

Literacy and FLES

Connecting to the Common Core Learning Standards

by Al Martino and Harriet Barnett

At present, WL teachers DO teach reading as a part of their curriculum. However, the new common core learning standards set the stage for FLES teachers to take a more active role, if not lead the way in developing important reading skills in our children. Although this new challenge may at first seem to be daunting, if not an impossible task, teachers will surely find activities which they may have used in the past which they may need to dust off, upgrade and/or change. This is an exciting and positive challenge for FLES teachers.

The FLES teacher's skills and knowledge about current best teaching reading practices may be challenged and may need modification. This challenge provides a powerful opportunity for connecting with teachers in their buildings. This new sense of 'connectedness' with the other core teachers serves as a platform for creating new and meaningful dialogs about students, curriculum, and professional practices across the curriculum providing us with an even stronger rationale for the maintenance and implementation of FLES programs in our schools.

Let's take a moment to raise the issue of writing and its role in the process of literacy. As one develops components of reading in the classroom; some writing (and writing activities) will flow naturally from these elements. However, the development of writing skills in and of themselves deserves its own article. For our purposes we will include writing as it flows naturally from reading instruction.

With a new and more focused attention to the development of reading skills and connection to the core curriculum, this paper focuses on three important skill components. They are:

- aural/oral language development
- phonemic awareness or connecting

sounds to the written symbols

- comprehension or deriving meaning from the written symbols.

How can we now take these elements and make them an integral part of our core curriculum and a part of our daily instruction?

1. AURAL/ORAL

The most basic and fundamental way to develop aural/oral skills is through the use of the target language by the teacher. This provides the basis for all other language learning activities, be they reading, speaking, listening or even cultural awareness. Students must be surrounded by the language, and be wrapped up neatly into the quilt of second language instruction so that they begin to understand that the second language has meaning, is understandable, and is yet another form of communication.

Most FLES teachers have been focusing on developing listening and speaking skills as primary goals for many years. Teachers should be aware that students who use a language for oral/aural communication frequently have greater success at reading comprehension. "Oral language provides the basis for both first and second language reading. Meaningful reading experiences in both first and second language classrooms are dependent on the students' oral language comprehension and on their existing background knowledge and experiences. As students develop their listening comprehension they begin to develop connections between oral language and the print which represents this oral language. "(Curtain, Dahlberg, p. 132). This statement indicates that listening is the first stepping-stone in developing the reading skills as indicated by Curtain and Dahlberg and is reiterated in the CCLS. As such, the FLES teacher needs to create these opportunities for students to hear and demonstrate comprehension of the target language (TL).

The FLES teacher teaches the listening skills necessary to support the diverse purposes of reading by providing listening activities generated for different purposes. For example, if students are listening to a story,, they learn to listen more globally to understand the gist of the story and some key plot points. Yet, if they are listening for instructions, they must listen for details and might even need to take notes as well as be able to ask for clarification or repetition. This second type of listening activity is very different from the first one and is often not included in the repertoire of a FLES teacher's plans.

Another example could be that in listening to a poem, students might focus on the sounds of the language, the emotion evoked by those sounds, and how it makes them feel. If they listen to a poem the same way in which they listen to instructions or directions, they will not fulfill the purpose of listening, and will be unsuccessful in the task completion. Still another example is that of listening for fact or opinion. In this case, the learner needs to listen for a series of details and needs to determine the source of these details in order to form his/her own opinion. In summary, while there are other purposes for listening, here are the 4 examples cited above:

- to determine main idea
- to complete a task,
- to experience an emotion
- to form an opinion

Many oral/aural activities can, as students' language proficiency and vocabulary grow, be easily transformed into reading activities. One way to do this is having the teacher read a story to the class; showing them key pictures and acting it out in order to facilitate understanding without asking the students to read the text. The story which the teacher reads may be word-for-word from the text, or, it may be simpli-

fied to match the proficiency level of the students. The teacher could leave off the ending of the story and the students would provide their own ending in English in order to demonstrate that they understand the gist. This aural activity can now become a reading activity when the teacher provides the students with a choice of 3 possible written endings in the TL or by providing written true/false statements about the text for students to answer according to the text. See Figure 1 for strategies that also support CCLS literacy development.

2. PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Awareness of the sounds of a language and the blending of different sounds to create new sounds along with their connection to the symbols they represent are integral to both first and second language reading development. This, coupled with the importance of these symbols holding meaning, and that being able to understand the symbols both as isolated items as well as in a larger context are critical elements to reading development. The language that you teach might dictate the type, order and nature of phonemic instruction which you will deliver to your students. However, the ideas suggested below, will develop phonemic awareness in any language.

"Sight words" refers to those words which are easily and quickly recognizable upon sight.

Certain sight words, with which the students are familiar orally, (through the routine use of the TL by the teacher) will become critical pieces to the instruction of phonemic awareness. These words can easily serve as examples of the relationships between the sounds, the blending of sounds and the written symbols. Early FLES offers a unique opportunity to reinforce the concept that a connection or relationship exists between the strange lines and squiggles they see (the sight system) and the sounds they represent (the sound system) with which they might be familiar. These high frequency sight words in the TL should be words that are relatively short and easily illustrated or demonstrated in order to avoid using English to secure the meaning. In choosing these words, the teacher should refer to the specific theme or topic being studied and they should be presented visually (as they have already been presented orally/aurally) in context.

A Word Wall is a strategy used by teachers to help develop literacy skills. It

FIGURE 1

USING A STORY BOOK WITH PICTURES

The teacher reads a story to the class and shows the students several pictures from the book. The teacher also prepares simple written statements in the TL about these pictures to which the students must match accordingly. Or, the teacher extrapolates 5 pictures from the book. They write sentences in the TL about each picture which the students must match and place in the correct order. Next, the teacher can take the same five sentences without the support of the pictures, and ask students to place them in their logical sequence.

USING A STORY BOOK ALREADY BEING READ IN ANOTHER CLASS

Students bring the book they are currently reading in their homeroom class to the WL classroom. The students look at their books while the FLES teacher asks questions in the TL about the story or pictures. The students answer the questions in the TL while looking at the pictures or looking at the English written text for their answers.

PICTURES FROM THE CURRENT FLES THEME

A worksheet is provided by the teacher with 8 pictures from the current theme of the lesson. On another paper, the teacher provides the TL word or words for each picture. The student must cut and paste the correct word to the correct picture. Similarly, the teacher can spell aloud the words in the TL which the students would write in the appropriate box/picture. The teacher can then provide a handout for individual/pair use or use easel paper for whole class instruction, with descriptions of each picture such as, "color the apple blue, write an X on the banana, etc.." Students must read these directions and follow accordingly. A handout can also be provided with directions in the TL for placing these pictures in random order. For example, "the pear is number one, the apple is number two, etc..." Once they have cut out or torn apart the pictures they can place them according to the written directions in the text.

LOOKING FOR SHAPES!

For the topic of shapes, the students read a simple story, perhaps one created by the FLES teacher. The students find and underline the words for the shapes. The teacher might follow up with a worksheet with the words for the shapes on it and they must draw the shape for each word. Or, the teacher calls out the shape word from the story and the students find it in the text. Another variation is for the teacher to prepare a sheet with individual shape words, each one followed by a shape. Students tell whether the written word matches the picture. Written directions in the TL for coloring the shapes may also be given as yet another way to develop reading.

usually is a wall-mounted visual, containing key words (sight words are often used) which are the focus of a given lesson. The individual words are printed large enough so as to be seen by all students from their desks. Teachers use this wall as a reference tool, for drill, pronunciation, spelling, word recognition and the students use it as needed.

In cases where the FLES teacher does

not have access to a wall, this activity can be accomplished by the teacher creating a single paged worksheet with the words included and distributed to each individual student. If the students have these in advance, they may be asked to take them out at the beginning of the lesson in which it is being used.

