

 **SCHOLASTIC**
**Professional
Paper**

Guided Reading and Spanish-Speaking Children

by
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**GUIDED
READING
PROGRAM**
en español

INTRODUCTION

As the demographics of our country continue to change, more and more students are coming into our classrooms from homes that speak a language other than English, primarily Spanish. According to Slavin & Cheung (2004), English-language learners comprise one of the fastest-growing student populations in U.S. schools. Knowing these students' strengths as well as anticipating their needs should inform the design and delivery of literacy instruction for second-language learners (August et al., 2002). Following are the challenges faced in bilingual classrooms and in reading instruction for second language learners:

- Delivering differentiated instruction to a growing population of English-language learners;
- Locating and using relevant and suitable materials to support instruction;
- Using suitable assessments to screen, monitor progress, and diagnose students in order to inform instruction.

Equipped with a systematic and explicit instructional approach, teachers can meet these challenges, helping students learn to read and write while respecting their first language. A clear and proven approach will assist teachers in making informed decisions about how to differentiate instruction and offer suitable challenges within students' instructional range. The guided reading instructional system provides the appropriate level of text and instructional support so that students can process each book with fluency and comprehension.

Providing guided reading instruction in the students' first language establishes the necessary scaffolding for students to become proficient learners of English. This is accomplished by delivering reading instruction based on the students' strongest asset—their familiarity with their native language. Additionally, such instruction helps students maintain their first language as well as concurrently advance their literacy skills in both languages.

Fountas & Pinnell (2001) describe guided reading as small-group instruction in which the teacher selects a text at an appropriate level, introduces the text, and provides purposeful teaching that supports the students' understanding of the text. Guided reading addresses the following key instructional issues facing teachers of English-language learners:

1. How do we provide effective literacy development in students' first language?
2. How do we establish the necessary scaffolding to offer appropriate support and challenges?
3. How do we ensure that instruction relates to children's social and cultural backgrounds?
4. How can we carefully match the characteristics of texts to readers and their grasp of the reading process?

Whether guided reading instruction is in English or Spanish, the essential components are the same. Providing effective reading instruction in either language depends on evaluating the strengths and needs of the students. Torgesen (1998) recommends that in order for teachers to obtain a complete picture of students' overall reading development, they need to observe students as they integrate all sources of information. This can be achieved by observing students as they read connected text. Guided reading instruction provides an important tool for such observation in addition to offering scaffolded instruction.

The necessity of providing a systematic approach to second-language learning is underscored by the fact that language learning takes place most rapidly in the early years, making it easier to learn a second-language at an earlier rather than a later age, preferably before the age of ten (Jensen, 1998). Students within a guided reading program are continually expanding, extending and refining their reading skills and strategies, and through this process teachers are adding to their repertoire of instructional practices, all of which can only serve future generations of English-language learners.

The Research Foundation

While all teachers benefit from an ongoing theoretical and research-based understanding of their practice, in particular, Garcia (1992) found that effective teachers of second-language learners were those who were articulate about what they were doing in the classrooms and had specific beliefs about their roles in teaching and learning. The following pages examine key research findings about second language learning, how these findings are incorporated in the principles of guided reading instruction, and their specific application in the Scholastic Guided Reading en español program.

How do we provide effective literacy development in students' first language?

Research Finding: Children who are literate in a first language are able to transfer literacy skills from their first language to a second one.

Research has established that children who are literate in a first language are more readily able to acquire literacy in a second one (Fitzgerald, 1995; Garcia, 1998). Moreover, students' strengths in their native Spanish will assist them well in acquiring a second language. It has been demonstrated that children who had attended school and acquired basic literacy skills in their native language before emigrating to the United States matched their peers in reading as soon as they gained proficiency in spoken English. Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible. Research by Durgunoglu, Nagy, & Hancin (1993) concluded that there is cross-language transfer of particular literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness skills.

In strengthening students' native Spanish, we are actually priming them for the acquisition of a second language. By developing students' Spanish literacy, teachers will enable them to use their native language well while enhancing their bilingual capabilities (August et al., 2002).

