

Workshop 6

Teaching English Language Learners

"The best teachers of English language learners use what they know about literacy and what they know about their students to build reading and writing skills. They learn about the role of reading and writing in different cultures and communities; they use students' backgrounds and linguistic skills as a foundation for learning; and, they give their students the tools they need to excel."

Robert Jiménez
Professor of Education
Vanderbilt University

What strengths and challenges do English language learners bring to the classroom? In this session, literacy and bilingual education expert Robert Jiménez examines the teaching strategies that best support the literacy development of students who are learning English as a second language. You will learn how to build on students' first language and background experiences, and how to create a classroom environment that promotes meaningful literacy learning.

Learning Goals

At the end of this session, you will better understand how to:

- use what you already know about effective literacy practices to plan instruction for English language learners;
- create a classroom environment and curriculum that integrate different languages and cultures;
- develop vocabulary to advance both language and literacy skills;
- promote oral language development and reading comprehension with teacher read-alouds and peer discussions.

Materials Needed

- the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter
- articles: "It's a Difference That Changes Us: An Alternative View of the Language and Literacy Learning Needs of Latina/o Students" and "Making Content Instruction Accessible for English Language Learners" found on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35
- the Evaluating Multicultural Literature Chart found at the end of this chapter
- a journal or notebook

Facilitator: You may want to have several copies of charts and articles available for participants without Internet access.

Before You Watch

Session Preparation

To prepare for this workshop session, you will review the key terms, identify the strategies that you already use, and then read two articles on teaching English language learners.

Facilitator: Have participants complete these activities before arriving for the session.

Key Terms

- Bilingual books
- Brokering language
- Contextual clues
- English language learners
- Funds of knowledge

Definitions for these terms can be found in the Glossary in the Appendix.



Notebook

What Do You Do?

Consider the strengths and needs of English language learners in your classroom. In what ways might their first language skills and culture support the development of background knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing? Think about how you plan instruction that acknowledges and promotes students' strengths and addresses their needs.

Now jot down your answers to these questions and, if you are taking this workshop for credit, save them for your Literacy Practices Portfolio:

1. What specific strengths do your students demonstrate in reading and writing? How do you use and support those strengths in your instruction?
2. What specific needs do your students demonstrate in reading and writing? How do you address those needs in your instruction?
3. What have you done that has been most successful in teaching English language learners?
4. What are your goals for improving the literacy development of your English language learners?
5. Which of your colleagues teach English language learners? How can you collaborate with these colleagues to develop and discuss effective teaching strategies?



Assignment

Examine the Literature

To complete this activity, use the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter.

Read each article listed below, recording your ideas on the chart during and after reading. When you have finished, save your chart to submit as an assignment.

These articles can be found as downloadable PDFs on the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35.

Before You Watch, cont'd.

It's a Difference That Changes Us: An Alternative View of the Language and Literacy Learning Needs of Latina/o Students

This article explores how teachers can discover the unique linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds of their English language learners, their literacy strengths and needs, and the ways in which reading and writing are important to them.

Jiménez, R. T. "It's a Difference That Changes Us: An Alternative View of the Language and Literacy Learning Needs of Latina/o Students." *The Reading Teacher* 54, no. 8 (May 2001): 736-742.

Making Content Instruction Accessible for English Language Learners

This article examines the ways in which teachers combine language instruction with subject area material.

Hernandez, A. "Making Content Instruction Accessible for English Language Learners." In *English Learners: Reaching the Highest Level of English Literacy*, edited by G. G. Garcia, 125-149. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2003.

Analyze the Video

Facilitator: When the workshop session begins, you may want to spend a few minutes discussing the key terms, participants' prior knowledge, and the readings.

Video Summary

In this video, Professor Robert Jiménez discusses the strengths that English language learners bring to the classroom, the importance of high expectations, and the benefits of connecting students' cultures with curriculum. You will also see classroom examples that illustrate the research-based strategies Professor Jiménez describes. The video addresses the following questions:

- Where do I start?
- How can I build on what English language learners bring to the classroom?
- How can the classroom context support English language learners?
- What are some strategies for teaching English language learners?

Analyze the Video, cont'd.



Notebook

Watch the Video

Watch the video, “Teaching English Language Learners,” taking notes as you watch. After you watch, jot down your answers to the questions below. If you prefer to watch the video in segments, pause the video when you see the next session heading.

Video Segment 1: Where Do I Start? (approximate times: 00:00-06:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image at the beginning of the video.

In the first video segment, Professor Jiménez explores common views of English language learners, and how teachers can use what they know about literacy instruction and their students to maximize learning.

- How can teachers’ expectations of English language learners affect students’ learning and performance?
- How can you use what you already know about literacy instruction and your English language learners to enhance their learning?



