



Reading interventions for
English language learners:
The way forward

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Reading Instruction

- Learning to read is not easy. It requires:
 - oral language,
 - development of foundational skills,
 - development and use of strategies,
 - integrations of various components,
and
 - opportunities of read and write

In effective classrooms,

- Teachers are knowledgeable, have materials that support teaching and learning, and have adequate time to teach reading.
- Students have materials at their grade level, are engaged in purposeful activities, and have multiple opportunities to practice what they are learning.

Teachers of ELLs

- Knowledge of the linguistic system
- Knowledge of reading components
- Knowledge of effective practices for teaching each of the components of reading
- Knowledge of methods for evaluating student learning

“The limits of my language
mean the limits of my world.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

How does language impact learning?

Nearly 60% of the ELLs who enter U. S. schools in kindergarten fail to develop sufficient proficiency in English to be reclassified (Hakuta et al., 2000; Hill 2004; Parrish, Perez, Merickel, & Linqanti, 2006) before they complete high school or drop out.

How does language impact learning?

- 130 cwpm at 3rd grade
 - Non-ELL 90%
 - Non-ELL and low SES 75%
 - High English proficiency 68%
 - Low English proficiency 29%
- 130 cwpm at 5th grade
 - Non-ELL 82%
 - Non-ELL and low SES 62%
 - High English proficiency 58%
 - Low English proficiency 19%

How does language impact learning?

- Additionally, ELLs are more likely to be referred for compensatory or special education during transition (Gersten, 1996).

Difficulties lie at the intersection of

- Language
- Literacy
- Background knowledge

More specifically,

- Language knowledge proficiency differentiate good and poor readers.
- Lack of academic language in English and possibly lack of background knowledge may account for poor reading outcomes.
- Adequate reading comprehension depends on a person already knowing 90-95% of the words in a text (Nagy & Scott, 2000).

\$64,000 Question

- Do language and learning problems stem from
 - lack of language proficiency,
 - a language disorder, or
 - lack of educational opportunity?

This **continues** to be an issue.

Educational Response

Reading Programs

- Most programs focus on building reading skills, they assume a certain level of English language skills.
- Thus, there is not enough emphasis on building language proficiency, in particular academic language.
- Further, students need access to expository text to build disciplinary knowledge.

Effective Reading Interventions

- Carefully constructed scope and sequence designed to prevent possible confusions
- Explicit instruction in synthetic phonics, with emphasis on fluency
- Integrates decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies
- Begin with 100% decodable text

English

- Focus on phonemic awareness—segmenting and blending—until children are sensitive to phonemes within blends
- Focus on reading monosyllabic cvc words before moving into multisyllabic and other syllable types
- Sounding out is the primary decoding strategy
- Children are taught to be “flexible” decoders since English has many irregular words
- Children practice processing connected text fluently through the reading of decodable stories
- Basic comprehension strategies are taught and practiced daily
- ESL inserts ensure that children have the necessary concepts and vocabulary to participate in each lesson

Spanish

- Significantly less phonemic awareness instruction
- The cv syllable type is given major emphasis
- Reading multisyllabic words begins almost immediately
- The phoneme is focused on syllables within words, but children don't sound out an entire multisyllabic word phoneme by phoneme
- Processing words syllable by syllable is the primary decoding strategy
- Children read much more complex word structures much sooner than they do in English
- Spanish text becomes richer much more quickly, allowing for the inclusion of more advanced comprehension strategies

Recommendation 2

- Provide focused, intensive small-group interventions for ELLs.
- Interventions should focus on several of the five core elements – phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension **and/or writing**.
- Explicit instruction should be the primary means of instructional delivery.
- Scientific evidence base: **Strong**.

Recommendation specifics

- 30 minutes per day in small homogeneous groups of 3-6 students.
 - There may be advantages in having ELLs and non-ELLs in the same groups.
 - Use flexible grouping strategies. (e.g. moving students based on progress in the small groups and data).

Recommendation 3

- Provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark on universal screening.
- Typically these groups meet between three to five times a week for 20-40 minutes.
- Level of Evidence: **Strong**

However,

- The educational response to students who struggle is not addressing all possible causes of difficulties especially for ELLs

Possible Causes of Difficulties

- When children can't decode, we focus on basic word level skills:
 - letter sounds,
 - alphabetic principle
 - blending, and
 - automatic word recognition
- When children can't decode, they may
 - **lack language**

Possible Causes of Difficulties

- When children can decode but are not fluent, we focus on
 - Fluency building
- When children can decode but are not fluent, they may
 - Lack automaticity
 - Have not had enough opportunity to practice
 - **Lack language**

Possible Causes of Difficulties

- When children can decode and are fluent but do not comprehend, we focus on
 - Comprehension strategies
- When children can decode and are fluent but do not comprehend, they may
 - Lack comprehension strategies
 - Lack language
 - Lack content and background knowledge

In general, ELLs

- have fewer opportunities to engage in academic discussions,
- to be exposed to rich content instruction, and
- to have good language models among their peers.

Further,

to develop high levels of cognitive skills as well as the language associated with it,

- students need language models that are comprehensible, and
- opportunities to use language in the context of specific instructional activities.

They need academic literacy.

This does not mean

- they do not need foundational skills.
- But, only a small percentage of ELLs have difficulty acquiring the foundational skills needed for accurate and automatic word reading.
- The majority of ELLs that struggle with reading, have difficulty with fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Additional recommendations

School Level

- 3. Before making placement decisions, including Tier 2 placement, evaluate data considering, language of instruction, length of time students has received instruction in the target language, and students' opportunity to learn.

(Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009)

Classroom Level

- 1. Group students homogenously for instruction using scores on literacy assessments not language. ELLs benefit from language models.
- 2. Provide instruction that teaches all reading components systematically, that is, they provide a foundation and build skills and knowledge gradually.

(Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009)

Language Considerations

- 1. Include opportunities to use language in the context of instruction. For example, ask students to discuss an answer with a partner prior to sharing with the class.
- 2. Read books to students to expose them to higher levels of language.

(Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009)

Language Considerations

- 3. Teach vocabulary at different levels—for example, show pictures of common objects, demonstrate actions. Teach academic vocabulary deeply. For example, give students the definition, examples and non-examples, and opportunities to use the words.

(Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009)

Flexible grouping

- Increases opportunities for engagement in structured, academic talk.
- Provides independent reading opportunities that is purposeful.
- Provides peer-assisted learning opportunities.

Summary

- Use what we know is effective:
 - Teach explicitly
 - Focus on targeted skills
 - Teach all day purposefully
 - Teach across content areas

Summary

- Language is necessary for higher order thinking and for accessing content area material.
- If students are to become proficient language users, they must have opportunities to not only hear robust language, they must also use it.

Questions yet to be answered

- Does oral language become a more robust predictor of reading success for ELLs in later grades?
- What other possibilities exist for identifying ELLs at risk of reading difficulty in early elementary and subsequent grades?
- Do we need to measure language or is it enough to know of its impact?

Final Thought

“Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes