LITERACY INSTRUCTION

for

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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A Teacher's Guide to Research-Based Practices

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▶ FOUNDATIONS

THIS BOOK IS for mainstream teachers and reading specialists who work with English language learners (ELLs)—students whose first language is other than English or who have not fully mastered oral English. It is also for English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers whose primary responsibility is to promote these students' proficiency in English so that they can succeed in school. There is a growing number of such students in all schools: urban, suburban, and rural.
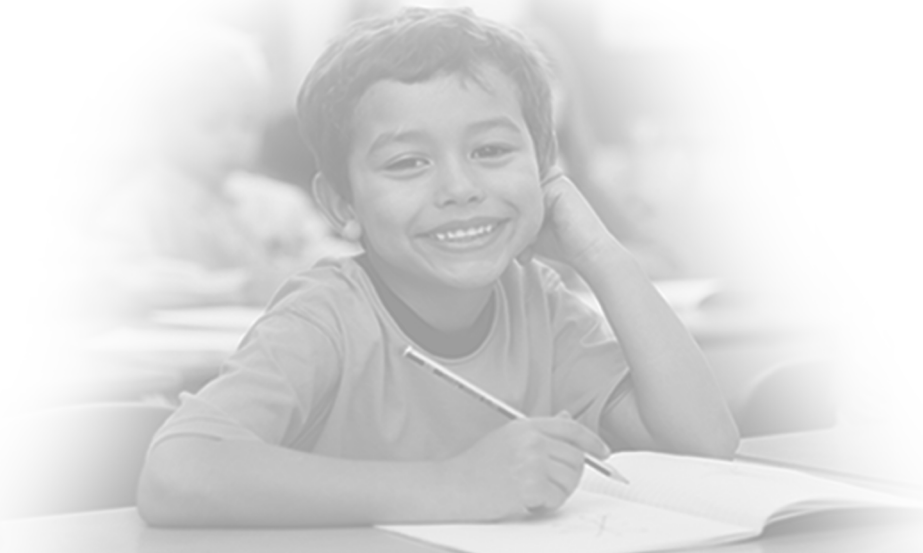
Our goal is to provide guidance to mainstream teachers, reading specialists, and ESL teachers on how to teach literacy in English to ELLs so that they become fluent readers and writers and successful in school. In this chapter, we lay the foundations for you to help ELLs become literate in English, their second language. We begin with general ideas about schooling for ELLs. Then, we discuss specific ideas about reading and writing for ELLs and describe what we know from research about literacy development in a second language. We end the chapter by describing what is important for teachers to know about their ELLs.

▶ Big Ideas About Schooling for ELLs

We begin this chapter with some big ideas that have emerged from research on language and literacy development in ELLs. These ideas have also emerged from our work with ELLs, their teachers, and other educators. We return to these big ideas in more detail throughout the book as we talk about how best to teach reading and writing to ELLs. These are ideas that can guide your thinking, instructional planning and delivery, and assessment with ELLs.

BIG IDEAS ABOUT SCHOOLING FOR ELLS
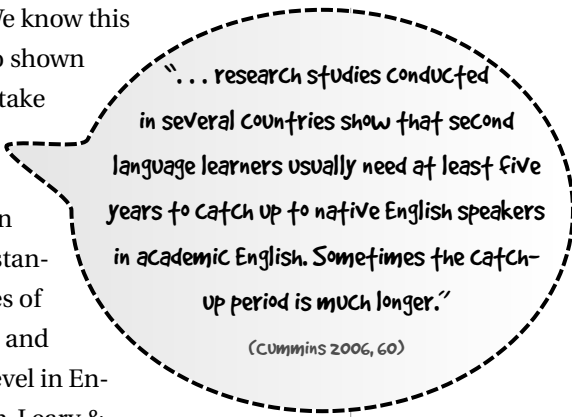
❑ Learning takes time.
❑ ELLs are resourceful learners.
❑ It is easier to learn something new when it stems from something familiar.
❑ Language learning is culture learning.
❑ Classroom-based assessment is essential.

Learning Takes Time

Learning in school takes time, and it takes extra time for ELLs who must learn a new language, acquire new academic skills and knowledge in a cultural context that may be unfamiliar to them, and figure

out how to fit in socially with their peers. We know this from common sense, and research has also shown the real outcomes of instruction often can take months or even years to be seen.

For example, numerous studies on bilingual education for ELLs have shown that they often score below grade level on standardized English tests in the primary grades of the program. However, by grades four, five, and certainly six, they score not only at grade level in English but often above grade level (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato 2006).

"... research studies conducted in several countries show that second language learners usually need at least five years to catch up to native English speakers in academic English. Sometimes the catch-up period is much longer."

(Cummins 2006, 60)

ELLs Are Resourceful Learners

ELLs are very resourceful. They use whatever language, cultural, and other background resources they have in order to do well in school. In particular, they use a lot of what they know about their home language when learning to read and write in English. This strategy is referred to by researchers as "bootstrapping," because when ELLs use their home language to help them learn English it is like children using the straps on snow boots to pull on their boots—it is much easier than if you just tug away at the boots themselves (see Figure 1.1). They also draw on experiences they have had before joining your classroom to make sense of what is going on in school, to interpret stories they are reading in class, to figure out how to make friends, and so on. Sometimes the connections they make from their home language and their family experiences are entirely appropriate, and sometimes they differ from what a native English speaker would do. When ELLs make connections between their home language and English, it is important to understand that this indicates that they are actively trying to break into English by using whatever resources they have. We should not penalize them during assessment activities for drawing on the home language and culture when they have not yet mastered English, even if this strategy results in a mistake. Rather, we should plan instructional activities that encourage students to make connections with the home language and culture; this can be done even when you, the teacher, do not know the student's home language.

