

# Initial Reading in a Bilingual Elementary School

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Since reading is a major mode of communication, reading instruction plays a very important role in the bilingual elementary school curriculum today. The teaching of reading to any child, English-speaking or otherwise, requires an approach which presents reading simply as a step in the process of communication. If reading is an extension of the spoken word, reading strategies taught should maximize the correspondence between the printed word and the child's language.

The *Language Experience Approach* (LEA), also called the *Whole Language Approach* is an example of a strategy that constantly strengthens the link between oral and written language; it has grown from current psycholinguistic research. Reading is an active psycholinguistic process because it uses language in the written form to get to meaning; language and thought are always interacting in the reading process. (Goodman and Goodman 1980, Smith 1980, Greenslade 1980, Iser 1967)

The *LEA* provides practice for learning basic language concepts--words, letters, sounds, sentences, which beginning readers lack, regardless of their native language.

This reading approach is an excellent way to teach reading readiness concepts such as voice-print match, left to right progression, word-space-word, and word recognition within familiar contexts.

The *LEA* may be used with children of various ages functioning at various language levels. It may be used with native or non-native speakers of English. It may be also used with children who have great fluency in language. Verbally gifted children when they first enter school, do not experience a period of language regression while they take time to learn a few word-recognition skills. This reading approach encourages each child, regardless of his/her language level to succeed in reading tasks.

Moreover, the *Whole Language Approach* recognizes in daily practice that the oral language background of each child is the basic ingredient in word recognition.

Schon (1992) presents several classifications of charts which are suitable for use as language experience charts. These meaningful reading materials allow children to learn the skills of reading as they read, not in order to read.

I shall list some of these charts or records of the children's activities. These charts may be dictated by the students and printed on the blackboard and/or chart paper by the teacher.

### 1. *Personal Language Chart*

I am Liza.  
I am 6 years old.  
My father's name is Gil.  
My mother's name is Gloria.  
I have one sister.  
She is 8 years old.  
Her name is Frances.  
(The child illustrated her story.)

### 2. *Work Chart*

#### The Flag

We made the Mexican flag.  
We cut three squares of colored paper.  
One square was green.  
One square was white.  
One square was red.

### 3. *Narrative Chart*

#### The Rocket

The space shuttle Discovery was launched  
this morning.  
There were 3 astronauts in the space ship.  
It will be out in space for a week.  
(The children can illustrate their own story.)

#### 4. Reading Skill Chart

Rhyming words may be emphasized by having children think about such word groups as these:

tail - mail  
 kite - bite  
 night - light  
 red - bed  
 big - fig

#### 5. Phonics Charts (Initial Sounds)

P	S	M
Paul	Sally	Mary
pot	supper	mother
park	silly	map
piano	sad	mirror
pear	sun	mouse

(The children may draw pictures for each of the words.)

Some guidelines are now given for using the language experience materials:

1. Say each word as you print it on the blackboard or on chart paper.
2. Read the entire text in a natural speaking fashion, pointing to each word as it is read.
3. Suggest to the children that they might like to read it, too.
4. Point to and identify words that appear more than once. Let them *read* these words.
5. Make a comment like, "There are so many words here!" Then point to each one., Show how a space separates one word from another.

6. Reread the entire account. Encourage the children to read along with you. Indicate that a *period* means *stop*.

In conclusion, the Language Experience Approach is particularly recommended in an initial bilingual reading program because it may be used with a heterogeneous group of language speakers and children of various ages. This program may be adapted to meet the linguistic needs of all the students. Supplementary materials and techniques, such as phonics or a basal reading series may be employed to enrich the program. Teachers who employ the Language Experience Reading methods effectively, may be rewarded as they see children who are both learning to read and wanting to read.

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