The Need for a New Perspective on Second-Language Literacy

The reader might ask, Why do we need another book about literacy instruction and why one that is specific to second language learners? Bernhardt (2003) states that 80 percent of all reading research in the world has been done in four countries—the United States, England, New Zealand, and Australia—all of which are English-speaking countries. This research, while instructive, has been conducted largely by monolingual English researchers on monolingual English-speaking students and then applied to second language learners without question and, in many cases, without modification. Bernhardt adds that the preponderance of this monolingual English view of how children learn to read is exacerbated by state and federal policies regarding best practices for reading instruction, which rely solely on this monolingual research base.

Further compounding the issue is the production of commercial reading programs that are also based on this monolingual view and that are purchased by states and local school districts and used with diverse populations of children, assuming that the research base applies across languages and cultural groups. This deeply entrenched approach toward literacy has left little space for biliteracy and multiliteracy development or guidelines for how teaching literacy in English may need to be modified for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Moll, 2001; Moll & Dwin, 1996; Perez, 1998; Reyes, 2001; Schwarzer, 2001).

This situation has resulted in a call for a new perspective on teaching literacy to second language learners that emphasizes approaches and strategies specific to the needs of CLD learners. The chapters in this text address some of the gaps in research surrounding literacy instruction for second language learners so that ESL teachers and grade-level/mainstream teachers can bridge theory to practice as they develop a culturally responsive pedagogy. English as a second language (ESL) teachers are encouraged to continue providing ESL services if a CLD student qualifies for them via a solid oral ESL program that takes place daily and is explicit in its focus on literacy development. Grade-level/mainstream classroom teachers are encouraged to provide a comprehensive second-language reading program that takes place in addition to and not instead of ESL. This text provides grade-level/mainstream classroom teachers with the information they need to support second-language literacy development with their CLD students, in addition to whatever ESL program the school has in place.
Our research has found that teachers and schools who incorporate the languages and cultures represented by their CLD students have far greater success in supporting literacy development than those that do not. This success is further enhanced when ESL teachers and grade-level/mainstream classroom teachers work together to create a comprehensive literacy development program. Each of the chapters in this text provides concrete suggestions and hands-on strategies for both ESL and grade-level/mainstream teachers to implement in their daily instructional practice. Following these suggestions and applying these strategies will help ensure that children’s languages and cultures are the cornerstone of their literacy development.

Beginning to Develop a New Pedagogy

Chapter 1 sets the stage for this text by exploring what literacy means for CLD students. This chapter then introduces the five elements of literacy instruction that the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) views as critical to any reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Chapter 1 also details current approaches to reading instruction for alphabetic languages, which include analytic or top-down approaches (whole to part), synthetic or bottom-up approaches (part to whole), and interactive approaches. The NRP (2000) findings were synthetic (bottom-up) in their recommendations. This text proposes that rather than a focus on learning to crack the code, literacy instruction for second language learners must focus on meaning.

Chapter 2 presents an introduction to the CLD student biography and its role in literacy development. Central to this discussion is the need for educators to consider the whole child by exploring each student’s sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions to best use his or her assets to further the abilities to read and write in a second language. Too often, these dimensions are overlooked, viewed as problems to be solved, or seen as sources of interference in learning to read in English. Suggestions for getting to know students and using their languages and cultures in instruction are presented.

At the core of this text is a focus on the five core elements of reading instruction that were introduced by the NRP (2000). Chapter 3 begins this exploration by proposing a reexamination of phonemic awareness with CLD students. Traditionally, the development of phonemic awareness in monolingual English reading programs is based on instruction in phonemic awareness tasks. The challenge for CLD students is that these tasks are often decontextualized drills of isolated English letter sounds. For CLD students who are learning English and who do not yet know these letter sounds, this decontextualized approach to phonemic awareness
instruction often results in a disconnect. The reexamination in Chapter 3 is centered on research that found that CLD students can engage in cross-linguistic transfer by accessing existing phonemic awareness skills in their native language and transferring these skills to reading and writing in English. In an analysis of the word recognition view and sociopsycholinguistic view of reading, this chapter identifies which view is most beneficial for CLD students. This chapter proposes multiple strategies for teaching phonemic awareness tasks by modeling a contextualized approach to instruction that emphasizes cross-linguistic transfer.

