Teaching the Program in Multi-age Classrooms

If you are teaching a multi-age class, we recommend that you choose the level of the program that is appropriate for the majority of your students to use throughout the school year. Since the program provides plenty of time for writing practice and individual conferences, all of your students will be able to develop comfortably as writers even if the lessons are designed for students at a lower or higher grade level.

Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)

The Being a Writer program helps you implement effective teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students, including ELLs. (For more information, see “How the Being a Writer Program Supports ELLs” on page xlviii.)

While the program is an effective tool in teaching writing 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 WRITING TO ELLs

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

STAGES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Learning a new language is a developmental process. The following table outlines the generally accepted stages of acquiring a language and the characteristics of students at each stage. Progress from one stage to the next depends on a wide variety of factors, including cognitive and social development and maturity, previous academic experience, family education and home literacy practices, personality, cultural background, and individual learning styles.
Stages of Second Language Acquisition

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<tr>
<th>Developmental Stages of Language Proficiency (under immersion)</th>
<th>Student Characteristics</th>
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</table>
| Stage 1: Receptive or Preproduction (can last up to 6 months) | Often nonverbal during this period  
Acquires receptive vocabulary (words and ideas that children “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) | Uses one- to two-word answers  
Verbally labels and categorizes  
Listens more attentively  
Writes words and some simple sentences |
| Stage 3: Speech Emergence (can last 1 to 3 years) | Speaks in phrases, short sentences  
Sequences stories using words and pictures  
Writes simple sentences |
| Stage 4: Intermediate Fluency (can last 3 to 5 years) | Uses increased vocabulary  
Speaks, reads, and writes more complex sentences  
Demonstrates higher-order skills, such as analyzing, predicting, debating, etc. |
| Stage 5: Advanced Fluency (can last 5 to 7 years) | Demonstrates a high level of comprehension  
Continues to develop academic vocabulary  
Continues to speak, read, and write increasingly complex sentences |

HOW THE BEING A WRITER PROGRAM SUPPORTS ELLs

English Language Development strategies are an inherent part of the program’s design. In addition, the program suggests ways to modify the instruction to enhance support for ELLs. There are a number of effective English Language Development (ELD) instructional strategies integrated throughout the Being a Writer program. These strategies help make the content comprehensible, support students at their individual level of language proficiency, and help students see themselves as valuable members of the classroom community. The table on the next page shows the ELD strategies used in Being a Writer.
English Language Development (ELD) Strategies in the Being a Writer Program

| Emphasis on writing as meaningful expression | Balanced approach to listening, speaking, reading, and writing  
|                                             | Teacher questioning  
|                                             | Explicit teacher modeling  
|                                             | Writing in narrative, expository (informative), and opinion genres  
|                                             | Activating prior knowledge  
|                                             | Making connections (i.e., text-to-self)  
|                                             | Building intrinsic motivation through providing choice  
| Visual aids and engaging materials          | Rich, meaningful literature  
|                                             | Engaging book art  
|                                             | Emphasis on writing and illustration  
|                                             | Teacher modeling of writing, revising, and proofreading  
| Explicit vocabulary instruction             | Opportunities to preview and discuss read-alouds before lessons  
|                                             | Building academic vocabulary  
|                                             | Brainstorming lists of words to use in students’ writing  
| 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  
|                                             | Sharing work and reflecting  

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING ELLs

In addition to the practices embedded in the Being a Writer lessons, ELL Notes provide specific suggestions for adapting instruction to meet the needs of ELLs. In addition, you can implement a number of general strategies to help ELLs participate more fully in the program. These include:

- **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.
• **Using visual aids and technology.** Photographs, realia (real objects), diagrams, and even quick sketches on the board can help to increase a student’s comprehension. When giving directions, physically modeling the steps and writing them on the board while saying them aloud are effective ways to boost comprehension. Audiovisual resources such as recordings of books read aloud, author interviews, and interactive versions of read-alouds can also be helpful.

• **Inviting expression through movement and art.** Having students express their thinking through movement and art can be enormously powerful. Drawing, painting, dancing, mimicking, role-playing, acting, singing, and chanting rhymes are effective ways for students to increase comprehension, build vocabulary, and convey understanding. The Total Physical Response (TPR) method, developed by James Asher, helps children build concepts and vocabulary by giving them increasingly complex verbal prompts (stand, sit, jump, etc.) that they act out physically and nonverbally (see Bibliography on page 751).

• **Building vocabulary.** ELL vocabulary is highlighted for most read-alouds in the program, and we recommend that you introduce this vocabulary (discuss it, act it out, draw it, etc.) and define it during the reading. In addition, you might brainstorm words related to particular read-alouds or themes (see the example below). The students can then illustrate each word and post the illustrations next to the printed words, creating a visual chart to refer to as they write.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for “First Time” Stories</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>baby brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>apartment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

• **Preteaching.** It is a good idea to preteach concepts with ELLs, when possible. This can mean previewing vocabulary, doing a picture walk of a story, or looking at realia or photographs before a lesson. Preteaching in a student’s primary language can be particularly effective—teachers, instructional aides, parents, or other community members can be enlisted to help. Some of the *Being a Writer* read-aloud books are available in Spanish. For a list of these titles, visit the Center for the Collaborative Classroom’s website (collaborativeclassroom.org).
- **Simplifying questions.** Open-ended questions are used throughout the *Being a Writer* program to elicit language and higher-order thinking from 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 such 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

<table>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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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<tr>
<td>Avoid the subjunctive.</td>
<td>If you were going to write about a family member, what might you write?</td>
<td>You will write a story about someone in your family. What will you write?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide context clues as part of the question.</td>
<td>What happens at the beginning of the story?</td>
<td>Peter wakes up and it is snowing. What else happens at the beginning of the story?</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **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 ELLs 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:

Q Do the student’s drawings and written symbols communicate thinking or show evidence of my teaching (such as completing a frame sentence and illustrating it appropriately, or including a beginning, middle, and end in a story)?

Q Does the student nod, laugh, or demonstrate engagement through other facial expressions?

Q Does the student pick up academic and social cues from peers?

Q Does the student follow classroom signals and routines?

Q Does the student follow simple directions (such as “Please get out your writing notebooks and pencils”)?

Q Does the student utter, chant, or sing some familiar words or phrases?

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

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PAIRING ELLs

A key practice in the Being a Writer program is to have students work in unit-long partnerships. Random pairing is suggested as a way to ensure equity by reinforcing the value of each child in the classroom (see “Random Pairing” on page xxxix). However, when considering the needs of ELLs, 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 opportunity to hear the language 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.

Building the Home–School Connection

Keeping families informed about their children’s participation in the Being a Writer program helps family members understand and appreciate how their children are developing as writers and how they can support that development.

FAMILY LETTERS

We provide a letter to send home with the students at the end of each unit, available in both English and Spanish. Each letter describes the unit’s focus, instruction, and social development goals and offers suggestions for encouraging writing development at home. The family letters are included in the Online Resources list for each unit and can be accessed via the CCC Learning Hub (ccclearninghub.org).