outside, take a look around. You might see a plant or two growing in the most unusual place!

The **topic sentence** tells the main idea.

Each **fact or detail** supports the main idea. The writing is focused.

The **concluding sentence** connects all the ideas. It makes the writing complete.

Prewrite

**1. Choose a Topic** What topic will you write about in your article? Talk with a partner to choose the best one.

Language Frames

<p><b>Tell Your Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plants can _____. That might be a good topic.</li> <li>• I know a lot about _____, so I'll write about that.</li> <li>• My favorite plant is _____. I would like to tell more about it.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Respond to Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think/do not think that is a good topic because _____.</li> <li>• _____ sounds interesting. Tell me more.</li> <li>• I like that plant, too. I would like to read about _____.</li> </ul>
---	---

**2. Gather Information** Find all the facts and details you'll need for your article. Do they all tell about the same topic?

**3. Get Organized** Use a main idea and details diagram to help you organize what you'll say.

Main Idea and Details Diagram

Main Idea:  
Plants grow everywhere.

Supporting Detail:  
in cracks on sidewalks

Supporting Detail:  
underwater

The main idea goes here.

Add details that support the main idea.

Draft

Use your main idea and details diagram to write your draft.

- Turn your main idea into a topic sentence.
- Turn your details into sentences that tell more about the main idea.



**Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Ph.D., University of Texas**

Sylvia Linan-Thompson is an associate director of the National Research and Development Center on English Language. She has developed and examined reading interventions for struggling readers who are monolingual English speakers, English language learners and bilingual students acquiring Spanish literacy. Linan-Thompson has authored articles, and books on literacy instruction and teacher professional development topics.

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MP3 Listen to Sylvia Linan-Thompson share more information on fluency.

## Fluency is More than Reading Quickly!

by Sylvia Linan-Thompson

Fluent reading is important because it represents effortless reading. If a task is easy and enjoyable we are more likely to engage in it. Conversely, if a task is difficult we are less likely to voluntarily engage in it. The implication for English language learners (ELLs) extends beyond fluency since we learn most of our new vocabulary from wide reading.

Thanks to the increased attention to reading instruction most of us are able to define reading fluency as involving three skills: reading accurately, at a good rate, and with prosody. To best promote students' achievement, it is important to understand why each of these components is critical for fluent reading as well as comprehension.

**Accuracy** Students who can read accurately have developed decoding skills, can read a substantial number of high frequency words automatically, and have strategies for reading unknown words when they encounter them in text (Turner & Chapman, 1995). Accurate reading is also important to comprehension. Although it may not affect comprehension if we read *home* for *house*, it will if we read *horse* for *house*. Therefore, it is important to ensure that students develop adequate decoding skills. Exposure to and practice reading high frequency and decodable words both in isolation and in text will help students develop automaticity in reading words. Students also need to learn to monitor their understanding of what they read. This monitoring will help them self-correct if a word they read incorrectly affects their comprehension of what they are reading.

---

*“If students pause appropriately, use correct phrasing, or change their intonation and expression in response to the text, we can usually assume that they understand what they are reading.”*

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**Rate** Students who have developed automaticity in reading words will be able to read at an appropriate rate. To help you understand why automaticity at the word level is important in reading, remember what it was like to learn to ride a bike. When we are first learning to ride most of our attention is on maintaining our balance and keeping the bicycle

moving forward. We are not able to admire the scenery or to hold a conversation. As our ability to maintain our balance becomes automatic, we can begin to enjoy the scenery and can hold conversations with other riders. If we are daring, we may even ride with “no hands”. LaBerge and Samuels (1974) explained that because we are only able to attend to one thing at a time, we alternate our attention between activities when we have to attend to two or more activities. However, if one activity is so well learned that it is automatic, we can give another activity our undivided attention. If we apply this analogy to reading fluency it becomes clear that to maximize comprehension, word reading has to be automatic.