Video Segment 2: How Can I Build on What English Language Learners Bring to the Classroom? (approximate times: 06:00-12:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately six minutes into the video.

In this segment, Professor Jiménez argues that students’ language and cultural diversity should be viewed as an asset rather than a liability.

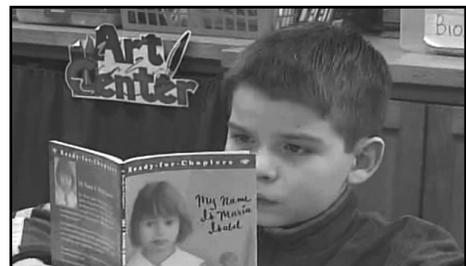
- Think about your English language learners. What ideas from the video might be useful in your classroom?
- How can you ensure that English language learners and their English-speaking peers have equal access to the curriculum?
- How can you support students in maintaining their first language?



Video Segment 3: How Can the Classroom Context Support English Language Learners? (approximate times: 12:00-15:00): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 12 minutes into the video.

In this segment, Professor Jiménez stresses the importance of including many cultural materials (books, dictionaries, wall displays) that reflect the backgrounds of the English language learners in the class.

- How can you use multicultural literature to support English language learners in your curriculum?
- How does your classroom reflect the nature of the community itself as well as materials written by the students?
- How can you group students so that they use their native language to support their language and literacy development?



Analyze the Video, cont'd.

Video Segment 4: What are Some Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners? (approximate times: 15:00-end): If you are watching the video in segments, you will find this image approximately 15 minutes into the video.

In the final video segment, Professor Jiménez discusses instructional strategies for working with English language learners in the classroom.



- What aspects of reading development are most critical to address when instructing English language learners?
- How can modeling oral reading support English language learners?
- What strategies can you use to teach students how to figure out and remember unknown words?
- What are some strategies you might use to encourage students to maintain their native language as they develop literacy in English?

Extend Your Knowledge

Examine the Topic

Inclusion of multicultural literature in a classroom literacy program is important for both English language learners and students who are native speakers of English. Read these statements by Robert Jiménez and Denise Agosto. Consider how the ideas in these statements reflect your own practices and classroom materials.

One of the best ways that a teacher can support the English language learner is to build classroom libraries that students find enticing and appealing, in terms of materials that they want to look at and read. I really encourage teachers to include as many culturally authentic materials as possible. Include materials that students find interesting, that represent their cultural backgrounds, and that include characters that look like the students themselves, so that they have reasons to make connections with those classroom materials.

Robert Jiménez

The best multicultural literature shares five major characteristics: accuracy, expertise, respect, purpose, and quality. Use these characteristics as criteria to identify and evaluate multicultural literature.

1. Accuracy

- Are cultural aspects (food, dress, flora, fauna, etc.) portrayed accurately?
- Does diversity exist among the members of each cultural group portrayed? (Remember that no culture is monolithic. For example, each member of an ethnic group has slightly different facial features. Groups of people should not appear to have identical faces in illustrations; they should look like individuals.)
- Are non-English words spelled and used correctly?
- Is historical information correct?

Extend Your Knowledge, cont'd.

2. Expertise

- According to any author/illustrator notes or biographical information, are the author and/or illustrator qualified to write or illustrate material relating to the culture(s) portrayed? How?
- Have the author and/or illustrator conducted related research? If not, have they lived among (either as a member of or as a visitor to) the groups of people represented in the work?

3. Respect

- Do the author and/or illustrator avoid the representation of stereotypes in the characters' speech, appearance, and behaviors?
- Do the author and/or illustrator avoid using a condescending or negative tone in relation to cultural characteristics of the characters and setting?
- Are minority characters portrayed as equal in societal worth to majority characters, or are they represented in subordinate social positions? If so, is there a legitimate reason for this representation, or is it due to cultural biases of the author/illustrator?

4. Purpose

- Does the cultural setting add to the work, or does it seem superfluous?
- Could the work succeed equally well if it used a different cultural setting (or characters from a different culture)?

5. Quality

- Does the work ring true to you?
- Are the story elements of setting, plot, and character well developed?
- Does the dialogue sound natural, not forced?
- Are the illustrations of high quality for composition, color, and perspective? Do they represent the text?
- Is the item high quality overall, independent of its multicultural characteristics?

Adapted from "Criteria for Evaluating Multicultural Literature" by Denise Agosto.



Notebook

Now, write your answers to these questions:

- Why is reading multicultural literature important for your English language learners? For all students in your classroom?
- How do the five characteristics of multicultural literature relate to students' comprehension and motivation to read?
- How should you decide which multicultural texts to select for your classroom library?
- How can you use multicultural literature within your curriculum?
- How can English language learners benefit from reading mainstream literature as well as multicultural literature? How can all students?

