

# Effective Practices for English Learners



## BRIEF 3

### Core and Supplemental English as a Second Language Literacy Instruction for English Learners

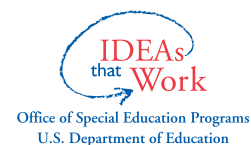


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## Contributors to This Brief



### Project REME

Lucinda Soltero-Gonzalez  
John Hoover



### Project ESTRE<sup>2</sup>LLA

Alba Ortiz  
Hermelinda Cavazos  
Sylvia Linan-Thompson



### Project ELITE

Leticia Romero Grimaldo  
Shannon Giroir  
Greg Roberts  
Sharon Vaughn

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## Multitiered Instructional Frameworks

*Response to intervention (RTI) describes models that use data to inform decisions regarding delivery of instruction. Many RTI models closely align with three-tier models of instructional delivery, where Tier 1 refers to the core curriculum that all students receive, Tier 2 refers to supplemental support that some students receive, and Tier 3 offers an even more intensive level of instruction for students who do not demonstrate adequate improvement, given Tier 2 support. In practice, RTI and three tiers have become synonymous for many. Accordingly, this report uses “multitiered models” to describe the broad group of instructional approaches that depend on students’ response to instruction as a primary indicator for planning ongoing levels of instructional intensity. This distinction acknowledges that the number of tiers in the model is not the critical feature. The important features in multitiered models are the use of appropriate, research-based reading instruction and interventions; assessment, screening, and progress monitoring of students in need of support; and culturally responsive teaching strategies and principles. These features can be implemented in any number of tiers, depending on the resources and needs that characterize a school, district, or state.*

# Core and Supplemental English as a Second Language Literacy Instruction for English Learners

This document is the third in a series of briefs for school leaders, educators, and policymakers charged with implementing or supporting multitiered instruction that accommodates English learners (ELs). In this brief, three model demonstration projects (Cohort 5 of the Model Demonstration Coordination Center—see sidebar) share their framework for the successful design and delivery of core and supplemental literacy instruction for kindergarten to grade 3 ELs who receive literacy instruction in English only. This brief provides guidance to educators in preparing and delivering English instruction for ELs and in framing supports for classroom teachers that ensure culturally and linguistically responsive core and supplemental English literacy instruction.

## Audience

This brief is designed to support practitioners, instructional coaches, and policymakers in the design and delivery of core and supplemental literacy instruction for kindergarten to grade 3 ELs who receive literacy instruction in English only.

**Practitioners:** The key concepts and features of literacy instruction and the evidence-based recommendations for improving literacy practices in this brief are valuable to classroom teachers and interventionists in their preparation and delivery of English literacy instruction for ELs.

**Instructional coaches:** The guiding principles in the brief can help instructional coaches frame supports for classroom teachers, ensuring culturally and linguistically responsive core and supplemental English literacy instruction.

**Policymakers:** This brief also informs district and school policymakers of evidence-based literacy instructional concepts and practices necessary to structure and deliver an effective core and supplemental English literacy program for ELs.

## Introduction

Multitiered instructional frameworks typically include three tiers. In Tier 1, core instruction is delivered within the general education classroom. For students who are taught through appropriate methods but do not make adequate progress in Tier 1, supplemental interventions, commonly referred to as Tier 2, are warranted. Tier 2 interventions need to closely align with core instruction to meet the specific language and literacy needs of ELs while ensuring their access to the core curriculum. Tier 3 is a more intensive

### Cohort 5 Model Demonstration Projects

The three research projects that authored this report were funded in September 2011 by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. These projects make up what is known as Cohort 5 of the Model Demonstration Coordination Center (MDCC). Each of the research projects works with school districts that serve large populations of ELs.

Cohort 5 works to improve the outcomes of ELs in the primary grades by implementing tiered approaches that incorporate the following instructional features:

- Appropriate, research-based reading instruction and interventions for ELs
- Culturally responsive teaching strategies and principles
- Progress monitoring and data-based decision-making
- Professional development and strategic coaching for teachers

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level of targeted support that addresses students' specific learning and language needs; some school districts designate Tier 3 interventions for students placed in special education. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions should enhance, not replace, effective core instruction.

