



# A Balanced Approach to Early Spanish Literacy Instruction

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Goldenberg, C. (1998). A balanced approach to early Spanish literacy instruction. In R. Gersten & R. Jiménez (Eds.), *Promoting learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students: Classroom applications from contemporary research*. Wadsworth.

## INTRODUCTION: BALANCING SKILLS AND WHOLE

Once upon a time, basketball coaches around the country were involved in a furious debate over how to coach. There were two groups of coaches, each openly contemptuous of the other. Both sides felt the other had ulterior motives and political agendas, didn't care about players, had misguided philosophies, or were simply ignorant. The basketball-loving public was confused and could not understand why professionals seemed to be so divided along basic issues. Basketball lovers were particularly concerned since the overall level and quality of basketball playing seemed to be, if anything, deteriorating. While the coaches argued and sometimes insulted each other, generations of basketball players were being lost.

On one side were those—called the fundamentals-first coaches—who were convinced that you got better at basketball by isolating and then focusing on the basics of the game. During practices, these coaches stressed the fundamentals. Players went through practice and drill routines for basic aspects of the game—shooting, passing, dribbling, rebounding, and playing defense. They practiced everything except actually playing basketball. The only time players got to play was during official league or tournament games. When things went poorly in the games, the coaches' response was, "These kids are just not getting the fundamentals," and they would intensify their drills and their practice routines. Many players improved in their skills, but they were not very good basketball players, nor were the teams very good basketball teams.

A different group of coaches took a very different approach. These coaches believed that you learn to play by playing and not by breaking the game down into skills or subskills. These coaches—who called themselves whole-basketball coaches—thought that learning to play basketball should be a natural process. They advocated having players play real games all the time. Players chose up sides and played among themselves during practice. These teams hardly ever received explicit instruction or practice in shooting, passing, dribbling, rebounding, or playing defense. Even if individual players or whole teams were noticeably weak in some aspect of the game, coaches did not work explicitly on these weaknesses. Instead, they looked for or tried to create coachable moments during games when they could help players work out the rough spots. Individual skills were never singled out for work and practice outside the context of a game. Some players became frustrated; others enjoyed and benefitted from large amounts of playing time. But team play did not really improve.

Disagreements in the field of literacy instruction sometimes resemble this fractious basketball debate. Just as the fundamentals-first coaches stressed game fundamentals nearly to the exclusion of actually playing the game, early literacy instruction sometimes runs the risk of stressing the basics of letters, sounds, and decoding to the near exclusion of having students engage in actual reading and writing. Similarly, educators who stress the importance of making literacy highly meaningful or authentic from the beginning are reluctant, as were the whole-game coaches, to break reading and writing down into skills and provide students with instruction and practice to improve performance overall.

Although the terms have changed over the years, the phonics (or skills) versus meaning debate in literacy instruction has raged for much of this century. Indeed, the debates sometimes sound more like “wars” (Stanovich, 1993/94). Only highly charged topics with explicit political or social implications, such as bilingual education, school desegregation, or sex education, attract more fervid partisanship than the debate over how children should be taught to read. The reasons are many and complex and the subject of many academic, professional, and popular works.<sup>1</sup> But the partisans sometimes act and sound like the coaches in our tale.

Over the past decade, however, there have been increased calls for balance in early literacy education (e.g., Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Delpit, 1986; Goldenberg, 1991; Honig, 1995; Spiegel, 1992). Condemarín (1991) and Goldenberg (1990, 1994) have made analogous arguments for a balanced approach in Spanish reading. A balanced approach is based on an interactive view of reading, which suggests that both skills and meaning are important for literacy development. Instead of exclusively emphasizing letters and sounds or meaning and purpose, a balanced approach involves a mix. It provides children with instruction and learning opportunities that promote both development of phonological processes (i.e., the sounds letters make and how those letters and sounds combine to form words) and attention to authentic communication via the written word—the use of literature, journals, diaries, and other meaningful print forms. Learning

purposeful aspects of literacy complement and reinforce each other, just as learning the fundamentals of basketball and learning to play in real games complement and reinforce each other. They are not in competition.

