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## Approaches and Strategies in Second Language Literacy Instruction

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**Annotation:** *This article focuses on beginning level young language learners benefit from early literacy instruction, pattern texts and Language Experience Activities that are some of the top-down instructional strategies that work with young language learners, using Literacy Blocks for young language learners to write their own stories, describe imaginary interactions with the book elements when participating in Entering the Text activities, or engaging in Fixed Form Poetry writing, literacy activities recall exciting games. It also outlines Literacy Scaffolds sustain children's reading and writing and enable young language learners to produce texts of which students can be proud.*

**Keywords:** *Authentic Literacy Events, Literate Classroom Environment, Dictated Stories, Pattern Texts, Literacy Scaffolds.*

**Introduction.** Second language literacy experts recommend that literacy instruction should start early in the ESL classroom, before children develop full proficiency in a second language. Because writing is less threatening than speaking in that children need not be afraid of mispronouncing an unfamiliar word, children can have their first experiences of producing written statements in English well before they start speaking in a second language.

**Literature review.** Using Whole Language in Authentic Literacy Events – As most beginning level language learners will have a hard time dealing with tasks such as “What is the first sound of the word at?” or “Use the word in your own sentence!” using instructional strategies that work from the bottom to the top is not feasible with that group of students.

To account for this fact, learning to read and write in a second language should start as a whole, not a part. Second language teachers stay away from practicing the reading of disjointed decontextualized target language lists, nor do they ask students to practice writing word lists made of items such as the or in. Rather, they encourage language learners to use whole pieces of written language while reading for meaning and writing for communication. [1]

In the second language classroom, teachers encourage children to use oral and written language the way it is used in real life. When reading and writing, language learners need to participate in authentic literacy events; they read and write for real purposes.[2] Language learners benefit most from reading and writing stories and fairy tales, letters, newspapers, recipes, prescriptions, travel pamphlets, advertisements, song lyrics, and poems, as well as other authentic literacy pieces.[3] These literacy pieces can have just a few

words; sometimes these words are repeated several times for the sake of both practice and clarity. No matter how short and basic these pieces are, they work best if they are similar to pieces of written text that children might find outside the classroom.

Creating a Literate Classroom Environment – First literacy lessons happen in the second language classroom when language learners find themselves in the environment which sends them a message that reading and writing are important and enjoyable activities. Thematic displays of books, displays of children's works, and lists of students as well as lists of classroom rules all contribute to a print-rich environment.[3]

**Discussion.** The classroom environment is conducive to reading and writing if the classroom is converted into a virtual dictionary with the help of labels and poster size pictionary. Each element of the ESL classroom space, whether it be a chair or a wall, a make-believe paleontological excavation site, a doctor's office, a pretend store, or a reading corner, proclaim their name with the help of a label. As for oversize pictionaries, they are particularly effective if they are thematically organized, that is, if they carry lexical items that belong to the same semantic fields, such as animals, body parts, feelings, seasons, clothing, furnishings, common adjectives and verbs, colors, and so forth. It is essential that pictures illustrating the meaning of target language vocabulary be attractive and easy to interpret. Poster size pictionaries are helpful resources, not pieces of decoration, and it is important that children understand their role in the classroom. When implementing a writing activity, the teacher asks students to identify a pictionary that might help them work on a given piece of writing.

Language Experience Approach and Dictated Stories –The Language Experience Approach (LEA), initially developed for the mainstream literacy classroom, has been embraced by TESOL educators. [4]

In the field of TESOL, Language Experience Activities are also commonly referred to under the name of Dictated Stories<sup>14</sup> or Dictated Chart Stories. [5]

As evident from its name, the Language Experience Approach integrates teaching reading and writing with some type of a lived experience. The LEA activity consists of four steps: experience, description, transcription, and reading. During the first experience step, the teacher engages children in a group activity. During the second description step, children describe the activity they just experienced in their own words. During the third transcription step, the teacher transcribes the stories as the children tell them. During the final reading step, children read the texts they have created.

Dictated Stories are somewhat different from LEA stories in that they are not necessarily preceded by an activity. In the second language classroom, it is quite common for children to create Dictated Stories that provide personal information or describe objects. For instance, a Dictated Story might describe students' food preferences or a class pet. LEA stories that are authored by children and portray children's own experiences make excellent reading materials. These stories which are written in children's own language are not only effective because they facilitate text prediction (It is easy for children to make predictions when reading dictated LEA texts, because the texts contain words that the children themselves supplied.) but also because establishing an experiential background for a literacy activity gives children an opportunity to read and write about something they know rather than a situation that is far removed from their experiences. [6]

A class trip, taking care of a class pet, a hands-on project, such as making applesauce or papier-mache masks, all can serve as bases for LEA activities. Describing a puppet or a stuffed animal is also effective. Virtually every aspect of classroom life, ranging from first introductions to elaborate projects, can be chronicled in Dictated Stories. The goal behind early LEA activities is to familiarize language learners with their new environments.