## **Essential Features of Core and Supplemental Literacy Instruction Within Multitiered Frameworks for ELs in English-Medium Programs**

Two essential features of the multitiered instructional frameworks featured in this series of briefs provide the foundation of core and supplemental English literacy instruction for ELs. The first feature is creating a strength-based, responsive learning environment that validates students' cultural and linguistic diversity as assets and resources for learning.<sup>1</sup> The second is teachers implementing evidence-based practices designed for, and validated with, ELs to promote language and literacy development.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Literacy Instruction**

An essential feature of multitiered instructional frameworks for ELs participating in English-medium programs is English literacy instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive. This feature stems from the understanding that all learning is shaped by the specific sociocultural context in which it occurs (e.g., home, community, school). ELs are more likely to struggle or disengage when there is a disconnect between teaching practices and ELs' communication at home. For ELs, this disconnect can lead to unrecognized potential, as well as linguistic and cultural characteristics interpreted as symptoms of learning disabilities.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is critical that teachers of ELs understand the central role of culture in learning and provide instruction that is responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity.

Responsive teachers recognize that children's diverse backgrounds and personal experiences are valuable resources to support learning. Responsive teachers affirm cultural and linguistic diversity as assets to build upon, rather than deficits to remediate, by framing teaching around social justice principles. These educators have high expectations of all students, providing them with supports needed to reach their potential. Responsive teachers provide relevant instruction and help children make connections between what they learn in school and their lives. They establish strong home-school connections and validate the literacy practices and funds of knowledge in the children's homes. Involvement with families and their communities allows teachers to develop a greater understanding and appreciation for the social, linguistic, and cultural contexts that form the foundation for students' learning experiences at school. Responsive teachers use high-quality, multicultural children's literature, creating spaces for children to grapple with real-life problems by appreciating multiple perspectives.

### **Effective English Literacy Instruction for ELs**

In this series of briefs, the following principles, supported by theoretical and research evidence, provide the basis for core and supplemental English literacy instruction: (1) integration of the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) into daily literacy instruction; (2) direct and interactive approaches to literacy teaching; (3) English oral language development; and (4) high-quality instruction in specific components of English literacy. In the following sections, we discuss each of these principles.

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1 Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto & Bode, 2012

2 Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hoover & Klingner, 2011

## Integration of the Four Language Domains Into Daily English Literacy Instruction

Effective English literacy teaching for ELs builds skills in each of the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These domains complement one another and should be integrated into daily instruction. Given the requirements of the Common Core Standards, which have been adopted by many states across the country, this integrated view of literacy—particularly, a greater attention to writing—is recommended as best practice.<sup>3</sup>

### Direct and Interactive Approaches to Literacy Teaching

A research review of effective instruction for ELs favors a combination of explicit and interactive approaches over process-based or explicit instruction approaches alone.<sup>4</sup> Explicit instruction emphasizes the targeted teaching of specific reading and writing skills. Explicit attention to the development of reading and writing skills and metalinguistic awareness has positive effects on text-level skills (e.g., reading comprehension, writing, transfer of reading comprehension strategies). In interactive or cooperative learning, teachers promote dialogue and collaboration among all learners. Interactive learning environments are culturally responsive for groups who come from socially cooperative systems that differ from mainstream practices in U.S. schools. By incorporating literacy methods based on explicit and interactive teaching, educators are better equipped to help students apply both word-level and text-level skills, increasing the likelihood of success.

### English Oral Language Development

Sound literacy instruction for ELs must emphasize oral language development in English.<sup>5</sup> Oral language skills contribute to ELs' acquisition of both word- and text-level literacy skills in English. For example, vocabulary knowledge, awareness of cognates, listening comprehension, and dialogue influence the acquisition of literacy skills. These oral language skills should be enhanced through explicit instruction and structured practice. Conversely, neglecting oral language development for academic purposes may have negative effects on literacy learning.

### High-Quality Instruction in Specific Components of English Literacy

Although there is reason to believe that common teaching practices that are beneficial for monolingual English speakers may also benefit ELs, these practices must be adjusted to address the strengths and needs of the EL population.<sup>6</sup> Teachers should be aware of the differences in teaching English to native speakers versus students who are acquiring English as a second language. These differences have important implications for literacy instruction for ELs. Suggestions for how to adjust instruction in the five key components of English reading identified by the National Reading Panel (reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading fluency, phonological awareness, and phonics)<sup>7</sup> to meet the language and literacy learning needs of ELs are outlined below. We have added a writing component to this list.

