

Applying Reading Research to the Development of an Integrated Lesson Plan

What can you do when your English language students are poor readers? I asked myself this question after half my sixth grade class in Santiago, Chile failed a reading test. For many students, reading is not only a problem in their second language (L2); it is also a problem in their first language (L1). For example, 15-year-old Chilean students have poor reading skills in their L1 when compared with their peers in other countries (OECD/UNESCO-UIS 2003). This data is troubling because the lack of literacy and poor reading ability prevents individuals from participating in society (August and Shanahan 2006a; OECD/UNESCO-UIS 2003).

These facts prompted me to reflect on my own teaching practice and to review the research on reading pedagogy in L1 and English as a second or foreign language (ESL or EFL) contexts. In this article I will discuss some major trends in reading instruction, including an integrated approach that

brings together methods from different perspectives. Finally, I will present an integrated lesson plan that I believe can be adapted to benefit students of all levels.

Approaches to reading instruction

Any investigation into reading pedagogy will encounter a long-term debate about two opposite approaches to help children learn to read. Although there are variations of these two approaches, the extremes are represented as *whole language* versus *phonics*.

The whole language approach to reading

Goodman (1967) became a proponent for the whole language approach when he claimed that beginning readers needed little direct instruction to decode the letters and sounds of the language. He believed that learners have the ability to decode the letters, syllables, words, and phrases as they read meaningful texts by making

inferences about the linguistic data. This process, which he called a “psycholinguistic guessing game,” necessarily involved risk-taking and miscues, but he claimed it allowed students to become proficient readers and users of the language.

Whole language became a comprehensive way to teach reading and other language skills with concrete suggestions for how teachers can deal with instructional, psychological, and institutional factors. For the whole language approach, it is essential to provide a literate classroom environment with a wide variety of relevant texts that are attractive to learners. Even though students will make mistakes in word recognition, spelling, and pronunciation, they eventually will be able to create meaning out of words and sentences by using textual cues and their own background knowledge to figure them out.

The phonics approach to reading

Supporters of the phonics approach, also referred to as a *skills-based* approach, point to research showing that children benefit from direct instruction about the letters, syllables, and corresponding sounds of English (Rose 2006; Johnston and Watson 2003). Therefore, the phonics approach claims that reading instruction should start with the most basic components of words, which are the letters of the alphabet and *phonemes* (speech sounds). As they practice, students blend individual sounds into words and are ultimately able to recognize and pronounce them in a reading text.

Many studies have indicated positive results from skills-based instruction. For example, in a study conducted in Scotland, researchers found beneficial results from teaching *synthetic phonics*, or the explicit instruction of letter sounds and how to pronounce words by sounding out and blending all the letters. In the study, approximately 300 first grade students of different genders and socio-economic backgrounds were taught to read using analytic and synthetic phonics for 20 minutes a day over a period of sixteen weeks. At the end of the first year, the synthetic phonics group was performing the best. The progress of 95 boys and 85 girls was then monitored over a seven-year period, after which researchers concluded that the positive effects of synthetic phonics were sustained over the duration of the study.

They stated that synthetic phonics instruction “led to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds performing at the same level as children from advantaged backgrounds” and “to boys performing better than or as well as girls” (Johnston and Watson 2005, 8).

Phonics and different languages

In spite of positive results, many researchers have suggested that the English sound system is too irregular for the teaching of phonics to be practical. English has 26 letters, approximately 44 phonemes, and a large number of *graphemes*, which are a letter or combination of letters that represents a phoneme. Many English phonemes are represented by different graphemes that are pronounced identically, while other phonemes are represented by identical graphemes that are pronounced differently. For example, the phoneme /f/ is spelled differently in the words *fox*, *elephant*, and *rough*, and the grapheme “ea” in the words *dear* and *pear* has two different pronunciations. These issues make English words notoriously difficult for beginners to spell and pronounce and can interfere with word recognition.

In contrast, Spanish uses 30 letters—five vowels, 22 single consonants and three digraphs (ll, rr, ch)—to represent the 28 phonemes of the language (Ijalba and Conner 2006). The one-to-one correspondence between the letters of Spanish and its sounds make it a highly transparent language. Thus, decoding can be learned more rapidly in Spanish than in English.

An integrated approach to reading instruction

Because of the importance of reading, many countries in recent years have commissioned studies to compile and analyze research and provide recommendations on how to improve instruction. Among these countries are Australia (Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training 2005), New Zealand (Literacy Taskforce 1999), the United States (National Reading Panel 2000), and Ireland (Eivers et al. 2005). The final reports on the studies are notable because their recommendations combine elements of both the whole language and phonics approaches.