It Is Easier to Learn Something New When It Stems from Something Familiar

Relating instruction for ELLs to what is familiar to them allows them to make sense of it and to acquire new skills and knowledge more quickly. Try reading something that is totally unfamiliar to you in English or your second language. You will find it extremely slow to read, difficult to understand, and almost impossible to remember. Now read something that is related to a topic that you are familiar with—you will not only read the text faster but you will understand the new parts more easily and remember the content better. ELLs are the same: They can understand a lot of what is being taught even before they master English if you begin with the familiar. Mainstream teachers and reading specialists can be challenged to know what is familiar to their ELLs because their backgrounds differ so much from their teachers. This means that mainstream teachers need to make special efforts to understand their ELL students and their backgrounds better, a topic that we address in the last section of this chapter. Throughout this book, you will read about strategies for gathering valuable information about ELLs and for building on their past experiences and knowledge when teaching them literacy skills in English.

Language Learning Is Culture Learning

When ELLs learn English, they learn more than the sounds, words, and grammatical patterns that make up English. They also learn how to use English in socially appropriate and effective ways. Most important,

Figure 1.1 Using the Home Language to *Bootstrap* into English

they are also learning how to be fully functioning and valued members of their peer group. Therefore, it is important to remember that when ELLs are struggling with English, it may be because they have a lot to learn—culture as well as language and new academic material. For older ELLs who start schooling in English in the higher grades, the challenge is even greater.

> "The beliefs, attitudes, and values that each of us holds not only shape our perceptions of the world around us, they also make it easier or more difficult for us to build new knowledge."
>
> (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, & Damico 2007, 185)

It is important to make an extra effort to provide cultural scaffolding to help ELLs comprehend English and use it effectively. We describe ways of incorporating cultural scaffolding into everyday activities in the classroom and school throughout the book.

Classroom-Based Assessment Is Essential: Looking for the Best in Performance

Assessment is integral to effective teaching. Teachers use formal and informal methods of assessment to see if students are learning what they are taught and to judge the effectiveness of their instructional efforts. We discuss classroom-based assessment in detail in Chapter 6.

Teachers use formal assessment when they administer district- and state-mandated tests or even classroom tests. However, the most useful assessment activities in school are informal. They occur during day-to-day teaching, and they inform teachers whether their students are on track, if they have learned what they are being taught, and whether students who are getting additional support are progressing. It is critically important when you assess and when you interpret the results of your assessments that you look for the best in your students. This is especially true for ELLs because they will often demonstrate what they have learned and know in ways that differ from your mainstream students and

NOTE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

It is not only ELLs who are learning culture in your school! The English-speaking students from the mainstream culture have the opportunity to learn about all the other cultures represented among their classmates. Take advantage of the fact that you have a tremendous possibility for cultural enrichment for all students.

Research Finding

Many studies have pointed out the importance of using student-achievement data to shape and/or monitor program effectiveness (August & Hakuta 1997; Corallo & McDonald 2002; Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes Scribner 1999; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato 2006; Slavin & Calderón 2001). More specifically, effective schools use assessment measures that are aligned with the school's vision and goals, with the school's curriculum, and with related standards (Lindholm-Leary & Molina 2000, Montecel & Cortez 2002).

even from your own expectations, for example, when ELLs use words from Spanish to express an idea in English because they do not know the appropriate English words yet. Assess for the best: Be sure to look for what your students know, and understand that there is often evidence of growth and learning even in their "mistakes." When students say or do something that looks "wrong," think harder—there is probably a good reason why the student did what he did.

▶ What We Know About Literacy Development

We all understand that literacy is the ability to read and write fluently and accurately. When we think of reading and writing in this way we think of skills that are linked directly with written language—word decoding, punctuation, paragraphing, and knowledge of text genres (expository versus narrative). All children need to be taught these kinds of skills and knowledge because they are not usually acquired naturally in the course of learning language. Children do not acquire literacy skills without some form of instruction, be it formal instruction in school or informal instruction when parents read to children at home or engage them in conversations about stories they have heard. Many English-speaking children may have acquired some of these skills before coming to school because they have had prior experiences with print or oral forms of literacy. However, there is a great deal of variation in how much even mainstream children acquire these print-related skills at home. Some ELLs will also have had print-related experiences in their home language before joining your class. Students, mainstream or ELL, who have had print-related experiences before coming to school are prepared for literacy instruction in school. However, some ELLs will not have had experiences with written language at home; they may speak a language at home that is not written, or their parents may be too busy working to read to them. Even those ELLs who have had print-related experiences in the home language may have had experiences with a written language that uses a different script (e.g., Chinese or Arabic) or that is organized differently, such as from right to left (e.g., Hebrew) and not from left to right as English is. Mainstream

teachers and reading specialists need to consider these points when they plan literacy instruction for ELLs.

A definition of literacy that focuses only on written forms of language is an over simplification of what students need to know in order to read and write well. A host of different kinds of skills and knowledge are involved in reading and writing that are not linked exclusively to written language. For example, if students are asked to read a story about a visit to the dentist, they must have certain background knowledge: what a dentist is, what she does, and why children go to dentists. Some ELLs may not have had experience with a dentist, and, as a result, they will have trouble making sense of the story. In order to understand this story, students also need to know how verb tense and adverbs are used in English to sequence events: "*Jason had a toothache so his father took him to see the dentist. When Jason was in the dentist's office, the dentist gave him a coloring book so he wouldn't be scared. After he played with the coloring book in the waiting room for a few minutes, Jason went into the dentist's office.*" Many native English-speaking children will be familiar with how English is used to sequence events because they have been using English all their lives; many ELLs will not be familiar with these aspects of English. Of course, to understand the story, students must also know the meanings of specific words—*dentist, appointment, toothache, cavity, filling,* and so on. Most mainstream students, although not all, will know these words already simply as a result of being proficient in English; some ELLs will not.