- **Reading comprehension.** Reading comprehension is a complex skill that requires the learner to coordinate multiple processes (e.g., decoding, fluency, self-monitoring, inferencing, integrating prior knowledge). Reading comprehension in English may be even more complicated for ELs who are not yet English proficient. Among the factors that influence ELs' comprehension are differences in background knowledge and cultural schema, level of English language proficiency, and degree of fa-

3 Escamilla et al., 2014

4 Genesee & Riches, 2006

5 Shanahan & Beck, 2006

6 Goldenberg, 2008, 2013

7 National Reading Panel, 2000

miliarity with text structures. Mancilla-Martinez and Lesaux’s longitudinal study of reading comprehension among ELs in English-medium programs found that although the ELs’ word-level skills were adequate, their reading comprehension was considerably below grade level.<sup>8</sup> English proficiency accounted for the unique variance in reading comprehension outcomes in English. These researchers suggest a greater attention to vocabulary and oral language development in English to improve ELs’ reading comprehension.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Provide comprehension strategy instruction to develop metacognitive skills (e.g., making predictions, summarizing the main idea) while attending to vocabulary development.
  - Implement literature circles with collaborative or instructional conversations.
  - Incorporate questions that require higher-level thinking skills (e.g., criticizing, synthesizing, or applying concepts to real-life situations) while making language structures explicit for students.
  - Encourage students to demonstrate knowledge by using their home language (e.g., discussing in Spanish a book read in English) or other sign systems (e.g., drawings, dramatizations, diagrams).
- **Vocabulary.** Knowledge of vocabulary is essential for comprehension.<sup>9</sup> For many ELs, English vocabulary knowledge lags behind word-level skills, negatively affecting reading comprehension. Also, although many ELs possess large vocabularies in English, these vocabularies often lack depth. That is, ELs may know only the most common meaning of words but not associated meanings. The types of

### Principles in Practice: Project ESTRE<sup>2</sup>LLA, Texas

Comprehension is the goal of reading, and to comprehend text, students need to understand 90% to 95% of the words they read. Thus, one of the goals of the project is to ensure that instruction at Tier 1 and Tier 2 builds students’ academic language to improve their ability to comprehend text. After reviewing student assessment data and classroom observation data, job-embedded professional development sessions on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary instruction, morphology, academic language, fluency, comprehension, and guided reading strategies were provided to teachers. Instructional routines to teach each of the major components while explicitly incorporating features of effective instruction and practice activities were also provided. Professional development was followed by classroom observations, coaching, and feedback to support implementation. Continuing challenges included providing the necessary level of coaching and follow-up support for full implementation and scheduling classroom observations when teachers were preparing students for standardized assessments.

Teachers were taught how to be thoughtful in their planning and selection of instructional materials to address the diversity of their students. They activated and/or built students’ knowledge by explicitly explaining new topics, building a linguistic base, and linking new to prior knowledge. By asking questions and having students share what they knew about the topic, teachers could assess students’ prior knowledge; in turn, students could connect their knowledge and experiences with lesson content. Professional development focused on how to differentiate instruction to meet the unique needs of ELs by scaffolding both language and literacy development. In addition, teachers reflected on their practice and continuously asked themselves whether their instruction led to expected outcomes. Specifically, teachers asked themselves whether ELs improved academically and developed the academic language necessary for school success.