A bike-riding analogy can help us understand the challenge of vocabulary for ELLs. We know from cognitive studies that people can retain seven items for twelve seconds in short-term memory. After twelve seconds we have to do something with the information or we lose the memory. Readers must be able to hold information in working memory while constructing meaning from text (Francis, Rivera, et al., 2006). When learning to read in a second language, students

frequently encounter words they can decode but may not know the meaning of. Their attention becomes diverted and working memory taxed as they try to make sense of these words. By the time they figure out the meaning of the words, they may have lost the thread of the text, with a resulting loss of both fluency and comprehension.

**Prosody** Equally important to automaticity, reading with prosody, or the rhythm of natural language, can serve as an indicator that students are processing the text as they read. Reading with prosody includes several elements:

- **Phrasing:** Phrasing is how you use your voice to group words together. When students speak with correct phrasing, they have a smooth rhythm and meter and don't read too fast or too slow. Sentences are smooth, not choppy. As they learn about phrasing, students use punctuation to guide them in when to stop, pause, or emphasize words or phrases.
- **Intonation:** Good readers change their voice as they read. As students learn to read with good intonation, they use rise in fall of the pitch or tone of voice as they read. They change the sound of their voice to match the text, stressing words or phrases as appropriate.
- **Expression:** Expression is how you use your voice to show feeling. As students learn to read with expression, they focus on matching the sound and volume of their voice to the text.

If students pause appropriately, use correct phrasing, or change their intonation and expression in response to the text, we can usually assume that they understand what they are reading. Their response to the text is a reflection of their processing of the text as they read. If they are unable to comprehend the text, or if they are still developing decoding skills, their reading of the text may resemble reading a list of unrelated words—reading in a monotone. If there is some comprehension of the text, their reading may be uneven—halting and monotone at some points, and fluid and with expressive at others.

## 1 Fluent reading involves more than speed

In the last few years we have seen an increased emphasis on the assessment of oral reading fluency (ORF). Evidence clearly demonstrates that oral reading fluency is related to reading comprehension. As a result, much of the fluency instruction in classrooms has focused on increasing students' reading rate so that they can meet the benchmark for the grade level and time of year.

However, if teachers base their instructional decisions solely on students' ORF scores, they may over-estimate students' ability to comprehend what they read. Recent research tells us that for linguistically diverse students—faced with the challenge of reading in a language in which they're not typically fully proficient—text-reading fluency is *not* a reliable indicator of reading comprehension. For example, across four studies conducted with linguistically diverse learners and/or low-performing learners, from the primary grades to grade 6, text-reading fluency scores were in the average range, yet the mean score for reading comprehension was well below average. This may be the case not just for ELLs, but also for many of their peers who are from low-income backgrounds with underdeveloped language and world knowledge.

Goals such as ORF benchmarks are useful tools for educators, but teachers must keep in mind that there is variation among students and that the same reading rate may lead to different results. For example, Kung (2009) found that:

- A third grade ELL with an ORF score of 130 words correct per minute (wcpm) has a 61 percent chance of passing the Minnesota state test.
- A third grade monolingual English speaker with the same ORF score has an 80 percent chance of passing the state test.
- ELLs must read 150 wcpm to have an 80 percent chance of passing the third grade test.
- An ELL with high English proficiency and a score of 130 wcpm has a 68 percent chance of passing the test while one with low English proficiency has a 29 percent chance of passing.

The answer in response to the data presented here is not to work on getting students to read faster but also to build and monitor their language skills and develop their background knowledge so that they can understand what they read when they are reading at an appropriate rate. Strong accuracy and rate are important measures and must be combined with other key measures of reading to ensure the ultimate goal of building a strong understanding of text and enjoyment of reading.

## 2 Language factors can influence fluency

Research with ELLs indicates that many ELLs are able to develop good word-level decoding skills. However, they may continue to lag behind their peers on measures of reading fluency and comprehension. Research shows that language skills often play a significant role in these students' reading fluency. Students unfamiliar with English syntax are less likely to be able to anticipate what will come next in a sentence and therefore, approach each word as an independent word rather than as part of a sentence with meaning. Even when decoding is automatic, these language based factors may impact fluency:

- Limited English vocabulary;
- Divergent background knowledge;
- Limited knowledge of English syntax and grammar and language transfer challenges;
- Phonics transfer issues; and
- Lack of familiarity with English morphology (word parts and the way words work).

