

English Language Learning for Everyone

A Resource Manual for Teachers with Struggling English Language Learners



C I W A

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Most adult learners in English as a Second Language programs, including basic literacy, LINC and bridge to work classes manage the assigned coursework and show expected progress. There are those, however, who struggle to acquire a new language within the contexts of their classes and require some form of individualized support to make gains in their language acquisition. For these individuals, the learning of English language and/or literacy skill development is and continues to be extremely difficult.

Struggling learners are often viewed negatively by themselves as well as by society. Those who have not done so, often cover up the more obvious signs of experiencing difficulties by altering their behavior. Many of them avoid situations where they may have to engage in a task in which they have major difficulties. However, this is sometimes not possible and they have to persevere with things in spite of their difficulties. With help, support and accommodation, even struggling learners can succeed but they need specific strategies both inside the classroom and in their everyday lives.

CIWA has been fortunate to capitalize on the expertise of a learning support specialist who provides struggling learners with strategies to enhance their language learning and makes recommendations for instructors for rethinking their teaching practices in order to accommodate these learners and ensure their success. In addition to supported language learning that has evolved from this unique double-pronged approach, a compilation of resources and expertise has emerged and materialized in the *Resource Manual for Teachers with Struggling English Language Learners*.

Who Is It For?

The resource manual was written for teachers and administrators who are looking for ways to support struggling learners in adult ESL programs. We hope that this manual will be a helpful resource for thinking of ways to create inclusive learning environments and to provide teachers with some practical tools.

How Is It Organized?

The Resource Manual is divided into four main sections:

- Section 1: Observe
- Section 2: Understand
- Section 3: Support
- Section 4: Case Studies

The first three sections - Observe, Understand and Support - comprise the framework for the process we follow with students referred for learning support services. Generally, the process looks something like this:

- **Observe:** a learner is referred for support as a result of a teacher's observations, i.e. the learner is not keeping up with the class.
- **Understand:** the student and instructional team look at what might be affecting the learning process for this particular student.
- **Support:** a plan is put in place that we hope will make learning more accessible to the student. Many of supportive learning activities will benefit more learners than the one who was identified for additional supports.

The process is dynamic; further observations and understanding continue to shape the process. Over time, a learner's needs may change or grow, and so we re-evaluate and change the plan as needed.

Within each of the first three sections, topics are organized in the following manner:

Topic title

- Main points about the topic are outlined under the heading

Further details about each topic are detailed in these text boxes.

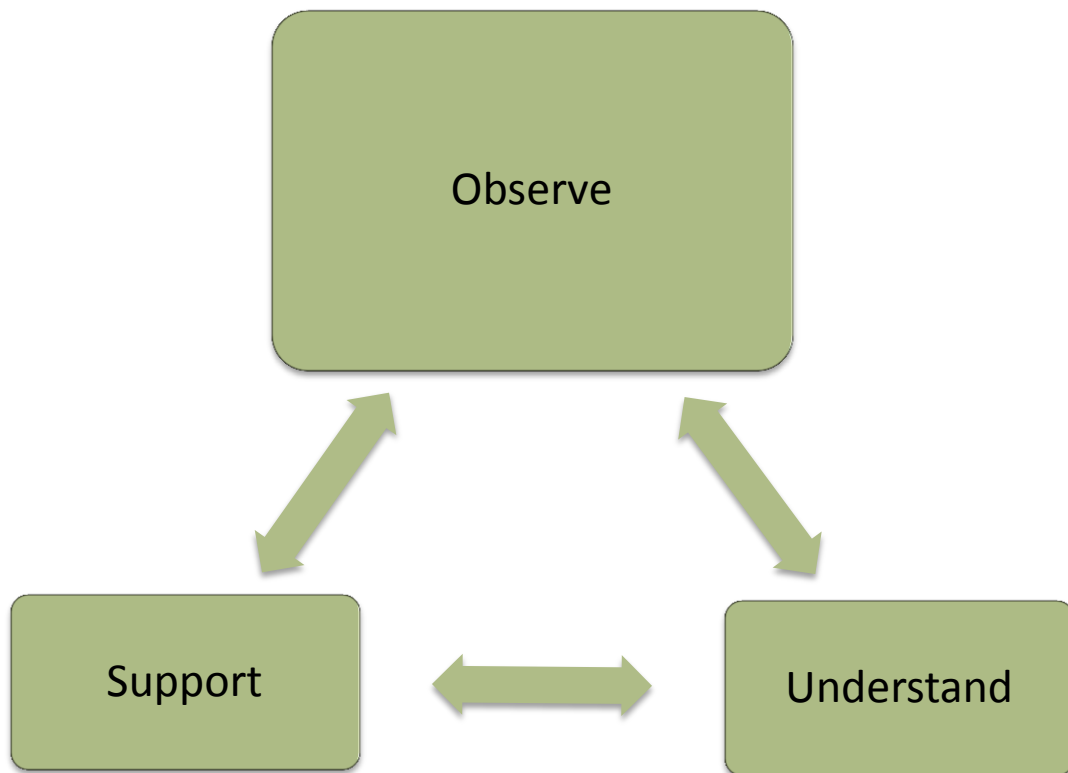
In the fourth section you will see the framework of Observe, Understand and Support carried out with **case studies** of five different learners, each with differing needs. The case studies are based on our own work with adult ELLs. Names and some characteristics of the learners have been changed to protect their privacy. As a teacher or administrator, perhaps you will identify with some of the observations noted in the case studies.

The case studies in Section 4 are organized in this way:

- a description of the learner in the text box
- **observations** made by the instructor and learning support specialist
- a chart including what we **understand** as a result of observations and suggestions for ways to **support** the learner

The case studies reflect the process we follow to collaborate with instructors to support struggling learners. With generous funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, we are able to offer consultations to organizations in and around Calgary.

SECTION I: OBSERVE



Observe Your Learners

Observations about a learner's strengths and weaknesses are a starting point for understanding what we can do in the classroom to best support the learner.

Look for:

- what the learner is doing
- when you observe the behaviour
- in what kinds of situations you observe the behaviour

The process of observing, understanding and supporting your learners is ongoing. Continue to note your observations as you work with the learner.

Learners are referred for additional support for any number of reasons. Teachers refer learners based on their in-class observations about a learner's strengths as well as areas of concern. Often a learner is not making expected progress. These observations provide valuable information that serves as a basis for the needs assessment. They help to guide discussion with the learner about her learning experience during an intake interview.

The following is a list of learning behaviours that teachers have noted.

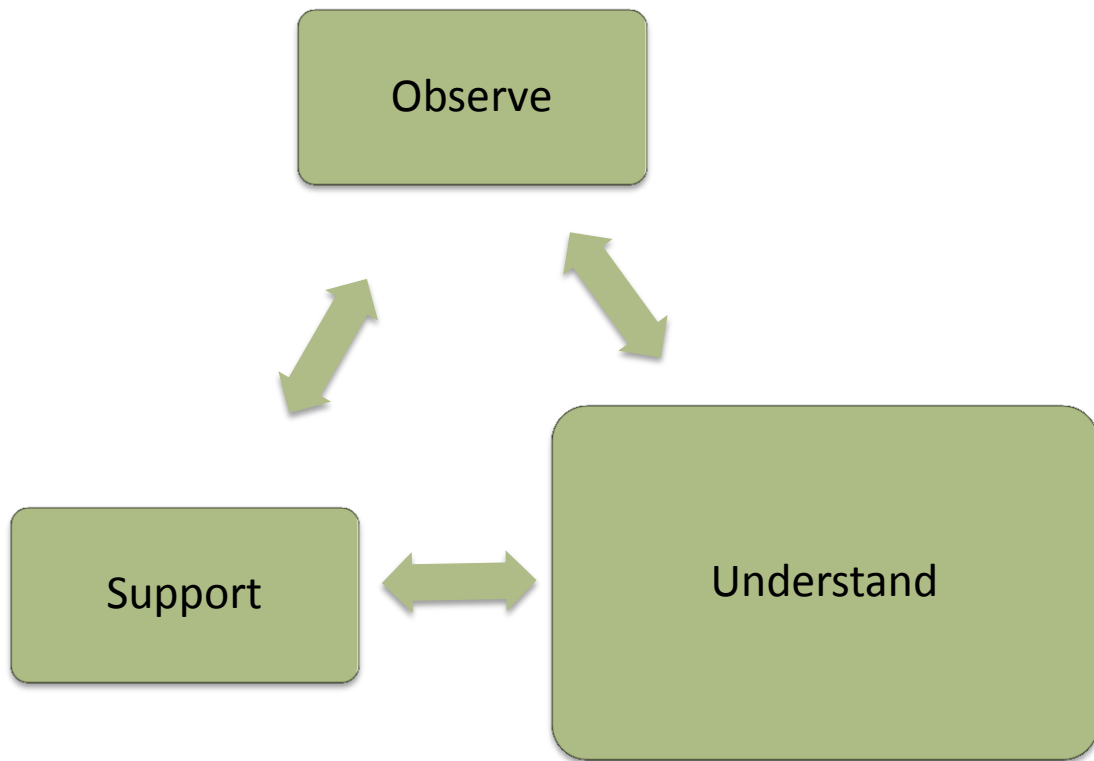
The learner:

- responds to questions off-topic
- has difficulty following instructions
- has difficulty forming letters
- does not consistently recognize letter names
- makes many spelling mistakes in common words
- reverses or misses letters when spelling
- writes sentences non-grammatically
- does not follow a simple paragraph structure
- repeats phrases and words in writing assignments

- is unable to answer questions about a text she has read
- has difficulty finding papers in her binder or organizing files
- appears disengaged
- interrupts the class
- has difficulty breaking down larger tasks into manageable chunks
- has difficulty retaining an internship

In addition to observing learning behaviours, it is helpful to note when and where the learning behaviour occurs. If the learner appears to be distracted, note the kinds of activities during which this has been observed. Note the time of day as well. You may find that the learner is frequently distracted after a shift in activities or during a certain type of task. Jot down this information. You may find patterns that help you to better understand your learner.