The word walls might look like samples one and two below.

HEALTH AND BODY PARTS WORD WALL

The teacher will print five-ten high frequency words and place them on the wall. These need to be printed large enough so that they are easily seen by all students.

These words should be changed as the students learn them and/or as the theme and topic changes.

bien	mal	así así	la cabeza
los ojos	la nariz	me duele	las orejas

SAMPLE 1: INDIVIDUAL SHEETS OF PAPER FOR POSTING ON THE WALL

bien	mal	así así	la cabeza
los ojos	la nariz	me duele	las orejas

SAMPLE 2: LARGE SHEET/ROLL OF PAPER WHICH MAY BE POSTED ON THE WALL

The teacher now creates activities that engage the students as they interact with the words so that they are familiar with the words, can pronounce them easily and fluently, understand their meaning, and that they are easily recognizable on sight.

TEAM ACTIVITY	Charades: In a charade-type activity team A draws a card with a sentence from a previously read text and acts it out. Team B finds that particular sentence in the text and reads it aloud.
TEAM ACTIVITY	Pictionary: Pictionary is played like the activity above except that Team A draws a <i>picture</i> card from the pile and then continues as above.
WHOLE CLASS	Flashcards: Students see flashcards on which the first letter or the vowels are omitted and students must say the word and identify the missing letters in the TL. If the students have not learned the alphabet in the TL, the teacher might say the letters, and the students would write them on the worksheet. This provides an interesting and contextualized way to learn the TL alphabet.
SMALL GROUPS	Flashcards: The teacher prepares the flashcards (as in the above activity) on small index card sized paper and places them in a plastic baggie. In small groups, the students take turns drawing a card out of the baggie, providing the pronunciation, giving the missing letters and demonstrating the meaning through actions or drawings.
INDIVIDUAL WORK	Word walls: Providing individual word walls for the students allows them to check off the words as they know them by sight thus self-monitoring.
WHOLE CLASS	The teacher uses the word wall to spell the words out in the target language. The teacher asks the students to follow along, on their own paper, to say the letters aloud after the teacher and to write them on their own paper. This is a way to help teach the alphabet in context.
INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, SMALL GROUP	Categorizing: Once many sight words have been established, the teacher gives the students a selection of many words from different topics/themes (for example:15) which have appeared on previous and current word walls. The students say them according to the topic in which they belong. Certain words and phrases, although they might be learned in one topic, MAY be used with other topics. For example, words like <i>in, on, and</i> etc., may be placed in more than one category. A variation is for the students (working in pairs, individuals, triads) to write these words into the categories so that they are practicing the spelling and phonemic awareness. Once again, they might easily place some words in several different categories. The teachers might create a worksheet in the TL that looks like the sample below. The number of categories should be at least three.
TEAM ACTIVITY	Spelling bee: Students work in two teams. One team says the word, and the other word must spell it out loud or, write it and show it to the teacher and to the other team for correction and/or approval. White boards are helpful for this activity.

SAMPLE FOR CATEGORIZING

Words used: head, melon, small, arm, T-shirt, peach, pear, sneakers, nose, big, pants, cap

BODY PARTS	CLOTHING	FOODS
head	small	peach
small	T-shirt	pear
arm	sneakers	melon
nose	big	big
big	pants	small
	cap	

Oral reading has a place in the classroom as it helps to develop the connections between the oral/aural and written word. Examples of texts for oral reading should be taken from fiction and non-fiction, should be short in length (excerpts can and should be used), age, proficiency level and interest appropriate. These texts may or may not be culturally bound, depending on the individual text and level of difficulty. Many sources for oral reading may be found on the internet.