These challenges are often balanced by benefit of oral fluency in students' home language. As we work to help students succeed, instruction must leverage the strengths ELLs bring to the classroom to gain knowledge of vocabulary, background, linguistic, phonetic, and morphological knowledge of English.

## 3 Instruction is designed to build fluency and comprehension

From the information above, we can see that it is not enough to make sure that ELLs have adequate decoding skills and practice in oral reading rates. To become fully fluent readers and enhance comprehension in English, ELLs need to develop rich vocabulary and knowledge of the world. They need to become increasingly familiar with English syntax, grammar, and morphology. And they need to develop deep knowledge of the meanings of words.

*National Geographic Reach* is designed to address all of these needs that impact ELLs' achieving full reading fluency and comprehension. As we have seen from the earlier articles in this section, *Reach* focuses on building students' academic and content vocabulary, increasing their background knowledge, teaching them the structure of English, and building strong comprehension strategies. Vocabulary lessons in *National Geographic Reach* provide extensive exposure to key words. When students have developed deep familiarity with words, they will be able to read and comprehend them in text. Content, language, grammar, vocabulary, and decoding skills are aligned around interesting academic topics that motivate students and support them in achieving high levels of comprehension.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Fluency/Intonation**

**Quicksand: When Earth Turns to Liquid**

Use this passage to practice reading with proper expression.

**What is Quicksand?**

The word quicksand makes some people shiver with fear. 9

This is probably because of the way many movies show 19

quicksand. In films, quicksand is often a mysterious substance 28

that sucks people and animals to their deaths! 36

Actual quicksand is very different from movie quicksand. 44

It rarely harms people or animals. Real quicksand is not 54

mysterious. It is a simple substance that forms naturally. 63

**Fluency/Intonation**

Read or read with feeling.  Read with appropriate feeling for each context.

Read with some feeling, but does not match context.  Read with appropriate feeling for all context.

**Accuracy and Rate Formula**

Use the formula to measure a reader's accuracy and rate while reading aloud.

word attempted  
in one minute

number of errors

word correct per minute  
(wcpm)

For use with TE p. T327c **5.16** UNIT 5 | Mysteries of Matter

◀ Fluency lessons develop students' reading accuracy, rate, intonation, and expression.

- Repeated reading activities give students practice in reading texts multiple times until they are able to read them fluently and with good prosody.
- Multiple texts of varying genres and lengths on similar topics, which provides the opportunity to see and read words used in similar contexts across different texts.
- A rich array of Leveled Books, which offer additional opportunities to develop fluency as students read on topics of their choice.

These instructional resources provide a rich array of tools to support accuracy, rate, and prosody.

Finally, the components of *National Geographic Reach* include the online **Comprehension Coach**—an interactive, personalized computer application. This resource supports fluency development by allowing students to

- hear modeled, fluent readings
- record repeated readings and keep track of wcpm scores
- access coaching for pronunciation and point-of-use vocabulary and comprehension supports.

The **Comprehension Coach** can highlight text as it is read, identify mis-readings and provide feedback and tools to coach students. The speech recognition provides automatic assessment of accuracy and rate, saving instructional time and allowing teachers to focus on building comprehension skills. Students can use the **Comprehension Coach** to track their developing comprehension and fluency via an online resource. They can practice listening and reading anytime, anywhere. This creates a non-threatening environment that promotes more frequent practice and builds confidence.

## Conclusion

For ELLs, the development of reading fluency involves more than automatic decoding and reading rate. Many ELLs need to develop more extensive vocabulary, wider background knowledge, and greater familiarity with English grammar, syntax, and word meanings in order to read with full comprehension and fluency. *National Geographic Reach* addresses these foundation needs and also provides extensive practice in oral and repeated reading to help ELLs achieve the highest level of understanding and fluency.

In addition to this rich foundation of vocabulary and language, *National Geographic Reach* also provides specific practice to help students develop fluency. Resources include:

- Professional modeled readings and teacher read-alouds.
- Fluency models focusing on specific prosody skills.
- Frequent opportunities for oral reading, which is beneficial because it forces students to attend to each word (Francis, Rivera, et al. 2006).