8 Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011

9 Carlo et al., 2004

English words that often confuse ELs include prepositions, pronouns, cohesion markers, metaphors, and idioms. Knowledge of cognates can be beneficial for ELs, especially for speakers of languages that share common etymologies from Latin and Greek, such as English and Spanish.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Provide explicit vocabulary instruction across grade levels.
  - Infuse “read-alouds” with an interactive approach to ensure both vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.
  - Use students’ native language strategically during English language lessons to support vocabulary development in English (e.g., provide a term or example in a student’s native language).
  - Teach students how to use their knowledge of cognates (words with common meanings and spellings in two or more languages) to aid in comprehension.
  - Teach morphological analysis (e.g., identify word roots, affixes, and suffixes) to help students derive the meaning of unfamiliar words in English).
- **Reading fluency.** Fluency is closely related to reading comprehension. However, the strong relationship between fluency and comprehension found in fluent monolingual English speakers is not apparent in ELs.<sup>10</sup> ELs whose oral language skills in English are less developed, particularly vocabulary knowledge, may read fluently yet struggle with comprehension. Fluency instruction for ELs should consider both surface (e.g., phonemic awareness, decoding, orthographic cues, prosodic elements of the English language) and deep (vocabulary knowledge and comprehension) constructs of fluency.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Help students recognize similarities and differences between sounds and word parts across languages (e.g., vowels that look the same in Spanish and English but that represent different sounds).
  - Provide explicit instruction on punctuation marks in English. If students are literate in their native language, point out how punctuation marks are similar to or different from their home language (e.g., to indicate dialogue in a text, quotation marks are used in English and a dash is used in Spanish).
  - Provide multiple opportunities to hear fluent and expressive reading (e.g., interactive read-alouds, modeled and shared reading).
  - Incorporate vocabulary instruction directly related to texts.
  - Encourage students to reread texts (e.g., repeated reading, partner reading, choral reading, reader’s theater).
- **Phonological awareness.** Phonological awareness is an important predictor for later reading achievement in English. Numerous research studies support the idea that ELs can develop phonological awareness in a second language by tapping into the phonological patterns in their first language.<sup>11</sup> However, research indicates that the transfer of phonological awareness skills from one language to another may depend on the student’s language proficiency level in the first language.<sup>12</sup> Phonological awareness may be a difficult concept for ELs learning to read in English. One challenge is in detecting and pronouncing sounds in English that do not exist in the learner’s first language. Inability to iden-

10 Crosson & Lesaux, 2010

11 For example: August, Calderón, & Carlo, 2002; Durgunoglu & Verhoeven, 2013

12 Atwill, Blanchard, Christie, Gorin, & García, 2010

tify unfamiliar sounds in English may make isolating and manipulating sounds within a word difficult for ELs. It is important that teachers recognize these challenges and distinguish them from early signs of a language or learning disability.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Start phonological awareness instruction with sounds that are similar in English and the student’s first language (e.g., similar sounds between Spanish and English include consonants represented by the letters *b, c, d, f, l, m, n, p, q, s,* and *t*).
  - Determine phonemes not present in the students’ first language and help ELs learn these sounds (e.g., English consonant sounds such as *sh* or *th* do not exist in Spanish).
  - Become familiar with common cross-language transfers that do not conform to the phonological patterns of the target language (e.g., substitution of *es* for *s*, as in *school* and *eschool*).
  - Use words that students already know.
  - Embed phonological awareness tasks within reading and writing activities in meaningful ways (e.g., use words from a text read during an interactive read-aloud or shared reading).
- **Phonics.** Learning sound-letter correspondence in English may be challenging for ELs when their English language proficiency is not sufficiently developed to make sense of the words in a text.<sup>13</sup> ELs who have learned to read and write in their first language may learn to read in English more easily, especially when the orthographic systems of the two languages are similar. Yet when they encounter sound-symbol correspondences in English that do not exist in their first language, students may be confused (e.g., vowels in Spanish and English look the same but represent different sounds). Other challenges ELs often face when acquiring phonics skills in English include recognizing homonyms (e.g., *mail* and *male*) and words with silent letters (e.g., *face*, in the case of Spanish speakers).

### Principles in Practice: Project REME, Colorado

Project REME was implemented through a university-school district partnership serving as the foundation for collaborative decision-making in core and supplemental literacy instruction. Participant classroom teachers created action items specific to literacy instructional components selected from a research-based best practices guide that summarizes more than 45 literacy practices for ELs. Project REME teachers were receptive to trying new strategies to meet the literacy needs of ELs and to openly reflect on their successes and challenges. Action items included goals to increase home-school connections at both the classroom and school levels. The REME team also observed teachers creating opportunities for shared learning and oral language development by incorporating sentence frames, preteaching key vocabulary, attempting different interactive structures (e.g., think-pair-share, reader’s theater), and helping students make connections through brainstorming and verbal connections. All three pilot schools implemented the dictado strategy, a cross-language method to develop writing skills and metalanguage,<sup>14</sup> thereby experiencing benefits in (a) the targeting of multiple literacy skills, (b) ease of integration into the curriculum, and (c) ability to monitor student progress.

Along with the successes, there were several continuing challenges in the implementation of literacy instruction. Teachers needed additional support in recognizing and capitalizing on opportunities to increase connections to students’ home lives or language. Also, increased support from the REME team was needed for classroom teachers to incorporate shared reading and writing activities before sending students to work independently, differentiate among language proficiency levels to make instructional adjustments, and incorporate skills-based instruction (e.g., phonemic awareness and phonics) in a meaningful and contextualized way.