SECTION 2: UNDERSTAND



Understand Your Learners

There are many factors that influence language acquisition. By taking a holistic view of the language learning process, we are better able to understand what is working well for a learner and what is not.

Struggling ELLs may experience multiple barriers to learning, including learning disabilities, linguistic factors and socio-affective factors.

We can learn more about a learner through an intake interview.

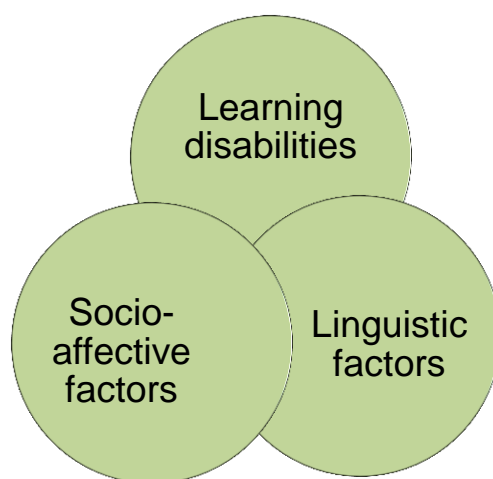
A needs assessment can help us understand how to better support a learner.

For more on interviewing your ELLs, see page 30.

ELLs may exhibit learning behaviours previously listed for a variety of reasons. Some are learning to read and write for the first time. Others experience anxiety in a language learning environment or live with the effects of trauma. Some may have learning disabilities, though this is difficult to discern with ELLs for reasons that will be discussed in the next section.

Our intake process involves interviewing the learner in the first language with the support of an interpreter. We also work with the learner individually for a more in-depth understanding of her learning process.

The process of understanding why an English language learner succeeds in some areas and struggles in others requires taking a holistic view of the learner. Language acquisition is affected by many factors and it may be that a learner experiences multiple barriers to learning. In this section, we will look at how learning disabilities, linguistic factors and socio-cultural factors can affect a person's ability to acquire a second language.



SECTION 2.1: Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities (LD) undoubtedly affect adult learners in English as a Second Language programs, however there is very little research on the subject. Robin Lovrien Schwarz's work with LD in adult English language learners highlights the importance of addressing the needs of adult ELLs with learning difficulties and provides us with some tools to both understand and support struggling learners (Lovrien Schwarz, 2005; Schwarz, 2006). While diagnosing LD in adult ELLs is complex, all struggling learners require a supportive, inclusive learning environment that addresses their individual needs.

Learning Disabilities Defined

A learning disability is a neurologically-based processing problem that affects a person with average or above average intelligence (Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta, 2013).

- People who have learning difficulties process things differently from others.
- Language processing is the largest difficulty for persons with a learning disability (Price & Cole, 2009, p. 8ff).
- Adapting teaching methods to a learner's needs creates opportunities for successful learning for persons with LD.
- 30-50% of children with a learning disability also have Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or AD/HD.
- Anxiety and depression are found to co-exist with learning disabilities in adolescents (Price & Cole).

Learning disabilities affect an estimated 1 in 10 Canadians (Price and Cole, 8ff). It would not be a big leap to consider that adult English Language Learners who struggle with language acquisition might have learning disabilities. Language and language processing are affected in over 80% of learning disabilities (Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta).

Although LD is by definition life-long, many persons with learning disabilities experience successful fulfilling lives. Teachers can adapt their teaching style to the learner's needs. Learners benefit by developing learning strategies that work for them.

Learners with a learning disability often lack phonological awareness, an important factor in learning to read and write in English. While learning disabilities are related to processing language and numbers, people with learning disabilities can also have difficulty with:

Attention	Speaking	Calculation
Memory	Reading	Social skills
Reasoning	Writing	Emotional development
Coordination	Spelling	

Diagnosing LD in Adult ELLs

An accurate diagnosis of learning disabilities in adult English Language Learners is difficult to obtain.

- An LD diagnosis requires ruling out any other possible factors as primary causes for the learning difficulty.
- Diagnostic tools may be culturally biased.

Determining the cause of a learning difficulty for an ELL is difficult. Diagnosing LD requires ruling out all other potential reasons a learner might be struggling (Price and Cole). Other factors can also make learning difficult. To diagnose an learning disability, the primary factor affecting learning must be neurobiological and not:

Hearing or vision problems	Socio-economic factors	Lack of motivation
Cultural or linguistic factors	Ineffective teaching	

Ruling these items out as the primary cause of a learning difficulty is especially challenging with adult English Language Learners.

An additional challenge in diagnosing LD in adult ELLs is concerned with the nature of the diagnostic assessments themselves. Diagnostic assessments, often designed in the United States, include questions that are culturally-specific and difficult to understand for someone who was raised in a culture outside of Western one and who is learning English as an additional language (PANDA - Minnesota ABE Disability Specialists; Schwarz, 2006). Even when a diagnosis is received, its reliability is questionable. As a result of the complexity involved, few adult ELLs are diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Working with Struggling Learners

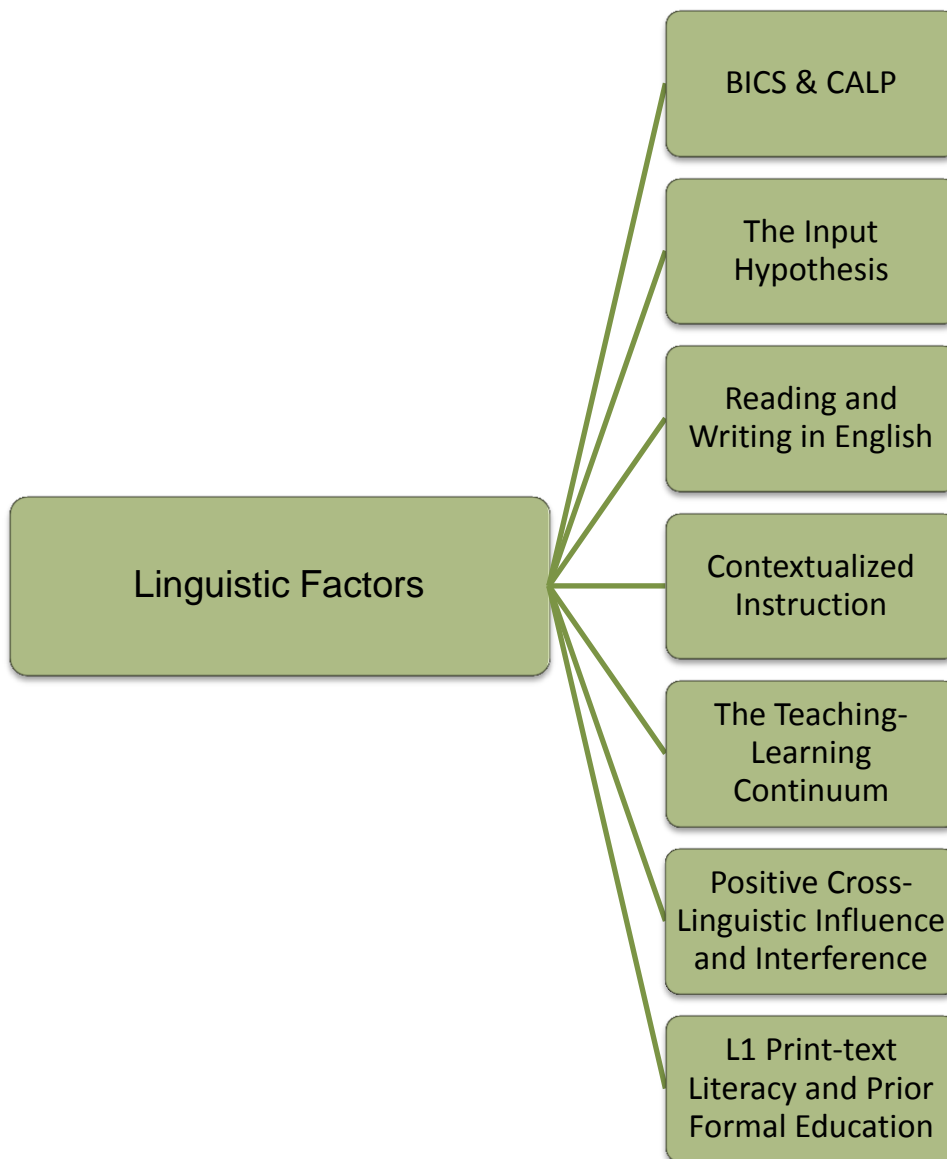
Struggling students need more time to achieve their learning goals, require more attention from the instructor and, overall, learn differently. Struggling learners can succeed but they need specific strategies both inside the classroom and in their everyday lives, and instructors need to be aware of how to take such learning strategies into consideration.