The idea here is not to reach a compromise or strike a deal for the sake of making everyone happy. Rather, the reasoning behind appeals for a balanced approach is that both perspectives in this debate have much to offer in the search for a comprehensive and unified approach to early literacy education that makes the most sense for students. Learners generally benefit both from explicit guidance in how to recognize words efficiently (the phonological approach) and from a wide range of opportunities to use print for authentic communication (the meaning-based approach).

Such a blend, or balance, underlies the approach to literacy education adopted in a schoolwide project that has improved academic achievement for low-income, mostly Hispanic students (Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994). In this chapter, I will describe this approach to early literacy development (grades K–2). The framework for this approach consists of a set of goals and expectations for students’ reading and writing development. The goals and expectations were purposefully designed to incorporate both perspectives (the phonics, or skills, perspective and the meaning and communication perspective) into a unified and comprehensive view of how children learn to become literate.

It is important to note that the balanced early literacy curriculum described here was developed and used in a larger context of schoolwide change and improvement (briefly described later). In other words, this project did not focus on early literacy exclusively; rather, a balanced approach to early literacy was but one aspect of a larger effort to improve achievement at the school. Reading and writing goals and expectations were developed at each grade level; various means for assessing students’ achievement were also developed and used; achievement at the school indeed improved overall. Thus it is impossible to say whether improvements in the early grades are due specifically to a balanced early literacy program or to the larger change process at the school, which included having clear and supported goals and expectations for student learning at each grade level. The operating assumption of the educators and researchers who worked on this project was that both were involved—a substantive and balanced approach to literacy education was supported by an effective change process. Both substance and process are fundamental for successful school change (Fullan, 1991). Each is necessary; neither is alone sufficient.

## THE NEED TO IMPROVE SPANISH LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT

The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (1995) estimates that nearly 2 million students in U.S. schools speak Spanish as their primary language. Many of these students—although by no means all—are in bilingual education programs where they learn to read and write in Spanish before

making the transition to learning to read and write in English. But even when taught and tested in their primary language, Spanish-speaking students often experience low levels of literacy attainment. First-grade children tested in Spanish score on average at the 32nd percentile on national norms; second- and third-grade students, still taught and tested in Spanish, drop to the 27th percentile (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1988). Even students who receive intensive tutoring in Spanish reading (a Spanish version of Reading Recovery; Clay, 1985) still score at the 41st percentile. Students not eligible for this intervention, because they were above the bottom fifth of their class, scored on average at only the 31st percentile (Escamilla, 1994), nearly identical to the national sample of the late 1980s (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1988).

Many bilingual programs are clearly failing to help Spanish-speaking children achieve at grade-level norms in their native language. This failure undoubtedly compromises the effectiveness of bilingual programs. According to bilingual education theory (e.g., California State Department of Education, 1981), students will ultimately achieve at higher levels in English if they first achieve at high levels in their native language. High levels of Spanish literacy do not guarantee high levels of English literacy, but poor achievement in Spanish augurs little success in English.

How should educators approach the challenge of promoting high levels of native language literacy for Spanish-speaking children? The project described here, as well as other recent successful ventures (e.g., Dianda & Flaherty, 1995), suggest that Spanish-speaking children, no less than English-speaking children, benefit from a balanced literacy program that teaches phonological skills while also providing meaning- and language-rich opportunities to interact with print.

## A SCHOOL CHANGE PROJECT

The school where this project has been located—Freeman Avenue School (a pseudonym)—is one of five elementary schools in a small, heavily Latino school district in Southern California. Freeman's demographics reflect those of the district overall: 95% of the school's 800+ students are Hispanic; 93% come from homes where Spanish is predominantly spoken; 86% of students are limited-English proficient; 89% qualify for free school meals; and another 7% qualify for reduced-priced meals. Hispanic parents—mostly from Mexico—average around seven years of formal schooling.

