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Teaching English Language Learners
by Kathyrn H. Au, Gilbert G. Garcia, Claude N. Goldenberg, and MaryEllen Vogt

The Challenge Faced by Teachers

Today’s classrooms include an increasing number of English Language Learners (ELL), or students who speak a home language other than English and who have limited knowledge of English. Nearly two-thirds of English language learners, over 2.1 million, are in the age range from preschool through grade 6, and this ELL population is extremely diverse. Even among Spanish speakers, who make up more than three-fourths of the English language learners in the United States, there is great diversity in terms of birthplace, country of family origin, rural/urban background, socio-economic status, parent and grandparent education, and reasons for immigration to the United States. When we consider that other ELL groups come from Asian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, and European countries, we can see how complex and diverse the school-age population is in many parts of the country.

Teachers face the challenge of bringing all students, including English language learners, to high levels of literacy. The task is made difficult by several factors. One is the sheer complexity of learning to write and read in a language one does not yet understand. In many situations teaching reading in the native language is not an option, so teachers of English language learners must confront the dual challenge of helping children learn to read and write English while learning to speak and understand it.

Research with English learners suggests that they need high-quality, direct instruction from the start. That includes authentic encounters with written texts that focus on meaning and communication. But they also need explicit teaching and guidance in those aspects of English oral and written language with which they might not be familiar—word identification skills, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, syntax, and English spelling patterns and the sounds represented by English spellings. Such instruction will prevent English language learners from falling farther and farther behind their mainstream peers.

Testing, Placement, and Teaching

School personnel often test English language learners for proficiency both in English and in their primary language before placing them in classes. Many schools use at least one of several different English proficiency tests that are commercially available (e.g., Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM), Language Assessment Scales (LAS), Idea Proficiency Test).

In addition to proficiency in English, teachers should pay particular attention to students’ literacy levels in their home language. English learners who can read and write in their first language present different instructional needs than English learners who have little or no literacy in their home language.
Here are some profiles of English language learners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ELL</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sole speaker of a foreign language at the school</td>
<td>Assessing primary language skills or teaching in the primary language is probably not an option.</td>
<td>Teachers will need to adapt their teaching style, using “sheltered” techniques to make lessons more accessible. (Echevarria &amp; Graves, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student who is literate and well-educated in home language but has been in the U.S. a relatively short time</td>
<td>This student is certain to have skills and understanding that will facilitate English language development and English literacy.</td>
<td>Maintaining and drawing upon the student’s native language literacy competencies is likely to promote the student’s academic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student who was born in the U.S. and hears English and another language at home</td>
<td>Some students in this group may need much encouragement to achieve their potential.</td>
<td>As with most students, these learners will respond positively to a caring teacher who shows interest in their cultural background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English-speaking beginning reader</td>
<td>Young child in an “English immersion” class where beginning reading skills are being taught.</td>
<td>Studies have suggested that non-English-speaking children can learn beginning reading skills as well as or almost as well as their native English-speaking peers. (Geva, Mack, Merbaum, Lam, &amp; Wade-Woolley, 1998; Siegel, 1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Students Acquire a Second Language**

Teachers often observe that it does not take long for English language learners to gain the everyday language needed to communicate with peers at recess or in the lunchroom. Most students gain this kind of proficiency in about two years. However, students may require five years or more to learn the *academic language* necessary to keep up with the demands of school (Cummins, 1979; Collier, 1989). Academic language includes the terms associated with literature and language arts (*character, vowel, punctuation, exclamation, context clues, etc.*), as well as the vocabulary needed to learn the content-area subjects. Relatively little time and effort are required when students already know a concept through their primary language. In this case, their task is simply to attach new English words to that concept. But it is much more difficult for a student to learn a concept through the medium of English rather than their primary language.
The Role of Students’ Primary Language

Research suggests that English language learners who can already read and write in their first language will have a relatively easy time learning to read and write in a second language. In essence, students need to learn to read and write only once, because many concepts are readily transferred from one language to another (Snow, 1990). This includes literacy concepts, such as letter-sound correspondences and reading strategies, as well as concepts in the content areas.

But not all concepts transfer, particularly those related to the specifics of the language. For example, although many letters have similar sounds in Spanish and English, some do not, and students must “unlearn” the sound in the primary language when reading in English. Similarly, syntax differs in languages. In English, an adjective typically goes before the noun it modifies. This is not so in many other languages. Direct instruction is important in helping English learners understand important differences between speaking, writing, and reading in their home language as opposed to English.