We may view an assessment of learning disabilities as a first step to understanding why a learner is struggling. If obtaining a diagnosis is not possible because of the complexity barriers the learner faces, we are not left without ways to better understand and support the learner. Alternative sources of information can help us think about what is working for a particular learner and what is not. Teaching methods used to address learning needs of those diagnosed with LD benefit other learners, too. Whether a learner is experiencing difficulty due to a learning disability or some other reason, we can take steps to better understand and support the learner. Supporting adult ELLs with learning difficulties, whatever the cause of the difficulty, is critical to their success as language learners.

Adult English Language Learners may experience learning difficulties that make keeping up with their classroom instruction impossible without additional support. Supporting adult ELLs with learning challenges, whatever the cause of the difficulty, is critical to their success as language learners.

SECTION 2.2: Linguistic Factors

The process of learning English is made more or less accessible to adult ELLs depending on a number of linguistic factors. First, there are different types of language required for daily use and academic or work-related purposes. How close a learner's own life experience and language skills are to the instructional content and level are considerations in each individual's language learning. Features of a person's first language play a role in their second language acquisition. Finally, we will look at the ways an adult ELL's prior experience with language learning, literacy and formal education influence how they learn language.



BICS and CALP

- **BICS** (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) can be acquired in as little as two years depending on conditions.
- **CALP** (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) may take seven to ten years to develop.

Learners who exhibit a good command of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (as might be demonstrated in conversational skills) may not deliver in situations that require specific skills and language such as in academic settings or in the workplace.

Jim Cummins' BICS and CALP is a widely held theory that differentiates between types of language that a language learner acquires. Cummins found that learners acquire the language necessary for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, or BICS, after approximately two years when they are immersed in the target language and have plenty of opportunities to practice (Parrish, 2004, pp. 16-17). A person who is proficient in BICS can carry on a general conversation fluently. However, a language learner who can carry on a conversation has not necessarily developed academic language required for school or work. Developing Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, or CALP, can take anywhere from five to seven years (Cummins, 1999-2003). CALP involves a great deal of vocabulary, complex grammar structures, semantics and higher order thinking skills required in academic settings. This means that academic and job-specific language acquisition can require a great deal of time. For language learners faced with additional barriers and challenges, we can expect language acquisition to take even more time. Parrish lists prior schooling, experience with complex language, literacy level in the first language, and practice with academic language skills in L1 all playing a role in how long it takes for a language learner to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

The Input Hypothesis

In order for a language learner to acquire L2, language input must be at a level where most of the comprehension occurs i.e. language that the learner understands. There must be enough comprehensible input or language that the learner understands, for a person to acquire language.

According to Lems, Miller, & Soro (2010), teachers modify their language when they:

- repeat key words
- remove unnecessary words or phrases
- use gestures
- speak slowly

The level of language used in relationship to a learner's current language level plays an important part in a learner's ability to acquire L2. Stephen Krashen described this relationship in his input hypothesis, stating that language instruction needs to be at just a step above the learner's current functioning level. There must be enough comprehensible input, language that the learner can already understand, in order for a learner to acquire a second language (Parrish, 2004). A language teacher can modify their language by repeating words, removing unnecessary words or phrases, using gestures or speaking more slowly. In order to develop spoken and written skills in L2, providing conversation or written interaction at a level just above the learner's current ability is also essential to L2 development (Lems et al., 2010). If a learner appears to be struggling, we might consider whether the level of language used in the classroom is beyond what the learner is ready for.

Reading and Writing in English

In **transparent** orthographic systems, sound-letter correspondence is clear and consistent.

In **opaque** orthographic systems, sound-letter correspondence is less direct.

- English orthography is opaque.
- In English, good readers access multiple reading strategies and skills:
 - phonological awareness
 - phonics skills
 - word patterns strategies
- Effective reading and writing instruction involves explicit, repeated strategies instruction.

One factor that affects the ability to learn to read in a language is the level of transparency of the target language (Lems et al., 2010). Both Turkish and Cherokee have recently been reformed and are now transparent writing systems. When the letter and sound systems represented each other clearly, literacy in those languages increased. English spelling is not straightforward. Irregularities in English spelling require the reader to access several strategies to read. To develop English literacy, decoding and sight word recognition are both important.

The development of phonological awareness, phonics skills and word patterning all support reading and writing. To enhance literacy instruction, teachers can also combine the study of reading and spelling, create opportunities for daily in-class reading and celebrate diverse writing systems.

Background Knowledge and Contextualized Instruction

In order for learners to make meaning of text, they require an understanding of the context for that text. Contextualized instruction provides that.

To determine whether a text supports a learner to make meaning of the text, determine the:

- level of language
- relevance of concepts to the learners' lives
- whether the concepts are universal or culturally laden

In 'The Intentional Teacher,' Hetty Roessingh discusses the complexities involved in reading for ELLs (2005). In order to make meaning from reading, ELLs must understand the context, the cultural assumptions and metaphors involved in the story. Roessingh highlights the importance of contextualized instruction. To support an ELL's ability to make meaning of the text, we need to ask ourselves how accessible it is to the reader. In addition to the level of language, we need to investigate whether the concepts are relevant to the learners' lives and if they are universal or culturally laden.

In addition to considering these factors when we select a text, it is important to create language learning activities that also promote understanding and knowledge. If learners do not already have an understanding of the context for a text, the teacher's role is to provide the rich context from which learners can create meaning.

The Teaching-Learning Continuum

The Teaching-Learning Continuum provides a framework for looking at the amount of Low and High Challenge characteristics to include in a language learning task.

A learning task that:

- has only Low Challenge characteristics may be boring to learners
- has too many High Challenge characteristics may overwhelm learners
- balances Low Challenge and High Challenge component characteristics allows learners to focus on the most important parts of the learning task

Heide Spruck Wrigley's Teaching-Learning Continuum is one tool that can help teachers plan language learning tasks at a level that is best suited for their learners. The Instructional Zone has a balance of Low Challenge and High Challenge components. When too many components of a language learning exercise are High Challenge, learners become frustrated (Wrigley, Literacy Work). Her Teaching-Continuum chart below provides a helpful way of gauging the complexity of language learning activities in a given context.

Teaching/Learning Continuum

Factor	Low Challenge	High Challenge
Context	Familiar	New
Reading Task	Highly Structured	Minimally Defined
Reading Process	Highly Facilitated	Independent
Content/Concepts	Concrete	Abstract
Prompts	Visual	Print-Based
Teacher Explanation	Demonstration	Theoretical
Vocabulary	Common	Sophisticated
Sentence Structure	Simple	Complex
Reading Strategies	Previously Practiced	Newly Introduced

Figure 1: The Teaching/Learning Continuum by Heide Spruck Wrigley

Positive Cross-Linguistic Influence and Interference

Positive cross-linguistic influence refers to anything learned in the first language that supports second language acquisition. Cross-linguistic interference refers to features of L1 that make learning parts of L2 more difficult. Features of a learner's first language can support or interfere with second language acquisition. Awareness of these factors can support language acquisition.

Positive cross-linguistic influence is anything learned in L1 that supports L2 acquisition (Lems et al., 2010, p. 22ff). This can be broader skills such as meta-cognitive skills or narrower skills like directionality. Someone who has learned to read and write in their first language will be able to apply some of the skills used in L1 to reading and writing in the target language. A person who has learned to read left to right in their first language will apply that skill to their English literacy development without thinking about it. Cognates are another example of positive cross-linguistic influence. In Spanish, 30-40% of words are related to words in English (Reading Rockets, 2007). When a learner is aware of cognates and has strategies to use them to understand English, it supports her L2 acquisition.

Features of L1 may also make some parts of L2 acquisition more difficult. This is called interference. For example, when an English sound is not a feature of a learner's first language, it may be more difficult to pronounce that particular sound. False cognates can also create L1 interference. A false cognate is a word that looks or sounds like a cognate, but has a different meaning. While the words appear to be cognates, they are not related and do not mean the same thing.

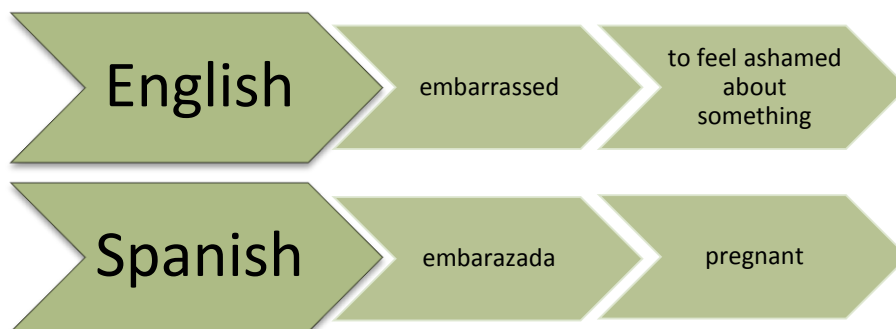


Figure 2: False Cognates (Reading Rockets, 2007)

L1 Print Literacy and Prior Formal Education

L1 print literacy refers to the level of literacy an ELL has acquired in their first language. In some cases, it might also refer to literacy acquired in a second language where the school system in the country of origin is not the same as the learner's first language. Prior formal education refers to learning that has occurred in a school setting.