Many of these skills are part of language competence in general, rather than competence with written forms of language per se. We know that the foundations of literacy lie in children's general language competence—the breadth of their vocabulary and their comprehension and production of complex language to explain, analyze, critique, and narrate. We refer to these as *underlying language competencies.* Acquisition of these kinds of language competencies requires experiences in which things are explained, people tell stories, or someone critiques something. These experiences can take place in the home or in school.

In case we give the impression that the diverse components of literacy development that we have just described exist in isolation and, therefore, can be taught in isolation, it is crucial to emphasize that literacy development is an integrated process. Figure 1.2 is a good

graphic representation of how all of the components of reading fit together. As this figure illustrates, literacy involves bidirectional processes that include bottom-up and top-down processes. The bottom-up processes include foundational skills—related to letter-sound knowledge, decoding, and spelling—that are related to reading and writing individual words or sentences. The top-down processes include larger or higher-order skills that allow readers to link text to meaning and the world at large. Top-down processes include comprehension of text, inferencing, and analysis and criticism of written text in relation to what students know, among others. ELLs often have the knowledge needed to engage in top-down processes—knowledge of the world, story structure, knowledge of the meaning of individual words and common phrases—but they do not necessarily know how to apply this knowledge and these skills to written English. Nevertheless, this knowledge is a starting point that allows them to link written language to meaning, even before they can decode or encode words in English using processes represented at the bottom of the model (sounds, letters and numerals, punctuation marks, etc.).

ELLs who are learning to read and write English have all of the challenges that mainstream English-speaking children face, and, in addition, they must acquire proficiency in English for both social and academic purposes; they must acquire background knowledge that is the foundation of the school curriculum; they must acquire enough knowledge of mainstream culture to integrate and function effectively in school and with their schoolmates; and they must keep up with the academic curriculum. The multiple demands of schooling on ELLs need to be addressed all at the same time. This is a challenge for mainstream teachers who are also working with English-speaking students.

▶ WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN ELLS

A great deal of research has been done during the last two decades on reading acquisition. The lion's share of attention has focused on the acquisition of literacy skills in English as a first language. However, there

Top Down

Knowledge of the World

Content Knowledge Gained from Prior Schooling Experiences

Life Experience

Knowledge of How the English Language Works
(Knowledge of Text Structure)

Knowledge of Phrase and Sentence Structure

Knowledge of Words and Word Structure

Prior Literacy Experiences in Other Languages and English

Knowledge of Sounds, Letters, and Symbols
from the Home Language and from English

Bottom Up

Figure 1.2 Top-Down/Bottom-Up

is also a growing body of research on the acquisition of reading and writing skills in English as a second language. The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan 2006) and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (Genesee et al. 2006) published reviews of that research.

The findings from these two panels have guided the preparation of this book. In this section, we want to review for you the main findings from those reviews. These findings form the basis for the strategies and activities that we describe for teaching literacy to ELLs, so we will be returning to them throughout the remainder of the book. The main findings from those two panels that we think are particularly important follow:

1. Second-language literacy development is complex.
2. Second- and native-language literacy development are similar in some important ways.
3. Second-language literacy development differs from native-language literacy development.
4. What matters depends on the learner's stage of development.

1. Second-Language Literacy Development Is Complex

Like literacy development in one's first language, learning to read and write in a second language includes several interrelated skills and the use of diverse kinds of knowledge (cultural and real world) at the same time. Some of the component skills involved in reading and writing (like phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling) are building blocks for other skills, such as reading comprehension and complex writing. Difficulty with these building-block skills can impede students from achieving fluent and accurate reading comprehension and writing skills later on when more complex forms of written language are involved.

Meaning and interest in reading are also important components of literacy development; in fact, they are so important that they are crucial at all stages of learning to read and write. For reading and writing to be meaningful and interesting, ELLs must be able to relate what they are reading and writing about to their lives and to things in the world around them. Thus, background knowledge is yet another important component of developing literacy skills. If ELLs do not find the literacy activities in the classroom meaningful and interesting, they will not be engaged in the learning process. Engagement is important

if ELLs are to sustain their efforts in learning to read and write from grade to grade. The more students read and write with interest and enthusiasm, the more proficient readers and writers they become. ELLs need to see that reading and writing are meaningful, useful, and relevant to their lives.

2. Second- and Native-Language Literacy Development Are Similar in Some Important Ways

Many of the same skills and abilities play an important role in learning to read and write in English as a second language and learning to read and write in English as a first language. For example:

- ❑ Print-based experiences and abilities, such as knowledge of letter-sound relationships and concepts of print, are important in early stages of learning to read.

- ❑ Phonological awareness is important in learning to decode and spell words; phonological awareness is what allows students to map oral language to written symbols.

- ❑ Complex language skills are important in comprehending and writing text.

- ❑ Background and cultural knowledge are important, whether reading or writing individual words or connected text; background knowledge makes reading meaningful.

3. Second-Language Literacy Development Differs from Native-Language Literacy Development

ELLs and native English-speaking students differ from one another in how advanced their competence in English is and in the kinds of background knowledge they possess. ELLs have lots of background knowledge, but it often differs from that of mainstream students. Another major difference between second- and native-language literacy development is that second-language learners draw on first-language skills and experiences, particularly in the early stages of second-language literacy development, to break into English. All the abilities and skills listed in the preceding section that are common to first- and

second-language literacy development can be applied to learning to read and write a second language if they have been acquired in the first language. For example, Spanish-speaking ELLs who know the names or sounds of the alphabet in Spanish can and often will use those names and sounds to identify letters in English, until they learn the differences. This is particularly likely and useful during the early stages of second-language literacy development when ELLs have not yet acquired full mastery of English. As their proficiency in English increases, they have less need to draw on their home-language skills. However, they will continue to draw on the home language when they need to, even at advanced stages of literacy development. ELLs' use of home-language skills is a way for them to bootstrap into English reading and writing—it facilitates learning to read and write in English. The best example of this is seen in ELLs who can already read and write in their home language. They acquire literacy skills in English relatively quickly in comparison to ELLs who have no reading and writing skills in the home language.