One way to implement an oral reading activity is for the teacher to read aloud from a text while the students read along silently with him/her. It is important for the teacher to read aloud slowly, purposefully and meaningfully **clumping** two to three words that belong together at a time, (for example: “the tall blond boy” is one clump, as opposed to “the tall, blond, boy”). The teacher should also use inflections in his/her voice and pay attention to punctuation. Each student needs a copy of the text being read aloud by the teacher. The text may be printed on easel paper for the whole class to see. A variation is to have the students read aloud, mimicking the sounds, pauses and inflections of the teacher. If the students have an individual copy of the text, they can be asked to follow with their fingers as the text is read aloud. Afterwards, the teacher may read aloud a specific sentence from the text and the students must find it and then echo it back to the teacher.

These techniques can produce good sound symbol relationships. Although this activity is truly focusing on developing phonemic awareness, the teacher must be cognizant that comprehension is at the heart of all language building activities.

3. COMPREHENSION

Reading comprehension relates to one’s ability to understand a text and exists before, during and after the act of reading. It is both active and interactive and rises above the act of understanding single words to the understanding of larger groups of words. Reading comprehension calls upon multiple processes in the brain and is

truly a very complex act. Comprehension is the main purpose of reading. By comprehension, we do NOT mean direct word for word translation to English, though understanding in English is implied. The FLES teacher has to employ many techniques in order to facilitate and enhance reading comprehension. For example, multiple passes over the text helps to teach students that comprehension of any written texts may require re and rereading. Another technique is for the student to circle all punctuation during a first reading to help them recognize the existence of the punctuation and its important role in aiding comprehension. Two classic examples in which the total meaning is altered through punctuation is:

*A woman without her man is nothing.
A woman: without her, man is nothing,*

*Let’s eat, Grandma!
Let’s eat Grandma!*

Dramatizing as the student reads the text helps to put meaning into the written word. Peer-reading is another strategy in which students sit and read a given text aloud together, helping each other decode, pronounce and clump words together in a meaningful way.

Background knowledge is a critical factor in reading comprehension and begins before the act of reading. Once a text has been selected, it is important for the teacher to determine what students know about the topic before reading about it. In the case in which there are gaps in background knowledge, the teacher should provide an opportunity for this information to be shared by the class. For example, if the text is about a farm, and some children have never seen or experienced a farm in person, there should be a whole class discussion about a farm, in the target language, using visuals, video, the internet and dramatization in order to help the student to frame his understanding of the topic before actually beginning the reading. The teacher might even create a short anecdote in the target language about a farm in order to include some key aspects and

vocabulary about a farm which may surface in the subsequent reading. The teacher should never assume that all students share the same background knowledge on any given topic. Often the classroom teachers are able to help FLES teachers to understand what the background knowledge is about a particular subject, or they might even be able to provide that experience for the FLES teacher.

Questioning techniques are the backbone to developing and assessing good reading comprehension. In the past, teachers have focused too long on the lower levels of questioning; asking about basic and often explicitly stated information. In the new core-curriculum, teachers are asked to develop higher level thinking skills and the question the teachers pose determines the particular level of cognitive involvement of the student. Questions that begin with “why” require deeper reading for meaning. An example would be to ask why a certain character behaved or acted in a certain way and the answer may require the student to infer a response from information provided in the text

Asking why someone did something may require the student not only to understand the text, the actions of the character, etc., but also to make a personal assumption about the reason why something took place based on information in the text, but which is not explicitly stated.

“Why” questions also point out the difference between cause and effect and might easily tie in with the thematic content of other subjects.

- In a paragraph about a family or a family member you might ask: “Who is your favorite person and why do you like her/her based on the text?”
- In a reading about healthy living you might ask: “What foods mentioned in the text do you eat and are they good for you?” (Topics: science/health)
- In a reading about the environment you might ask: “Name three ways the text says to recycle and then state why you think they are effective.”

(Topic: science)

- In a reading about travel you might ask: "Where does Mrs. Smith travel in the reading, and what does she do?" Then you might ask if they would like you like to travel to that sample place and why. (Topic: social studies/geography)
- In a reading about the old and new Olympics you might ask: "What are some of the sports played in the ancient Olympic games that are still played in modern day Olympics?" Then ask them which sport would they want to learn to play and say why. (Topic: physical education)

In even the simplest text, the teacher can draw the students to higher order thinking by carefully choosing the questions. At times, students may need help in formulating their responses to these questions which demand higher thinking skills as they require the use of higher level language. They may need to know how to use expressions such as "I need," "I want," "I practice," "I wish," which can be given to the students as needed.

