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English Learners Reading English: What We Know, What We Need to Know

OF ALL SCHOOL LEARNING, success in literacy, especially reading, is certainly among the most important achievements for all students due to its key role in academic learning and consequent social and economic opportunities. In recent years, pressures to prepare a highly literate populace together with concerns over reading achievement have prompted federal and state leaders in the United States to focus attention on ways to teach reading more effectively. Debates over best teaching practices have fueled differences between whole language and phonics advocates.

The result is a highly vocal and polarized rhetoric that fails to capture the reality of today's classrooms: dedicated teachers combining experience, insight, and professional judgment to address the increasingly diverse and changing learning needs of their students. Often missing in the debate are the literacy needs of English learners, though as a group, they score among the lowest in reading achievement nationwide. Finding a place for English learners in the discussion of best practices is thus imperative.

The inadequacy of efforts to define simple guidelines for teaching English learners to read is not due to lack of concern on the part of researchers, educators, or politicians. Rather a combination of factors makes English learners' reading a conceptually difficult topic to encompass. Among these factors are the dynamic, evolving, and sometimes controversial state of reading research in general; a lack of consistent, generalizable research findings on second language reading processes and programs in particular; and the rapid growth and tremendous diversity among English learners themselves (Fitzgerald, 1995).

As we write this article, we enter the arena well aware of these obstacles. Nonetheless, we see this as an opportunity to synthesize research, theory, and practice in the field of second language reading. We begin by describing English reading processes among native and non-native English speakers. Then, using theory, experience, and research where available for support, we offer a set of recommendations for teaching English learners to read in English.

Diversity Among English Learners

The most salient feature of English learners as a group is their remarkable diversity. At the very least, these students vary in age, prior educational experiences, cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, country of origin, and levels of both primary language and English language development, including literacy development. Some are immigrants or children of immigrants and represent languages from every continent in the world. Others

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have roots in U.S. soil that go back for generations, maintaining languages as diverse as Spanish, Navajo, Chippewa, Cherokee, Choctaw, Apache, and Crow. Of course English learners also vary along personal lines, as do all students, in terms of their interests, desires, aptitudes, and potentials.

Just as English learners vary one from another, so do the classrooms and programs that serve them. While some classrooms serve English learners from the same primary language background, often Spanish, other classrooms may include students from over 10 different primary language backgrounds. Some students will receive literacy instruction in the primary language; many will not. Regardless of program type or classroom composition, tremendous diversity will be found in any classroom in terms of students' English proficiency, reading and writing ability, primary language literacy, and literacy practices in the home.

As daunting as the diversity among second language readers may be, one unifying factor in the equation is that the *process* of reading in English is essentially similar for all readers, whether they are native or non-native English speakers (Fitzgerald, 1995; Goodman & Goodman, 1978). This process involves decoding written symbols into the language they represent to arrive at meaning. What differ between native and non-native English readers are the cognitive-linguistic and experiential resources they bring to the reading task, especially in terms of those variables that relate directly to reading comprehension in English, i.e., (a) English language proficiency, (b) background knowledge related to the text, and (c) literacy abilities and experiences, if any, in the first language. We elaborate later on these three differences between native and non-native English readers, but first we briefly describe how native English speakers read in English in order to establish those elements of the reading process shared in common by native and non-native English readers.

Good Readers Reading in English

How do good readers read? That is, how do native English speakers who are also good readers make sense of a text written in English? First, good readers generally approach a text with a particular purpose in mind. They have enough experience with written language to know its various uses, and they put that understanding into practice when selecting a text to achieve their purpose.

Along with a purpose, good readers may bring at least some prior knowledge of the text topic. The more familiar the topic, the easier it will be for the reader to understand the text. That is, comprehension is affected by the extent to which the reader is familiar with the topics, objects, and events described in a text (Anderson, 1994). Good readers activate prior knowledge of the text topic by imagining what they know and do not know about the topic, predicting what the text will be about, and generating questions the text might answer.

