Promoting English Learners’ Literacy Development in English

English Learners (ELs) each bring their own, varied cultural and linguistic literacy development experiences to literacy acquisition in English. As explained in the 2006 report *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners*¹, ELs take a more unique route than their English speaking peers to developing literacy in English, even though their reading instruction comprises the same research-based components: phonemic awareness, phonics/decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension along with writing skills development. Successful literacy instruction for ELs results when ELs build upon their prior knowledge, capitalize on opportunities for cross-linguistic transfer, and receive academic language and literacy instruction that is comprehensible.

Building on ELs’ existing phonological awareness to develop phonemic awareness is equally important to their literacy development as it is for native English-speaking students. It is essential, however, to recognize that the ELs’ development of phonemic awareness is largely influenced by their native language proficiency and their phonemic awareness of the sounds in their native language.²

Given the interactive nature of the components of literacy, ELs benefit most when all six skills are taken into consideration simultaneously, rather than learning them in isolation. For example, Helman discussed the importance of phonics in learning to read and also recommended eight instructional guidelines to support ELs’ acquisition of the written code: 1) Work with students at their developmental level; 2) Build on students’ home language and literacy skills; 3) Follow a systematic sequence of literacy instruction; 4) Make phonics instruction clear and explicit; 5) Use active learning strategies to teach and practice skills; 6) Integrate vocabulary study into phonics instruction; 7) Connect phonics instruction to meaningful texts; 8) Check for understanding and use frequent informal assessments.³

*Flink Bilingual Literacy* implements these recommendations to offer ELs appropriate second language literacy learning opportunities in English with meaningful practice in all six skill areas. Specifically, *Flink Bilingual Literacy* provides:

- Explicit phonics practice in Spanish and English using a language-specific scope and sequence for each language to ensure complete mastery of phonemic awareness and decoding skills,
- Explicit vocabulary development built on a curated list of over 1,200 high frequency vocabulary words essential for developing social and academic literacy,
- Over 120 grade-leveled eBooks in both Spanish and English with audio support for guided reading practice, tools to measure fluency, and activities supporting the development of reading comprehension via the framework *Strategies That Work*⁴: making connections, visualizing, inferring, determining importance, and synthesizing, and
- Structured opportunities to write that provide a scaffold from mechanics activities to free writing.

Daniel and Cowan⁵ discussed the many language learning benefits of technology as an instructional tool for ELs. Among those benefits, the *Flink Bilingual Literacy* supplemental program offers ELs software-based practice that includes: the opportunity for ELs to interact with their second language numerous times while developing control over a text through the processing of auditory and visual input; and, regular opportunities for oral language development in the form of collaboration with peers on interactive tasks that are meaningful and result in language learning. In these many ways, *Flink Bilingual Literacy* promotes both reading comprehension and writing skills for ELs.

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