### Lada Kratky, M.A.

Lada Kratky is a bilingual educator and featured national speaker. She has authored several Spanish reading programs including *Alfarrimas*; the phonics programs, *Phonics and Friends*; and ESL series *Avenues*.

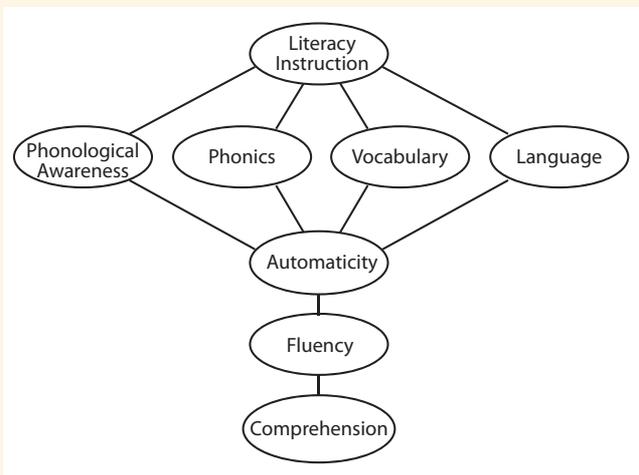
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(((MP3))) Listen to Lada Kratky share more information on beginning reading.

# Reach into Beginning Reading *by Lada Kratky*

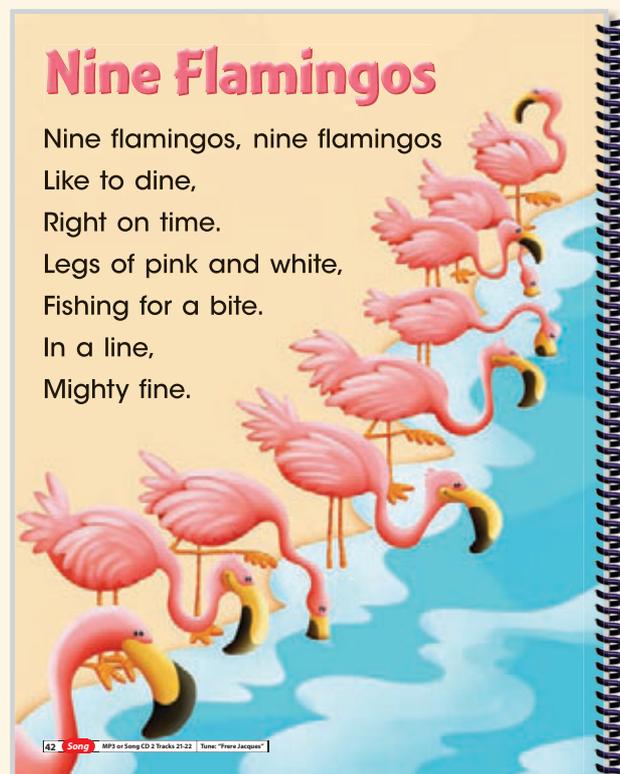
A classroom filled with beginning readers is typically made up of students from a wide range of backgrounds and with varying strengths. The teacher’s task is to discover those strengths and build on them. It is generally said that one third of the students in such a classroom will learn how to read relatively easily; another third will have to work harder; and for the last third, reading will be one of the most difficult skills they will ever have to master. English language learners (ELLs) may face even greater challenges, as they will have to master both language and literacy skills at the same time, since reading is not just decoding, but working through text to arrive at its message.

The report of the National Reading Panel in 2000 identified five key components of reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. As teachers of ELLs, we must add another component – that of language. ELLs who are learning to read in English must also learn how English works – its grammar and syntax, language functions, and the meanings of many new words. An effective reading program for ELLs will focus on all these skills. As students develop their phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and language, they will also develop increasing reading fluency. And as fluency develops, it will in turn strengthen comprehension—the ultimate goal of reading.