Having set a purpose and activated prior knowledge, the good reader begins reading by visually processing the print from left to right, top to bottom of the page, given that we are talking about reading in English. Processing the print involves decoding the words on the page, i.e., producing a mental or verbal equivalent to access meaning. However, decoding word by word is insufficient, as evidenced by some students who accurately call out every word in a sentence without understanding the meaning.

As they are decoded, the words on the page must also be interpreted, initially in the context of the phrases and sentences of which they are a part, and subsequently across sentences and paragraphs as the larger meaning of the text is constructed. The comprehension process thus depends upon the reader's knowledge of the particular vocabulary and grammatical structures that comprise the sentences of the text and also upon the reader's familiarity with the way the text as a whole is structured.

As the good reader moves across sentences and paragraphs to construct the larger meaning of a text, familiarity with the genre and its text structure comes into play in the comprehension process, helping the reader anticipate and predict the direction and flow of ideas (Kintsch & Van Dijk, 1978). For example, a text that begins, "Once upon a time," signals the beginning of a fairy tale told with a narrative text structure.

Contrast that with a paragraph that begins, "Three key events led to California's rapid rise to statehood." This sentence signals an informational text that will probably be written with an enumeration

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text structure. Good readers are sufficiently familiar with a variety of genres and text structures to use this knowledge for predicting and confirming meaning across sentences, paragraphs, and passages that comprise a text.

As good readers move through the text, decoding and constructing meaning, they need to hold on to their ongoing textual interpretation in order to elaborate, modify, and further build upon it, thereby keeping their interpretation going and growing. Reading is thus a complex, cognitive-linguistic process that engages background knowledge and taxes both short- and long-term memory. It is also a process that takes place in a social context while serving as a social act of communication between the author and reader. In this interactive view, text comprehension is simultaneously driven by the reader's purpose, prior knowledge, and ongoing interpretation as these interact with decoding to achieve communication (Rumelhart, 1994).

Finally, good readers are strategic readers, meaning they monitor their understanding as they read to check whether their interpretation makes sense and to make sure they are achieving their purpose (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1980). They employ fix-up strategies, such as rereading a confusing part, to assist themselves in comprehending a text and achieving their purpose for reading. In this sense, reading is an active process of constructing and confirming meaning, one that is both linear and sequential as well as recursive and selective in that good readers may preview the text, reread a sentence, or go back to a different section to double check their evolving interpretation.

We have briefly described how good readers set a purpose for reading and bring several knowledge resources to bear upon the comprehension process, among them: decoding ability, language knowledge, background knowledge, written genre knowledge, familiarity with text structures, and comprehension-monitoring abilities. Non-native English readers engage in a similar reading process, calling into play similar knowledge resources, with certain important differences that we focus on in the next sections: (a) English language proficiency, (b) background knowledge, and (c) literacy knowledge and experience in the primary language.

English Language Proficiency

English language proficiency stands out as the defining difference between native and non-native English speakers, even though English learners range along a broad continuum from non-English to fully English proficient. In this context, English language proficiency refers to an individual's general knowledge of English, including vocabulary, grammar, and discourse conventions, which may be called upon during any instance of oral or written language use (Canale & Swain, 1980; Peregoy & Boyle, 1991).

To the extent that a reader is limited in English language proficiency, the ability to make sense of a text written in English is likewise hindered. Even second language readers who are proficient in English have been found to read more slowly than native English speakers, attesting to the comprehension difficulties related to English language proficiency during reading (Fitzgerald, 1995). This fact calls into question the validity of standardized reading achievement test results for many English learners.

Background Knowledge: Text Content

Interestingly, the comprehension challenges imposed by limited English proficiency are alleviated when the text concerns content with which the second language reader is familiar. For example, in one study, Arab Muslim and Hispanic Catholic college students in the United States were given two passages to read, one with Muslim-oriented content and one with Catholic-oriented content (Carrell, 1987). For both groups, comprehension was better when reading the passage reflecting their own cultural tradition. In similar studies involving culturally familiar and culturally unfamiliar passages of similar linguistic difficulty, comprehension was higher for the culturally familiar text (Fitzgerald, 1995). In other words, familiarity with text content alleviated limitations associated with second language proficiency in text comprehension.

