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Research-Based Practices for English Language Learners

CAROLYN DERBY HAS TAUGHT EITHER 2ND OR 3RD GRADE FOR THE PAST 10 YEARS IN A district in the Northwest. The district she teaches in draws from a community that is both rural and suburban in character. Carolyn comments: "I would really like to feel more confident about teaching the growing number of students in my class whose parents speak a language other than English in the home. Initially, new students were primarily Spanish speaking, although now some students speak languages such as Vietnamese, Croatian, and Russian. I have learned a great deal in the last few years about the customs of these families and have integrated my learning into my classroom, but I still worry that I may not be using the best practices for teaching—especially teaching reading."

Carolyn is not alone. She is among many teachers instructing English language learners (ELLs), who are found in every state in growing numbers. ELLs come from families with a wide range of education, from the highly educated to those with very limited or no formal education. They are represented in every socioeconomic level and speak more than 470 different languages, although Spanish is the home language for at least 75 percent of these students. Despite these differences, researchers have identified effective instructional and assessment practices for beginning readers who are ELLs.

As with all reading instruction, the ultimate goals are reading for understanding, learning, and interest. In the early grades, with most students, the focus is on moving to meaning after assuring that students have foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. How do these goals differ for English language learners? The broad goals of reading are the same for all students. An additional goal with ELLs is to

Why Should I Teach Phonemic Awareness?

Children who begin school with little phonological awareness have trouble acquiring alphabetic coding skill and thus have difficulty recognizing words. (Stanovich, 2000, p. 393)

Phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first two years of school (Learning First Alliance, 2000; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; National Research Council [NRC], 1998). Having an awareness of the sounds within words influences outcomes in word recognition within and across languages and ultimately enhances comprehension for all students. Phonemic awareness instruction also improves spelling for students, with the exception of those with established learning disabilities. Children who have poorly developed phonemic awareness skills at the end of their kindergarten year are likely to become poor readers. This is true for students learning to read in most languages, and it is true for students learning to read in a second language.

The good news is that most beginning readers, including ELLs and those who have early reading difficulties, can acquire these skills if they are given explicit instruction in phonemic awareness for even a brief amount of time each day (such as 15 minutes). Young English language learners can acquire age-appropriate phonemic awareness skills even when their English proficiency is not fully developed. In fact, there is some evidence that limited speech perception does not interfere with a child's

ability to develop phonemic awareness skills (Chiappe et al., 2002). Although very recent immigrants with minimal to no exposure to English will have to develop some English language skills before engaging in phonemic awareness activities, it is important that teachers provide students opportunities to develop these skills as early as possible. Kindergarten students benefit from phonemic awareness instruction more than students who receive their first lessons in phonemic awareness in 1st or 2nd grade (Ehri et al., 2001). Those teaching 1st and 2nd grade will want to teach phonemic awareness to students who lack this skill (Ehri et al., 2001) and as a review for all students.

What Are the Phonemic Awareness Skills That Students Should Know?

The skills that have the most impact on later reading are blending and segmenting at the phoneme level. However, before students get to this level, there are other phonological awareness skills that will prepare them for these and other phonemic awareness tasks. Phonological awareness includes blending, segmenting, and manipulating, but with larger word parts such as syllables and onset-rimes. Words that can be divided into onset and rime are one-syllable words. The onset consists of the consonant or consonants before the vowel. The rime is the vowel and every sound after the vowel. For example, in the word *can*, /c/ is the onset, /an/ is the rime. In *scratch*, the onset is /scr/ and the rime is /atch/. Phonemic awareness is the most complex of the skills on the continuum of

Procedures

1. Model how to insert cassettes into tape recorders and how to start, stop, and rewind tapes. Show students how to handle and wear the headphones.
2. Model the procedures for reading along, such as pointing to words and reading quietly.
3. Have students read the book with the audiotape.
4. Monitor students to ensure that they are following along with their fingers and reading quietly. Provide individual assistance if needed.
5. Have students read the passage three times: with the tape, with another student, and with the teacher.

6. Encourage students to document their readings using the assisted reading log.

Adaptations

- Have students follow the above procedures as they listen to computer-based books and commercial software reading programs. Many software programs are available in both English and Spanish with built-in record-keeping systems to monitor students' progress.
- After reading along with a tape or computer, have students record part of the passage or book and then listen to it. Help students evaluate their reading, with the following questions and tips:
 “When you read orally, what do you do well?”

FIGURE 4.6 ➤ **Assisted Reading Log**

Date	Title	Read With			
		Tape/ Computer	Self	Student	Teacher
	1.				
	2.				
	3.				
	4.				
	5.				
	6.				
	7.				
	8.				

Review Lesson for the Doubling Rule

Objective. Review the doubling rule for adding *-ing* or *-ed* to a CVC verb.