> "The studies reviewed . . . provide ample research evidence that certain aspects of second-language literacy development are related to performance on similar constructs in the first language; this suggests that common underlying abilities play a significant role in both first- and second-language development; that certain error types can be understood in terms of differences between the first and second languages; that well-developed literacy skills in the first language can facilitate second-language literacy development. . . .")
>
> (August & Shanahan 2008, 7–8)

4. What Matters Depends on the Learner's Stage of Development

Some things are important at all stages of learning to read and write. Meaning and engagement are always important. Meaningful and interesting classroom activities provide engaging contexts for ELLs to acquire the diverse skills that are necessary to become fluent readers and writers. At the same time, some skills are especially important during particular stages of literacy development. Skills and knowledge that are related to small units of written language, such as the

sounds of letters, mapping sounds to letters, and phonological awareness, are particularly important early on. However, because these small units of language are likely to be devoid of meaning, it can be a challenge to teach them in a way that is meaningful and interesting to the students. Students usually find learning these small units boring and useless unless they are embedded in meaningful activities; we talk more about this in Chapter 2. The small units of language are important early on because they are the building blocks of word-level skills, which in turn are the building blocks of higher-level reading and writing skills, such as sentence and text comprehension. Students who struggle with decoding words and sentences have trouble attending to meaning. Conversely, however, students can decode fluently but lack the skills needed to comprehend text—for example, knowledge of complex grammar and background knowledge related to academic text. Therefore, it is important to begin to build students' language competence and background knowledge during the early grades so they can draw on that competence and knowledge in higher grades when reading and writing text-length material becomes the focus of attention.

Certain genres of language are particularly important in the early stages, while other genres become more important in later stages. Narrative is particularly important in the early stages because all students are familiar with narratives and can relate to and become engaged in narratives. Expository and scientific genres of written language become more important in later stages when students read and write decontextualized academic material.

You can probably start to see that, if students are to acquire all of these interrelated skills, it is critical to plan instructional activities that integrate multiple skills at the same time—for example, by integrating instruction about letter-sound relationships with vocabulary development and with ELLs' understanding of content related to the academic curriculum. You do not have the luxury of teaching only one set of skills at a time; instruction must be multifaceted. This is true when teaching mainstream students as well; but, it is particularly important when teaching ELLs whose social and cultural backgrounds and levels of English language competence are also considerations.

▶ Getting to Know Your English Language Learners

In order to translate what we know about literacy development into effective practice, it is critical to know your students well. This section describes what is most important to know about ELLs and offers suggestions on how to get to know them. Like all students, ELLs are highly individual. However, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that there are even greater individual differences among ELLs than among mainstream students. By definition, mainstream students have been exposed to mainstream culture and this can have a somewhat homogenizing effect on what they know, what they can do, and how they learn; for example, at the moment, all students in mainstream America know who Harry Potter is. ELLs who have just joined your class and have come from another country might not. It is critically important that you get to know your ELLs as individuals so that you can plan instruction that takes their learning resources and backgrounds into account. In the same way that we strongly believe that mainstream educators should start with what mainstream students already know and can do as a foundation for expanding their competencies, we should do the same for ELLs. Here are some important characteristics of ELLs that are worth thinking about because they might influence how your students learn and, therefore, how you might teach them.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF ELLS

1. Level of proficiency in English upon entry to your school
2. Prior literacy skills and training
3. Prior schooling
4. Grade level
5. Family background
6. Similarity of the home language and culture to that of the mainstream

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In the sections that follow, we expand on each of these points and suggest how they might be important for literacy instruction and learning; we provide more detail in the chapters that follow.

Important Characteristics of ELLs

1. Level of proficiency in English upon entry to your school

Obviously, it is important to determine each student's proficiency in English when they join your classroom. This is essential so that you know what level of English you can use with them and where to begin when planning instruction that will advance their proficiency in English. ELLs with no or limited English will need more accelerated English instruction and support than ELLs who have some proficiency in English. It is important to determine ELLs' competence in *social language* as well as *academic language*.

> **Research Finding**
>
> Social language includes language linked to life in and outside the classroom, such as talking with classmates about interests and activities outside school, borrowing a pencil from a classmate, or asking for help. Academic language is linked to academic subjects and instruction, such as following instructions, knowing the names of concepts and objects used in a science or social studies class, describing events or phenomenon that are being taught in class, and describing or explaining events or phenomena in a science or social studies lesson (Chamot & O'Malley 1994, Cummins 2006).

Your school may have administered a standardized test to measure your ELL students' English language proficiency at intake. It is important to remember that the norms for standardized tests that are based on native speakers of English are not appropriate for interpreting test scores of ELLs. Moreover, standardized tests are not adequate by themselves because they assess ELLs in formal testing situations that may be unfamiliar to them and may even be culturally inappropriate or threatening. Be sure to use other informal forms of assessments as well—we provide case studies and lots of details about carrying out assessment of oral language and literacy skills with ELLs in Chapter 6. See the following suggestions for ways of thinking about how to describe ELLs' proficiency in English as a second language.

> **Ways of describing proficiency in English as a second language**
>
> 1. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages has published ESL standards for both social and academic language (TESOL 2006). These standards can be useful if your school district has not developed its own framework.

2. In addition to formal frameworks, you can also make a list of the kinds of social language you use with your students to organize them and guide their behavior through the day. You can use these informally to see how well ELLs in your class can use and comprehend such language.

3. With respect to academic language, you can analyze what you are currently teaching and make a list of basic vocabulary and functional language that is needed to comprehend, talk, and read about the subjects you teach. We give an example of this based on an analysis of a content unit in Chapter 4.