Here are three ways teachers can support students’ primary languages:

- Ensure that environmental print reflects students’ first languages.
- Encourage bilingual students to publish books and share their stories in languages other than English.
- Have bilingual students read and write with aides, parents, or other students who speak their first language.

Second Language Acquisition: Instruction and Interaction

English language learners need instruction and interaction. Much language learning can and does take place through naturally occurring conversation; this is true of the classroom as well as of the home.

We acquire language when we receive what Krashen calls “comprehensible input,” or understandable messages, either oral or written. As long as we understand most of what we read or hear, we will continue to gain in language proficiency. The best opportunities for language development occur when most, but not all, of the language is familiar to us. Because most of the input is familiar, we can understand the content of the message. Being challenged by a few new features at a time (e.g., some new vocabulary or a new sentence structure) gives us the opportunity to grow as language users without feeling overwhelmed.

However, English language learners need to be explicitly taught the structure of English. At the same time, they need to know that they are in a safe environment in which their efforts to speak, read, and write will be positively received. Students will learn English more quickly if they are willing to take risks by engaging in conversation and by sharing their reading and writing. Allowing English language
learners to work with their classmates and to use English in non-threatening situations will do more to promote language learning than calling on students to respond in front of the whole class, having them read individually, or giving tests.

**Research-Based Guidelines for Instruction**

**Provide explicit instruction in the structure of English.**
(August and Hakuta, 1997; Goldenberg, 1994)
- Lessons should include the sounds of English, grammar, writing, and phonics and structural analysis. (See the Guide to Language Transfer Support in the back of this Handbook for a listing of English structures that may present problems for speakers of other languages.)

**Build students’ background knowledge for texts to be read.**
(Garcia & Pearson, 1995)
- Use photos, illustrations, examples, demonstrations, videos, and modeling to develop students’ background.
- Incorporate a variety of instructional techniques to develop background, such as brainstorming, KWL charts, quick writes, and discussion.
- Help students survey the text prior to reading. In the text, preview the photos, illustrations, graphs, charts, key vocabulary, and so on.
- Explicitly connect new learning to previously learned concepts and vocabulary (“Yesterday, we learned . . . ; today, we’ll learn about . . . ”).

**Build students’ English vocabulary.** (Garcia, 1991, 1996; Saville-Troika, 1984)
- Select key terms that are critical to understanding the lesson’s most important concepts. Introduce and teach key vocabulary words only.
- Introduce key vocabulary orally and in writing. Define the words, using examples, illustrations, modeling, demonstrations, context clues, and so forth. Link the words directly to the key content concepts as you teach.
- Use Vocabulary Self-Selection (VSS). After reading a text, students may select vocabulary words essential to understanding key concepts. Students discuss their words and enter them in a word study notebook.
- Use a variety of vocabulary building approaches, such as Word Walls (Cunningham, 1995), personal dictionaries, cloze sentences, word sorts (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2000), and graphic organizers.
- Develop English learners’ academic language. This vocabulary includes words related to processes (predict, categorize), following directions (pass papers to your right), and routines (morning message, recess).

- Have students talk frequently with each other and with the teacher. Decrease the amount of “teacher talk.”
- Have students use English in conversation groups and discussion circles. Have them share ideas with buddies or small groups.
- Encourage elaborated responses about lesson concepts. Use phrases such as “Tell me more about that….”“What else?”
- Overcome the temptation to speak for English learners or to complete their sentences. Be patient; let the students formulate what they want to say. Have students report back after a cooperative activity to allow for language use.

If students are already literate in another language, encourage them to transfer existing strategies to English. (Jimenez, et. al, 1995, 1996; Nagy, et. al, 1993)

- Help students who have had schooling in their home country make connections; compare English terms with terms in their primary language.
- Incorporate cognates whenever possible, especially if students’ first language has a Latin base. For example, the English term *calculate* has a Spanish cognate: *calcular*.

Provide comprehensible input, which means that you will include speech appropriate for the student’s proficiency level as well as give clear explanations of academic tasks. (Krashen, 1985; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000)

- Try to adjust your speech for students’ proficiency rates (such as speaking at a reasonable rate; clearly enunciating). Speak naturally, but pause often so that English learners can process what you are saying.
- Provide clear explanations of academic tasks (explain what is meant by terms like *discuss, share with your partner, summarize*). Model how to do routine classroom procedures such as turning in homework or completed assignments, sharing ideas with a partner, and so on.
- Use a variety of techniques to make concepts clear: modeling, visuals, hands-on activities, real objects, gestures, body language, and so forth.
- Rather than repeat what you’ve said, paraphrase, using clear language and vocabulary.