Guided Reading Principles

- Guided reading builds on students' overall knowledge base and strengths, and provides them with appropriate challenges at their level.
- Guided reading builds on students' language knowledge, helping students apply what they know about letters, sounds, and words.
- Guided reading provides readers the opportunity to explore a wide range of texts that they will be able to read.

Guided Reading en español

Strategies aimed at building literacy skills in students' first language are taught in *Guided Reading en español* through the use of Spanish-language fiction and nonfiction leveled books. These books allow teachers to match students with the just-right level of text, promoting implementation of phonics and word-based strategies as well as facilitating the transition to English by establishing a foundation in transferable comprehension, literacy, and language skills in the context of readings in the home language.

How do we establish the necessary scaffolding to offer appropriate support and challenges?

Research Finding: Building new knowledge upon existing skills is key to children's language and literacy development.

What the child can do with assistance today can be done alone tomorrow (Vygotsky, 1978). In scaffolding reading instruction for the second-language learner, it is important for the teacher to use small-group instruction and to employ the meaningful use of realia (concrete objects) and total physical response (TPR) techniques (context-specific movements). The use of leveled texts is one key way to differentiate instruction for Spanish-speaking students and scaffold students toward reading independence. Teachers need to constantly monitor the progress of the students to ensure that texts, interactions, and assignments are at the instructional level appropriate for optimum learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

It has been widely observed that bilingual children constantly use one language to support and develop the other language (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996). For instance, the use of cognates seems to be reciprocal between the first and second languages. When teaching English-language reading to Spanish-speaking students, consideration must be given to the similarities and differences in the two languages. For Spanish-speaking students, these common skills include reading from left to right, returning to the next line at the right margin, and putting words together with the same 26 letters of the alphabet, with the exception of diacritical marks.

Attunement to differences is a strength that can be built upon for second-language learners (Hiebert, 2001). For instance, children who are learning to read in a second language have been found to be more attuned to different sounds in the second language than monolingual children (August, Calderon, & Carlo, 2002). In addition, successful readers have been shown to use a self-teaching strategy in which they figure out unknown words by applying their knowledge of previously taught patterns (Share, 1995).

Guided Reading Principles

- Guided reading instruction is conducted in small groups based on similar reading behaviors with the teacher differentiating the instruction for each student by prompting individual students to use specific reading strategies as needed.
- The key phases of guided reading instruction include the introduction of vocabulary and concepts that link to students' experience (before reading); individual prompting, reinforcement, and teacher demonstrations (during reading); and rich conversation and explicit skill lessons (after reading).
- Guided reading provides the necessary support to encourage the active participation of students with a variety of texts at their instructional level.

Guided Reading en español

Guided Reading en español is designed to teach to the widest range of reading abilities that exist in K–3 classrooms. The comprehensive instructional plans provide scaffolded instruction for each carefully leveled book. Every lesson provides instruction that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension in order for students to become independent strategic readers. Each Teaching Card also contains strategies for moving students into English literacy.

How do we ensure that instruction relates to children’s social and cultural backgrounds?

Research Finding: Literacy learning depends on providing a context that is relevant to students’ experience.

Research has demonstrated that reading comprehension is strongly related to the prior knowledge that readers bring to their reading (Afflerbach, 1990). Second-language learners have a rich cultural, social, and language experience to bring to new texts, providing those texts are situated for them within a meaningful context. Moll and Dworin (1996) have revealed to us that biliteracy mediates and amplifies the cultural experiences of learners in ways not possible in one language alone. Yet when students arrive at school, they face an abundance of social language and academic language that is likely to feel foreign to them. Academic language tends to be content-centered, while social language is more context-centered. Through social interaction, students are able to link academic and social language.