2. Prior literacy skills and training

Of course, it is also important to know about your ELLs' stage of literacy development and their prior literacy training, whether in English or in their home language. We talk in detail about how to assess the literacy skills of ELLs in Chapter 6. ELLs with some literacy skills in English have a head start; ELLs with some literacy skills in the home language also have a head start because they can transfer many of these skills to learning to read and write in English. When assessing ELLs' literacy skills, it is useful to refer to a model of literacy development. Alternative models of the development of literacy skills in English as a second language have been proposed. Your school, district, or state may have its own model of literacy development, which provides the basis for instructional planning and assessment in your school. Each model has its own way of labeling and describing the stages of development. Figure 1.3 includes a synopsis of some models and the labels that have been used to identify the stages ELLs go thorough in acquiring literacy skills in English. This list is not complete, but it gives you an idea of how varied and, at the same time, similar the labels are that different models use to describe the stages of ESL literacy development.

We present our own developmental framework for

Research Finding

Research tells us that students who already know how to read and write in one language can learn to read and write English more quickly and easily than students with no prior literacy training. We also know that ELLs who have preliteracy or literacy skills in the home language will use those skills to break into English reading and writing (August & Shanahan 2006, Riches & Genesee 2006).

Models of Literacy Development

READING					
Walker (1992; p. 33)	Emergent	Grounded	Expanding	Strategic	Reflective
Bear et al. (2007; p. 10)	Emergent	Beginning	Transitional	Intermediate	Advanced
WIDA (State of Wisconsin 2004)	Entering	Beginning	Developing	Expanding	Bridging	Reaching
Boyd-Batstone (2006; p. 13)	Beginning	Early Intermediate	Intermediate	Early Advanced	Advanced

WRITING					
Law & Eckes (2007, 89–98)	Drawing	Scribbling	Use of Letter-Like Forms	Copying	Inventive Spelling (parts of words to full words)	Standard English Spelling
O'Malley & Valdez Pierce (1996)	Pre-Emergent	Emergent	Dependent	Developing	Independent	Fluent	Proficient
Bear et al. (Spelling) (2007; p. 10)	Emergent	Beginning (Letter-Name Alphabetic)	Transitional (Within-Word Pattern)	Intermediate (Syllables and Affixes)	Advanced (Derivational Relations)

Figure 1.3 Models of Literacy Development

describing the literacy development of ELLs in Chart 1.1 to illustrate what such a framework might look like. We use this framework elsewhere in the book so that we have a common frame of reference. Our framework consists of four levels of proficiency: *beginning, beginning intermediate, intermediate advanced,* and *advanced supported.* Expectations for reading and writing development are described separately, but this is artificial because reading and writing development occur in tandem. In fact, we talk extensively about teaching reading and writing skills in an integrated fashion throughout the book—see especially Chapter 5. You will also notice that our framework includes different kinds of skills, knowledge, and predispositions, in keeping with research findings that we discussed earlier indicating that literacy development is complex and multicomponential. Some of the components of literacy we refer in Chart 1.1 are linked directly to written language; some are part of students' underlying language competencies; and some involve attitudes, motivation, and predispositions with respect

Literacy Development Framework

READING			
BEGINNING	**BEGINNING INTERMEDIATE**	**INTERMEDIATE ADVANCED**	**ADVANCED SUPPORTED**
• demonstrates knowledge of concepts of print and how print and books are organized • demonstrates interest in oral reading • shows interest in choosing books from class or school library • enjoys "reading" books alone or with others during book time • uses pictures and text features (bolding, italics) to support decoding attempts	• selects books of appropriate level and content, with teacher support • uses a variety of strategies to comprehend text • enjoys reading for pleasure • reads predictable text without assistance • can read different genres but may need some assistance	• independently selects books of appropriate level and content • reads with focus and purpose • chooses books of appropriate difficulty, both narrative and expository	• can listen to, read, discuss & analyze familiar & conceptually challenging text at grade level • understands and can identify features of different genres • can identify, use, and reproduce features of different genres • can compare main features of different genres of text
• uses knowledge of letter-sound correspondences to read words • can read and understand simple high-frequency words (sight words) • recognizes letters, words, and their parts • recognizes commonly used phrases (*thank you, the end, once upon a time*) • uses home language to decode unfamiliar words	• can read many words fluently • knows many of the highest-frequency sight words • uses a variety of strategies to read and understand new words: context, pictures, home language • can define/describe the meaning of familiar words, with assistance • can relate new words to existing vocabulary • understands word classes: nouns, verbs, prepositions, adverbs, etc. • can identify cognate words in English and home language with support	• can read many infrequent or uncommon words accurately (technical and academic words) • uses word parts (prefixes and affixes) and sentence context to understand new words • uses spelling patterns • recognizes and understands root words (nation/national) • can predict upcoming words based on context	• can identify "shades" of meaning in related words and identify alternative meanings of the same word • uses context cues to determine meanings of new words • can determine the correct/appropriate meaning of words with multiple meanings in context
• uses pictures and background knowledge to identify themes and characters in books (in English or home language) • can provide simple description of story theme with support • uses picture cards to describe major story events or a process • uses pictures as an aid to sequencing story events or a process (e.g., how to make tortillas; how foods get from the producer to the consumer) • can predict events in read-alouds (using home language or English) with prompting • can relate oral stories and expository text to personal life (using home language or English)	• can answer literal, inferential, and evaluative questions about text; may need scaffolding • can identify and describe not only main ideas but essential details of text • can critique text for truthfulness, relevance, meaningfulness, creativity • seeks assistance in understanding difficult text • monitors comprehension and uses variety of strategies to comprehend difficult text	• understands structure and purpose of different genres of text: narrative, expository • can answer literal, inferential, and evaluative questions about text with minimal scaffolding • uses text structure and transition words as an aid to comprehension • can identify implications of actions in text • can generalize meanings from texts to new contexts	• can identify the main idea or essential purpose in grade-level text and demonstrates this ability by paraphrasing, summarizing, and locating relevant details • monitors comprehension and uses a variety of strategies to repair comprehension of grade-appropriate text • expresses understanding of main idea or essential purpose of text in an organized, coherent, and appropriate fashion in oral or written form • can analyze and evaluate structure and content of different text genres • draws inferences from what is given in the text and is able to explain and defend the inferences made