Background knowledge is a powerful variable for both native and non-native English readers. However, it becomes doubly important in second language reading because it interacts with language proficiency during reading, alleviating the comprehension difficulties stemming from language proficiency

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limitations. Therefore, building background knowledge on a text topic through first-hand experiences such as science experiments, museum visits, and manipulatives can facilitate success in reading.

Background Knowledge: Text Structure

In addition to familiarity with text content, familiarity with text structure also facilitates reading comprehension (Carrell, 1987, 1992). Because text structure conventions can vary from one language to another, explicit instruction on English text structures is beneficial for English learners, especially those who are literate in their primary language. For example, knowing how a story plot or a cause/effect argument is structured can facilitate reading comprehension in those genres.

Text structure knowledge boosts comprehension by helping readers anticipate and predict the direction of a plot or argument, thereby facilitating attention to the larger meaning of the text. For example, familiarity with problem/solution text structure can assist the reader in anticipating, seeking, and finding the author's proposed solution to the problem posed. Similarly, calling students' attention to headings and subheadings used in content area texts provides them a strategy for previewing text content and creating potential questions to answer when reading.

Familiarity with English text structures results from extensive experience reading a variety of texts in English, especially when explicit discussion of text structure is provided to help students perceive these patterns and use them to understand text. All English learners can benefit from text structure instruction, especially those who are literate in the primary language, given that text structure conventions may vary across languages and cultures. By showing students the elements, organization, and sequencing that make up a "good essay," a "good story," or a "good argument" in English, teachers can immediately boost the quality of their students' reading and writing.

Assisting English learners with expository text structures is especially critical because content area texts become longer, more complex, and more conceptually dense from the third grade and up through high school and college. Text structure knowledge can help students grapple with these challenging texts, promoting reading comprehension and learning in science, social studies, and other content areas.

In summary, to the extent that the reader's background knowledge is reflected in a text, the text is easier to understand. Furthermore, background knowledge and language knowledge *interact* during second language reading, so that comprehension limitations can be overcome to some extent when the text topic is familiar. Knowledge of text structure conventions also enables readers to predict and confirm the meaning in a passage, enhancing comprehension. By tailoring instruction to students' English proficiency and building background knowledge for particular text content and structure, teachers significantly increase their students' chances for success in reading English.

Success in reading English is a valued outcome in itself, but it has the additional benefit of providing a useful source of linguistic input for English language development. Wide reading not only increases reading ability but also promotes English language development (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983). Furthermore, wide reading increases general background knowledge, which in turn facilitates comprehension when reading texts of all kinds, including content area texts.

Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

Thus far we have highlighted language knowledge and background knowledge as important aspects of the reading process. These factors can only be brought into play, however, if the reader has adequate knowledge of the writing system to access the language encoded in the text, a fact that holds equally true for both first and second language readers. In English and other languages that use alphabetic writing systems, speech sounds are represented by letters and letter sequences, reflecting the nature of the alphabetic principle. In order for beginning readers to make use of the alphabetic principle, they need to be able to (a) hear individual speech sounds in words, i.e., phonemic awareness; and (b) learn the symbols that represent those sounds, i.e., phonics or graphophonics. Without substantial knowledge of these sound/symbol correspondences, readers are deprived of a useful tool for recognizing unfamiliar words.

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Phonics is not the only tool readers may use to unlock an unfamiliar word. Good readers also use context to help them predict a word that fits grammatically and makes sense in the context of the sentence and passage. Here again, we see language knowledge, background knowledge, and experience with written texts fueling word recognition, as a passage is read and comprehended. The essential question is not whether students should be taught sound/symbol correspondences but rather how these should be taught.

For English learners, there is very little research either on phonemic awareness (the ability to hear, isolate, and manipulate sounds in spoken words) or phonics instruction (instruction on sound/letter correspondences). However, because both phonemic awareness and phonics are language-based processes, and because English learners vary in their English language proficiency, English language proficiency must be taken into consideration in deciding how and when to emphasize phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, a topic we return to in our instructional recommendations at the end of this article.