A trend towards this type of integrated approach is clearly represented in the Chilean educational system, as is recognized by Mabel Condemarín, winner of the Chilean National Prize for Education 2003, who emphasizes the need to unite contributions from the whole language and phonics approaches into an integrated approach (Condemarín, Galdames, and Medina 1995; Alliende and Condemarín 2002). Furthermore, in a description of first grade reading, the Ministerio de Educación de Chile (2007, 5) states that the most productive strategies to allow children to read various texts independently and with comprehension will “integrate the contributions of the whole language model, which promotes immersion in a world of print, with the contributions of the skills model.” Some whole language strategies mentioned include (1) creating a lettered classroom, (2) practicing silent, sustained reading, (3) taking a reading walk, and (4) examining a variety of authentic texts relevant to the child’s world (Ministerio de Educación de Chile 2007). However, research and teaching practice shows how “only one model does not favor the development of reading,” and that immersion should be combined, especially in first grade, with “strategies designed to develop phonemic awareness and the discovery of the relationship between the sounds of words and the patterns of letters, as this helps the majority of children to decode the meaning of texts” (Ministerio de Educación de Chile 2007, 5).

The National Reading Panel

In 1997, the U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) convened an influential group of experts to assess different approaches used to teach children to read. The National Reading Panel (NRP), as it was called, was directed to report on the research, indicate if it could be applied in the classroom, and, if appropriate, present “a strategy for rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective reading instruction in the schools” (National Reading Panel 2000, 1).

The NRP reviewed scientific, evidence-based research that met rigorous methodological standards while excluding qualitative

studies. In 2000 it released a report that examined the five components of reading discussed below.

1. Phonemic Awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words. For example, below is a basic activity to make students aware of different sounds in English words.

Question	Answer
What is the first sound of the word <i>hat</i> ?	h
What is the last sound of the word <i>map</i> ?	p
What is the middle sound of the word <i>top</i> ?	o
Add an “s” to the end of <i>top</i> .	tops
Put the “s” in front of <i>top</i> .	stop
Replace the “t” in the word <i>stop</i> with an “h.”	shop

2. Phonics is instruction that teaches the relationship between letters and/or graphemes and phonemes. For example, the word “cat” would be pronounced: /k/ + /æ/ + /t/ = /kæt/ Students are taught to pronounce words by sounding out and blending all the letters. The National Reading Panel (2000, 10) found “that explicit, systematic phonics instruction is a valuable and essential part of a classroom reading program.”

3. Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, smoothly, and rapidly with proper expression. The NRP found that fluency is often neglected in the classroom, and that guided, repeated oral reading with feedback is effective. Other techniques to promote fluency include Extensive Reading (ER) and Repeated Reading (RR). With ER, students read a variety of texts that are interesting to them and at the right level. With RR, learners read a specific passage several times in order to increase their word recognition and comprehension; both ER and RR can result in increased fluency and enjoyment of reading (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, and Gorsuch 2004).

4. Vocabulary is knowledge of words and is required to communicate effectively and understand a text. According to Nation

(2001), it takes five to sixteen meetings of a new word before it can be learned. Nagy (2005) has identified five components of effective vocabulary instruction:

1. Wide reading
2. Developing word consciousness in students
3. Use of high-quality oral language in the classroom
4. Direct teaching of specific words
5. Modeling independent word learning strategies

5. Comprehension is the understanding of what is being read, and it is the ultimate goal of reading. The National Reading Panel (2000) identified seven strategies to enhance reading comprehension:

1. Comprehension monitoring
2. Cooperative learning
3. Use of graphic and semantic organizers
4. Question generation
5. Question answering
6. Story structure
7. Summarizing

After the NRP released its report, several researchers and practitioners expressed their concern over the narrow point of view and exclusion of alternate research and qualitative studies (Yatvin 2000; Pressley 2001, 2006; International Reading Association 2006). As a result, qualitative instructional practices relating to classroom organization, motivation and engagement, differentiated instruction, oral language, writing, and expert tutoring were recommended by the International Reading Association (2006) to be added to the five components of reading instruction identified by the NRP. In conjunction with the NRP's actual findings, these new recommendations offer more possibilities to make reading instruction more comprehensive and integrative.

Reading instruction for second language learners

The National Reading Panel (2000) did not focus on reading for ESL or EFL students. However, most of the reading instruction techniques and activities from an L1 integrated approach are applicable to L2 learners and are a recognizable part of ESL and EFL instruction, as can be seen from second

language teaching methodology texts such as Omaggio (1986).