13 Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011

14 Escamilla et al., 2014



### Principles in Practice: Project ELITE, Texas

In a collaborative effort between researchers and campus administrators to address the large number of students in need of supplemental reading intervention (Tier 2 and Tier 3), Project ELITE worked to identify areas in which to strengthen core instruction in kindergarten to grade 3. Because the practice of reading text aloud to students with guided comprehension activities was already part of many teachers' instructional routine, project staff members focused on refining the practice to optimize learning and language acquisition for ELs, particularly in vocabulary and comprehension.

The Project ELITE read-aloud routine extended the work of Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, and Vaughn, who designed a strategy for storybook reading that systematically built the vocabulary and comprehension of young ELs.<sup>15</sup> The key features of the read-aloud routine included (1) introducing high-utility words within the context of a narrative or informational text; (2) reading the text aloud; and then (3) structuring meaningful interactive, text-based activities that allow for deeper processing of new vocabulary and concepts from the text.

The Project ELITE read-aloud routine incorporated principles of culturally responsive pedagogy by providing guidance to teachers in choosing culturally responsive reading texts. In addition, the routine took an "assets-based" approach to instruction, as teachers facilitated vocabulary development through structured opportunities to connect new language to students' background and experiences. Teachers also implemented a number of instructional supports for ELs by anchoring the practice in principles of language acquisition. These supports included contextualizing vocabulary instruction by connecting words to their authentic use in texts and recognizing the role of interaction (i.e., opportunities for learners to use and practice new language through meaningful negotiations) in the second-language process.

Through fidelity observations, focus group interviews with teachers, and field notes collected during the coaching cycle, successes in the following areas were noted:

- Instructional supports for ELs: Having a regular, structured routine helped ELs to better engage with the instructional activities. Students knew what teachers expected of them during the different interactive pieces of the routine and could predict what instructional activity would happen next.
- Language awareness: Teachers reported a noticeable increase in students' word awareness. Students showed "ownership" of new vocabulary and were able to recognize and use words across different contexts.
- Critical reflection on current practice: Through the implementation process, teachers became more critical of the type and quality of the speaking opportunities they provided to students, particularly in how the interactions facilitated language development for ELs. Also, once teachers recognized the opportunities that culturally responsive texts provided for making meaningful connections between new language and students' lived experiences, they became more critical about the reading texts they selected.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Pair phonics instruction with oral language and vocabulary instruction.
- Integrate phonics instruction within meaningful reading activities.
- **Writing.** Writing is a complex process that integrates a variety of skills, such as fluency, vocabulary and syntactic knowledge, and voice. Writing and reading have a reciprocal relationship.<sup>16</sup> Thus, making the connection between reading and writing supports the development of both skills and creates more opportunities for ELs to write for functional purposes. Students' oral language abilities

15 Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004

16 Clay, 1993

should be the basis for planning writing and reading activities. At the same time, writing instruction should help expand ELs' language competence.

The following are recommendations for implementation:

- Connect writing and reading during daily instruction.
- Model how to connect oral and written language through explicit and interactive approaches (e.g., modeled and shared writing, language experience approach, dialogue journals).
- Encourage written literature responses (e.g., literature logs, modified patterned language books).
- Promote collaborative writing (e.g., stories for wordless picture books, poetry books, scripts for reader's theater).
- Explicitly teach writing conventions (e.g., through the dictado strategy, in which the teacher dictates words and sentences to students and then constructs a corrected text with students, emphasizing spelling, grammar, and writing conventions).

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## For Further Guidance

This brief is part of the *Effective Practices for English Learners* series. The goal of this series is to assist administrators, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in implementing or refining a campus-wide model for improving the academic achievement of ELs in the primary grades. Other briefs in this series address key issues in implementing multitiered systems of support for ELs and can be consulted for further guidance.

**Effective Practices for English Learners**

**BRIEF 1**

Meeting the Needs of English Learners  
Through a Multitiered Instructional Framework

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**Effective Practices for English Learners**

**BRIEF 2**

Assessment and Data-Based Decision-Making

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**BRIEF 4**

Core and Supplemental Biliteracy Instruction  
for English Learners

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**Effective Practices for English Learners**

**BRIEF 5**

Professional Development to Support  
a Multitiered Instructional Framework

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