L1 print literacy and prior formal education experience impact L2 literacy acquisition.

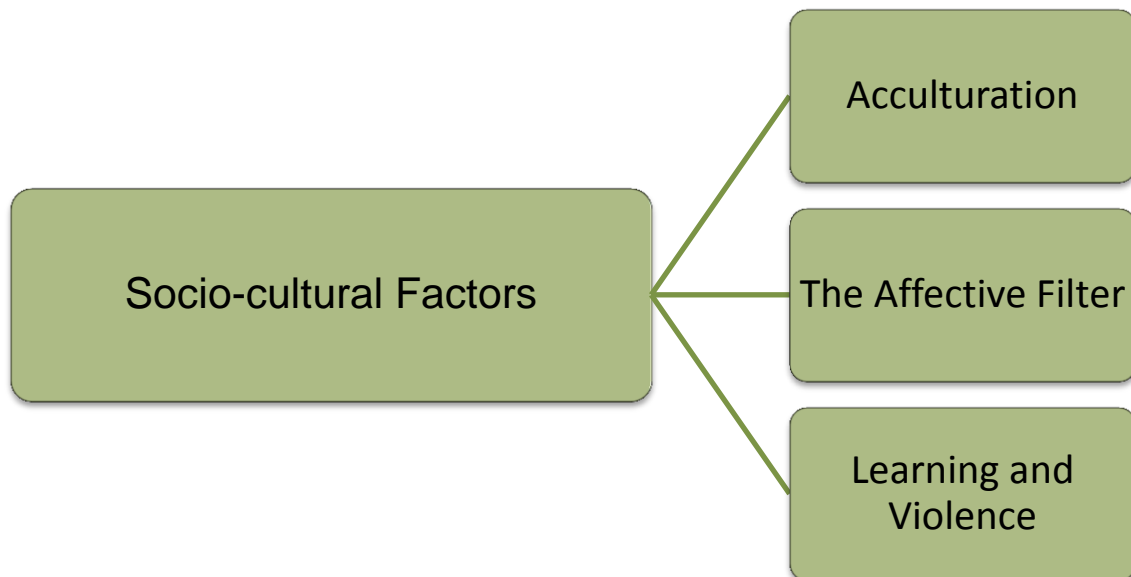
Language instruction for learners with low literacy in the first language must be tailored to meet literacy-specific needs.

A language learner's first language literacy and prior schooling experience are important factors in second language literacy acquisition. The level of print-text literacy an English language learner has in their first language affects literacy development in an additional language (Bigelow & Lovrien Schwarz, 2010).

Adult ELLs who are learning to read and write for the first time need to develop additional skills that another learner has already developed in their first language. Learners who are not print literate in the first language require much more time to develop second language literacy than those who are print literate in the first language (Kurvers, Stockmann, & van de Craats, 2009). Second language literacy learners require tailored instruction and instructional materials in order to make literacy gains in the second language.

SECTION 2.3: Socio-cultural Factors

In addition to possible learning disabilities and linguistic factors, socio-affective factors can also affect the ease with which a person acquires language. We know that a person's acculturation process, or how a person adapts to life in the new culture while maintaining their own, affects language acquisition. Adult ELLs may be faced with numerous stressors, both in and out of the class. All of this affects how a person learns another language.



Acculturation

Acculturation describes a person's ability to adapt to the dominant culture while maintaining the heritage culture (Parrish, 2004, p. 3).

An ELL's level of acculturation affects second language acquisition. When an ELL is accepted by the dominant culture, there will be more opportunities to practice the target language.

Acculturation describes a person's ability to adapt to the dominant culture while maintaining the heritage culture. Acculturation is influenced by factors such as the level of similarity between the country of origin and second culture, reasons for immigration, changes in status, family separation, and whether the minority culture is more or less accepted by the dominant culture. Any factor in the acculturation process can affect language acquisition.

An ELL's level of acceptance in the dominant culture plays a significant role in second language acquisition (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Case studies by Bonny Norton and Kellen Toohey showed how ELLs' level of acceptance in the dominant culture was correlated with increased opportunities for social interaction in the target language. In the study, the two learners who showed the most growth were able to create new identities that were valued by the dominant culture. (For example, one of the learners engaged peers by sharing her knowledge about a region they were interested in.) As a result, they were accepted into peer networks and gained opportunities to participate in English conversations.

The Affective Filter

The affective filter describes the connection between a learner's stress level and ability to learn. When the affective filter is high, less learning is able to make its way past the invisible affective filter.

- A high affective filter makes it more difficult to learn.
- Stressors may be related to language learning or originate from situations outside of the classroom.
- Teachers can take steps to help lower the affective filter.

The affective filter hypothesis looks at the effects of stress on a person's ability to take in new information (Parrish, 2004, p. 14). Stressors act as a filter, blocking a person's language acquisition. Stressors can include factors that originate both in and out of class. Embarrassment using the second language in class, lack of sleep and life-stress can all make it more difficult to learn a language.

Second language teachers can take steps to help lower the affective filter for learners. Providing meaningful feedback, allowing for mistakes, avoiding spotlighting learners, allowing for various learning styles and needs and showing respect for all learners are all ways teachers create a safe learning environment. Offering learners choices in how they present material, allowing for presentations to small groups instead of the whole class, and giving learners sufficient time to formulate answers can further help lower the affective filter (Lems et al., 2010, p. 18).

Learning and Violence

Experiences of violence affect learning.

- Creating a safe learning environment is critical to support learners who have experienced violence.
- Learners who have experienced or are presently experiencing violence may have difficulties that make active participation in school and learning difficult.

Schools can serve to support learners to manage participating in school.

- Spacing out, acting out and sporadic or poor attendance might be related to experiences of violence. Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or acculturation challenges can also result in the same behaviours.

In her work with women who are literacy learners, Jenny Horsman has found that past and current violence has a large, often hidden, impact on learning. In Horsman's interviews with women in literacy programs, she found that violence had often played a role in a lack of access to literacy during childhood (Horsman, 2000).

Creating a safe learning environment is especially important for learners who are in violent situations now or have been in the past. Experiences of violence can make learning more difficult. Attention difficulties can be related to issues of violence. Spacing out, acting out and sporadic or poor attendance can all be related to experiences of violence (Spiral Community Resource Group, n.d.)

When a learner exhibits any of the above challenges, educational organizations might question a learner's readiness for school. Instead, Horsman suggests that schools support the learner to manage participating in school (2001, p. 22). Creating learning environments that are accessible to every learner is especially important when learners have experienced or are presently experiencing violence outside of the classroom.

A note on memory:

To support learners with memory issues:

- present information in familiar contexts
- use familiar language to introduce new concepts
- create opportunities for kinesthetic, hands-on learning experiences
- repeat information in different ways
- review concepts regularly
- teach learners memorization strategies

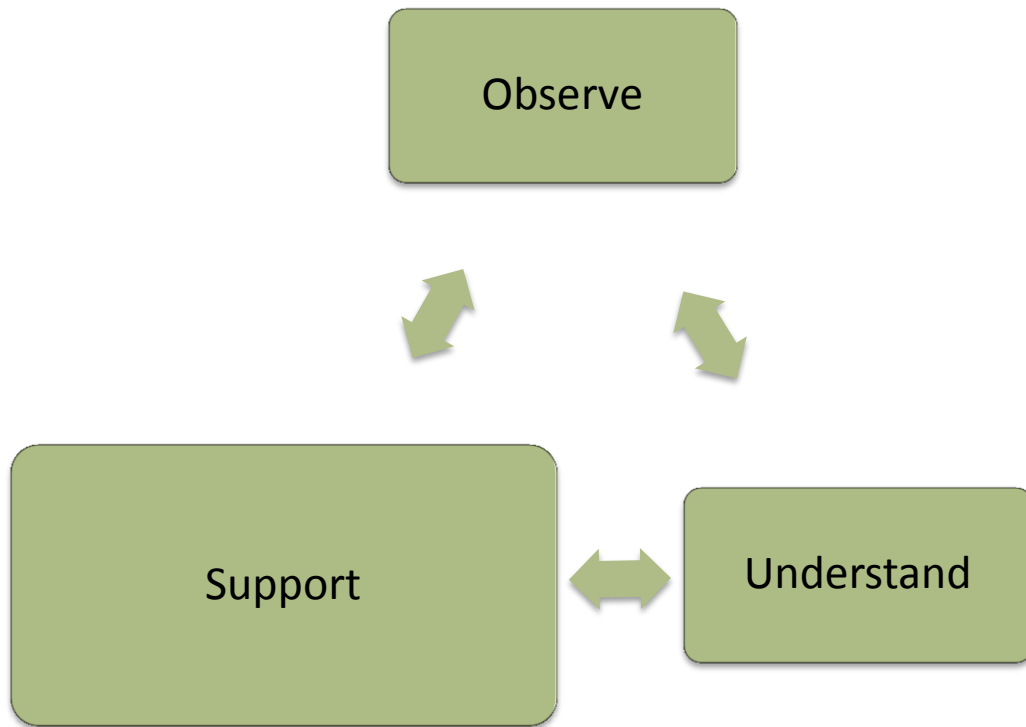
(Alberta Education, 2010, pp. 127-129)

For detailed strategies to support learners who have difficulty with memory, see pages 127-129 in Making a Difference (Alberta Education, 2010).