The best opportunities for language development occur when most, but not all, of the language is familiar to us.
• Use the overhead, white board, or chart paper to illustrate (in words and in pictures) what you’re saying and explaining.
• As often as possible, encourage students to share concepts, ideas, and directions with each other; circulate to check for accuracy of information.
• For students in early stages of English acquisition, ask an aide or other student who speaks the same language to reinforce key concepts and to check for understanding.
• Avoid jargon and idiomatic speech as much as possible.

Regularly assess and monitor student progress.

• Honor students’ levels of English proficiency, encouraging responses that tell you how well they are learning the key concepts. For example, an emergent speaker may be able to point to pictures to show you he or she understands rather than tell you an answer in a complete sentence.
• Support students’ oral approximations, allowing them to experiment with English in a risk-free environment.
• Use authentic, multidimensional assessment measures such as observation, teacher-to-student and student-to-student conversations, written pieces, oral responses, and so on.

References
Encourage wide and free reading in English for language and literacy development. (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983)

- Have a wide variety of books, articles, stories, and poetry available for self-selected reading.
- Model how to select free reading materials according to interests and reading levels.
- Encourage students to share what they are reading on a regular basis.
- Use language experience (dictated stories) to build confidence and fluency in English.
- Read aloud to students every day from a variety of texts.

In many situations, teaching reading in the native language is not an option, so teachers of English language learners must confront the dual challenge of helping children learn to read and write English while learning to speak and understand it.
Overview

The lessons in this handbook provide teachers with materials and approaches designed to help English language learners develop English proficiency and fluency, while supporting instruction in Houghton Mifflin Reading. A more detailed walkthrough (pages 10–15) of these lessons follows this introduction.

Preteach/Reteach

Skills and literature taught in Houghton Mifflin Reading are previewed and reviewed in this handbook, giving students exposure to informal English and instruction in patterns of formal academic English. Comprehension of the program’s literature is supported by the preteaching of vocabulary and language patterns. Additional key skills are previewed and reviewed throughout the week. Specific lesson language is planned for the teacher to maximize language learning.

Language Development

A variety of original songs, poems, and chants function as openers for each week’s lessons. Songs and poems activate prior knowledge, create a common experiential base, and generate interest in the topic presented. The accompanying lessons help prepare students by concretely illustrating the topics through movement, visual aids, realia, role-play, drawing, and so on. Oral language development techniques include total physical response, songs and dialogues, shared storytelling, role-plays, language experience stories, use of realia, environmental print, visual aids, and simulations.

Skill Focus Lessons

Targeted language skills are directly taught and practiced in a series of preview and review lessons. Activities cover the range of proficiencies and desired outcomes from a focus on sounds and letters, through word-level skills to sentence level proficiency. Academic language is explicitly identified and used as a component of reading comprehension. Instruction includes previews and reviews of Structural Analysis, Vocabulary, Grammar, and Writing skills.

Literature Focus Lessons

These lessons allow students to orally develop literary response, analysis, and comprehension strategies through the use of picture-walks and guided literature previews and reviews. Students practice retelling stories, engage in shared and guided reading activities, and develop listening and speaking strategies.

If Needed . . . Lessons

Students at the Beginning/Preproduction level will benefit from rhythmic and rhyming language development activities designed for them. These lessons draw from the selection-opener songs and chants and provide opportunities for students at this level to engage in low-risk, high-interest activities. Simple texts provide repetition, while accompanying lessons allow students to perform gestures and movements that help them internalize vocabulary, language structures, and English language patterns.

Proficiency Levels

English language learners typically pass through a series of predictable stages as they acquire English and progress toward fluency in the language. This handbook supplies comprehensive guidance for teachers providing differentiated instruction to students at the following stages of English language proficiency:

Beginning/Preproduction Students at the Beginning/Preproduction stage may comprehend limited amounts of English instruction, such as simple repeated sentences, but will rely on visual and other clues for understanding. They can be expected to respond nonverbally, by pointing, gesturing, and by imitating sounds and actions. Students will follow shared readings and will rely on illustrations and graphic clues to attach meaning to printed material. Students may illustrate characters, objects, and actions to convey meaning.
Teachers should
- provide opportunities for active listening, incorporating props, visual aids, and real objects into presentations
- pair or group students with more proficient speakers of English
- conduct shared and guided readings that incorporate prior knowledge and involve the use of visual and graphic supports
- use and involve students in physical movement and expression
- involve students in literacy activities and provide students with exposure to written English
- have students label and manipulate real objects and photographs or illustrations

Early Production/Speech Emergent  Students at the Early Production/Speech Emergent stage are actively developing receptive vocabulary, but are ready to voluntarily produce from one- and two-word answers to short phrases or short sentences, and can recite and repeat poems, songs, and chants. They can also retell simple stories using pictures and objects, and can engage in dialogues, interviews, or role-plays. They comprehend simple passages and can follow text during group reading. They are able to use simple sentences and details in their writing, write from dictation, and write using a variety of genres.

