

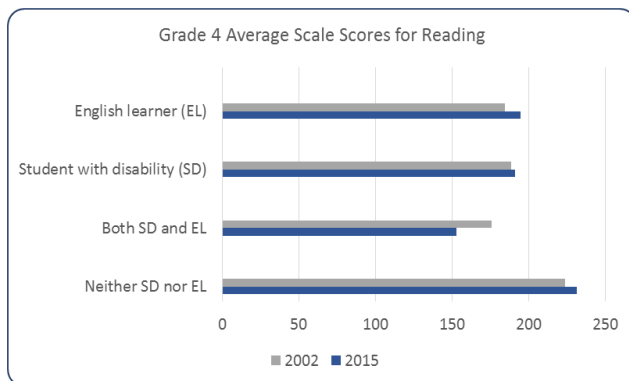


Reading Instruction for English Learners with Learning Disabilities

Do ELs struggle to develop literacy because of their limited proficiency in English or because of LD?

Children whose primary language is other than English often experience more challenges in developing literacy skills in the early elementary grades. Young learners with learning disabilities (LD) and English Learners (ELs) are both at-risk for having low reading achievements. Children with LD often experience reading difficulty related to phonological processing and/or decoding; and ELs experience difficulty due to lack of exposure to the language. For children that are both EL and LD this problem is intensified. Figure 1 shows that ELs with a disability have lower reading scale scores compared to other students (National Centers for Education Statistics, 2015). Unfortunately, many of the current instructional practices for ELs with LD are based on generalizations of research findings that investigated either ELs *without* disabilities, or non-ELs with LD.

The purpose of this Info Sheet is to present a brief review of several validated instructional practices for developing reading skills for ELs with LD.



Who are English learners?

Almost half of all culturally and linguistically diverse students have limited English language proficiency and are classified as ELs. An EL is one whose primary language is other than English, and whose English skills are so limited that they have difficulty learning in a general education setting in which instruction is provided in English. According to the US Department of Education (2015), the percentage of ELs in public schools in the United States has increased between 2002-2013 (8.7% and 9.2%, respectively), indicating a higher demand for guidelines on how to best address ELs academic needs.

The ability to accurately identify at-risk ELs is considered to be a major challenge and many ELs are inappropriately over identified as LD and placed in special education programs. This problem is partly due to

- Lack of appropriate assessment tools to distinguish between students' difficulty to acquire a second language or a language-based learning disability.
- Lack of professional personnel that are aware of the recent evidence-based instructional approaches designed specifically for ELs with LD.

SUGGESTIONS

- Use the first language to support second language learning.
- Incorporate supportive culturally responsive learning opportunities.
- Provide opportunities for the ELs to practice the language skills.

To provide effective, culturally responsive reading comprehension instruction for ELs with and without LD, educators need to create culturally responsive teaching and learning environments. Reading texts and material should allow ELs to make personal connections with familiar themes that affirms their identities. Furthermore, teachers need to understand the relationship between first and second language acquisition and the impact of LD on language acquisition. Literacy instruction for ELs with LD needs to promote a high level of student engagement, activation of higher order cognitive processes, and opportunities for students to practice English language skills in supportive, cooperative learning groups.

What are the essential reading skills?

Various studies show that ELs benefit from instructional materials that emphasize essential reading concepts such as:

- **Phonological awareness**, which is the ability to identify and manipulate linguistic sounds apart from their meanings. Phonological awareness is a prerequisite to reading and can be taught and used in a number of ways. This skill allows students to understand the alphabetic principle, the sound-symbol correspondence rules, and even recognize words that are only partially regular.
- **Fluency**, which is the ability to read text aloud rapidly, smoothly, effortlessly, and accurately. Fluency is closely tied to reading comprehension, as students need to be able to read fast enough through a text to create an overall picture in their minds.
- **Vocabulary**, which plays a significant role in reading and reading comprehension. A reader cannot understand a text without knowing the meanings of most of the words. Vocabulary can either be taught through explicit instruction or by using context clues.

Reading comprehension, which is the basic reason why we read. Reading comprehension is not only highly related to the abovementioned skills, but also requires readers to draw upon general thinking skills.

Classroom-Based Reading Activities

Reading and early literacy interventions that ELs with and without LD benefit from include but are not limited to:

1. **Repeated Reading** activities in which the classroom teacher provides short reading passages (about 50 and 300 words) that are based on student's individual reading level and asks students to orally read the selected passage 3-5 times until a predetermined reading rate is attained (e.g., 85 words per minute).
2. In **Partner Reading** activities students are paired and required to take turns reading a short passage a number of times to become more fluent. Each student reads the text three times and then provides feedback about their own experience and also their partner's reading fluency.