Conclusion

There are many reasons why learners struggle or succeed in language acquisition and, therefore, it is difficult to pinpoint just one or two factors. Learning behaviours associated with learning disabilities are also behaviours associated with low levels of literacy in the native language or even with trauma. When we work with struggling ELLs, we look for information to help us understand what might be causing some difficulties. Knowing our learners and understanding the many factors influencing language acquisition helps us as we begin to look for ways to better support our learners.

SECTION 3: SUPPORT



Supporting Your Learners

Creating the best possible chance for success for a learner involves a holistic approach to service provision and access to wrap-around services that may include settlement, employment and/or family services. Our extensive client intake process enables us to identify whether the student would benefit from additional supports beyond assistance with their learning goals. We refer learners for assistance in accessing prescription eyeglasses, looking for work and other settlement issues as they arise.

Most adult ESL classes in Canada include learners with a broad spectrum of backgrounds, language learning needs and learning styles. Supporting a struggling learner within an already diverse class can be challenging, especially if there are not additional supports in place. Ideally, classroom teachers are supported by educational assistants who can provide individualized support on a regular basis. This is not currently the case for many adult ESL classes. In this section, we look at instructional practices that benefit the general population of adult ELLs and are critical considerations in supporting those who are struggling.

Get to Know Your Learners: Learner Interviews

Interviewing learners at the beginning of term can provide considerable information that will help you identify ways to support them.

- Identify strengths and barriers.
- Make appropriate referrals to manage barriers.
- Tailor instruction.

By interviewing a learner, the teacher gains a better picture of what a learner's needs are (Lovrien Schwarz, 2005). In an interview that is approached privately and sensitively, the teacher may learn critical information about a learner's health, basic needs and literacy background. We have found that most learners referred for additional learning support face multifaceted barriers. With added information about a learner's barriers, we can make appropriate referrals. We refer many of the learners we work with to employment, family or settlement and integration counsellors.

During an intake interview, we ask learners about their prior experience with formal education and literacy in the first language. This information is invaluable in helping to determine ways to best support a learner's second language and literacy acquisition.

In her work with an Adult Basic Education program, Sylvia Greene worked with a team to identify needs of learners who seemed to have reached a plateau in their learning (Greene, 2008). Greene interviewed each of the five learners identified by teachers as struggling learners. In the interviews, Greene found that three of the five learners were getting very little sleep. One of the learners slept only two hours a night in an effort to make time to continue school, hold down a job and care for her children. Vision problems were also a common thread among identified learners. As a result of the interviews, the program and curriculum were able to address the needs of these learners in a way that was likely to benefit all learners.

Establish Routines

Create predictable classroom activities that occur on a daily or weekly basis.

Classroom routines and rituals benefit many learners.

When learners are familiar with a routine, time and energy can be spent on learning content rather than learning how to complete a task.

Establishing classroom routines is an example of instructional practice that benefits those who experience various types of barriers to learning. Experts in LD and ESL literacy instruction agree on the importance of establishing classroom routines (Price & Cole, 2009; Isserlis, 2008). When we create routines and rituals in the classroom, learners know what to expect. Routines provide a sense of predictability that helps learners focus on the learning content, rather than how to perform an activity or wondering what's coming next.

In her class, Janet Isserlis worked with learners to develop language experience stories each week. These stories created a basis for further weekly literacy activities. While the activities remained the same, learners were exposed to new language and content.

Balanced Literacy Instruction: Whole-Part-Whole

The Whole-Part-Whole method is an approach to literacy instruction that balances whole language and phonics instruction.

When teaching in an in ESL class, Whole-Part-Whole instruction:

- begins with a familiar context
- engages learners in specific skills development within the context
- brings the context and skills back into use in learners' lives

Starting with meaning benefits dyslexic ELLs. (Spiegel & Sunderland, 2000).

The Whole-Part-Whole method of instruction begins with a context that is familiar and meaningful to learners (Vinogradov, September 2009). Once the broader context or theme is established, the teacher engages learners in specific skills development within that context. In this method, 'whole' refers to the theme or context. 'Part' could be phonemic awareness, phonics or grammar points that the teacher emphasizes within that context. With the context and targeted skills in place, the instruction moves to 'whole' again, where learner practice the skills they have learned and apply it to a real-life situation.

Developing L2 Oral Skills

In a study by Larry Condelli and Heide Spruck Wrigley, classes that showed the most oral language gains:

- used first language judiciously to support L2 development
- practiced the same components multiple times in a variety of ways

In their What Works Study, Larry Condelli and Heide Spruck Wrigley looked at best practices in ESL instruction for learners with less than six years of formal instruction in their first language (Wrigley, 2003; Condelli & Spruck Wrigley, 2008). In this study of 500 learners, classes with the most growth in English oral skills used the first language to support instruction *. In these classes, learners practiced the same skills multiple times in a variety of ways.

**see the next section for more on the use of L1 in ESL classrooms*

L2 Literacy: the Listening and Speaking Factor

Strong L2 oral skills support literacy acquisition.

ELLs require a strong listening vocabulary to support literacy development.

Second language literacy is supported by strong L2 oral skills. Native speakers begin school with an estimated 5000-7000 words in their repertoire of listening vocabulary (Lems et al., 2010). Beginning English language learners do not have this level of listening vocabulary to support their literacy. Reading comprehension requires the reader to understand the vocabulary orally first.

The Use of L1 in ESL Instruction

A learner's first language can be used in-class to support second language acquisition.

L1 can be used:

- to explain or clarify content
- as a means for learners to discuss issues/problem-solve

Condelli and Wrigley also found that when a learner's first language was used to explain or clarify L2 content, learners experienced more growth in both oral communication and reading comprehension. They suggest this could be linked to lower anxiety levels, particularly where the teacher spoke the same language as the learners.

Thinking critically in a language requires an ability to communicate in that language. It is difficult for beginning ELLs to address scenarios related to learners' daily lives in a meaningful way in a second language. Allowing learners to use their native language to discuss issues and problem-solve may reinforce English language learning (Condelli & Spruck Wrigley).

Explicit, Intensive and Supportive Instruction

To prevent reading difficulties, provide instruction that is:

- explicit
- intensive
- supportive

Much of what early childhood literacy research tells us is of value to ESL teachers. In his article, 'The Prevention of Reading Difficulties,' Joseph K. Torgesen describes the necessity of explicit, intensive and supportive literacy instruction for children who struggle with literacy at the very beginning of a their educational experience (2002). Those who do not have phonemic awareness at Grade 1 become much further behind their classmates by Grade 4.

Phonemic awareness requires hearing the distinct sounds in words. Children who do not have a basis of phonemic awareness, later struggle with phonics as they are unable to make sense of it. Torgesen advocates for a balanced literacy approach emphasizing both word-level processes and reading comprehension. Explicit phonemic instruction provided the most reading growth for all young learners, and that struggling readers showed even greater gains. The more at-risk the children are, the more explicit instruction needs to impact the reading process and the intensity or number of teaching/learning opportunities each day becomes increasingly important. We might consider how explicit, intensive and supportive literacy instruction could be relevant for ELLs who are emergent readers.

Decoding

Explicit strategy instruction provides learners with tools that will support their language and literacy acquisition. Reading Rockets offers a database of literacy strategies to use with learners before, during and after reading (Reading Rockets, 2013). Some skills and activities to support reading and writing address:

- phonemic awareness and phonics skills
- word families
- jigsaw words

Phonemic awareness and phonics skills

Even before the connection of sounds and letters is developed, instructors can bring learners' awareness to patterns in sounds. For example, hearing which words start with the same sound, rhyme, or how many syllables a word has, helps promote phonics awareness when instructors make the same connections in print. El-Konin Boxes are a useful, tactile tool to help learners recognize each of the phonemes, or the smallest sounds in a word and thereby develop their phonics skills. Learners identify each sound they hear in a word. At beginning levels, ask learners to place a chip on the grid each time they hear a sound. As learners become competent at identifying the number of sounds, use letter cubes/blocks to identify sounds in place of bingo chips or other markers.

Word families

One of the strategies instructors can use to help learners develop awareness of sound-letter correspondence is to practice working with word families. Instructors can start by bringing learners' attention first to hearing parts of words that rhyme like "can" and "fan" and then moving on to more difficult tasks, like asking learners what word they can make by putting the /f/ sound in front of 'an' (Between the Lions, 2013). A slightly more complex task would be putting the sounds into print/text. This creates a basis for later decoding more difficult words. At higher levels, the same word part, 'an', can be used to sound out or spell words such as "hand", "plant" or "stand". Even more challenging is to use the word chunk to sound out or spell longer words containing 'an' like landlord or cancel. Repeated explicit instruction throughout stages of English proficiency will benefit struggling ELLs to carry this strategy into their independent work as well.