Teachers should
- continue to provide opportunities for contextually supported active listening
- model processes expected of students while verbally guiding students through tasks
- use scaffolding techniques throughout lessons, assisting and supporting student comprehension
- expose students to patterned or predictable books
- provide opportunities for expression in speech and print for a variety of purposes and audiences

Intermediate/Advanced  Students at the Intermediate/Advanced stage continue to build receptive vocabulary, but are able to respond to prompts and questions in more extended form. They speak fluently in conversations and group discussions, and appropriately use English idioms. These students may engage in independent reading according to their level of oral fluency and prior experiences with print. They are able to write in greater detail, in a wide variety of genres, and for a wide variety of purposes, including creative and analytical writing.

Teachers should
- structure group discussion
- provide real texts such as trade books, magazines, newspapers, and reference materials for conceptual development
- provide opportunities for students to create oral and written narratives
- structure a variety of realistic writing experiences and include opportunities for journal writing, student-authored stories and newsletters, and language experience activities

Resources
Blackline Masters and additional resources for assessment and language transfer support appear at the back of this handbook. Assessment resources include ideas for ongoing assessment of students’ progress, a student profile matrix, and a Student Assessment Checklist to help monitor each student’s transition from level to level. Resources for language transfer include a guide to some common problem areas as well as charts showing where specific sounds and features of the English language are taught and reinforced.
To the Teacher

This sample lesson walkthrough will familiarize you with the five-day lesson plan for English language development that is provided for each major selection in this level of *Houghton Mifflin Reading*. Annotations in this walkthrough introduce the major parts of each lesson and explain some of the strategies and activities that are most helpful to English language learners.

Blackline Master

A Blackline Master accompanies the first Language Development lesson of the week. Each Master contains a poem or chant that introduces related vocabulary. A full-size copy of the master can be found in the Resources section of this book.

Additional Resources

The Get Set for Reading CD-ROM provides background building, vocabulary support, and story summaries for each selection. Students can also log on to [www.eduplace.com](http://www.eduplace.com) for more activities related to the Anthology selection and use the audio CD to improve their listening and comprehension skills.

Lesson Walkthrough

Running a Race

**Day 1**

**Vocabulary**

- start, finish, finish line, first place

**Materials**

- masking tape

**Act It Out**

Once students are familiar with the poem, use masking tape to mark two lines on the floor about twelve feet apart. Have students label the lines *Start* and *Finish*. Ask two volunteers to pantomime running a race as the class recites the poem. Invite other student pairs to do the same.

**Act It Out**

- Today we are going to talk about running in a race. People have races to see who will run the fastest. What do you know about being in a race?
- Have students describe or demonstrate what they know about racing or races. Elicit from students that most races have a start and a finish. Write the words *start* and *finish* on the board.
- Display the poem “Ready, Set, Go!” and read it aloud. Use appropriate motions, such as pantomiming a racer at the starting line. Then have students read the poem with you, including the motions.

**Multi-Level Response**

**Beginning/Preproduction**

- **Ask**: Where is the finish line? Show me how you get ready to run a race. Show me how you look when you win a race.

**Early Production/Speech Emergent**

- **Ask**: Who was in first place? Where is a good place to have a race? Would you race in a library or in a gym? Why?

**Intermediate/Advanced**

- **Ask**: Do you like to race? Why or why not? Describe a race you have seen or been in. What was exciting about the race?
Suggestions for grouping and classroom management, including planning and managing small-group instruction, can be found in the Classroom Management Handbook that accompanies Houghton Mifflin Reading.

SAMPLE LESSON WALKTHROUGH

**Literature Focus**

This section provides opportunities for students to preview and review the Anthology selection. The selection preview on Days 1 and 2 includes a picture walk with questions geared toward all proficiency levels. The selection review on Day 4 includes a summary of the selection and questions to assess students’ comprehension. See page 15 as well.

**Get Set to Read**

The Get Set to Read, found in the Anthology, develops background and vocabulary for the Anthology selection. It is especially appropriate for English language learners due to its focus on background building. Prompts help students activate prior knowledge.