Chart 1.1 Literacy Development Framework

WRITING			
BEGINNING	**BEGINNING INTERMEDIATE**	**INTERMEDIATE ADVANCED**	**ADVANCED SUPPORTED**
• knows basic concepts of writing: how to hold a pencil, organize letters from left to right, etc.	• handwriting is legible and age appropriate • appropriate spacing, letter formation, indenting, and use of symbols (. ? " " , ')	• fluent, legible handwriting	• writing is fluent, legible, and organized • enjoys writing for personal purposes
• can write letters, words, and common phrases independently or copy from models • knows the names of letters • sometimes uses names/sounds from home language • uses invented spelling to write words • sometimes uses sounds from home language to spell English words	• writes simple sentences (with some mistakes) and sequences of sentence • spells familiar words correctly • spells irregular and unfamiliar words using invented spelling, home language, or similarity to known words • uses word endings and prefixes appropriately, although not always accurately • some spelling and grammar errors in low-frequency words and complex grammar	• spelling of familiar words is conventional, with few mistakes • can write simple paragraph • sentence grammar is growing in complexity and accuracy • understands and uses appropriate punctuation, paragraphing, headings, etc., in accord with purpose of text • expanded use of vocabulary in appropriate ways	• spelling, grammar, punctuation, and paragraphing are used correctly (for the most part), appropriately, and skillfully for purpose of text • uses topic-appropriate vocabulary and includes new words appropriately • appropriate use of technical terms that are appropriate to subject matter
• can create oral narratives and write them using simple vocabulary and grammar • communicates message at a word and phrase level • participates willingly in group writing using simple sentences and high-frequency words • can tell story or recount story in logical order • can use pictures to sequence events presented during oral story read • uses templates and writing frames as supports for writing	• can retell and analyze simple stories fluently (in English or home language) • with assistance, can predict events and infer consequences from narratives • uses variety of vocabulary and sentence patterns to write • some use of connectors and verb tense to create cohesion in writing	• can express self in writing on a range of topics using basic vocabulary and grammatical patterns • ideas in written text are organized logically according to genre • uses varied sentence patterns; may need assistance • uses appropriate connectors and verb tenses to create coherence • can edit writing, with prompting • can prepare a draft with assistance	• can write appropriately for a variety of purposes, both academic and personal • text is appropriately organized for specific purpose • can make connections between different academic subjects and school and personal/home life • sentence grammar, including tense, is used to create cohesion and relate information in a logical and meaningful way • edits text when given feedback; critiques own writing to revise it • takes chances and is creative writing personal or narrative text

Chart 1.1 Continued

to reading and writing. Our framework is quite simple; other frameworks are much more detailed and complex. This simplified version is adequate for purposes of this book; however, you should be sure to familiarize yourself with your school or district's framework. Some suggestions for getting a sense of your ELLs' prior literacy experiences follow:

To get a sense of your ELL students' prior literacy experiences

- Examine their past school records, if they are available.

- Gather information about their backgrounds by talking with family members or by visiting their homes or neighborhoods.

- Have students write brief descriptions about themselves or their families in English or the home language; even writing samples in the home language can give you a rough idea of whether they have some skills in literacy.

- Use teaching strategies that allow you to get to know your students better, such as dialogue journals, described in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

3. Prior schooling

It is also important to find out how much and what kind of prior schooling experiences your ELL students have had. ELLs who have had prior schooling before they join your class might be familiar and comfortable with your routines, especially if their prior schooling has been in an English-language setting. However, students who have had prior schooling in other countries may have learned different classroom routines and norms. For example, students coming from many parts of Asia, Africa, and South America may be used to teacher-fronted classrooms where a considerable amount of group or lockstep learning takes place. Classrooms that are student-centered and individualized may be unfamiliar to them, and they may need extra time and assistance to figure out what to do in your classroom. Students with prior schooling may also have learned basic math, reading, and study skills, which they can use to get going in your classroom.

Do not assume that students with prior schooling necessarily know how your classroom functions or that they would be at the same level as your students. They may be more or less advanced in their academic studies than your students. We often think that developing countries, for example, have less sophisticated educational systems than our own. However, in some cases, schools in these countries have more rigorous academic programs. Here are some ways to learn how much and what kind of prior schooling your ELLs have had:

Getting information about prior schooling

- Examine students' past school records, if available, to get a sense of not only how the student performed but what was taught.

- Gather as much information about the student's history before getting to your school by asking family members and the students themselves.

- Investigate the educational and social situations in the students' countries of origin.

4. Grade level

The linguistic and academic demands of schooling get progressively more challenging the higher the grade level. The subject matter and skills that students must learn become more complex and abstract, and language becomes more important as a tool for teaching and learning content in higher grades; competence in reading and writing become particularly important at this stage of schooling. The learning curve for ELLs must be steeper than that for mainstream students because ELLs must acquire proficiency in English at the same time as they master new academic content. In the case of students with limited formal schooling, they have to make up for the time when they were not in school. Thus,

Research Finding

Sheltered instruction is a research-based approach that helps ELLs develop oral language proficiency while building literacy skills and content area knowledge. Teachers prepare students for a lesson by building background knowledge; they teach the lesson using strategies that make language comprehensible; they provide opportunities for interaction and practice; and they assess and review (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt 2004).

the grade level you teach will have a fundamental and critical influence on how you organize the learning environment for ELLs. ELLs in the higher elementary grades need extensive use of sheltered instruction to cope with academic subjects and lots of scaffolding and differentiation if they are to learn English at the same time as they learn new academic material. If ELLs are to close the gap with their English-speaking peers, they must have accelerated instruction in English literacy; this becomes even more important the higher the grade level.