Jigsaw words

Jigsaw words are useful when words divide easily into two recognizable parts in a pattern. Days of the week are nice starting

Sentence strips or Jigsaw sentences

Use sentence strips or jigsaw sentences to develop learner awareness of sentence structure. Sentences cut into short parts to be put together by the learner. This helps with syntactical awareness.

points as ELLs often learn these early on in their English language development. Here, “day” is the same in each word. Write each day of the week on its own index card or strip of paper. Then cut the words into two parts. Ask the learner to make different words using the initial morpheme and “day” (Spiegel & Sunderland, 2000, p. 119). Use this activity to help learners see that parts of words put together can form new, longer words. You can bring attention to word patterns in other ways, such as having learners colour a specified word or morpheme in a text the same colour. With these exercises, you are supporting both kinaesthetic learners and visual learners, respectively.

Vocabulary Development

Explicit vocabulary instruction involves direct instruction about morphemes and their meanings. Teach these concepts:

- root or base words
- prefixes
- suffixes

Words sharing the same base or root are sometimes pronounced differently, making it difficult for the learner to recognize them. In electricity, the second c does not sound the same as its root word, “electric” (Lems, et al., 2010).

As learners begin to develop their English language skills, explicit instruction about the use of morphemes can support vocabulary expansion (Lems et al., 2010, p. 91ff). Morphemes are the smallest parts of words that carry meaning, or the root/base of a word. Learners require explicit, repeated instruction and practice with how prefixes, suffixes and root words to develop a strong vocabulary. An understanding of how morphemes work supports readers when they encounter unfamiliar words.

Intensive and Extensive Listening Practice

Intensive listening activities emphasize focusing on discrete aspects of an utterance with multiple opportunities to listen to it.

Extensive listening activities emphasize developing strategies to get the gist of oral language.

- Intensive and extensive listening activities are most effective when alternated.

Alternating intensive and extensive listening practice activities are important to developing strong listening skills in a second language (Lems et al., 2010). In an intensive listening activity, the language learner focuses on listening for the discrete features of the English language. Learners hear the oral text multiple times and analyze its parts. Teachers can use media clips to draw learners' attention to features of spoken English such as pronunciation. Transcribing a song, dictation exercises and using closed captioning are also intensive listening exercises.

Extensive listening practice involves learners listening for the gist of what they hear. Activities that facilitate this include Total Physical Response, listening for ideas in presentations and listening to media clips for comprehension.

Connecting Language Learning to Life

As discussed earlier, developing L2 skills within the context of a theme creates many opportunities to focus on the smaller features of the new language. The use of authentic materials, learner-generated texts, the Language Experience Approach and dialogue journals are all ways to connect language development to learners' lives in a meaningful way. When instruction is connected to learners' lives, they are able to draw on background knowledge that gives the new language skills a 'hook' to hang on. Ideas for connecting learning to life follow.

Learner-generated Texts

In a learner-generated text, the text's content comes from the learner.

- Learner-generated texts:
 - are meaningful and relevant to the learner
 - use language already in a learner's repertoire

As learners develop L2 oral language skills, these skills will support literacy development (Vinogradov & Bigelow, 2010). Learners from strong oral traditions can also draw on this strength to develop literacy skills when literacy exercises are closely related to a learner's life experience and current needs. Personal stories or folktales from learners' L1 can be written in English at a level that learners understand. Learner-generated texts consist of language that is familiar to learners and content that is meaningful and familiar. Learners will be better able to focus their energy on reading skills.

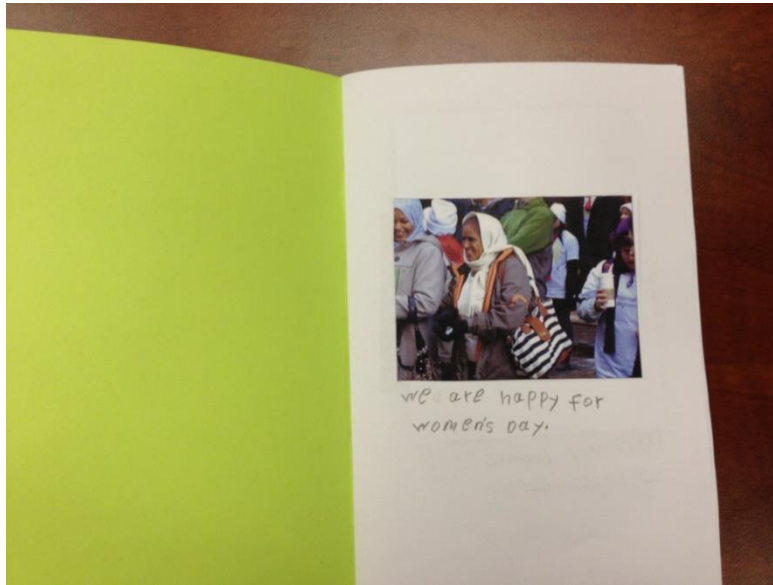


Figure 3: Learner-generated books about participation in International Women's Day Celebrations

Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach or LEA is story-writing method where the teacher writes a story dictated by learners, based on their experiences.

LEA stories are:

- based on learners' experiences (usually a shared experience)
- dictated by learners and transcribed by the teacher
- not corrected by the teacher
- used as a basis for language study points within context

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) is a great tool for building emerging literacy with adults. In LEA, learners tell a story using their own words. The teacher writes the learners' story without corrections or modifications. Because the text is learner-generated, the vocabulary and content are familiar. We know that when readers are familiar with the content and vocabulary in a story, they will be able to focus on reading for meaning. Often stories tell about field trips the class has taken together. They can also tell about learners' individual experiences.

Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals involve written correspondence between the learner and her teacher.

- Dialogue journals develop a sense of purpose in writing.
- Written work is not marked or corrected.
- They provide valuable information to the teacher.

The use of dialogue journals with adult ELLs can help learners develop a sense of purpose for writing. In dialogue journals, the learner writes in a notebook on a topic of his or her choice. The teacher responds to the content of the journal entry (Lems et al., 2010, p. 210). The teacher does not mark or correct the learner's written work. However, when the teacher reads the learner's writing, she can gain a sense of writing areas that the class can work on together (Isserlis, 2008).

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading involves reading:

- large amounts of text
- text of the learner's choice

Extensive reading develops reading comprehension and reading strategies (Lems et al., p. 183). Running an extensive reading program involves providing learners with plenty of class time for reading materials of their choice alongside accessible reading materials (Vinogradov, 2009). While an abundance of extensive reading programs exists within elementary school programs, there are still few resources written for adult ELLs at the lowest levels (Young-Scholten & Maguire, 2008).

Multiple Intelligences

The Multiple Intelligences theory represents a variety of different learning styles. Based on this theory, teachers can create opportunities for learners with differing learning styles to acquire language.

In his work with Multiple Intelligences, Howard Gardner paved the way for understanding that people's intelligences, strengths and learning styles vary from each other (Parrish, 2004, p. 27). With an understanding of how people learn differently, we can create learning opportunities that work for more learners. In 1993, Gardner listed 7 intelligences:

Verbal/Linguistic	Logical/Mathematical	Bodily/Kinesthetic	Intrapersonal
Musical	Spatial/Visual	Natural/Environmental	

A musical learner might learn language well through jazz chants and singing songs. A kinesthetic learner would learn well engaged in hands-on activities. Consider the learning styles of your students to make learning more accessible to them.

Conclusion

Adapting instruction to meet the diverse needs of adult ELLs is an important step to supporting struggling learners in any class. The same instructional practices that support struggling learners can also benefit other learners in the same class.

SECTION 4: CASE STUDIES

Introduction

In the case studies that follow, you will see profiles of learners with characteristics common to those who struggle in their ESL classes. The learners profiled in these case studies come from differing backgrounds. Some have completed their high school and even college education in their first language, while others have not and are developing print-text literacy for the first time.

- Maggie – Workplace Training
- Sarah – Reading for Meaning
- Maria – Anxiety and Learning
- Fatima – Organizing Ideas and Academic Language
- Halima - Multifaceted Barriers to Learning

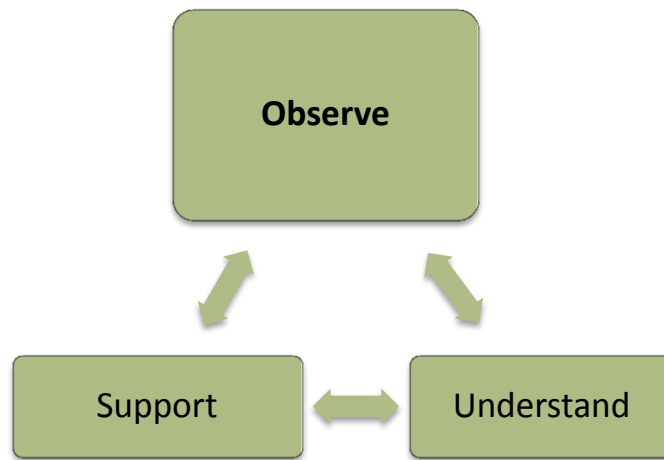
Maggie: Workplace Training

In this case, demonstrating knowledge of the content is most important. To determine where to support Maggie, we asked 'What are the most important skills for her to learn?'

Maggie is a participant in a childcare training program. Her instructor referred her because she was struggling to keep up with the content being delivered. Program participants receive certification at the end of the program and are required to learn the program's content and skills to receive this certification. Whether Maggie can master reading and writing the content-based information is less important than whether she can demonstrate that she understands it.