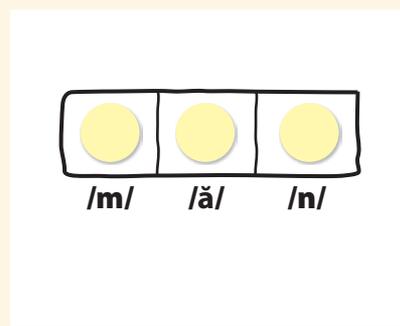
*National Geographic Reach* provides explicit and systematic instruction in all these areas to assure success for ELLs who are learning to read.

1. **Phonological awareness** Phonological awareness is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate sounds in words. It is an essential skill for emergent readers; children must be able to distinguish sounds in words before they can link the sounds to the letters that represent them. Explicit instruction in phonological awareness significantly improves students’ reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonological awareness is generally included in classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 2, but it is appropriate and necessary in any classroom, with students of any age, where beginning reading is taught.



As in all areas of learning, students bring to the classroom different strengths which will affect the sequence in which phonological awareness skills are taught. For those children with little awareness of the sounds they articulate while speaking, Yopp (2000) recommends starting with activities that focus on rhyme. Playful poems will naturally engage young learners, and encourage them to focus on repeating sounds in words.

*National Geographic Reach* begins phonological awareness instruction with identifying rhyming words. As instruction continues, children become aware of word parts by clapping or tapping syllables. After syllables, lessons shift to teaching students to hear individual sounds, focusing first on those that are easiest to hear—the vowels and continuous consonants (*f, h, l, m, n, r, s, w, y, z*). *National Geographic Reach* makes extensive use of Elkonin boxes, or sound boxes – a row of rectangles (first developed by the Russian psychologist Elkonin) that visually represent the sounds children listen for. These boxes help children distinguish separate sounds and identify which sounds come first, last, or in the middle of a word.



◀ Sound boxes help beginning readers visualize the distinct sounds they hear in words, in this case the word *m-a-n*.

After some practice with sound boxes, children can start to identify the sounds without visual support. Phonological awareness then continues developing sound awareness skills like changing initial, medial, and final sounds in words to make new words. As children start to associate letters with sounds, phonological awareness activities can begin to also include letters.

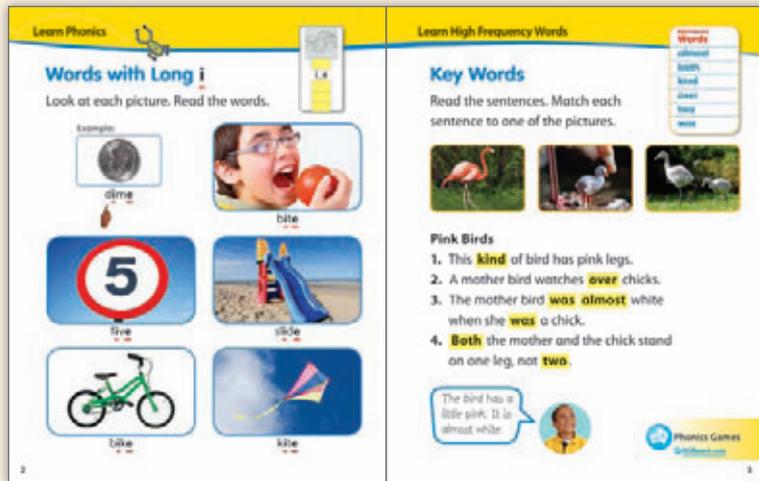
2. **Phonics** Explicit and systematic phonics instruction is an essential part of a successful classroom reading program (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonics instruction teaches students to map sounds to letters and then to blend the sounds to decode words. Some students will begin to sound out words as soon as they have learned letter-sound correspondences. Other students, however, need explicit and repeated coaching to blend sounds and recognize the words they are decoding. *Reach into Phonics*, the phonics component of *National Geographic Reach*, uses consistent routines to teach letter-sound correspondences and word blending. Children are first taught to blend using the sound-by-sound blending routine; additional routines (vowel-first blending; whole word blending) are included for children who need additional support.