Chapter 4 takes a historical look at the role of phonics in reading instruction. Building on the presentation of the word recognition view and the sociopsycholinguistic view of reading presented in Chapter 3, this chapter contextualizes phonics instruction from a sociopsycholinguistic viewpoint. Phonics instruction in the sociopsycholinguistic view incorporates three cueing systems to support the learner: the graphophonic, semantic, and syntactic cueing systems. Using authentic literature, Chapter 4 suggests possible ways educators can build from their prescribed reading programs to provide integrated phonics lessons for CLD students. Based on a student-centered approach to phonics instruction that supports and builds CLD students’ existing phonics skills, this chapter also identifies specific strategies that promote the use of linguistic investigations as the starting point from which educators can develop phonics skills with CLD students.

Chapter 5 explores the implications of current approaches to vocabulary development in instruction with CLD students. Building from these current approaches, this chapter highlights the importance of providing vocabulary instruction within meaningful linguistic and cultural contexts. To support teachers in the development of these meaningful contexts, this chapter provides specific examples of how vocabulary development can be linked to each of the four dimensions of the CLD student biography (sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive). Central to this discussion is a focus on differentiating vocabulary for CLD students at different stages of English language acquisition. Chapter 5 also explores how to tap into students’ prior and background knowledge before the lesson to bridge and connect the known to the unknown. Multiple strategies for promoting student interaction, practice, and application of academic vocabulary are provided. Furthermore, authentic assessment of students’ understanding of academic vocabulary is discussed and modeled through student samples.

Cognizant of the fact that vocabulary development underlies reading comprehension, the text moves from a discussion of vocabulary instruction to comprehension instruction in Chapter 6. Building on current research, this chapter proposes that central to comprehension instruction are the schematic connections students make while reading. CLD students who bring different life experiences than those of their monolingual English-speaking peers frequently make schematic
connections that differ as well. Chapter 6 explores this juxtaposition by illustrating how teachers can tap into the CLD student biography to promote the use of schematic connections in practice. Additionally, Chapter 6 provides teachers with three types of hands-on reading comprehension strategies that have been specifically designed to support CLD students’ schematic connections to text. The first type of strategy is metacognitive in nature and promotes CLD students’ monitoring of their own thought processes while reading. The second type, cognitive strategies, provides CLD students with concrete tools they can use individually or with peers. The third type, social/affective strategies, promotes student interaction and cultural connections to text.

Chapter 7 brings together the aspects of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension development by identifying how they work in unison to support fluency development. Traditionally, fluency instruction for CLD students has focused largely on *surface constructs* of fluency development, in which accuracy, speed, and prosody are the emphasis (Pikuisky & Chard, 2005). Chapter 7 introduces key considerations for promoting surface constructs of fluency development. Additionally, this chapter explores how teachers can transition CLD students to *deep constructs* of fluency development, in which the ultimate goal is comprehension. Numerous strategies are introduced to support teachers in providing fluency instruction that guides CLD students to develop these deep constructs of fluency. The emphasis of each of these strategies is on the power of collaboration and modeling. Through the use of interactive grouping configurations at the partner and small-group level, these hands-on strategies provide the reader with a new twist on fluency development.

Often, literacy books are about reading and not about writing. Chapter 8 specifically addresses the need to modify writing instruction for second language learners. As with reading instruction, writing instruction with CLD students is frequently approached in the same manner as writing instruction for monolingual English-speaking children. We propose that teachers adopt the perspective that what students know about writing in one language can be used to help teach the second language. For example, conducting a minilesson in which CLD students contrast languages might be more effective than asking students to correct grammar errors in written English sentences.

Chapter 9 challenges teachers to look “outside the lines” of traditional literacy assessment when working with CLD students by building from the multiple dimensions of the CLD student biography when approaching assessment. This chapter provides an overview of some of the most common assessments currently used in classrooms to identify students’ language proficiency levels and reading proficiency in the following areas: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Building from an authentic approach to assessment, this
chapter explores the ways teachers can assess CLD students’ knowledge in each of these areas by going back to the CLD student biography. Formative assessments are presented as one of the key ways for educators to apply authentic assessments in practice. Strategies for extending questioning that advances CLD students thinking, learning, and application are also introduced. The chapter concludes by presenting two student case studies that illustrate how to bring together the CLD student biography, reading instruction, and authentic assessment.

Chapter 10 brings the text to a close by examining how the information learned in the previous chapters aligns with two sets of standards: the Standards for the English Language Arts of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE, 1996) and the ESL Standards for Pre-K–12 Students of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 1997). Using both standards as a theoretical foundation, this chapter discusses how educators can maintain fidelity to the core curriculum they are required to teach yet still make accommodations within their reading curriculum to support their CLD students’ academic success. The chapter provides specific strategies that demonstrate how teachers can blend what they already do in their daily instruction with the new information they have learned so that they are able to maintain fidelity yet approach literacy instruction with a new lens rooted in the CLD student biography.