In the United States, where minority language students generally underperform in school, a large amount of research has been conducted to learn how to help them achieve in reading and other English language skills. Between 1979 and 2005, "the number of school-age children (ages 5–17) who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 million to 10.6 million, or from 9 to 20 percent of the population in this age range" (National Center for Education Statistics 2007). August and Shanahan (2006b) report that in 2004 five times as many students with limited English ability failed to complete high school than did students who used English at home. This educational disparity affects these students' ability to learn to read and write proficiently, and therefore prohibits them from fully participating in American society (August and Shanahan 2006a).

In response to this disparity, the U.S. Department of Education created the National Literacy Panel (NLP) in 2002 and directed it to "identify, assess, and synthesize research on the education of language minority children and youth with regard to literacy attainment and to produce a comprehensive report" (August and Shanahan 2006b, 2). In addition to recommending many aspects of an integrative approach to reading instruction, the final NLP report underscored the importance of oral proficiency (August and Shanahan 2006a). Students with oral proficiency in a second language will be better able to transfer their linguistic knowledge and vocabulary to new situations and contexts (Omaggio 1986). Therefore, stricter attention to oral skills is an essential component to an integrated approach to reading for ESL and EFL students.

Reading progress and the Matthew Effect

After reviewing my course textbook, I realized that it used the whole language model almost exclusively. The reading strategies of skimming, scanning, and prediction are routinely taught. However, the textbook does not include any direct instruction in the five components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). When faced with unknown vocabulary in context, half of my

students were unable to make the contextual guesses necessary to adequately comprehend the reading text. As a result, half of my students were losing the “psycholinguistic guessing game” described by Goodman (1967).

My students had been left to the mercy of the *Matthew Effect* described by Stanovich (1986), which refers to a biblical parable in Matthew 25:29: “For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.” In the Matthew Effect the good reader gets better and the poor reader gets worse. How? When someone likes to read, they read more. Consequently, they gain vocabulary and practice in fluent, automatic reading. Reading gets easier with practice. This virtuous cycle then repeats itself. On the other hand, when someone struggles with reading or does not like to read, they read less. As a result, they do not gain vocabulary or practice in fluent, automatic reading. This lack of reading practice makes reading even more difficult. This vicious cycle then repeats itself (Stanovich 1986, 364).

To circumvent the Matthew Effect and improve reading ability for all of my students, I created an integrated lesson plan (see Appendix) that included the five components of reading specified by the National Reading Panel (2000). I also incorporated opportunities for students to participate in meaningful conversation with each other as recommended by the National Literacy Panel (August and Shanahan 2006a) and others (Eivers et al. 2005; Omaggio 1986).

Conclusion

By keeping abreast of new developments in reading, teachers can improve their practice, as I did by researching the topic and developing an integrated lesson plan that is based on methods that have demonstrated positive results. The lesson plan engaged my students in reading and helped them understand what they read. Their grades improved so that by the end of the semester no one was failing. They became self-motivated readers, and many began to read books on their own outside of class, for pleasure. Most importantly, they discovered that Dr. Seuss (1990) was right when he said:

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes

You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.
You're on your own. And you know what
you know.
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where
to go.
Oh, the places you'll go!

References

- Alliende, F., and M. Condemarín. 2002. *La lectura: Teoría, evaluación y desarrollo* [Reading: Theory, evaluation and development]. 8th ed. Santiago, Chile: Andrés Bello.
- August, D., and T. Shanahan, eds. 2006a. *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language minority children and youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- . 2006b. Introduction and methodology. In *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth*, ed. D. August and T. Shanahan, 1–42. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training 2005. *Teaching reading—Report and recommendations: National inquiry into the teaching of literacy*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Condemarín, M., V. Galdames, and A. Medina. 1995. *Lenguaje integrado: Manual de apoyo a los talleres de perfeccionamiento de profesores de 1er ciclo básico* [Whole language: Support manual for the professional development workshop for first grade elementary teachers]. Santiago, Chile: Ministerio de Educación.
- Eivers, E., G. Shiel, R. Perkins, and J. Cosgrove. 2005. *Succeeding in reading? Reading standards in Irish primary schools*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.
- Goodman, K., 1967. Reading: A psycholinguistic guessing game. *Journal of the Reading Specialist* 6 (4): 126–35.
- Ijalba, E., and P. S. Conner. 2006. Multisensory identification-remediation of phonological-orthographic deficits in Spanish speakers learning English. Paper presented at the annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Miami.
- International Reading Association. 2006. *A call to action and a framework for change: IRA's position on NCLB reform*. Washington DC: International Reading Association. http://www.reading.org/downloads/resources/0608_NCLB_framework.pdf
- Johnston, R. S., and J. E. Watson. 2003. Accelerating reading and spelling with synthetic phonics: A five year follow up. *Insight 4*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department.