Experience in the Primary Language

Another difference English learners bring to their reading is the quantity and kind of literacy knowledge and experience they have in their primary language, if any, a variable that ties in closely with the age of the student, prior educational experiences in the primary language, and the socioeconomic status and educational level of the parents. When a student begins English reading instruction solidly literate in the primary language, even in a language that uses a very different writing system from English such as Russian or Chinese, that student possesses funds of knowledge that go well beyond simply being able to read (Moll, 1994).

For example, students who are literate in their home language have some knowledge of the *functions* of print. While the purposes of literacy in the primary language may differ from those they are learning for English, students literate in their primary language have nonetheless experienced the value, utility, and perhaps pleasures of print. In terms of reading per se, they have exercised the process of making sense from print, and, depending on their reading abilities, they are more or less automatic at decoding and comprehending text in their primary language.

In addition, students literate in the primary language are typically accustomed to the discipline and demands of school, whether educated in the United States or elsewhere. Education in the primary language thus facilitates academic adjustment while providing a solid experiential base for literacy development in English. The power of primary language literacy as a foundation for second language literacy provides the cornerstone for many bilingual education programs in the United States and worldwide.

Types of writing systems

When we make the claim that primary language literacy provides a good foundation for English literacy, we are suggesting that various aspects of reading and writing transfer across languages, including attitudes and expectations about print as well as the general process of decoding, interpreting the language, constructing meaning from text, and monitoring comprehension (Carrell, 1991; Pritchard, 1990; Tragar & Wong, 1984). At a more specific level, transfer of literacy ability from one language to another depends on the similarities and differences between their writing systems, including the unit of speech symbolized by each character.

For example, alphabetic writing systems, such as the three different ones used for English, Greek, and Russian, represent speech sounds or phonemes with letters or letter sequences. In contrast, in logographic writing systems, such as Chinese, each written character represents a meaning unit or morpheme; while in syllabic writing systems, such as kana in Japanese and Sequoyah's Cherokee syllabary, each written symbol represents a syllable.

In addition to differences in the unit of speech represented, directionality and spacing conventions differ across writing systems. For example, Hebrew reads from right to left whereas English and other European languages read from left to right. Chinese traditionally reads right to left. We suggest that specific differences among writing systems must be explicitly addressed when teaching English reading to students who are literate in their

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primary language. In order to do so, teachers need to learn about the writing systems their students use and the extent to which they are literate in them.

Writing systems similar to English

While providing substantial funds of knowledge upon which to base English literacy, the ability to read (and write) in another language thus poses the challenge of learning the similarities and differences between the ways English and the primary language are portrayed in print. To the extent that the writing systems are similar, positive transfer can occur in decoding.

Take Spanish and English, for example. In our experience (Peregoy, 1989; Peregoy & Boyle, 1991), certain features transfer readily such as the idea that speech sounds are represented by letters and letter sequences and the notion that print is read left-to-right and top-to-bottom. Specific letter-sound correspondences may transfer as well. For example, a native Spanish speaker who is proficient in reading Spanish will encounter a similar alphabet in English, with consonant letters representing similar sounds in the two languages. For example, the letters *b, c, d, f, l, m, n, p, q, s,* and *t* represent sounds that are similar enough in both English and Spanish that they may transfer readily to English reading for many students. Consequently, minimal phonics instruction is needed by many students for these consonants.

In contrast, the vowel letters look the same in Spanish and English but represent sounds very differently. Therefore English vowel sounds and their numerous, "unruly" spellings present a challenge to Spanish literate students learning to read English because the one-to-one correspondence between vowel letters and vowel sounds in Spanish does not hold true in English. Moreover, English has a plethora of vowel spellings that often include "silent letters." Consider the "long a" sound as spelled in the following words: *lake, weight, mail.* These spellings present a challenge to native and non-native English speakers alike. For Spanish literate students, explicit instruction on English vowel spelling patterns is often useful, preferably in the context of reading simple texts. At the same time, attention to text comprehension is essential, given that some students learn to decode English so well that they *appear* to be comprehending when in fact they are merely "word calling," i.e., pronouncing words without understanding the meaning.