In sum, this text is organized around the principles that reading and writing instruction for CLD students begins with the CLD student biography and should have at its core a focus on meaning. Consequently, the languages and cultures of second language learners are considered resources to be used in teaching, rather than problems to be solved. Throughout this text, teachers are guided to modify literacy instruction in ways that address both the assets and needs of CLD students. Modification does not mean doing the same thing only slower, more frequently, after school, or on Saturdays. Modification means doing something differently and changing our habits of mind!

Additional Features

To support readers’ understanding, additional features are included in each chapter of this text. These features have been designed to reflect the various learning styles of readers and to highlight critical concepts.

Chapter Outlines

Every chapter begins with a chapter outline, which serves as a graphic organizer by providing the reader with an overview of the key content to be presented.
Critical Considerations
After each chapter outline, questions are posed for teachers and practitioners working with CLD students. The Critical Considerations prompt the reader to reflect on the issues to be explored in depth in the chapter.

Strategies in Practice
These boxes provide the reader with detailed instructions for implementing the strategies introduced in each chapter. Special emphasis is given to the adaptations included with each strategy that are specific to CLD students. Driven by the strategy itself, these adaptations reflect the specific sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions of the CLD student biography.

Samples of Student Work
Select samples of student work have been included in this text and incorporated in several of the Strategies in Practice to depict student products. The student samples have been gathered from multiple classrooms in multiple states and reflect a wide range of CLD students. Not only are these students culturally diverse, but they are also linguistically diverse in that they represent multiple language groups in addition to Spanish speakers.

Teacher Voices
In our work with public school teachers, we have been fortunate to see and share in the successful implementation of literacy instruction modified specifically for CLD students. We have included quotations from teachers throughout the text to share the insights gained by teachers from their various experiences and to highlight critical concepts. From the teachers’ voices, readers can learn firsthand how literacy instruction that targets the multiple dimensions of the CLD student biography not only significantly impacts the academic success of CLD students but also helps create powerful communities of learners with monolingual English students in grade-level classrooms.

Vignettes
Vignettes are included in selected chapters to provide the reader with specific classroom scenarios that highlight critical concepts. Using the vignettes, readers are prompted to critically reflect on how these concepts directly impact their daily instructional practice.

Key Theories and Concepts
Each chapter provides a theoretical orientation and defines critical concepts relevant to the chapter content. At the end of each chapter, these key theories and
concepts are presented via a list of key vocabulary terms, which serve as a reminder to the reader of the theoretical foundation on which the chapter was based.

**Professional Conversations on Practice**
These prompts provide readers with topics for discussion about the key issues presented in each chapter. This feature guides educators to elaborate on the concepts presented and to engage in critical reflection on the application of this content in their own professional practice.

**Questions for Review and Reflection**
At the end of each chapter, questions are provided to engage readers in self-reflection on key content. The prompts further challenge teachers to consider their own readiness for implementing what they have learned in their professional practice.

**Glossary**
This feature is designed to aid readers in their understanding of this text as well as in their future applications of content in practice. Attention has been given to acronyms readers are likely to be unfamiliar with and terms that are essential to literacy instruction for CLD students.

**References**
A complete list of works cited in American Psychological Association (APA) bibliography style is included at the end of the text. This reference list documents the multiple sources used to provide the theoretical foundation and the research-based and practical applications of content suggested by the authors throughout this text. Additionally, this feature can be used as a resource for educators of CLD students at the preservice and inservice levels.

**Starting the Journey**

This text has been written to support educators in navigating the precarious task of teaching CLD students to read and write. Literacy instruction that is modified to be relevant and meaningful for second language learners provides these children with a solid path to academic success.

As we navigate the never-ending tides of politics that drive what happens in schools, we urge educators to let the following proverb guide their steps:

> Not to let a word get in the way
> Of its sentence,
Not to let a sentence get in the way
Of its intention,
But to send your mind out to meet
The intention as a guest,
That is understanding.

Understanding the unique aspects of literacy development for CLD students needs to be the goal if we are to educate the children who sit before us. We must understand literacy development from a new perspective where pedagogy is important but the unique aspects of students’ cultures and languages and their interaction with learning to read and write are more important. This text is intended to provide educators with the necessary information to move one step beyond their current practice to ensure more intentional accommodations for their CLD students.

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