5. Family background

ELLs, like many mainstream students, begin to acquire the foundations of literacy and even some beginning literacy skills in their families and communities. Therefore, knowing how language is used, and especially written forms of language, in your ELLs' families and communities can help you plan instruction that builds on what they already know or are familiar with. For example, ELLs in some families may be used to being read to or being told oral stories in their home language. Knowing this, you can create a learning environment that provides continuity with their family experiences and supports them as they learn to read and write in English. Other ELLs may come from families where the parents work at several jobs and do not have time for telling stories or reading to their children; or they may have limited education and literacy skills. Teachers will need to provide these students with the foundations of literacy in school. This does not mean that parents have no role to play; they can serve as "audience" as their children read to them in English or tell them stories. In short, in order to promote literacy development, teachers should link what they are teaching to the literacy-related experiences and skills that ELLs have acquired outside school.

For example, ELLs from some families may be used to working, playing, and doing homework in groups rather than individually. Knowing this, you can provide a learning environment that provides continuity with ELLs' past and supports

Research Finding

Luis Moll and his colleagues talk about the funds of knowledge that students have about life at home and in the community. Funds of knowledge are students' understandings of household activities and customs and ways of doing things at home and in the community; they also include students' knowledge about cultural habits, values, and activities. When teachers use students' funds of knowledge as a cultural resource and a basis for curriculum and lesson development, ELLs can relate to school in a way that they had previously been unable to (Moll 2000; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti 2005).

them as they learn new skills and subject matter. The parents of some ELLs are expert farmers, and, as a result, their children may have access to community gardens where they grow their own fruits and vegetables. Others may be doctors who have been trained in Eastern medicine, for example, and may have knowledge about medicinal plants and herbs. Knowing this provides you with knowledge about learning resources that you can draw on to build your ELLs' competence in English literacy and in academic domains. This can be done by linking what you are teaching to what your ELLs already know and can do outside school— for example, create a community garden in the classroom or school playground that permits ELLs with this kind of background to express their competencies. This could also be a terrific context for science or math teaching as well as for including parents in school activities.

6. Similarity of the home language and culture to that of the mainstream

As we have noted a number of times, ELLs are very resourceful. They use all the skills, knowledge, and experiences they have to help them learn in school. The most obvious and powerful resource they have is their home language. ELLs are most likely to draw on resources in the home language in the early stages of acquiring English; this is especially true when they are learning to read and write English, but it is also evident when they speak.

> "ELLs with initial L1 literacy experiences, such as emergent and family literacy, as well as those with well-developed L1 literacy skills, progress more quickly and successfully in L2 literacy development."
>
> (Riches & Genesee 2006, 83)

Using the home language to figure out English is sometimes referred to as *transfer*. When students transfer knowledge from the home language that is the same in English, we see this as progress because they are using the appropriate form for English. However, when the home language differs from English, this can result in "mistakes." For example, a Spanish-speaking ELL might not use a pronoun or noun in a sentence where most English speakers would, or she might put the adjective after the noun instead of before it; a Chinese-speaking ELL might not use *s* markings on plural nouns or may not insert endings on verbs in English to mark number and tense (e.g., "two cat" or "he go"). In every case, these students are doing this because this is the way their home language works.

"These L1 and L2 abilities appear to contribute to the development of a common bilingual reservoir that serves both L1 and L2 literacy and create an awareness of systematic relationships between languages, allowing ELLs to draw on existing L1 knowledge in the service of L2 literacy. Furthermore, it appears that L2 literacy is more than the sum of its parts, as ELLs appear to have unique abilities that result from their bilingual status."

(Riches & Genesee 2006, 82)

We notice examples of negative transfer and often interpret them as "mistakes" because they result in a form that is not expected in English or is wrong. We do not notice cases of positive transfer because these forms look like correct English. But it is wrong to view transfer that results in unusual English forms as mistakes. Rather it is more appropriate to recognize that the students are showing resourcefulness by using forms from their home language because they do not yet know the appropriate forms in English. By knowing something about your ELLs' home languages, at least the most common ones (like Spanish, Vietnamese, and Cantonese), you can better understand their efforts to learn English and you can be more confident that they are making progress even when they are using forms that differ from English. You can also use these cases of negative transfer to illustrate to your students how languages differ; this kind of metalinguistic knowledge is helpful when it comes to reading and writing.

ELLs might also use the cultural norms of their families and communities when they relate to other students and their teacher—as a kind of cultural transfer. In some cases, their home culture may have norms that are distinct from the norms used in the classroom; for example, children from some families may be reluctant to volunteer in class activities because they are taught to follow their teacher's directions and not to speak unless the teacher explicitly requests them to speak. In contrast, many literacy activities in mainstream U.S. classrooms rely on volunteer participation and volunteering is viewed as an indicator of motivational level or level of comprehension. If ELLs do not behave like mainstream students, it is important not to interpret their behavior as lack of interest or attention or as signs of difficulty. Rather, ELLs are doing what they know best and think is appropriate. Understanding the norms of ELLs' families and communities can help you better understand their behavior in class.

Here are some suggestions to help you find out about your students' home languages and cultures:

Learning about your ELL students' home languages and cultures

○

- Consult a member of the student's home culture about norms in their group.

- Ask fluent or near-fluent speakers of the student's language about cultural aspects of language use that are relevant to the classroom—physical distance between speakers, eye gaze, turn-taking, initiating talk. All of these can differ from the way English works. When you ask family members about their ways of doing things, be careful not to evaluate or judge their social norms using your own as a yardstick; this will minimize prejudicial views of the cultural norms and values of your students.