One technique is to give a question based on a text. The students will answer (either orally or in writing) and then they must indicate the particular section of the text that contains the answer. Then they may be asked to highlight that section/sentence or to copy it onto their own paper.

Open-ended questions can also create higher levels of language use as well. Questions such as, "Do you think ...?" "Would you like ...?"

Text selection is a critical aspect of teaching reading. The new CCLS acknowledges the value of fiction, but also draws new attention to the use of nonfiction texts. The purpose of the activity determines whether the text should be one or the other. Nonfiction texts may be a new source for FLES teachers. These texts are unique in that they are used to learn about and gather new information. Typical nonfiction texts focus on topics such as habitats, the environment, insects, the Anasazi Indians, President Lincoln etc. Some may focus on mathematics such as counting farm animals. The FLES teacher now has the opportunity to connect his/her lessons with the classroom teacher and to create a collaborative effort, to not only teach the world language, but to also

to teach core concepts through reading in the TL.

FLES teachers are encouraged to check with the classroom teachers to determine the reading and skill levels and interests of their students. This will make a difference in the selection of texts and questioning techniques the teacher will use.

In conclusion, we maintain that aligning second language instruction to the new emphasis on reading in the ELA section of the CCLS can prove to be the best thing for FLES. It establishes the value of FLES in the education of the whole child, creates opportunities for strong collaboration with the core teachers and provides a solid springboard for the focus on communication skills in the TL.

Harriet Barnett started a FLES program in 1960 and taught for more than 35 years as a foreign language classroom teacher in primary, middle and high schools and as an outreach person for ACTFL. She has given speeches and conducted numerous workshops regionally, nationally and internationally for major foreign language and other conferences. She was a two-time runner up for NYS Teacher of the Year, won an award from Burger King and received several awards from the New York State Association of Foreign Languages (NYS AFLT). She served on the boards of NYS AFLT and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) Metropolitan N.Y. Chapter, the AATSP and AATF FLES commissions and as national nominating chair for the AATSP. She has worked closely with the NYS Education Department on the State Curriculum and State Standards and was the Northeast and NYS representative of NNELL. She was on the writing team of the NYS Frameworks for Languages Other Than English (LOTE), the ACTFL K-12 Performance Guidelines, the NYS Resource Guides for Checkpoint A and for Early Foreign Language as well as co-author of a middle school textbook and a Spanish teaching songbook. She is currently a second language methods instructor at Manhattanville College in Purchase, N.Y., a consultant for several school districts, a workshop leader for Putnam/N. Westchester BOCES and co-chair of the Early Foreign Language Committee of NYS AFLT.



Al Martino taught French, Spanish and Italian for 21 years in grades K-12. He worked for six years as the Associate in Foreign Language Education at the New York State Education Department where he undertook the revision of the former NYS Proficiency and Regents Examinations. He developed

curriculum documents for grades K-12 based on the NYS Standards and the NYS LOTE (languages other than English) examinations. Martino then worked for eight years as a district administrator where he supervised programs of foreign languages and ESL. He also designed and implemented a Spanish FLES program and has worked as an adjunct in many universities in NYS for the past 20 years mostly teaching secondary and elementary foreign language courses. Most recently he is a clinical supervisor for the State University of New York at Albany (SUNY Albany) where he supervises students in both the foreign language and English as a second language classrooms. Al has won several awards from the New York State Association of Teachers of Foreign Languages, as well as from SUNY Albany and the American Association of Teachers of Italian. Al has written several articles and co-authored a middle school Spanish textbook. Al has consulted locally, across New York state, and nationally. Al currently is an adjunct at two colleges where he teaches foreign languages, supervises student teachers, and teaches classes in education.



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