Writing systems different from English

Clearly, some students may begin English reading instruction accustomed to a writing system that bears little or no resemblance to the one they must learn for English. For example, students who are literate in a logographic system such as Chinese are faced with learning the English convention of representing speech sounds instead of meaning units, and the practice of reading from left to right instead of right to left. These differences may require considerable concentration in the early stages of English reading acquisition as students develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle and begin to learn specific sound/symbol correspondences.

Early on, memorization of whole words and their meanings may prove useful for Chinese literate students, transferring a strategy they may have used to learn Chinese characters. Eventually, though, they need to grasp the alphabetic principle, attend to individual sounds in spoken English words (phonemic awareness), and associate those sounds with certain letters and letter sequences (phonics). As students learn to decode English, they also need to develop the English language knowledge that will allow them to access the meaning of the text, or their decoding will not lead to text comprehension.

In contrast to students with logographic literacy, some English learners may be literate in alphabetic writing systems that nonetheless use letters and print conventions that are very different from English, such as Arabic, Hebrew, and Thai. These students are apt to be well-versed in the alphabetic principle, which they acquired in the process of learning to read in the primary language, and that understanding should transfer easily to English reading. They are also more or less aware of various functions of print and have had considerable experience constructing meaning from text, another source of positive transfer. What will be new for these students are the specific letters and letter/sound correspondences used in English. To learn to read in English, they need to learn the specific

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conventions of how English is represented in print while at the same time developing English language proficiency to facilitate reading comprehension.

Students with minimal literacy experience

It is important to note that some English learners may come to school at any age with minimal literacy experience or abilities in any language. Before selecting instructional interventions for non-literate students, teachers need to find out as much as possible about the student's non-literacy. For example, is it due to minimal or interrupted schooling resulting from family mobility or circumstances of immigration? Is it because the family stems from a background without a literate tradition? Or does the child have some sort of visual, auditory, or linguistic processing difficulty that hinders the reading process? Knowing the student's prior experiences helps teachers know where to start.

By and large, students without prior literacy experiences benefit from exposure to the many practical purposes that written language can serve in daily life (Hamayan, 1994). Daily modeling of reading and writing is needed in which meaning and purpose are palpably clear, such as read alouds using texts with reliable picture cues to convey meaning, making and using lists of classroom duties, and reading students' names from a word wall to take roll.

In a language and literacy rich environment, learners will begin to develop English language proficiency while simultaneously gaining a rudimentary sense of how print works, both in form and function. These experiences will also offer opportunities for students to grasp the essence of the alphabetic principle upon which the English writing system is based. From there, students can benefit from word identification strategy instruction, using stories, poems, and songs they already know well due to repeated exposures in which textual meaning and purpose are made clear.

A Note of Caution

We have described our view of the reading process of English learners as similar to that of native English speakers, with important differences stemming in particular from variations in English language proficiency, background knowledge, and prior literacy experiences. We based our discussion on current theory and research in reading, including second language reading. Throughout our discussion, we have suggested ways to facilitate English learners' reading success by addressing the particular resources and special needs they bring to the task.

We need to point out here certain critical issues regarding the research base in second language reading. First, most of the research on second language reading has been conducted with older learners in secondary school or college. This is particularly the case for research on background knowledge and language proficiency effects on reading comprehension. Relatively little research addresses elementary school-aged English learners, and when it does, it focuses on students who are already able to read connected text (e.g., Peregoy, 1989; Peregoy & Boyle, 1991).

Beginning English reading acquisition and instruction for English learners, especially among students who are not literate in the primary language, are virtually untouched topics in the research literature, creating a dilemma for those who seek a strong research base to validate instructional practices. Teaching practices for native English speakers cannot simply be applied whole cloth to English learners without modifications that consider, at the very least, students' English language proficiency and primary language literacy. Topics such as phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, and effective approaches to beginning reading instruction are yet to be adequately researched for English learners.