Pattern Texts – Shared reading of pattern books, such as short stories, fairy tales, poems, or songs that contain a recurrent pattern of words, phrases, or sentences are also effective in the primary level ESL classroom. Pattern books provide for effective shared reading activities, because their repetitive structure scaffolds text prediction. Additionally, pattern books evoke a strong emotional response in young language learners. Children who are beginning to understand English derive pleasure from anticipating and then chanting familiar words.

Pattern books work particularly well if they are published in the big book format and include oversized illustrations that facilitate text comprehension. The language of the books is most beneficial to language learner needs if it is syntactically simple, natural, and reflective of the kind of language that children are likely to hear in their day-to-day communication. [7]

It is also important that books address themes and topics that children find relevant and interesting. Poems and songs that contain a simple, easy to follow, repetitive language pattern can also work as pattern books. Pattern nursery rhymes such as “Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed” or pattern songs such as “The Wheels on the Bus” work particularly well if they are published in the big book format and include attractive illustrations. If a commercial publication is not available, the teacher can create a pattern song book or a pattern poetry book by recording the words of a song or a poem on an oversized experience chart.

Personal narratives created by the teacher make excellent pattern books. Written in simple repetitive language and illustrated with photographs, stick-figure drawings, clip art, or stickers, these books are children’s favorite source of reading, because they model language use while helping create a stronger bond between the teacher and the students.

Literacy Scaffolds – To help English language learners write in English, second language teachers use literacy scaffolding, which is arguably the most important instructional strategy deployed to foster literacy skills of second language writers. Literacy Scaffolds are text models and patterns provided by the teacher or by more proficient learners, or designed collaboratively by the teacher and students to enable language learners read and write texts beyond their current proficiency level. Among the various literacy scaffolds used in the second language classroom are the following:

- ✓ pre-reading questioning;
- ✓ sentence patterns;
- ✓ pictionary;
- ✓ graphic organizers.

Each scaffold serves a distinct purpose. For instance, when teachers engage learners in the pre-reading discussion of pictures in a picture book, they assure that students will be able to make more accurate predictions when reading a text. When learners create an illustrated pictionary page during a prewriting activity, they are likely to create a piece of writing that is lexically rich and varied.

Literacy Blocks. The scaffolds which work particularly well with beginning level young students are Literacy Blocks. Literacy Blocks consist of two elements: the first one is a sentence scaffold or a sentence starter or a stem that assures that students’ writing is syntactically well formed. The second part is a word bank or a pictionary page made of nouns, verbs, or adjectives needed to complete the stem; words on the pictionary page are often thematically related. When writing with the help of Literacy Blocks, students finish off the stem with the words on the pictionary page; often writers reiterate the stem, creating a pattern text. Writing with the help of Literacy Blocks is a little bit like playing a Lego game or building an object out of toy blocks – in both instances; students assemble their creations out of ready pieces. Just as

children enjoy fashioning castles, boats, or cars out of prefabricated parts, language learners enjoy playing with pieces of language.

Literacy Blocks are effective when used during the silent or early speech emergence period with the students who still have no control of English syntax and a limited active vocabulary. If students are still at their silent stage, both the stem and the pictionary are provided by the teacher; emergent speakers can create their own Literacy Blocks as part of a teacher-guided brainstorming activity. First writing activities that rely on the use of Literacy Blocks generally tend to follow up the reading of pattern texts. [8]

Entering the Text Activities – As students' proficiency levels grow, pattern-writing activities can become more open-ended. In the second language classroom, response to literature activities work particularly well if students imagine infusing their own selves in the book and describe what would happen if they found themselves in the situation described in a story, or met one of the story's characters, or owned an unusual, magical object which the story describes.

These so-called Entering the Text activities work, because they appeal to young language learners' imagination while enabling them to practice target language items which they have encountered when reading their favorite books. Additionally, Entering the Text tasks are effective in the second language classroom, because they can be easily adapted to meet the needs of language learners with various proficiency and literacy levels.

**Conclusion.** While more proficient and more confident writers can create texts with a complex organization, emergent speakers and writers can create texts that are more patterned and more descriptive.

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