JOSSEY-BASS TEACHER GRADES K–6

How to Teach English Language Learners

Effective Strategies from Outstanding Educators

DIANE **HAAGER** | JANETTE K. **KLINGNER** | TERESE C. **ACEVES**

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

We often learn the most by watching those who are highly skilled perform their craft and then trying the new ideas ourselves. This book provides an opportunity to do just that by shining a light into the classrooms of successful elementary school teachers and their English language learners (ELLs) and depicting strategies for teaching reading and language arts while also supporting students' language acquisition. The book includes scenarios from bilingual and English immersion models in various schools and contexts where we will find ELLs. These case studies highlight instruction across three tiers of reading instruction typical of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model: core reading and language arts instruction, small-group supplemental reading intervention for struggling readers, and intensive instruction for students with learning disabilities. Each chapter includes opportunities for reflection through questions for the readers and suggested application activities. This book is for readers who want to learn how to improve outcomes for English language learners, and it is appropriate for group study, in professional learning communities or teacher education classes, or for individual reading.

THE AUTHORS

Diane Haager is a professor at California State University, Los Angeles, where she instructs teachers in methods for teaching students with reading difficulties and learning disabilities. Haager has worked in the public schools as a reading specialist and special educator. She is coauthor with Janette K. Klingner of *Differentiating Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: The Special Educator's Guide* (Allyn & Bacon, 2004), and she coauthored the reading intervention handbook *Interventions for Reading Success* (Brookes, 2007), as well as numerous book chapters and articles. Haager's research interests include effective reading instruction for English learners, students with learning disabilities, and students at risk for reading failure.

Janette K. Klingner is a professor of education specializing in bilingual multicultural special education at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She was a bilingual special education teacher for ten years before earning a PhD in reading and learning disabilities from the University of Miami. To date, she has authored or coauthored more than eighty articles, books, and book chapters. In 2004 she won the American Educational Research Association's Early Career Award. Research interests include reading comprehension strategy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students, Response to Intervention for English language learners, the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education, and professional development that enhances teacher quality.

Terese C. Aceves is an associate professor of special education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. After working in the classroom as a bilingual resource specialist, she earned her PhD in special education, disabilities, and risk studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, while also completing her masters degree in school psychology. She is coeditor of *Education for All: Critical Issues in the Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities* (Jossey-Bass, 2008). Her research interests include early intervention and identification of children at risk for reading failure and supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families who have children with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are teacher-educators and researchers with a constant thirst for learning how to improve outcomes for all children—particularly culturally and linguistically diverse students and students with special needs. Our inspiration for this book came from our desire to help teachers see effective instruction in action. Through our research, we have encountered amazing teachers who have been successful with English language learners. We wish to help others learn from their successful practices.

We are very grateful for the teachers who have allowed us to come into their classrooms and learn from what they do. Only a few of them are represented in this book. We are grateful to the principals and teachers who have welcomed us into their schools, permitted us to observe in their classrooms, and talked with us about what they do for their students. We hope there will always be such welcoming professionals who are willing to share their practices, so that all can benefit from their expertise.

All the teachers depicted in this book participated in school-based research projects. We are grateful for the research teams who helped us manage the projects, collect data, conduct interviews, and analyze our findings, including Michelle Windmueller, Joe Dimino, Jennifer Mahdavi, Danessa Murdock, Josefa Rascón, Beth Harry, Angela Deterville, and Keith Sturges.

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Diane Haager: To those who shaped my thinking about teaching as we taught together, especially Gail Wagner, Tom Wagner, Bea Raddant, Opal Hamm, Sue Stark, and Paul Heithaus. Also to the children I have taught, many of whom were learning English as a second language while learning to read and write. I have learned so much from you all!

Janette K. Klingner: To the many outstanding bilingual educators I had the privilege of working with and learning from during my years as a resource specialist at Anne Darling Elementary School in San Jose, California. Among them were bilingual teachers Beverly Basalla, Trini Warren, Juan Herrera, Adele Montenegro, and Sue Sartor; the counselor Jesse Aguirre; the paraprofessional who worked with me in our trilingual resource room, Elizabeth Sousa; and our principal, Cecilia Espalin-Huffman. Together we made a difference!