*Reach into Phonics* includes a wide variety of engaging activities that support children in practicing their decoding skills. Word building activities reinforce sound/spellings. Word sorting helps familiarize ELLs with the many ways some English sounds (such as long o) can be spelled. After learning and practicing phonics skills in individual words and sentences, children read the **Read on Your Own Books**. These decodable texts focus on content area topics linked to the instructional units of *National Geographic Reach*. They provide practice with the phonics skills that have been taught, but unlike many decodable texts, they feature meaningful and engaging text that children want to read, illustrated with outstanding photographs.



3. **High Frequency Words** Typical English text includes a large number of High Frequency Words—common words that appear very frequently and are often phonetically irregular, such as *a, one, are,* and *of*. Readers must learn to recognize High Frequency Words on sight. To teach instant recognition of these words, *National Geographic Reach* uses a research-based High Frequency Word Routine in which children look at the word, hear it pronounced, hear it used in a sentence, then say the word, spell it, and say it again. Children have multiple opportunities to read the words after they are taught, including in context in the **Read On Your Own Books**. High frequency words are reviewed as part of language function lessons, reinforcing the meaning and pronunciation of these essential words.

4. **Vocabulary and Language** Lessons in phonological awareness, phonics, and high frequency words support beginning readers in developing effective decoding skills, which are essential to becoming a fluent reader. However, while these skills are necessary, they are not sufficient. As we have seen above, many children, and ELLs especially, need robust vocabulary and language instruction to achieve their potential as readers.



- ▲ Pages include visual and contextual supports.

Earlier papers in this section have detailed the research basis of vocabulary and language instruction in *National Geographic Reach*. These same strengths are built in to all levels of the program. Visual and contextual visual supports are also a key part of beginning reading instruction to ensure that all shell support and develop English language proficiency growth.

5. **Comprehension** Building meaning and understanding is central to all parts of the program. As they learn to read children are challenged to think and talk about ideas and concepts.

Children don't spend time reading simplistic decodable texts. **Read on Your Own Book** topics are grade level science and social studies concepts, topics which relate to real life, texts that are worth reading and interest the students. Beginning readers read for meaning and are then asked to think about their reading. They give opinions, hold discussions, ask questions and answer them.

Content-based texts provide opportunities to develop comprehension and early literacy skills. ▶

Beginning readers benefit from the same robust and systematic vocabulary and language instruction as in later grades *National Geographic Reach*. Key vocabulary words are carefully selected for high academic and content utility. They are initially taught using a consistent research-based routine for introducing words. The words are then revisited each day of the lesson plan, so that children have multiple opportunities to explore the words and deepen their knowledge of them, to learn additional meanings, and to use the words many times in discussion, writing, games, graphic organizers, and skits or dramas. This repeated and varied exposure to words is what makes it possible for children to internalize and "own" the words and to use them effectively in academic discourse.

The same is true of language instruction in *National Geographic Reach*. Throughout each day, children are continually involved in learning and using language. In **Language of the Day** activities, language function lessons, grammar lessons, discussions with the teacher and with peers, **Theme Theater**, and daily writing, children are constantly encouraged and motivated to practice using new academic language and to make it part of their lives.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, many ELLs are able to decode text rapidly, but often their limited vocabulary and language skills interfere with their ability to comprehend. As ELLs develop more extensive vocabulary, comprehension, and language skills, they are increasingly able to combine decoding skills, language structures, and vocabulary knowledge to work their way through meaningful texts. Repeated exposure to content vocabulary helps develop reading fluency, which in turn leads to increased comprehension. With the repeated, focused practice encouraged in *National Geographic Reach*, students become fluent readers and develop strong comprehension skills, leading to enjoyment of learning and high levels of academic success.

**4 Build Comprehension** Discuss the following questions:

- 1 Details** Why does the clam live in the water? (The clam is a water animal. It can't live on land.)
- 2 Make Inferences** Why does the black Lab run in the water? (Possible answers: The black Lab is hot. The water is fun.)
- 3 Draw Conclusions** What has the boy been doing? (He has been playing soccer.)
- 4 Make Connections** When do you like to drink water? (Responses might include during sports, in hot weather, or at bedtime.)

**WORD KEY**  
Words with *cl, bl, gl*  
High Frequency Words  
Story Word \*