Part of the curriculum content involves reading children's stories. During one of our meetings, Maggie read a story from her program's collection. Maggie was able to decode some of the words and recognized some sight words. She was unable to accurately describe what the story was about.

Maggie also finds the childcare-specific vocabulary difficult. She does not understand much of the vocabulary in her handouts and is overwhelmed by the amount of content. As she is unable to determine what the most important information in her handouts is, she tries to remember it all.



Step 1: Observe

In class, the learner:

- is quiet
- does not appear to understand the course content

In an interview, the learner:

- said she did not understand much of the printed materials in class
- said she needs to know everything on the handouts
- said she understands concepts when her teacher explains them in class
- described her difficulty writing the tests

While reading a children's book or class handouts, the learner:

- demonstrates some decoding skills and sight word knowledge, though inconsistently
- is unable to describe what the children's story or the handout is about

Steps 2 and 3: Understand and Support

UNDERSTAND:	SUPPORT: take these steps to support the learner
Study Skills: Maggie is trying to retain large amounts of content, without knowing which information is the most important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Develop reading strategies to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Find the main idea○ Differentiate between the most important and less critical information✓ Develop study strategies to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Learn and remember key concepts and vocabulary (eg. create study notes, make notes in L1).
Vocabulary Development: Maggie is trying to learn all of the vocabulary and remembering very little.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Work with Maggie to highlight key words and practice their use in multiple contexts.✓ Encourage Maggie to write the definition in her own words (in L1 or English).
Decoding: Maggie has difficulty decoding much of the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ In context, work with Maggie to develop reading strategies such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Finding shorter, known words within longer words○ Reading and understanding prefixes, suffixes and root words
Taking Tests: Even when Maggie understands the course content, she feels she is unable to succeed on a test due to high level of literacy required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Consider alternative forms of assessment that would enable Maggie to demonstrate her knowledge of the subject (eg. an oral test or a presentation).

Communication

Verbal (words) communication	Non-verbal (not words) communication
Words we communicate by talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Body language• Touch• Physical appearance (how we look)• Personal objects (jewellery, watch, purse, binder)• Environmental factors• Use of space – where do we put things (eg. furniture)• Time• Paralanguage – how we talk (loud, quiet)• Silence (not talking)

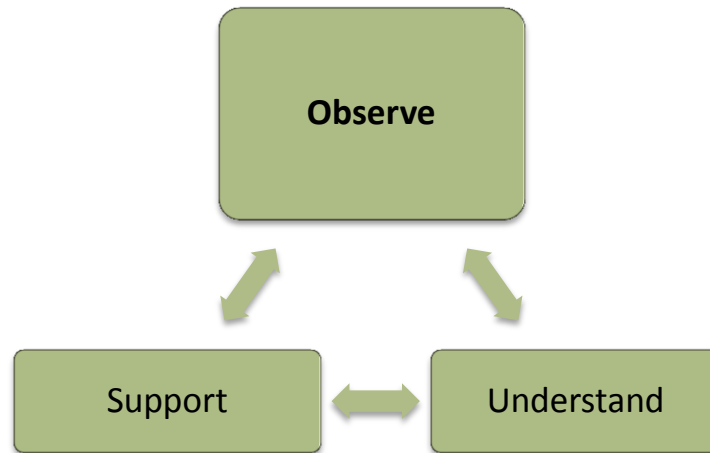
Figure 4: Learners organized information about verbal and non-verbal communication in this chart. This served as a study reference.

Sarah: Reading for Meaning

While Sarah read aloud, the words she said didn't match the text. When asked what the text was about, she did not know.

Sarah is in learner in a LINC 2 class. She has been in ESL classes for one year. While Sarah is progressing in her English listening and speaking acquisition at about the same rate as her peers, her reading and writing skills lag behind. Sarah's teacher observed that she had difficulty with decoding and spelling basic words.

Initially, Sarah talked about how important learning English was to her. She indicated that she had some difficulty seeing the print on handouts, but was able to see the whiteboard clearly. While she had a prescription for glasses, she was unable to afford them. During some one-on-one work, Sarah was asked to choose anything from her binder that she would like to read as an example. Sarah chose a text she had copied into her notebook. The text was a definition she had copied from the dictionary. When she was asked to read this, she stumbled through the text. She 'read' most of the words inaccurately, perhaps getting one or two of the letter-sounds in a word. After she finished reading the text, she was asked whether she knew what the text was about. She was unable to describe the text. When we talked about the text, Sarah did not recognize words that came directly from the text.



Step 1: Observe

In class, the learner:

- is making progress in her listening and speaking proficiency
- has not increased her reading and writing benchmarks in one year
- has difficulty decoding familiar words
- has difficulty spelling simple words

In an interview, the learner:

- talked about how important learning English is to her
- indicated that she has difficulty seeing print on handouts, but is able to see what her teacher writes on the whiteboard

While reading a text she selected the learner:

- demonstrated awareness of directionality
- demonstrated some awareness of sound-letter correspondence for initial consonants
- substituted nonsensical words for words in text
 - many of the substituted words began with the same initial consonant
- was unable to describe what the text was about

Steps 2 and 3: Understand and Support

UNDERSTAND:	SUPPORT: take these steps to support the learner
Visual difficulties: Sarah has difficulty seeing text on handouts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide handouts in large, clear, sans serif fonts. ✓ Make a referral to a settlement counsellor for support to access prescription glasses.
Sound-letter correspondence: Sarah has developed some first-letter sound awareness. She requires further phonics skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use El-Konin boxes with bingo chips. ✓ Clap out syllables to hear word parts. ✓ Work to develop decoding strategies by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sounding out words ○ building word family skills ○ finding shorter, familiar words in longer, unknown words
Spelling: Sarah has difficulty spelling simple, familiar words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reinforce phonemic awareness and phonics skills to support spelling (refer to sound-letter correspondence above). ✓ Use additional strategies to learn words that do not follow phonetic spelling rules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Look, say, cover, write, check ○ spelling chants
Reading for Meaning: In our work together, the Sarah did not connect the meaning to the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide simpler texts to decrease the learning load. ✓ Emphasize comprehension strategies by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asking questions about the text as Sarah reads ○ Practicing retelling ○ Ordering sentence strips after-reading

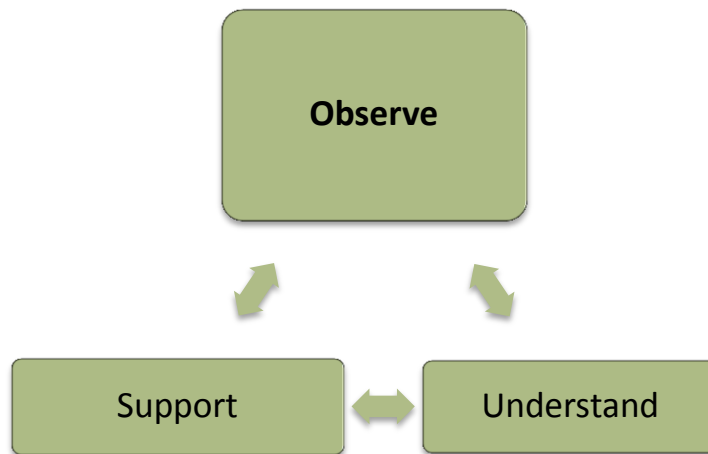
For ideas on decreasing the learning load, go to Wrigley's Teaching-Learning Continuum on p.19

Maria: Anxiety and Learning

Maria's anxiety over speaking English was making it difficult for her to acquire language.

Maria's teacher referred her for support with her listening and speaking skills. Her teacher observed that Maria has trouble following verbal instructions and was concerned that Maria is unable to follow much of the content. When Maria's teacher asks her questions in class, her answers appear to be frequently unrelated to the question. Maria's teacher noticed that she confuses simple, common vocabulary and often uses Spanish words in place of English when she speaks.

Our intake process with Maria included conversational and reading exercises. During some one-on-one conversation, we found that Maria did not understand some of the basic 5W question words. While Maria's unfamiliarity with many basic English words leaves gaps in her spoken English, her sometimes successful use of cognates in conversation enables her to use what would appear to be more complicated vocabulary than her peers. Maria said that she becomes anxious when she is asked a question in English.