In terms of phonemic awareness, in particular, research must address several important questions: (a) At what point in non-native English language development does phonemic awareness in English emerge? (b) How difficult is it for beginning English language learners to hear and manipulate speech sounds in English, and do these abilities vary based on the age of the learner? based on the student's primary language (e.g., Spanish vs. Turkish vs. Cantonese vs. Crow)? (c) Does primary language literacy in an alphabetic writing system facilitate phonemic awareness in English? What about primary language literacy in a logographic or syllabic writing system? If English learners do not demonstrate phonemic awareness, what methods

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of reading instruction will best promote their English literacy development? Virtually no research addresses these issues.

Instructional Implications

Below we draw a number of instructional implications from our discussion of English learner reading. For our purposes here, we provide only a brief overview of instructional strategies. For more in-depth descriptions, see Boyle and Peregoy (1998), Peregoy and Boyle (1997, in press), and Opitz (1998). In addition, see Meyer (this issue).

Learning about students

Learning as much as possible about individual English learners is essential to planning effective literacy instruction, especially in the broad areas we have discussed in this article: English language proficiency, prior knowledge and life experiences, and literacy in the primary language. This kind of information makes it possible to validate students for what they *do know* and build from there.

Building learning activities upon familiar concepts, for example, not only facilitates literacy and content learning but also helps students feel more comfortable and confident at school. In addition to school records, if they exist, good initial sources of information include the students themselves, their families, and community organizations. It may also be helpful to talk with other teachers who have students from the same family. In addition, school personnel such as community liaisons and paraprofessionals may prove helpful in providing information about students.

English language proficiency

By definition, English learners are still learning English. Classroom instruction often consists of oral language interactions between teachers and students. When using English as the language of instruction, teachers need to use sheltering strategies to assure that students will be able to understand and participate successfully in learning activities. Pairing nonverbal cues (e.g., pictures, demonstrations, and gestures) with verbal instruction helps make lessons comprehensible for students. Paraphrasing and defining important vocabulary in context also aid comprehension. As lessons are made more comprehensible for students, instruction simultaneously promotes language acquisition and content learning. For second language learners, every lesson is a potential language learning opportunity, and must be structured as such (Peregoy & Boyle, 1999).

Sensitivity to the varied language development levels of English learners will determine how much sheltering is needed, how much time it will take for students to process instructional content, and by what means (e.g., oral, written, pictorial, dramatization) they will display their learning. The more experience teachers have working with English learners, the more knowledgeable they become in determining those aspects of English their students are apt to find difficult, including vocabulary; word order; verb forms to express past, present, and future; word formation elements such as prefixes, suffixes, and roots; and function words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.

Beyond these linguistic elements, day-to-day observation allows teachers to gauge how well students use English to accomplish routine learning tasks and social interactions in ways that are appropriate to the classroom context. This knowledge helps teachers plan specific modifications in their own instructional language and guides them as they plan ways to prepare students for reading and understanding specific texts (see Meyer, this issue).

English learners who are beginning English reading instruction may be literate in the primary language due to education in another country or as a result of bilingual instruction in the United States. The benefits of primary language literacy are many, both as a foundation for English literacy and as a vehicle for developing full bilingualism and biliteracy. Although primary language reading instruction is beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that primary language development, including literacy, is a valuable educational goal for English learners themselves and for U.S. society as a whole (see Fillmore, this issue). Indeed without instruction in the primary language, oral and written skills are apt to deteriorate or become lost completely. Even so, many English learners find themselves learning oral and written English simultaneously, without the benefit of primary language instruction.

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The strategies for teaching English reading described below are applicable to English learners with or without primary language literacy abilities. The discussion assumes that English is the language of instruction.

Beginning readers

When English learners are beginning to read in English, attention to meaning is paramount at every step of instruction. In addition to using sheltering strategies to help students understand the *lesson*, teachers need to help students understand the meaning and purpose of the *text*. Texts used for beginning reading instruction should be short, simple pieces such as poems, pattern books, songs, simple directions, or recipes. Student understanding of the meaning and purpose may be developed by reading the text aloud, pointing out and defining or dramatizing important content words, and using other sheltering strategies to help students understand the text. Repetition, perhaps with hand movements like those used in finger plays, is useful for this purpose and can be fun and enjoyable.