Materials. Flip chart, blackboard, or dry-erase board; writing notebooks and pencils; marker

Sequence. Complete the activity as a group, complete activity in pairs, add CVCC words

1. Review the doubling rule with students. Remind them that in English when they add an ending to a CVC word they must double the last letter.
2. Write a CVC verb on board. Ask students what they must do to add an ending. Rewrite the word with the ending.
3. Tell students that they will have a tick-tack-toe tournament.
4. Draw a tick-tack-toe board, and write a CVC verb in each square.
5. Tell students that to gain a square, they have to change the verb by adding either *-ing* or *-ed* correctly. If the new word is written correctly, the student may draw an X or O. If the student does not add the ending correctly, the square remains open. In the first round, students play against the teacher.
6. Have students determine whether an answer is correct or not by showing thumbs up or thumbs down. Continue until someone wins the game by getting three in a row.

Variation. Students play in pairs.

Scaffold. Use only one type of ending.

Structural Analysis: Let's Add Word Parts

Objective. Students learn that affixes (prefixes and suffixes) change the word meaning.

Materials. Chart paper, marker, a list of root words students can read and give the meaning for each

Sequence. Most-common prefixes, most-common suffixes, less-common prefixes, less-common suffixes

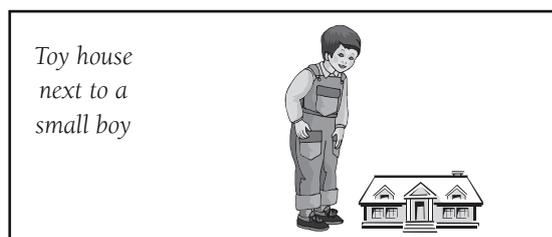
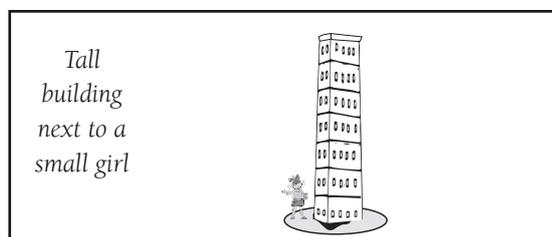
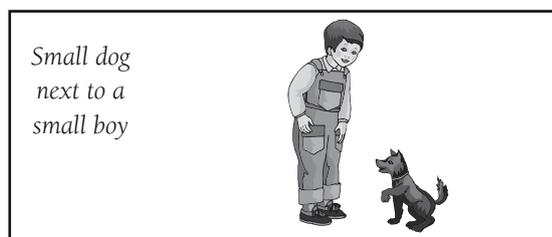
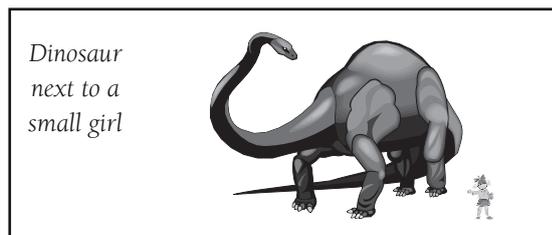
1. Tell students that adding word parts to a word will change the meaning of the word. Tell students that prefixes appear at the beginning of the word and that they will learn the meaning of the prefix and then add it to root words.
2. Write a prefix on the chart paper. Read the prefix and tell students its meaning.
3. Ask students to read the prefix and tell its meaning.
4. Write a root word on the chart paper. Ask students to read the word and give its meaning. If students do not know the meaning, provide it.
5. Write the root word with the prefix. Ask students to read the word.
6. Model how to determine the meaning of the new word. For example, *un-* means “not”; *happy* means “with joy”; so *unhappy* means “not happy” or “without joy.”
7. Provide additional root words and ask students to read and define the prefix, read the root word, read the word with prefix added, and define the new word.
8. Repeat steps 2–7 with the second prefix.

Comprehension Processing: Is It or Isn't It?

Objective. Students will learn vocabulary words through examples and nonexamples.

Materials. Vocabulary words, pictures that provide examples and nonexamples of the words, overhead projector, transparency, marker.

Example pictures for the vocabulary word *gigantic*:



1. Write one of the vocabulary words on a transparency.
2. Say the word, and have students repeat it.
3. Ask "What does ___ mean?" Provide appropriate feedback.

For example:

- "What does *gigantic* mean?"
- If response is correct, say "Yes, *gigantic* means 'huge.'"
- If response is incorrect, immediately model the correct response: "*Gigantic* means 'huge.'"

4. Discuss pictures that represent examples and nonexamples of the word.

For example:

- Point to the first picture and say: "The dinosaur is *gigantic*."
- Point to the second picture and say: "The dog is **not** *gigantic*."

5. Present the pictures one at a time. Have students determine if the picture is an example or nonexample of the word.

For example:

- "The tall building is *gigantic*."
- "The toy house is **not** *gigantic*."

6. Provide opportunities for students to practice discriminating whether a picture represents an example or nonexample of a word.

For example:

- Have students sit in a circle.
- Within reach of everyone, place the stack of pictures face down in the middle of the circle.
- Have students take turns identifying whether the picture represents an example or nonexample of a word.