Support for English Language Learners

The Being a Reader program helps you implement effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs). English Language Development strategies are an inherent part of the program’s design. In addition, an ELL Support feature provides lesson-specific preteaching strategies. ELL Notes suggest ways to modify the instruction to enhance support for ELLs.

While the Being a Reader program is an effective tool in teaching early reading to ELLs, it is not intended to stand alone as a comprehensive linguistic development program. It is assumed that additional support in second language acquisition is occurring for ELLs outside of this program.

About Teaching Reading to ELLs

One myth about teaching ELLs is that good teaching alone will meet these students’ linguistic and academic needs, and that they will simply “pick up” the language in the typical classroom context. While “good teaching” (using developmental, research-based instructional strategies) certainly benefits students learning English, it is important to build on each student’s specific academic and linguistic strengths and plan instruction based on his or her needs. The first step is to develop an accurate picture of each student’s level of English language proficiency and his or her previous academic experience.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Learning a new language is a developmental process. The table that follows outlines the generally accepted stages of acquiring a language and the characteristics of students in an immersion classroom at each stage. In an immersion classroom, the students are instructed in their second language (English) for all subjects. Progress from one stage to the next depends on a wide variety of factors, including cognitive and social development, maturity, previous academic experience, family education, home literacy practices, personality, cultural background, and individual learning styles.
## Stages of Second Language Acquisition

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<th>Developmental Stages of Language Proficiency (under immersion)</th>
<th>Student Characteristics</th>
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| **Stage 1: Receptive or Preproduction** (can last up to 6 months) | Often nonverbal during this period  
Acquires receptive vocabulary (words and ideas that students “take in” or learn before they begin to produce words verbally)  
Conveys understanding through drawing, writing, and gesturing  
Gradually becomes more comfortable in the classroom |
| **Stage 2: Early Production** (can last 6 months to 1 year) | Comprehends simple language  
Communicates with one key word and short phrases  
Verbally labels and categorizes  
Listens more attentively  
Begins to use present tense  
Writes words and some simple sentences |
| **Stage 3: Speech Emergence** (can last 1 to 3 years) | Has good comprehension of conversational language  
Sequences stories using words and pictures  
Is challenged by figurative language  
Speaks and writes simple sentences |
| **Stage 4: Intermediate Fluency** (can last 3 to 5 years) | Has excellent comprehension  
Uses newly acquired vocabulary  
Speaks, reads, and writes more complex sentences  
Participates in academic discussions  
Makes few grammatical errors  
May continue to be challenged by idioms and figurative language  
Demonstrates higher-order skills, such as analyzing, predicting, debating, etc. |
| **Stage 5: Advanced Fluency** (can last 5 to 7 years) | Has near-native fluency  
Demonstrates excellent comprehension  
Continues to develop academic vocabulary  
Continues to speak, read, and write increasingly complex sentences |
How the *Being a Reader* Program Supports ELLs

There are several effective English Language Development instructional strategies integrated throughout the *Being a Reader* program. These strategies help make the content engaging and comprehensible, support the students at their individual levels of language proficiency, and help the students see themselves as valuable members of the classroom community. The strategies included are shown in the chart below.

### English Language Development (ELD) Strategies in the *Being a Reader* Program

| Creating a respectful, safe learning community | Active, responsible learning  
|                                               | High expectations for classroom interactions  
|                                               | Explicit classroom procedures and routines  
|                                               | Explicit social skills instruction  
|                                               | Regular discussions to reflect on classroom values and community  
| Cooperative learning                          | Cooperative structures ("Turn to Your Partner" and "Think, Pair, Share")  
|                                               | Ongoing peer partnerships  
|                                               | Opportunities to express thinking orally and listen to others’ thinking  
|                                               | Reading in pairs  
|                                               | Sharing work and reflecting  
| Authentic communication                       | Whole-class, small-group, and partner discussions about interesting and important texts and topics  
|                                               | Opportunities to respond to or engage with a text in a variety of modalities (drawing, movement, drama, music)  
| Vocabulary development                        | Opportunities to preview and discuss read-alouds and small-group reading texts before lessons  
|                                               | Building academic vocabulary  
| Language-rich environment                     | Rich, meaningful literature  
|                                               | Engaging poems and songs  
|                                               | Daily opportunities for listening, speaking, reading, and writing  
|                                               | Small-group reading books accessible to all students  
| Scaffolded instruction                        | Explicit teacher modeling  
|                                               | Rereading text  
|                                               | Prompts to begin responses  
|                                               | Drawing on prior knowledge and experience  
|                                               | Building background knowledge  
| Critical thinking                             | Questions that prompt higher-order thinking  
|                                               | Sorting words and pictures  
|                                               | Exploring and responding to different viewpoints  
|                                               | Generating independent thinking  

**ELL NOTES**

ELL Notes in the margins of the lessons provide specific suggestions for modifying or enhancing instruction during a lesson to support your English Language Learners. For example, notes during a lesson include support in defining unfamiliar words or asking additional questions.

**ELL SUPPORT FEATURE**

An ELL Support feature in many of the strand Overviews offers lesson-specific support to make lesson content more accessible to your English Language Learners. In addition to identifying opportunities for positive language transfer, such as examples of shared letter-sound correspondences, this feature also identifies sounds of English that do not exist in the students’ primary languages or are likely to be especially confusing for ELLs. The ELL Support feature incorporates instructional strategies to help teachers address these challenges and make the most of instructional time.