○

- Read about the various languages and different cultural norms and customs of ELLs in your classroom; see Additional Resources at the end of this chapter for some suggestions.

You can learn more about ELLs' home languages in Chapter 3.

Special Needs

Learning takes time, whether it is learning to read and write, learning new math skills, or learning how to fit in socially. Children show enormous differences in how quickly they learn. Sometimes when ELLs take a long time to learn to read and write or

> **Research Finding**
>
> Although there is an over-representation of ELLs in special-education programs in the United States, it is not bilingualism that leads to academic difficulties. Rather, the problem lies in assessment procedures, the use of a medical model of special needs, and the use of categorical funding in the school system (Cummins 2000; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago 2004; Hamayan et al. 2007).

to understand math or science, we think that they have a learning disability or are language impaired. However, there is no reason to believe that learning a second language or being bilingual are risk factors for learning disability.

Children can acquire two languages simultaneously in essentially the same way and time as children who learn only one language, if they are given an adequate learning environment (see Genesee, Paradis, & Crago [2004] for an overview of relevant research).

Generally, children who learn a second language after their first language do not have difficulty if they are given adequate time and

> "There is no scientific evidence that infants' language learning ability is limited to one language. On the contrary, research on infants with . . . dual language exposure indicates that they have the innate capacity to acquire two languages without significant costs to the development of either language. Simultaneous dual language children generally experience the same milestones at approximately the same age as monolingual children, in both the early months and later on . . ."
>
> (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago 2004, 84)

input. At the same time, some ELLs, like some English speakers, may have genuine learning disabilities and require additional support. The challenge for educators is to identify specific difficulties that ELLs are encountering and provide them with interventions that help them overcome their difficulties. In trying to provide ELLs with learning difficulties with a continuum of support, extensive information about their school and home life must be gathered and used as a context for instruction (see, for example, the process described in Hamayan et al. 2007). Some ELLs may need to go through a full formal assessment, and because of the way funding is set up in some countries, including the United States, they may need to be formally identified as having a special-education need.

▶ Summing Up and Looking Ahead

In this chapter, we talked about some big ideas concerning teaching and learning in school in general. While these apply to mainstream students as well as ELLs, we focused on how they apply and what they mean for teaching literacy to ELLs who come from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. We then reviewed briefly what research tells us about learning to read and write in a second language. These research findings motivated a great deal of the guidance we provide in the remaining chapters; we consider the implications of these findings for teaching literacy to ELLs in greater detail in the coming chapters. Finally, we talked about how important it is to get to know your ELLs and suggested some ways in which you can do that.

This chapter sets the stage for the remaining chapters. In Chapter 2, we focus on the emergent literacy stage of development; we

devote a whole chapter to this topic since this stage is so critical for ELLs and because a large proportion of ELLs start school in English at the lower grade levels when literacy is still in the early stages of development. In Chapter 3, we go on to discuss how you can assist ELLs reach their full potential as readers and writers; here we emphasize your role in helping ELLs become biliterate—in English and their home language. This is not only a desirable goal but also a realistic one if you expand your conceptualization of how you can help students learn to read and write to include community and other resources to support ELLs' home language. The development of academic language and literacy in a second language is the topic of Chapter 4. While the first chapters were about learning to read, Chapter 4 is about reading to learn. In Chapter 5, we discuss ways of connecting reading and writing so that each is promoted. We describe teaching strategies where reading is used to promote writing and where student writing is used as individual or as class text to promote reading. Finally, in Chapter 6, we discuss assessment. Here we emphasize the value and importance of classroom-based assessment as a tool for instructional planning. We provide lots of examples of what kinds of assessment tools to use and how to use them with ELLs.

NOTE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Given requirements in U.S. schools, as well as in other countries, it is usually difficult to avoid formally classifying ELLs with special academic difficulties for "special education." If you test these students, it is likely that they will appear to have a special-education needs, even if they do not in reality have a learning, language, or reading disorder. However, with growing recognition of the value of Response to Intervention (RTI) protocols for identifying students' learning needs, doors are opening to allow you to set up systems in your school to provide such students with support before formal assessment is completed. See the procedures described in Hamayan et al. (2007) for suggestions on how to do this. See also the special issue of *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* (Vol. 30, Number 2, Summer 2007), which is dedicated to using RTI with ELLs.

▶ ## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Getting current information on English language learners

❏ National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs: www.ncela.gwu.edu

> *This website provides a wealth of information on English language learners including information on demographics and federal policies.*

❏ Migration Policy Institute: www.migrationpolicy.org/

> *This website provides research on immigrants and migrants; for example, see* Spotlight on Limited English Proficient Students in the United States *(2006) by Jeanne Batalova: www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/ display.cfm?ID=373.*

❏ US Census Bureau: http://factfinder.census.gov

> *This site provides national and statewide data on persons who speak languages other than English at home. It also provides self-report data on persons who speak English at less than proficient levels.*

Information about other languages and cultures

❏ www.ethnologue.com/web.asp

> *This website contains a catalogue of more than 6,700 languages spoken in 228 countries.*

❏ www.ipl.org/div/kidspace/browse/owd3000

> *This website provides information about the languages, cultures, religions, and geography of many countries around the world.*

❏ Flaitz, J. 2006. *Understanding Your Refugee and Immigrant Students: An Educational, Cultural and Linguistic Guide.* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

> *This book will help teachers understand the types of classroom experiences students may have had in their home countries. It covers common countries of origin from Central and South America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, the Near East, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. It talks about classroom life, teacher status, teacher-student relationships, teaching practices, discipline and classroom management, student-student relationships, and the like. It also identifies potential adjustment challenges and solutions.*

❏ Haghighat, C. 2003. *Language Profiles.* Vols. I–III. Toronto: World Languages Publishing House.

> *This book provides linguistic and cultural background information for sixty-seven languages.*

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