Extend Your Knowledge, cont'd.



Interactive Activity

Find the Unfamiliar Words

Go to the *Teaching Reading 3-5* Web site at
www.learner.org/channel/workshops/teachreading35

This activity is designed to help you think about how English language learners approach reading, what words they probably know, and how you can teach words that they may not know. You will read an excerpt from *My Name Is Maria Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada and highlight words based on how you would teach them to English language learners.

Tips for New Teachers



Tip

Supporting English Language Learners

English language learners need the same quality instruction as native English speakers. Here are some ways to support the literacy development of your English language learners:

- Encourage students to participate in classroom instruction and practice at all times.
- Ask questions frequently to check for understanding.
- Preteach additional vocabulary to enhance background knowledge.
- Illustrate word meanings and phrases with physical demonstrations and pictures.
- Teach word analysis skills that native English speaking students learned in earlier grades.
- Provide a variety of texts at different levels of difficulty for the same topic or content area unit of study.
- Select some books with high-quality photographs and limited text.
- Include bilingual dictionaries in your classroom library.
- Provide written reminders of new vocabulary words as your students are learning them, either in the form of student-produced dictionaries, word walls, or an ongoing list on the board.
- Encourage students to use their native language to support their writing in English. This might involve writing some words or sentences in their first language and others in English.
- Ask parents to share information about their culture and language with the class.
- Share information with parents about what students are studying each week. If necessary, have parent memos and fliers translated into their native language. Or, ask students to copy down weekly learning activities and discuss them with their parents.

Put It Into Practice

Choose Activities

In this section, you will build on what you have learned and develop strategies that you can use in your own classroom. The following activities are designed to help assess your multicultural books and to use students' interests to plan instruction. Choose one or both of the activities from the list below.

Activity 1: Evaluate Your Multicultural Literature

In this activity, you will practice evaluating the multicultural literature in your classroom library and instructional program.

Activity 2: Begin a Dialogue

In this activity, you will develop a questionnaire and then interview one of your English language learners.



Assignment

1. Evaluate Your Multicultural Literature

To complete this activity, use the Evaluating Multicultural Literature Chart found at the end of this chapter.

One of the ways teachers can help English language learners develop a strong sense of identity in the classroom and improve their reading comprehension is to use multicultural literature in the literacy program. In this activity, you will practice evaluating the multicultural literature in your classroom library and instructional program. When you have finished, save your Evaluating Multicultural Literature Chart to submit as an assignment.

1. Review the characteristics of quality multicultural literature and the questions for each characteristic listed in Extend Your Knowledge.
2. Select five books from your classroom, or five new books from the library, and evaluate them using the Evaluating Multicultural Literature Chart found at the end of this chapter. You may want to do this with a colleague.
3. Determine which books provide accurate portrayals of the cultures represented.
4. Review the information on your chart and answer these questions:
 - Are the books you selected accurate and authentic representations of the culture?
 - How will you use these books? (e.g., for independent reading, for whole-class or small-group instruction)
 - What other books would you like to include in your literacy program or classroom library?
 - Where can you find additional multicultural literature?

Put It Into Practice, cont'd.



Assignment

2. Begin a Dialogue

In this activity, you will develop a questionnaire and then interview one of your English language learners. This activity is designed to help you learn more about your student—in particular, his or her unique language, cultural and ethnic background, strengths and needs, and the ways in which reading and writing are important to him or her. When you have finished, save your written work to submit as an assignment.

1. Develop a questionnaire:

Reread Professor Jiménez's article, "It's a Difference That Changes Us: An Alternative View of the Language and Literacy Learning Needs of Latina/o Students." Then develop a questionnaire to guide you in a dialogue with your English language learner. Include questions that focus on the following categories:

- family background (culture, country of origin, language(s) spoken in different settings and to whom)
- siblings
- home literacy behaviors
- outside interests
- favorites (books, TV shows, movies, etc.)
- student self-assessment (e.g., What is easy for you? What is hard for you? What would you like to do better in school?)
- other

2. Engage in a dialogue:

Use the topics from the questionnaire as a basis for a dialogue with one English language learner. Take notes during the dialogue. Encourage the student to ask you questions as well.

3. Reflect and plan instruction:

Review your notes and discuss two changes you will make in subsequent instruction.

Reflect on Your Learning



Assignment

What Did You Learn?

Think about what you have learned about teaching English language learners from Professor Jiménez's comments, the classroom examples, and the readings and activities in this session. Write a summary of what you have learned. Use the questions below to guide your thinking. When you have finished, save your written work to submit as an assignment and, if you are taking this workshop for credit, include it in your Literacy Practices Portfolio.

