



English Language Learners and *istation Reading Curriculum*

White Paper
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English Language Learners (ELLs)

Appropriate and effective reading instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs) has been seriously lacking in core reading as well as English as a Second Language programs in the United States. Effective reading instruction for ELLs must address instructional techniques which use the development of language via vocabulary and the sequential skills of reading to create comprehension. The resultant underachievement of ELLs is due to their inability to read English with meaning. The consequences of ineffective early instruction and curricular deficiency in the beginning years of school bear out in higher drop out rates throughout the country.

Istation Reading Curriculum has put considerable effort into designing a reading program that specifically addresses this mismatch between the language development and reading skill needs of ELLs. The program makes English reading comprehensible using sheltered instructional techniques, focuses on the academic vocabulary that K-5 students are expected to know, and provides practice with these key words across tightly leveled, decodable readers and other passages and books. In essence the Istation Reading Curriculum teaches students to understand and read English, thus paving the way for increased achievement as they read to learn throughout their years of schooling and beyond.

Sheltered Instructional Techniques

Just as scaffolds are used in construction supporting a building until it is ready to stand on its own, Istation Reading Curriculum's approach to reading instruction provides the necessary scaffolds to ensure that students understand what they are reading.

These scaffolds include:

- the use of imagable words that are displayed with their corresponding pictures
- animated phonics with decoding rules (e.g. when two vowels go walking the first one does the talking)
- teaching of auditory, visual and kinesthetic representations of words
- building background knowledge through the use of common/ universal concepts
- adjusted pacing of instruction

Books are leveled to move from simple sentences and questions to compound subjects and objects, prepositional phrases, compound sentences, and embedded clauses. The Istation Reading Curriculum integrates reading instruction and language development, where English reading and ESL programs focus on one or the other. This intersection of language and reading is essential for the development of second language student readers who go beyond "word calling" and are able to read with meaning. As with the building whose scaffolds are removed when it can stand on its own, so it is with reading instruction through Istation Reading Curriculum. As students develop their English language skills, their reading becomes less dependent on visual scaffolds. When the student is ready to read on his/her own, the scaffolds are no longer required.

Vocabulary Development

Reading programs for native English speakers, whether literature based or focused on decoding, rarely ensure that the words students read are those that are academically most important. As Foorman and Francis¹ colleagues discovered in their 2004 study of six state-adopted first grade reading programs in Texas, these six programs only shared about 229 words, most of which were high frequency words. Imagine, all six programs focus on decoding but the words students learn to read are different, and depend on texts to which they are exposed. What this means is that there is no insurance that students will learn the words they need for academic success (e.g., the language of tests and textbooks).

In the Istation Reading Curriculum, the importance of students learning academic vocabulary is emphasized. These words, those that students need to be successful during the first, most important years of schooling, are coupled with Istation's Reading Curriculum's phonics sequence. Thus, ELLs are taught to read words they need to be successful in school.

Text Matters

A considerable amount of reading research over the past decade highlights the importance of the text students read. Apparently, all texts are not created equal. As in the Foorman and Francis study, research by Elfreida Hiebert² clearly demonstrates the increasingly larger amounts of new words in texts. This increase, growing steadily over the past 40 years, indicates that students are exposed to many words only one time. Rarely will they get to practice that word. This means that the number of times students read the same word within a text, is one or two. And approximately one in every three words first graders read is new. As we know, for beginning readers, practice reading words leads to automatic word recognition, which in turn allows students to read fluently and recognize the word with automaticity.

This is a serious problem for most readers; as the NAEP shows, students read slowly. ELLs read even more slowly, with their short-term memory occupied with the application of phonics rules. Hence, they have little room to connect their decoding to meaning. Istation Reading Curriculum pays close attention to the number of times students see the same word or phonics pattern within and across passages. Istation's single skill readers provide ample opportunity for students to begin the process of becoming automatic decoders. Thus students are helped to develop reading fluency and comprehension simultaneously.

***Istation Reading Curriculum* makes reading comprehensible for English language learners.**

- **Uses visual aids**
 - Picture clues
 - Animated instruction
 - Vocabulary previews
- **Uses appropriate pacing**
 - Spoken language
 - Skills application (easy, medium, hard)
- **Builds on prior knowledge**
 - Vocabulary in skill applications prior to reading in text, if possible
 - Vocabulary previews
- **Adjusts language**
 - Simple sentences
 - One-step directions
 - Repetitions available
- **Adapts texts**
 - Leveled vocabulary
 - Repeated vocabulary and phonics patterns to increase automatic word recognition and fluency
 - Gradually increased sentence complexity
 - Increased story structure

- **Engages students**
 - Animations, songs, humor
 - Literacy acquisition theater
 - New activities introduced frequently
 - Video-game like interactively

- **Selects appropriate vocabulary**
 - Highest frequency in lower elementary texts
 - Academic vocabulary
 - Concrete nouns (imagable)
 - Action verbs

- **Provides models**
 - Includes modeling and guided practice for each lesson
 - Models fluent reading

- **Reduces anxiety**
 - Individualized instruction through computer
 - Student sessions are private
 - Positive feedback
 - Scaffolds to correct wrong answers

¹ Foorman, B.R., Francis, D. J., Davidson. K. C., Harm., M. W., & J. Griffin (2004). Variability in Text Features in Six Grade 1 Basal Reading Programs, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8(2), 167-197.

² Hiebert, E. H. (2002). Standards, assessments, and text difficulty. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 337-391). Newark, DE: IRA