All children first learn to read words with a high level of concreteness and interest for them such as their own names and the names of siblings, favorite toys, and events. For students who are learning to read and write in a new language, vocabulary in the texts they encounter should represent and build upon concrete, familiar concepts in their lives (Hiebert, 2001). In addition, text structures vary in different languages and cultures and students may need explicit instruction in text and genre features in the second language that are not characteristic of the first one (Garcia, 1998). Studies have shown, overall, that culturally relevant and familiar text, especially when the meaning is built upon through discussion, is most successful for second-language literacy learning (Jiménez, 1997).

Guided Reading Principles

- Active participation by guided reading students with each other and with teachers during each phase of reading helps students bring their rich cultural and social experience to bear.
- In guided reading, the teacher provides a framework of relevance, language and visual information to help students successfully process new text.
- Guided reading texts are organized and leveled according to criteria that take into account meaningful text characteristics and vocabulary.

Guided Reading en español

This program features engaging, carefully-leveled Spanish literature from well-known authors. Each level of *Guided Reading en español* includes high-interest fiction and nonfiction titles that are inclusive of a wide range of social and cultural life experiences. Instruction establishes a foundation that draws upon children’s rich background knowledge.

How can we carefully match the characteristics of texts to readers and their grasp of the reading process?

Research Finding: Literacy learning is most effective when students read texts that are leveled to provide appropriate support and challenge.

Students make advances in reading competence through daily assisted and supported reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure than those that they can read independently (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Matching books to readers requires identifying the texts that will facilitate readers in working out problems and learning new strategies. This means providing books with the correct amount of challenge—not too easy and not too difficult (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). To match books to readers involves understanding the developmental process of literacy acquisition, carefully assessing each student’s level of reading skills and behaviors, and using complex analysis of individual texts.

A major issue in successfully transitioning English-language learners into English literacy is how to accommodate many levels of language and literacy within a single classroom. Small-group instruction with correctly matched texts is an advantageous instructional approach (August, 2003). Second-language learners, along with all beginning readers and writers, benefit from exposure to a wide variety of texts, and with guided reading these students will receive the support they need to read these texts with understanding.

Guided Reading Principles

- Guided reading provides books that meet the individual’s needs and are leveled to match students’ reading behaviors and proficiency.
- Guided reading analyzes texts in terms of matching students’ knowledge base and offering enough challenge to support problem-solving while still supporting fluency and meaning.
- Guided reading provides the introduction to new books, support while reading, and explicit minilessons needed to help children learn the strategies they need to read a wide variety of texts with understanding.

Guided Reading en español

Specifically tailored to the needs of children in kindergarten through third grade, *Guided Reading en español* supports early literacy in the home language through leveled Spanish-language literature. In addition, children’s transition to English proficiency is supported by an ESL Bridge feature that is related thematically to each reading. Vocabulary lists include Spanish-English cognates present in the text.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of identifying and elaborating these four key research ideas is based on the conclusion that effective reading instruction depends not only on what one does, but also on the depth and quality of the understandings by which it is guided (Adams, 1990). Moreover, once we have developed a theoretical understanding from which to conduct guided reading, it's important to investigate the explicit and systematic components of the guided reading approach. *Guided Reading en español* can become an integral and vital part of a core comprehensive reading program in an information-rich environment. *Guided Reading en español* provides teachers of English-language learners with instructional practices that promote using students' strengths as well as the support for their first language, enabling teachers to scaffold and differentiate instruction by teaching to individual needs. Guided reading in Spanish is critical for English-language learners for whom Spanish is their first language, because it takes into account the following key instructional points:

- Students' first language is a strength to be leveraged in learning a second one.
- New knowledge is built upon existing skills and understandings.
- Reading and writing take place within the social and cultural context and experience that students bring to the process.
- Literacy learning is most effective when students are supported in reading appropriately matched texts.

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Enrique A. Puig has 25 years of teaching experience. His expertise in bilingual and ESL education has been called upon by colleagues in school districts across the country and at the Ohio State University, Texas Tech University, Purdue University, and the University of Central Florida. He has presented at national and international conferences. He has been an advisor on the Scholastic **Guided Reading en español** program and a course instructor for Scholastic's online professional development course, **Scholastic RED**. The Florida Department of Education has recognized him as a *Title I Distinguished Educator*.

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