Step 1: Observe

In class, the learner:

- answers questions off-topic
- does not follow verbal instructions
- confuses basic vocabulary (eg. numbers and colours)
- frequently uses Spanish words in place of English words

In an interview, the learner:

- said she experiences anxiety when asked questions or speaking English in class

During one-on-one English conversation, the learner:

- responded to 5W questions with answers that did not correspond (eg. answered a *who* question with an answer appropriate to a *when* question)
- used English and Spanish interchangeably
- sometimes used more difficult English vocabulary in conversation
 - these words tended to be cognates (for more on cognates, see page 21)

Steps 2 and 3: Understand and Support

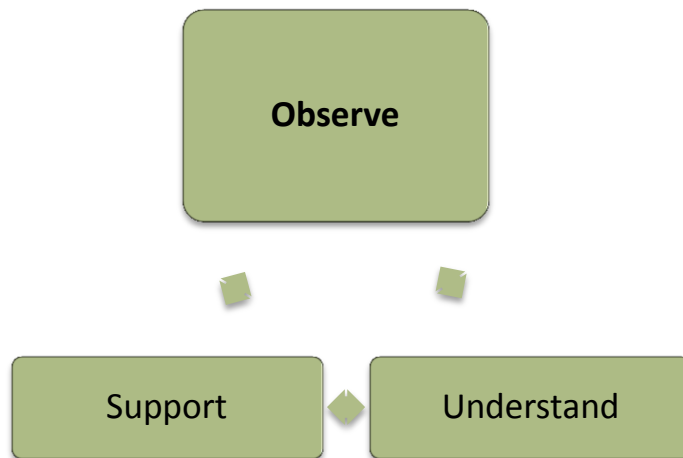
UNDERSTAND:	SUPPORT: take these steps to support the learner
Vocabulary: Gaps in basic English vocabulary are making clear communication difficult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Focus on developing beginning-level vocabulary and using it successfully in listening and speaking activities.✓ Clarify 5W question words and phrases. Practice basic questions and answers in a highly supported way.
Cognates: Maria has developed a beginning awareness of cognates in English and her first language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Maria can make note of cognates she comes across when she reads or hears English.✓ Use Watch videos made for adult ELLs with supporting texts in both L1 and English (eg. <i>We are New York</i>) to develop greater awareness of how to use and pronounce cognates in English.
Affective filter: Maria's affective filter is high. (See page 25 for a description of the affective filter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Refer learner to a family counsellor to develop strategies for anxiety management.

Fatima: Organizing Ideas and Academic Language

While Fatima could readily write about herself, she used generalized vocabulary and her paragraphs were disorganized.

Fatima is in a LINC 4 class. Her teacher referred her for writing support. After weeks of explicit instruction and practice using a basic paragraph structure, Fatima's paragraphs are repetitive and disorganized. Her teacher has observed that Fatima uses the same, generalized vocabulary throughout her writing. Instead of describing an object, Fatima uses words like "thing" and instead of using specific words about people (student, mechanic, doctor, neighbour, etc.), she uses the word "person". Fatima's teacher is also concerned about her spelling.

During the intake process, Fatima was given a photo of a woman grocery shopping and she was asked to write about it. Fatima expressed confusion at being asked to write about something that was not about her own experience. She was able to give details orally about what she saw, but found the idea of writing about a situation that she didn't have the facts for difficult, even though the scene was familiar. She was then asked to write a story about herself. She wrote a full page. In her writing sample there were several occurrences of invented spelling. Fatima spelled a number of sight words correctly, however she misspelled other familiar words that do not follow the conventional spelling rules.



Step 1: Observe

In class, the learner:

- writes the length of text expected by her teacher
- does not follow the paragraph structure presented in class
- repeats ideas in a paragraph
- uses generalized rather than specific, descriptive vocabulary

In an interview, the learner:

- said she had completed her high school education in her country of origin
- indicated she had lived in Canada for nearly a decade

During a one-on-one writing tutorial, the learner:

- expressed confusion at being asked to write about a situation that was not her own
- wrote at length about herself
- used invented spelling
- wrote some sight words correctly

Steps 2 and 3: Understand and Support

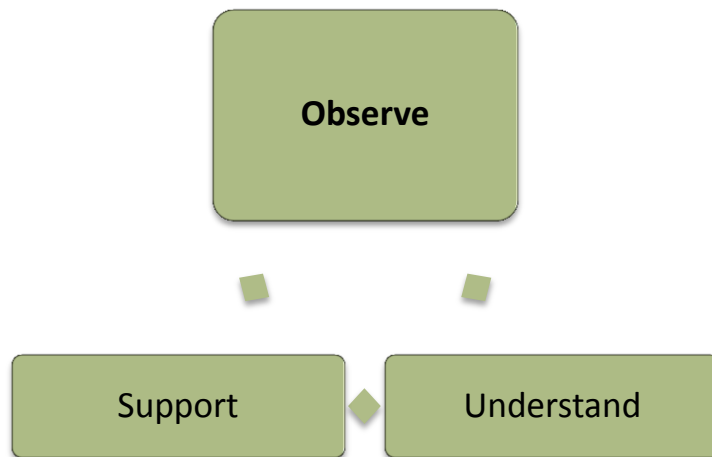
UNDERSTAND:	SUPPORT: take these steps to support the learner
Paragraph structure: Fatima does not follow a clear writing structure. She frequently repeats ideas.	✓ Use graphic organizers to support paragraph writing.
Vocabulary: Fatima writes using limited, general vocabulary (read about BICS and CALP on page 17).	✓ Brainstorm ideas about a story prior to writing. Write ideas onto a graphic organizer. Work with Fatima to clarify vague or generalized vocabulary with more specific words. ✓ Discuss topics of interest and relevance to Fatima. As you discuss the topic, clarify vocabulary that makes her meaning unclear (eg. the person, thing, etc.). Provide the unknown, more specific term. Encourage her to write it down and use the same word in conversation or writing activities later.
Spelling: Fatima substitutes vowels in her use of invented spelling. She misspells many words that do not follow the conventional spelling rules.	✓ Check Fatima's pronunciation of vowel sounds and her ability to hear the differences between sounds. ✓ Develop awareness of vowel sounds and how to read and write them. ✓ Develop reading and writing strategies to support spelling such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Word families○ The use of root words, prefixes and suffixes to understand, read and spell longer words○ Spelling rules, such as when to use c or s for the s sound○ Memory strategies

Halima: Multifaceted Barriers to Learning

This learner has been in the same level for over a year. While her attendance is regular, she appears to be uninterested in language learning activities.

Halima has repeated the same class, at the same level, for more than a year. While her English listening and speaking skills are stronger than her classmates, her teacher noted that her literacy skills remain unchanged. Halima appears to be uninterested in class activities, often interrupting or spacing out. At the first meeting, Halima said that she was unable to read because she had left her glasses at home.

The LEA story that was produced was transcribed in a large font that did not strain her eyes. She was able to pick out her name and some letters of the alphabet, but was unable to read the story back. When asked about her learning experience, Halima described how difficult it was for her to learn to read and write. She hasn't been to school before this and does not read or write in her language. Halima explained that when she's in school, she is preoccupied with health and financial concerns, and thinking about her family who are not yet in Canada. As a result, she has difficulty remembering class content from one day to the next.



Step 1: Observe

In class, the learner:

- speaks English above-level
- has difficulty forming letters
- does not recognize familiar words in print
- interrupts the class frequently
- appears to be disengaged

In an interview, the learner:

- described numerous challenges including:
 - health conditions
 - inability to sleep at night
 - difficulty concentrating during class
 - problems with memory
 - financial issues

During a one-on-one tutorial, the learner:

- was able to dictate a short story about herself
- identified her name in the story without support
- was unable to recognize words within the same text about herself

Steps 2 and 3: Understand and Support

UNDERSTAND:	SUPPORT: take these steps to support the learner
Eyesight: Halima may have difficulty with vision and is unable to afford glasses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide texts with plenty of white space and large (minimum 18 point), sans serif font. ✓ Refer Halima to a settlement counselor for support in making an appointment with an optometrist.
Life challenges: Halima's learning is affected by medications, lack of sleep and financial difficulty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ask Halima if she would like her teacher to know about her inability to concentrate in class, so her teacher can make adjustments to support her in class. ✓ Halima is interested in meeting with a family counselor to discuss the stressors she experiences and tools to manage them.
Phonemic and phonetic awareness: Halima does not have a sense of basic letter-sound correspondence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use El-Konin boxes with bingo chips to develop phonemic awareness ✓ Reinforce initial consonant sounds. ✓ Work with word families aurally and eventually with print-text. ✓ Practice chunking skills to decode longer, unfamiliar words (eg. day in Monday).
Comprehension: During the intake process, Halima did not make meaning of text, except for her name.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Decrease learning load to increase language acquisition and comprehension. ✓ Provide stories on familiar, meaningful topics. ✓ Draw on background knowledge of a topic before introducing text. ✓ Check comprehension with retelling or comprehension questions.
Memory: Halima has difficulty remembering what she learns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As above, decrease learning load to increase retention. ✓ Support Halima to develop memory strategies.

SECTION V: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND WORKS CITED

Glossary of Terms

Cognates - words that are similar in two or more languages. Awareness of cognates can support vocabulary development in the target language (see page 21 for more on using cognates).

El-Konin Boxes - a useful, tactile tool to help learners recognize each of the phonemes, or the smallest sounds, in a word. Learners place a chip or letter on the grid each time they hear a sound.

ELL - English language learner

ESL - English as a Second Language

Graphic organizers - makes abstract ideas more concrete by showing relationships between ideas

L1 - refers to a person's first language

L2 – generally, refers to the language a person is currently learning

Phonemic awareness - the ability to hear and work with the smallest parts of sounds in words

Phonics – involves the process of connecting sounds and letters

Retelling - a strategy that helps the learner and the teacher gauge comprehension. It can be used after either a listening or reading activity.

Sound-letter correspondence - how letters represent sounds

Target language - the language that a person is learning

Whole-part-whole - a balanced approach to literacy that moves between whole language and more detailed language and literacy skills

Word families - words that are related, like rhyming words, belong to a word family. Understanding how word families work is important to English reading and writing.

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