This phase of the lesson serves English language development and provides exposure to the forms and functions of print, creating a firm foundation for sight word recognition and subsequent instruction on specific sound/symbol correspondences and other word identification strategies. By using whole texts for which meaning has been developed, students learn the details of print in the context of reading for a purpose.

The above procedures apply for students of different ages. However, for older students care must be taken to assure that text content is age-appropriate. One way to do so is to base early reading instruction on student generated text, such as pattern poems, beginning "I like_____." Similarly, texts may be generated in class based on a particular learning experience, such as planting a garden, baking a casserole, or driving a car. The students provide the ideas, perhaps in one or two words, and the teacher writes the ideas down in conventional English sentences. These texts provide initial, meaningful encounters with print on which to base reading instruction.

To help teachers choose materials, many book lists are available on picture books with content appropriate for older students (e.g., Benedict, 1992) and on high interest, easy reading (e.g., Riechel, 1998; Rosow, 1996). (Searching the internet using keywords, *high interest low vocabulary,* yields a number of good resources including Libraries Unlimited at http://www.lu.com/lu/.) In addition to providing appropriate materials, it is important to learn about the student's primary language and whether the student is literate in it. If so, the teacher can validate the student for this accomplishment and anticipate areas of positive and/or negative transfer to reading in English.

Intermediate readers

English language learners who can read connected text develop as readers by reading longer, more complex texts in a variety of genres. Teachers need to prepare students for any given text by focusing on specific aspects of its genre, vocabulary, grammar, content, and text structure that may be new to them. The strategies described below may be selected before, during, and after reading to facilitate reading comprehension in any genre, including stories, essays, or content area textbook selections.

Before reading. Students need to know their purpose for reading, and what they will be asked to do with the information after reading. Teachers therefore need to assess students' background knowledge pertinent to the text to be read and build background before students begin to read. It is often helpful to introduce important concepts/vocabulary through visuals, demonstrations, and graphic or pictorial organizers prior to reading. While doing so, teachers can informally assess the extent of their students' knowledge of the topic. Brainstorming and clustering about a topic in small groups is another to way to assess and build background information for students who are fairly fluent in English, provided sheltering strategies are used. Teachers may prepare students for unfamiliar text structures by presenting graphics that sketch the structure illustrated with two or three examples of actual text that follow the structure. Recipes and business letters are two easy text structures to display graphically, for example, while story maps offer a useful graphic representation of narrative structure.

Staying with a text. To help students "get into" and stick with the text, the teacher may read a page or two aloud to the students, asking prediction

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questions to help them anticipate the direction of the piece. If the piece is especially difficult, the teacher may guide students through it by reading and discussing one paragraph at a time. Other strategies include pairing students to read to each other, with the teacher on hand to assist through rough spots. Additional strategies to help keep students on track during reading include student response logs and story maps or other graphic depictions of text meaning.

After reading. Strategies used after reading serve to help students process the story or passage more deeply and to organize and remember the information. Some strategies include: mapping, dramatization, creating a mural, and writing a script for a play or a readers theater. Any of these strategies may be used for in-depth literature study, content area reading, and theme-related projects.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the special characteristics English learners bring to the task of reading and learning to read in their new language. We have pointed out the tremendous diversity among second language readers, illustrating the difficulties inherent in making simple generalizations concerning their reading acquisition and instruction. Using theory and research, we have presented a view of reading comprehension to illustrate similarities and differences in reading processes of English learners and native English speakers.

Throughout our discussion we have emphasized the need to consider English language proficiency, prior knowledge and experiences, and primary language literacy as important factors in English learner reading, variables that must be considered by teachers and researchers alike as they go about their work. Not only do we need to learn more about reading development among English learners of varying ages and backgrounds, we also need to learn more about the most effective instruction for particular groups of English learners. Specific programs and materials need to be developed and evaluated in terms of how well they meet the literacy development needs of particular groups of students. There is much to be done as teachers and researchers work together to expand the knowledge base for creating the best instruction for English learners and their literacy development.

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