Terese C. Aceves: To the numerous teachers and administrators I had the opportunity and pleasure to work with and observe as a graduate student and beginning researcher. Also to my colleagues and friends within the Lennox School District and specifically at Jefferson Elementary School. During all my work in the schools I have never met a more dedicated group of teachers and administrators committed to supporting students with and without disabilities and their families.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Getting Started with This Book

Teachers have one universal wish that influences almost every instructional decision they make—to maximize their students' learning. Many factors influence teachers' ability to teach effectively. Contextual factors are often outside of teachers' direct control and include school climate and culture, district and state policy, geographic location, and community involvement, to name a few. What the student brings to the classroom in terms of prior knowledge, culture, experience, and skills also influences the end result. As teachers, we may have direct control only over what we bring to the classroom: our own knowledge, skills, experience, and beliefs about teaching. This book is about understanding these contextual and student factors that influence learning for students who are English language learners (ELLs). More important, it is about adding to teachers' repertoire to deliver the most effective instruction possible for the students they teach, with a particular focus on ELLs.

We have written this book to share with you—current or future teachers of ELLs—what we have learned from the many talented teachers we have encountered in schools serving children of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We also hope to share with you what we have learned from their students, who may have come to school fearful and hesitant about using English or another

language, but who proved capable of extraordinary achievements and of trusting that their teachers would teach them. In this book we offer a window into their teaching in the hope that you will learn from what they do and expand your own repertoire.

WHO ARE OUR PORTRAIT TEACHERS?

We have selected a few teachers to highlight—teachers whose stories capture those teacher factors that seem to make a difference between mediocre and excellent outcomes for ELLs. Our teachers were selected based on a variety of factors including the recommendations of school site principals, numerous classroom observations by research teams, and demonstrated positive student outcomes. Over the course of our research with a variety of schools, these teachers clearly rose to the top. Their reading instruction reached significantly beyond their district's standard reading curriculum. Classroom observations looked for those variables identified by our projects and previous research as effective practices. These variables include providing students with diverse opportunities for learning; offering direct systematic instruction in necessary readings skills; connecting with students' background knowledge, culture, language, and experiences; and creating a rigorous and collaborative learning environment, to name a few.

Each of these classrooms includes students who are in the process of acquiring English. The stories we share explore how these teachers helped their students learn to read according to challenging grade-level standards while also addressing their language learning needs. These teachers were able to help their students reach ambitious expectations. In some cases, the teachers were able to use the students' native language to support bilingual learning. In other cases, the teachers could not use this approach because of English-only policies in their state. Nonetheless, all teachers were very effective with their students.

We focus on reading and language arts instruction for several reasons. Language learning certainly occurs across all subject areas, but it is more focused and direct in reading and language arts. The ability to speak, read, and write affects students' success in all subject areas, making reading and language arts a critical area in which to apply instructional principles that will support ELLs. For more practical reasons, we selected this area of instruction because it is the area we have focused on in our own work with teachers—through professional development, teacher education, and research.

The teachers included in this book are real teachers with whom we have worked. Their involvement in our research projects led to descriptive data that we used to write their stories. Almost everything you will read was taken from

data sources such as observations, interviews, teacher surveys, and student data. Since they participated in various different projects, we do not have the same data sources for every teacher. When necessary, we have filled in holes by creating or embellishing the descriptions of actual activities when our data did not provide enough description. In these instances, we drew on our memory and experiences in the classrooms to flesh out a more complete description of an activity, teaching strategy, or teacher-student dialogue.

WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

Before we begin, let us share some information about the students who are the focus of this book. Although almost all the ELLs in the classes we describe speak Spanish, ELLs across the United States are a diverse group, coming from many different backgrounds with widely varying previous experiences. Some are recent immigrants. Many students who are newcomers have little to no knowledge of the English language, and their families may have equally little experience with English. They may have had very little previous schooling and might have spent years in a refugee camp and experienced a great deal of trauma in their home countries before emigrating. On the other hand, they might have attended school in their home country and be quite well educated and ready to tackle grade-level material in the United States. They might have learned some English already. Whether or not students already know how to read in their first language makes a tremendous difference when considering how best to teach them how to read in English. We only need to learn how to read once. If we are literate in our first language, then we still need to learn sound-symbol correspondence in English, but our task is much easier. Even students who can already read in another language, however, still benefit from some explicit instruction to help them transfer the skills they have developed.

Many ELLs are born in the United States, and they also differ in various ways. They may be from homes where both English and Spanish or another language are spoken and are learning two languages at once ("simultaneous bilinguals"). Some are from homes where they and their families speak their native language almost exclusively, and they are learning English as a second or additional language ("sequential bilinguals"). We are just now learning more about "simultaneous bilinguals" and realizing that the process of learning two languages at once is different from learning first one language and then another. When students are in the process of learning two languages, typically they know fewer words in both English and their first language than their monolingual peers in either language. Yet, importantly, the *total* number of words they know could be the same or

even higher. We should not worry when they code-switch—borrow from one language when speaking in another. It is not that they are confused or behind, or lack a language, or have a learning disability. Rather, we should realize that the process of becoming bilingual is different for them in some ways.

Also, the variations across social classes play a part in these situations. Whereas some ELLs are from wealthy or middle-class backgrounds, many others live in poverty, compounding the challenges they face. It is important to consider, however, that although their background experiences might not be the same as those of students from more affluent backgrounds, they still have had valuable experiences that can and should be used to support their learning. Even if they have not been to Disneyland, a museum, or the zoo, they have probably participated in family gatherings to celebrate special occasions and have family members with a range of skills and interests.

ELLs also differ in their previous schooling experiences, such as whether they have missed a lot of school or moved around a lot, attended preschool, or regularly attended one school with a consistent reading program. They may already have received some intensive support as part of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, or been placed in special education. They may or may not have received some native language instruction.

Why do these differences matter? It is important not to make assumptions about children's backgrounds, so that we do not underestimate or overestimate what they can do and we can improve our ability to provide appropriate instruction. For example, students who already are literate in their first language can become bored very quickly if asked to learn to read with students who are not yet literate, even though they all may be at similar levels of English proficiency. These differences do matter.

Regardless of English language learners' home language, the methods of instruction addressed in this book can be implemented with all ELLs. We present solid, key strategies for teaching reading to students from "diverse" linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Response to Intervention is a model of early identification for students who experience academic difficulty in the general education classroom. This model also serves as a method of early identification for students with learning disabilities. Prior to the most recent reauthorization of special education law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, or IDEA, 2004), students with disabilities often waited several years to receive assistance, causing them to fall further behind their same-age peers. Response to Intervention provides an alternative to this wait-and-fail model.

RTI's basic framework includes a multitiered approach involving a series of interventions whose intensity increases at each successive tier. Ongoing assessment is an essential component of this framework to determine whether instruction is meeting students' learning needs. The majority of research to date on Response to Intervention and early reading has focused on monolingual English-speaking students. Research focusing more on the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners is growing, but is still scarce. Given the increasing numbers of English language learners in U.S. schools, teachers must consider how an RTI framework may facilitate learning to read for these students. All but one of the schools we describe in this book (Bay Vista) were implementing RTI.

Tier 1: Effective Classroom Practice for All Students

General education encompasses the first tier of instruction. In this tier it is assumed that *all students* receive appropriate, rigorous instruction including a research-based reading program addressing the essential reading skills (such as phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). In most literature on RTI, this component is most often assumed. Such instruction increases students' opportunities for learning in the classroom. A majority of students do perfectly well with general instruction—approximately 80 percent of students at this tier. Schools conduct universal screening of students three to four times a year in the essential areas of reading to ensure that students meet necessary predetermined benchmarks.