- . 2005. A seven year study of the effects of synthetic phonics teaching on reading and spelling attainment. *Insight 17*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Education Department.
- Literacy Taskforce. 1999. *Report of the Literacy Taskforce*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.
- Ministerio de Educación de Chile. 2007. *Primer año básico: Lenguaje y comunicación* [First grade elementary: Language and communication]. Santiago, Chile: Ministerio de Educación. http://www.mineduc.cl/doc_planesprog/1B02_Lenguaje.pdf.
- Nagy, W. 2005. Why vocabulary instruction needs to be long-term and comprehensive. In *Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice*, ed. E. Hiebert and M. Kamil, 27–44. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Nation, I. S. P. 2001. *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. 2007. Participation in education: Elementary/secondary education. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2007/section1/indicator06.asp>.
- National Reading Panel. 2000. *Report of the National Reading Panel—Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm>.
- OECD/UNESCO-UIS. 2003. *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow: Further results from PISA 2000*. Paris: OECD/UNESCO.
- Omaggio, A. 1986. *Teaching language in context: Proficiency-oriented instruction*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
- Pressley, M. 2001. Effective beginning reading instruction: A paper commissioned by the National Reading Conference. Chicago: National Reading Conference.
- . 2006. What the future of reading research could be. Paper presented at International Reading Association Reading Research 2006, Chicago.
- Rose, J., 2006. *Independent review of the teaching of early reading: Final report*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Seuss, Dr. 1960. *Green eggs and ham*. New York: Random House.
- . 1990. *Oh, the places you'll go!* New York: Random House.
- Stanovich, K. E. 1986. Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly* 21 (4): 360–407.
- Taguchi, E., M. Takayasu-Maass, and G. J. Gorsuch. 2004. Developing reading fluency in EFL: How assisted repeated reading and extensive reading affect fluency development. *Reading in a Foreign Language* 16 (2): 70–96.
- Yatvin, J. 2000. Minority view. In *Report of the National Reading Panel—Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*, National Reading Panel, 1–6. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/upload/minorityView.pdf>.

THOMAS BAKER is an International House CELTA-qualified teacher who has taught EFL in Chile for seven years. He currently teaches at the Colegio del Verbo Divino and at the Instituto Chileno Británico de Cultura in Santiago.

Appendix **Do You Like Green Eggs and Ham? An Integrated Lesson Plan for Reading**

Applying Reading Research to the Development of an Integrated Lesson Plan • Thomas Baker

Purpose

I recommend this lesson plan for teachers who want to improve their students' reading comprehension. Beyond that, it will also positively affect students' enjoyment of reading. It can be easily adapted to almost any teaching situation. For each activity I note the skills that are developed, including oral proficiency and the following components from the National Reading Panel (2000):

- **Phonemic awareness** is evident when students can identify words that rhyme. In writing their own new ending that rhymes, they manipulate sounds and create rhymes of their own.
- **Phonics** is evident when students learn the sounds that vowel combinations make and then apply them to decode unknown words.

Do You Like Green Eggs and Ham? (continued)

Applying Reading Research to the Development of an Integrated Lesson Plan • Thomas Baker

- **Fluency** is developed by the repeated reading of the story. Students read the story several times, each time with a different purpose. This builds their ability to automatically recognize words on sight without sounding them out. Additionally, students practice with sight words to build speed of recognition.
- **Vocabulary knowledge** appears in the read aloud/think aloud activity, and the teacher shows students how good readers learn vocabulary in context by verbalizing thoughts. Additionally, students use the vocabulary of the story when summarizing, retelling, and writing. Concrete vocabulary is consolidated when students draw pictures to provide a visual representation of the words in the story.
- **Comprehension** is enhanced in the read aloud/think aloud activity. The teacher demonstrates how to make, confirm, and refute predictions, summarize while reading, monitor understanding while reading, visualize, make personal connections to the story, and develop word consciousness by focusing on how words are used and the sounds they make, such as the rhyme and rhythm of the iambic pentameter used by Dr. Seuss (1960). In addition, the Reader's Theater frees students to interpret and express their own meaning through the use of their voice and gestures.

