Pedagogy Overview: English Learners

Who are English learners?

Worldwide, the number of children growing up in linguistically diverse homes is on the rise. This trend holds enormous potential for these youth, as the ability to speak more than one language is a significant asset in today's global economy. In the United States, this population of learners is often referred to as English learners (ELs). Although ELs may share common characteristics, it is important to remember that no two students are the same. This diversity cuts across language background, generational status, language-learning experiences across languages, as well as the degree to which students' lives are impacted by factors known to relate to academic learning opportunities. To best support ELs, educators must have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds and focus on providing high-quality reading instruction, with varying levels of support.

What do we know about reading development among English learners?

ELs come to each and every classroom with enormous potential but also facing an ambitious challenge. They must develop English language proficiency alongside other academic skills and knowledge. In terms of reading development, the process for all readers, including ELs, happens over time and involves the acquisition of a number of different skills. These reading skills can be broken down into at least two main categories: skills related to "cracking the code" of reading (e.g., sound-symbol knowledge, spelling rules), and skills related to making meaning from texts (e.g., vocabulary, conceptual knowledge). Research indicates that when ELs are provided with systematic and explicit instruction in code-focused skills, in the absence of specific learning difficulties, they reach similar levels of word-reading accuracy and efficiency to their English-only peers. Importantly, if ELs do not also receive robust, comprehensive, and sustained instruction focused on the meaning-based side of reading, they are more likely to demonstrate reading comprehension difficulties when compared to those same English-only peers.

How does Lexia® Core5® Reading promote reading development for English learners?

The goal of Lexia Core5 Reading is to support educators as they provide differentiated literacy instruction for students of all abilities in grades preK–5, including students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Therefore, the central design principles of Core5 integrate effective practices for educating ELs. In what follows, the key ways in which Core5 supports reading development among ELs are described. These best practices for educating ELs are drawn from recent reviews of research conducted with this population.*

Teach key components of reading using a systematic and structured approach

For all developing readers, including ELs, systematic and explicit instruction focused on the key components of reading is crucial: phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Lexia Core5 Reading provides sequenced and structured instruction in each of these key areas. An essential feature of this instructional experience for ELs is the way in which the program creates personalized learning paths for each student through an adaptive placement and scaffolded, differentiated instruction all along the way.

Target academic language development in the context of meaningful content

ELs have often had fewer opportunities to develop academic language and concepts in English, and therefore, instruction must be comprehensive and intentional on the "meaning" side of reading development. Lexia Core5 Reading works to meet this challenge with a focus on comprehension and vocabulary from the earliest to the most advanced levels. Additionally, content-based reading comprehension activities and an explicit focus on academic vocabulary, grammar structures, and word-learning strategies provide the kind of explicit

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and deep academic language support currently shown to be important for ELs. Importantly, this instruction is contextualized in themes, texts, and visuals that aim to portray complex topics and various cultural identities. This content aspires to affirm the diverse experiences of our learners while also providing windows into worlds and ideas beyond the familiar.

Capitalize on technology to represent content in multiple ways and languages

As ELs develop their English proficiency and reading skills simultaneously, it is crucial that instructional approaches represent content in multiple ways—through language, text, graphics, and multimedia presentations. Lexia Core5 Reading offers a platform for learning that strategically uses technology to enhance the learning experience. For example, ELs have the option to access audio support that plays directions in one of six home languages. At the same time, "clickable" vocabulary terms in online texts offer embedded English-language support through student-friendly definitions, provided via text and audio, and paired with illustrative photographs. Additional visual supports are woven throughout the program, including images to depict terms and concepts, graphic organizers, visually engaging previews of content, and dynamic highlighting of grammar and word structures.

Offer real-time, embedded progress monitoring

Using data to guide instruction is the bedrock of quality teaching and learning. For ELs, it is particularly important that educators monitor development across the components of reading, responding in a timely and efficient way when difficulties surface. When it comes to all of the key components of reading development, ELs should be supported as readily as their English-only peers. Lexia's Assessment Without Testing® technology provides educators with real-time progress-monitoring data across these skills and competencies. This information is collected without a test event, saving time for what matters most: instruction that is guided by those data.

Provide resources for targeted instruction and extended application

While collecting data is the first step to reaching data-driven instruction for ELs, it is how the data are used that makes a difference for learning outcomes. Lexia Core5 Reading uses students' individual data to recommend specific resources for face-to-face instruction as well as materials for practice and extension of skills learned online.

For example, Lexia Lessons® are scripted materials for targeted, small-group instruction—a key strategy for supporting ELs' reading development. To further promote ELs' reading and language development, these lessons include specific strategies for oral language support that can be further adapted to connect key concepts with students' unique prior knowledge and experiences.

Just as important as targeted instruction are opportunities for extended and enriching application. Lexia Skill Builders® offer paper-and-pencil tasks that extend online learning. Every Lexia Skill Builder includes a key feature that links to best practices when working with ELs. These materials feature "starred" suggested activities that lend themselves to building listening, speaking, and writing skills, often in the form of peer collaboration.

The research-proven power of Lexia Core5 Reading for ELs

Lexia Core5 Reading provides an invaluable tool for supporting ELs that meets the challenge of developing strong reading skills by integrating instructional principles known to be effective with this group of learners. The application of these principles translates into improved outcomes: the data specifically bear out the program's instructional power in classrooms serving ELs. Multiple research studies have shown that this specific blended-learning program, in the context of high-quality and language-rich classroom environments, contributes to significant reading-development gains among ELs.** As ELs engage with the rich content in this structured and data-driven program, they build the foundation critical for reading development and, ultimately, academic success.

*Sources include the following:

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Francis, D. J., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., and Rivera, H. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions.* Center on Instruction.

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**Research demonstrating Lexia Core5 Reading's effectiveness with English learners

Kazakoff, E. R., Macaruso, P., & Hook, P. (2017). Efficacy of a blended learning approach to elementary school reading instruction for students who are English learners. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 66*(2), 429-449.

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