For English language learners, teachers must consider several factors necessary for effective general instruction in reading. These include understanding how to make instruction and assessment linguistically and culturally appropriate for the students they teach. Teachers of English language learners must be aware of students' first and second languages and how to teach according to

students' proficiency levels in both languages. They must consider students' cultural and familial experiences when planning instruction and assessment. Students' language and culture should be viewed as *assets* to instruction, rather than obstacles. In the classroom, effective teachers in Tier 1 recognize, tap into, and praise diversity. Students experiencing difficulty receive additional assistance in the classroom and are provided simple accommodations. When this assistance is not sufficient to bring students to proficiency, teachers consider additional Tier 2 intervention instruction.

Tier 2: Support for Struggling Readers

After receiving quality general reading instruction, 15 to 20 percent of students continue to experience difficulty acquiring specific skills known to be critical for later reading development, necessitating additional support on top of what they already receive in the classroom. These students will continue to receive general reading instruction and supplemental instruction with individualized or small-group support. In addition to universal screening three to four times per year, teachers assess these students' progress more regularly (perhaps weekly or bimonthly).

The literature often describes two methods of intervention instruction: the problem-solving approach and standard treatment protocol. Standard treatment protocol requires a standardized intervention for all students, most often provided by someone other than the classroom teacher and implemented outside the students' regular classroom. Conversely, the problem-solving model often works within a schools' existing student assistance or student study team, and the team develops a plan involving a series of classroom accommodations and modifications to the student's instructional program. The team objectively defines the problem, considers various factors that may have contributed to the problem, develops an action plan including evidence-based strategies for intervention, evaluates the plan, and monitors the student's progress. Both methods provide supplementary instruction to students experiencing difficulty with Tier 1 general classroom instruction alone. Intervention includes small-group instruction that is often provided by a general education teacher, reading specialist, or special education teacher.

Throughout Tier 2 instruction, progress monitoring provides evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention plan for individual students. Students who respond well to the intervention are not considered to have a learning disability. For students who receive intervention and do not respond—that is, their reading skills do not advance—the cause may be an inherent learning

disability. This would be evidence that a referral for special education is warranted. Then the problem-solving team would initiate a referral, parental consent, and comprehensive evaluation.

For English language learners, the problem-solving model appears to be the more flexible of the two intervention approaches. Methods of intervention instruction should not only be tailored to meet students' basic reading skills but also address their linguistic and learning needs. Although RTI research involving English language learners is growing, more quantitative and qualitative research is needed investigating those contextual and student factors that most optimally support ELLs experiencing difficulty learning to read in a language they are only beginning to acquire. Schools should continue to monitor both the intervention and general classroom reading instruction for its appropriateness, fidelity of implementation, and sensitivity to students' language and culture.

Tier 3: Intensive, Individualized Support

Approximately 5 to 8 percent of students may require more intensive, individualized support. Districts vary in the number of tiers offered within their RTI model. In some instances Tier 3 may include a more rigorous intervention approach or referral for special education evaluation. In other cases, special education instruction would be Tier 4. The instruction level in Tier 3 may be provided in small groups or a more individualized approach than that used in Tier 2 and will likely occur in an alternative setting. Teachers at this level monitor students' progress more regularly than in Tier 2.

Ultimately, RTI is a viable alternative to the exclusive use of the traditional discrepancy model for disability identification. The discrepancy approach historically requires students to wait until a significant two- to three-year discrepancy appears between their cognitive performance and academic achievement. Use of this model and a lack of instruction embedded in culturally and linguistically appropriate methods leads to the over- and sometimes underrepresentation of English language learners to special education program services.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each chapter in this book focuses on one or two teachers and their students during reading instruction. We envision multiple ways that this book could be used to enhance the understanding of current or future teachers. Of course, you can read this book on your own—curled up at home with a cup of tea, in a coffee shop on the weekend, or at the beach in the summer—and reflect on how these teachers' stories relate to your own experience. Both novice and seasoned