Assessment Tools

Assessment tools that may be used to identify students with LD in the elementary grade-levels may include:

- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Emergent Literacy Skills (DIBELS; Good & Kaminski, 2002)
- Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI; TEA, UTHSC, & UH, 2010)
- Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 2012)
- Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA; Beaver, 1997)
- Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening (PALS; Invernizzi, Sullivan, Meier, Swank, 2004)
- AIMSweb (Pearson, 2012).

3. **Rhyming activities** subtests which improves students' phonological awareness include:
 - a. Rhyme-recognition activities: *Does log rhyme with dog?*
 - b. Rhyme-completion questions: *Jack and Jill went up the _____?*
 - c. Naming similar rhyming words: *What other words rhyme with hat?*
4. **Syllabus awareness** activities include but are not limited to segmentation and deletion tasks in which students are required to:
 - a. Identify and count the number of syllables in words and pronounce each syllable separately: *garden has two syllables 'gar' and 'den'.*
 - b. Identify new words by deleting a part of a compound word: *if you delete basket from basketball you will have ball.*
5. **Phoneme awareness** activities consists of five sub-activities:
 - a. In initial sound recognition students select a picture starting with a specific sound or to pronounce the starting sound of a word.
 - b. In phoneme segmentation students are presented with flashcards of words and are asked to pronounce all the sounds in the words.
 - c. In phoneme deletion students need to identify the sound that was deleted in a word (e.g., fish: ish, when the /f/ sound is left out).
 - d. In the phoneme substitution students make new words by putting different sounds at the beginning of words.
 - e. In phoneme blending students identify pictures or body parts when they are pronounced one phoneme at a time (e.g., /h/, /a/, /n/, /d/).
6. **Daily explicit vocabulary instruction** should be emphasized in various parts of the curriculum, including reading, writing, math, science, history, and geography. Explicit instruction includes providing simple definitions such that students would be able to understand and use the words in meaningful ways.
7. **Context clues** tasks teaches students to use context to infer word meanings. Students need to be able to identify different types of context clues such as definition, synonym, antonym, and examples (Florida Department of Education, 1999; Khalaf et al., 2015; National Reading Panel, 2000).

Resources for Teachers

The following is a list of informal assessments for determining English language proficiency and acculturation status of ELs.

- **Acculturation Quick Screen. (2003).** Published by Cross Cultural Developmental Education Service, Ferndale, WA. Available at www.crosscultured.com
- **Checklist of Language Skills for Use with Limited English Proficient Students.** Available at: <http://www.davis.k12.ut.us/cms/lib09/UT01001306/Centricity/Domain/93/SPELL%20forms/Checklist%20of%20Language%20Skills%20BICS%20CALPS%20fillable.pdf>
- **Classroom Language Interaction Checklist. (2002).** Published by Cross Cultural Developmental Education Service, Ferndale, WA. Available at www.crosscultured.com
- **Resiliency Checklist. (2002).** Published by Cross Cultural Developmental Education Service, Ferndale, WA. Available at www.crosscultured.com
- **Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) (1985).** Developed by San Jose U.S.D., San Jose, CA. Available at <http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/LangAssessmtMdl>
- **EL Starter Kit for Educators: Tools for Monitoring Language Skills.** Available at <http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/guides/elstarterkit.pdf>
- **Dual Language Learners with Disabilities: Supporting Young Children in the Classroom.** Available at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/dll/>

Classroom-Based Reading Comprehension Activities

The following activities are validated approaches for developing reading comprehension skills for EL students with LD (Klingner and Bianco, 2006):

1. **Graphic organizers** facilitate the learning of key concepts and vocabulary for ELs with LD and increase students' reading abilities. Graphic organizers visually display how concepts are related and organized, which facilitates learning. Semantic mapping, a strategy involving diagramming related concepts from a reading passage, has been recommended for improving content area learning. Other examples of graphic organizers include semantic feature analysis and semantic/syntactic feature analysis.
2. **Modified reciprocal teaching** benefits ELs with LD because students have the opportunity to dialogue, express their ideas, and collaborate with each other which facilitates learning and comprehension. This activity includes activating background knowledge, summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting.
3. **Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)** is a type of reciprocal teaching that includes additional comprehension strategies and components of cooperative learning. CSR integrates four different comprehension strategies so that students working in collaborative groups are guided through a reading passage using prereading ("preview"), during reading ("click and clunk" and "get the gist") and postreading ("wrap-up") strategies. This multi-component comprehension strategy has been effective for increasing vocabulary and reading comprehension while also promoting cooperative learning.
4. **ClassWide Peer Tutoring (CWPT)** provides structured opportunities for ELs to converse in English while they retrieve knowledge and skills in their primary language. Students are paired with each other based on their ability and compatibility and are able to alternate roles as tutors. Error correction and positive feedback are provided immediately which facilitates learning. The teacher-student structure allows students to remain actively engaged through increased opportunities to respond allowing ELs with LD to practice the English language and learn from each other.

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