**Anthology, Segment 1**

This is a picture walk through the selection, targeted at the day’s reading in the core program. It is designed to introduce the selection and develop concepts and vocabulary.

**Skill Focus**

This section provides preview and/or review of selected skills taught each week in the core instruction. The skill areas included at Grades 3–6 are Structural Analysis, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Writing.
Vocabulary and Materials
This is a brief list of vocabulary that students will use in the language development lesson.

Materials are sometimes suggested for the lessons, since real life objects are useful and helpful for English language learners. The Picture-Word Cards are found in the Resources section of this book.

Graphic Organizers
Graphic organizers provide visual reinforcement of language and concepts. They promote active student involvement. Various kinds of graphic organizers are included in the lessons, such as charts, word webs, and diagrams.

If Needed . . .
This section gives additional support targeted to English language learners at beginning levels. It focuses on repetition and enhancement of the language and vocabulary on the Language Development Blackline Master.

Multi-Level Response
The Multi-Level Response feature gives each student an opportunity to respond to the lesson according to his or her English proficiency level. This section includes oral exercises aimed at assessing the students' listening and speaking comprehension. Drawings or other responses produced here may be saved and reviewed as part of ongoing assessment.
**Anthology, Segment 2**

This is a continuation of the picture walk from Day 1. It introduces concepts and vocabulary from the second segment of the Anthology selection.

**Skill Objective and Academic Language**

The skill objective summarizes the language objectives and purpose of the lesson. The academic language used in the lesson is listed, since these terms are often unfamiliar to English language learners. Writing the objectives and academic language on the board will reinforce students' recognition and comprehension of these words.

**Multi-Level Practice**

This feature gives each student an opportunity to practice the skill according to his or her own English proficiency level. Both written and oral practice are provided throughout each theme. These practice opportunities involve students in a variety of individual, partner, and small-group situations. You may want to save students' written work to assess their progress.

**Language Transfer Support**

The Language Transfer Support notes help identify areas where attempts to transfer knowledge from one language to another may lead to errors in English or difficulties in comprehension. For a more comprehensive list of language transfer errors, see the charts in the Resources section of this book.
Quote from Anthology
Each Language Development lesson on Days 2–5 begins with a reference to the Anthology selection. Students return to the selection they are reading in class. The context from the story is used as the starting point of the lesson.

Learning Modalities
These icons point out the different learning modalities that occur during the lessons. The various modalities allow students of developing abilities to participate in different ways. The modalities include Speak, Listen, Write, Move, and Look.

Interactive Activity
Each Language Development lesson includes an interactive activity, such as games, role-play, pantomime, speaking, and writing. This allows students at all levels to work together and learn from each other in a variety of directed and active ways.
Lesson Walkthrough

Selection Summary
This summary provides a retelling of the Anthology selection in straightforward language. Vocabulary, sentence structure, and narrative structure have been simplified to make the summary accessible and readable for English language learners.

The summary can be used as a preview, a review, or for reading practice at any time during the week. The Blackline Master for each summary can be found in the Resources section of this book.

Strategies for Comprehensible Input
As students read the selection summary, use these strategies to clarify any phrases that they may not understand: Explain, Restate, Show, and Model. Explaining terms or unfamiliar idioms, restating a difficult phrase in more familiar words, showing an illustration or object, and modeling or demonstrating an action are all ways to assure that English language learners comprehend, absorb, and enjoy each story.

Questions
These questions can be used to assess students’ understanding of the selection. Some are based on the comprehension skill taught with the selection in the core program; others have students retell the story, locate answers in the text and illustrations, or offer a personal response to the selection.

Comprehension Questions for the Anthology Selection
1. Look at the picture on Anthology pages 48–49. What is Akiak doing here? Why is this an important part of the story? (showing the team which way to go; team can’t win unless Akiak helps them)
2. Where does the story take place? Why is the setting important to the story? (Alaska, in the snow; snow and cold show what the race is like; Akiak injured from the snow; team gets lost because of tracks in the snow)
3. Tell about an important or exciting journey you have taken.

Kinds of Sentences
Flashcard Quiz. Give each student an index card with statement, question, exclamations, or command written on one side. On the other side of the card, have each student write an example of the kind of sentence from the card he or she received. Gather all the cards and have one student quiz the others by showing a sentence and having the other students tell what kind of sentence it is. Call on a volunteer to read the sentence aloud. Repeat the activity, having a different student display the sentence cards.