In addition, the ELL Support feature includes preteaching strategies to help your ELLs participate more fully in the lessons. The suggestions are grouped into three categories: previewing the text, building background knowledge, and providing language support. Examples of the strategies included in each category are listed below.

- **Preview the text.** Read the text aloud with ELLs, define vocabulary, or discuss illustrations.
- **Build background knowledge.** Use visual aids, technology, photographs, and realia to increase comprehension. Preteach concepts.
- **Provide language support.** Provide opportunities for the students to answer lesson questions ahead of time. Model answering lesson questions using simple answers. Introduce and practice using vocabulary that may be useful during class discussions.

**SUPPORTING ELLs DURING INDEPENDENT WORK**

Independent Work is an excellent opportunity to provide your English Language Learners with targeted literacy support. Here are several ways to differentiate instruction during Independent Work:

- **Provide audiobooks.** Provide a variety of audiobooks so ELLs can listen to a story, hear standard pronunciation, develop story language, and increase their understanding.
- **Use partner reading.** Have ELLs read a book in pairs with native English speakers.
- **Solicit written responses to literature.** Ask ELLs to draw or write responses to the text they are reading independently (for example, draw the main character or write a sentence describing the problem in the story).
- **Arrange one-on-one support.** Enlist instructional assistants, student tutors, student teachers, primary-language speakers, and parents to read and write with ELL students during Independent Work.
Additional Strategies for Supporting ELLs

In addition to the practices embedded in the Being a Reader lessons and ELL Support feature, you can implement additional general strategies to help your English Language Learners participate more fully in the program. We recommend:

- **Speaking slowly.** Beginning English speakers can miss a great deal when the language goes by too quickly. Modifying your rate of speech can make a big difference in helping them to understand you.

- **Simplifying questions.** Open-ended questions are used throughout the Being a Reader program to elicit language and higher-order thinking from the students. These questions are often more complex in structure than closed or one-word-answer questions. While all learners, including ELLs, benefit from the opportunity to consider open-ended questions, you might modify complicated questions into simpler ones to increase comprehension and participation by your ELLs. The table below lists some suggestions for simplifying questions.

### Suggestions for Simplifying Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Original Question</th>
<th>Simplified Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use the simple present tense.</td>
<td>What was happening at the beginning of the story?</td>
<td>What happens at the beginning of the story?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use active rather than passive voice.</td>
<td>How was the window broken in the story?</td>
<td>Who broke the window in the story?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask who/what/where/when questions rather than how/why questions.</td>
<td>How are you and your partner working together?</td>
<td>What do you and your partner do to work well together?</td>
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<td>Avoid the subjunctive.</td>
<td>After hearing this part of the book, what do you think raptors might have looked like?</td>
<td>The part of the book we read today describes raptors. What do you think raptors looked like?</td>
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<td>Provide definitions in the question.</td>
<td>Why is the old woman so reluctant to name the dog?</td>
<td>The old woman is reluctant; she does not want to name the dog. Why?</td>
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<td>Provide context clues as part of the question.</td>
<td>Why is Sally Jane’s visit to the reservoir important?</td>
<td>At the end of the story, Sally Jane visits the reservoir and thinks about what her mother said. What is important about that?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elicit nonverbal responses. (Stages 1–3)</td>
<td>What do you see in this picture that tells about the words?</td>
<td>This picture shows the sentence “I like to paint.” [Point to the paints. Point to the paintbrushes.]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elicit responses of 1–2 words or short phrases. (Stages 1–3)</td>
<td>What do you think will happen when Peter puts the snowball in his pocket?</td>
<td>Peter puts the snowball in his pocket. Is that a good idea?</td>
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Strategies for Assessing Comprehension

When students are in the preproduction and early production stages of language acquisition, it can be hard to assess exactly what they understand. It is important not to confuse lack of verbal response with lack of understanding. Rather than force English Language Learners to produce language before they are ready (which can raise anxiety and inhibit their progress), you can assess nonverbal responses while the students are actively engaged by asking yourself questions such as:

- Do the student’s drawings and written symbols communicate thinking or show evidence of understanding?
- Does the student nod, laugh, or demonstrate engagement through other facial expressions?
- Does the student pick up academic and social cues from peers?
- Does the student follow classroom signals and routines?
- Does the student follow simple directions (such as “Please get out your pencils”)?
- Does the student utter, chant, or sing some familiar words or phrases?

Considerations for Pairing ELLs

A key practice in the Being a Reader program is to have the students work in partnerships. Random pairing is suggested as a way to ensure equity by reinforcing the value of each student in the classroom (see “Random Pairing” on page xxx). However, when considering the needs of English Language Learners, it may be advantageous to partner these students in a more strategic way. You might pair a beginning English speaker with a fluent English or multilingual speaker. It can be effective if the multilingual partner shares the ELL’s primary language, but we recommend prudence in asking the more fluent English speaker to serve as translator. Another option is to place ELLs in trios with fluent English speakers to allow them more opportunities to hear English spoken in conversation. In this case, it is important to make sure that all three students are participating and including one another in the work.

By carefully observing your ELLs and employing some of the strategies suggested here (as well as those in the ELL Support feature and ELL Notes in the lessons), you will be able to support your students’ development as readers and as caring, collaborative participants in your reading community.