Total Time: 80 minutes (2 class periods of 40 minutes each)

Materials

- Handout/Storybook: *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss (1960)
 - CD or tape-recording of *Green Eggs and Ham*
 - CD or tape player
- Three presentations (presentations can be done with PowerPoint, overheads, drawings, magazine cutouts, index cards, or an actor)
1. *Green Eggs and Ham* story (also downloaded Google images, drawings, realia)
 2. Dr. Seuss biography (birthplace, childhood, family, marriage, career, death)
 3. Sight words and Fry Phrases (index cards, chalkboard or whiteboard, paper)

First Class: (40 minutes)

Pre-reading (15 minutes)

Skills developed: Vocabulary, Comprehension, Oral Proficiency

1. Activate Prior Knowledge
 - a. Write the word *egg* on the board. Ask students in pairs to draw a spidergram with the word *egg* in the center. Students make as many connections as possible.
 - b. Pair and Share: Each pair shares their spidergram with another pair.
 - c. Change Pairs and Repeat.
 - d. New pairs. Write the word *ham* on the board. Repeat steps a, b, and c.
 - e. Pairwork. Turn and Talk:
 - "Have you ever tried to give someone something they didn't want?"
 - "Has anyone ever tried to give you something you didn't want?"
2. Prediction Activity
 - a. Write the words *green eggs and ham* on the board. Ask students to make two predictions about the story.
 - b. Pair and Share: Students discuss their predictions in pairs.

During Reading (15 minutes)

Skills developed: Vocabulary, Comprehension, Fluency, Oral Proficiency

3. Read Aloud/Think Aloud (Teacher reads text aloud and students read silently)
 - a. Teacher models fluent reading: Reads with rhythm, rate, intonation and expression.
 - b. Teacher thinks aloud periodically to show what a good reader does when a story does

Do You Like Green Eggs and Ham? (continued)

Applying Reading Research to the Development of an Integrated Lesson Plan • Thomas Baker

not make sense. Some examples include: reread or summarize parts; use story structure; use pictures, maps, graphs, charts, and examples; personalize the story; guess at meanings using prefixes, suffixes, root words, synonyms, and antonyms.

- c. Teacher asks students to predict, summarize, retell, and visualize.
- d. Students confirm predictions and make new predictions.
- e. Teacher asks questions using: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? What if...?

Post-reading (10 minutes)

Skills developed: Vocabulary, Comprehension, Oral Proficiency, Phonemic Awareness

4. Teacher wraps up 40-minute class period
 - a. Students share their personal reaction to the story in pairs.
 - b. Plenary: Teacher asks students to share reactions with the whole class.
 - c. Teacher assigns homework from the list below:
 1. Reread the story. Make a list of all the words that rhyme, such as *boat/goat*, *house/mouse*, and *train/rain*.
 2. Write a letter to the author. Tell him your opinion of the story.
 3. List at least three ways to make green eggs. (Interview parents or use Internet or encyclopedia.)
 4. Draw all of the characters or objects mentioned in the story.

Second Class (40 minutes)

Post-reading (continued from previous class)

Skills developed: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Fluency, Oral Proficiency, Comprehension

5. Students turn in homework (1 minute)
6. Retell Story in pairs (2 minutes). One student retells the story; the other summarizes the retold story.
7. Shared Reading (7 minutes). All students read along aloud with CD recording of story (possibly set to music).
8. Use PowerPoint, overheads, drawings, magazine cutouts (7 minutes).
 - a. Share Dr. Seuss biography with students.
 - b. Use PowerPoint, overheads, or flash cards to practice sight words and Fry phrases.
 - c. Teacher asks students to find all words that rhyme and circle vowel combinations. Teacher tells student to ask their partners about the sounds that oa, ou, ai, make.
 - d. Complete the rhyming rule:
When two vowels go walking, the first one does the _____. (talking)
When o goes walking with u, the rule isn't always _____! (true)
9. Repeated Reading Role Play (7 minutes)
 - a. Divide the class in half.
 - b. Half the class is A; the other half is B. Read in character and use appropriate expression.
 - c. Change roles. Repeat same as above.
10. Reader's Theater. Students read from a text while performing the story. Lines are not memorized. (14 minutes)
 - a. Students perform *Green Eggs and Ham* in pairs.
 - b. Teacher and students give *Oscars* for outstanding performances.
11. Teacher assigns homework from list below (2 minutes)
 - a. Write a new ending for the story. The ending must rhyme.
 - b. Write a paragraph about the character you liked most in the story and explain why. How are you similar or different from this character?