- Which ideas from the video were most helpful to you in teaching your students who are learning English as a second language?
- What changes in your classroom environment will you make to support English language learners?
- How will you include students in choosing books and other classroom materials that reflect their language and culture?
- What instructional strategies or practices might you begin to implement immediately?
- What questions do you still have about meeting the needs of English language learners?



Assignment

Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio

Continue to build your portfolio of instructional practices. Your portfolio for this workshop session will include the following:

- current practices in place in your classroom
- changes you would like to make
- a description of one change you have implemented
- evidence of student learning

1. Current practices

Include your written response from What Do You Do? Then, describe two of your English language learners. What are their literacy strengths? How can you build on these strengths to facilitate English language learning? What are the specific areas in which they struggle (background knowledge, vocabulary, fluency and accuracy, comprehension, writing)? What strategies will you use in your instruction? You may want to consider talking to parents, teachers, or a bilingual specialist to learn more about students' background, academic successes, needs, and strengths.

2. Changes you would like to make

Include your written response from What Did You Learn?

Reflect on Your Learning, cont'd.

3. One change you have implemented

a. Make a change

Choose one instructional change that you described in What Did You Learn? to implement now. What is your thinking behind making this change? Describe in detail how it will be implemented (e.g., an instructional practice, a lesson plan, modeling a strategy, etc.). What are the expected outcomes for student learning? Develop a lesson in which you implement this change.

b. Reflect on the change

Write a brief reflection about what worked when you implemented this change and what you will change the next time you teach this lesson. (If you are taking this workshop during the summer, describe the learning goals and expected outcomes of this change.)

4. Evidence of student learning

Include evidence demonstrating student learning as a result of the change. Explain how students exhibited better comprehension through your instruction. Listed below are possible pieces of evidence:

- a journal entry
- a student reflection
- a student response to reading
- evidence of use of a personal or bilingual dictionary
- notes from a teacher-student reading conference
- notes from a student think-aloud
- observational notes from a book discussion
- a video recording of a book discussion
- an audio recording of a discussion group
- evidence of student engagement through an authentic activity

Assignments

If you are taking this workshop for graduate credit, submit the following assignments for Workshop 6: Teaching English Language Learners:

1. Examine the Literature

Read two articles on teaching English language learners and complete the Examine the Literature Response Chart.

2. Evaluate Your Multicultural Literature

Practice evaluating the multicultural literature in your classroom library and instructional program, and complete the Evaluating Multicultural Literature Chart.

3. Begin a Dialogue

Develop a questionnaire and then interview one of your English language learners.

4. What Did You Learn?

Write a summary of the ideas and strategies you explored in this session.

5. Create a Literacy Practices Portfolio

If you are taking this workshop for credit, you will continue constructing your portfolio of instructional practices.

Related Resources

Print Resources

Drucker, M. J. "What Reading Teachers Should Know About ESL Learners." *The Reading Teacher* 57, no. 1 (Sept. 2003): 20-22.

Fitzgerald, J., and M. F. Graves. "Reading Supports for All." *Educational Leadership* 62, no. 4 (Dec. 2004/Jan. 2005): 68-71.

Hernandez, A. "Making Content Instruction Accessible for English Language Learners." In *English Learners: Reaching the Highest Level of English Literacy*, edited by G. G. Garcia, 125-149. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2003.

Lucas, T., and A. Katz. "Reframing the Debate: The Roles of Native Languages in English-Only Programs for Minority Students." *TESOL Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1994): 537-561.

Smith, P. H., R. T. Jiménez, and N. Martínez-Leon. "Other Countries' Literacies: What U.S. Educators Can Learn from Mexican Schools." *The Reading Teacher* 56, no. 8 (May 2003): 2-11.

Strickland, D. S., K. Ganske, and J. K. Monroe. *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention 3-6*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse, and Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

Tse, L. *Why Don't They Learn English?* New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

Web Resources

English Teaching Forum

<http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol40/no2/p34.pdf>

This article, from the English Teaching Forum, provides ideas for fun games that help students practice new language skills.

Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESL)

<http://iteslj.org/links/>

This site is maintained by Teachers of English as a Second Language and provides resources for students and teachers including dictionaries and reference materials, information on grammar and English usage, and pronunciation.

Teaching Reading 3-5

Teaching English Language Learners > Before You Watch

Examine the Literature Response Chart

Title	Big Ideas	Notes and Questions
1.		
2.		

Teaching Reading 3-5

Teaching English Language Learners > Put It Into Practice

Evaluating Multicultural Literature

Title	Culture Represented	Accuracy	Expertise	Respect	Purpose	Quality

Notes