When the project began in 1990–91, average achievement at the school was well below state, national, and district norms. In the final year of the administration of the California Assessment Project (1990), for example, students at Freeman scored between the 7th and 15th statewide percentiles on reading, writing, and mathematics. Within three years, however, achievement at the school had surpassed that in the rest of the district and in some respects had matched or surpassed state and national norms. In 1990, only 31% of

Freeman's first-grade students who were learning to read in Spanish were on grade level according to national norms; around the district, the figure was 41%. But by the time this group of students reached third grade, students at Freeman outperformed other Spanish-speaking third graders in the district and around the nation—61% were reading at or above grade level at Freeman, in contrast to 49% on grade level around the district (students had been at their respective schools since the beginning of first grade).<sup>2</sup>

Fourth graders tested in English reading, many of whom were limited-English proficient students who had first learned to read and write in Spanish, also improved. Before 1990, Freeman students scored below state and district students on tests administered by the California State Department of Education. By 1993, Freeman students' achievement was superior to that of the rest of the district and nearly equivalent to the state average: 28% of Freeman's fourth graders scored at the highest levels (4 and up on a 6-point scale) on the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) reading test. In contrast, 17% of the fourth graders in the rest of the district and 30% of the fourth graders around the state scored at levels 4 and above.

## A Model to Guide Change

The goal of this project has been unambiguous: To work with faculty, administrators, parents, and students at the school to improve academic achievement, primarily in the language arts. We were guided in our work by a four-element change model developed in collaboration with the school's principal (Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994; Sullivan, 1994). The function of the change model was to help provide overall coherence to the school's change efforts, something often missing in the patchwork of disparate efforts that too often characterizes attempts to reform or restructure schools. As Fullan, Bennett, and Rolheiser-Bennett (1990) have pointed out, "The greatest problem faced by school districts is not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations which are not coordinated" (p. 19).

The model is derived from research in educational change and our own experience working in particular school settings. It consists of four sets of factors, or change elements:

- *goals* that are set and shared
- *indicators* that measure success
- *assistance* by capable others
- *leadership* that supports and pressures

Versions of three of these change elements—goals, indicators of achievement, and leadership—have long been associated with efforts to improve school effectiveness. A fourth factor—assistance—has recently begun to receive attention (see Fullan, 1985, 1991; Loucks-Horsley & Mundry, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1989). We predicted that these four factors would

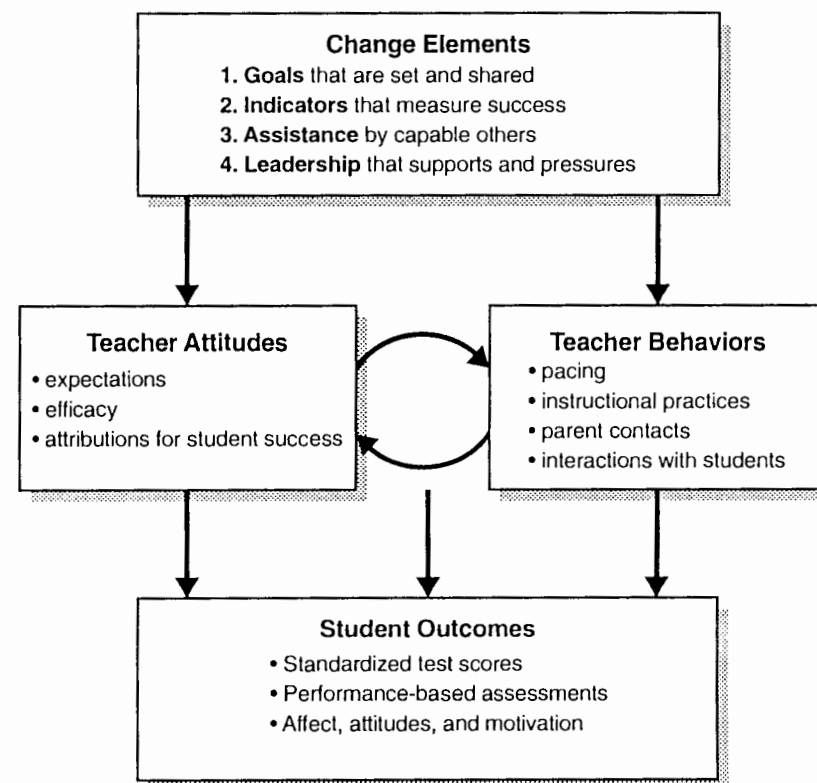
influence teacher attitudes (e.g., expectations, sense of efficacy, attributions) and behaviors (e.g., teaching practices, parent contacts, interactions with students) known to influence important student outcomes, such as achievement and attitudes.<sup>3</sup> We expected the model to help create a school community where teachers would have regular and consistent opportunities for professional growth and development specifically aimed at helping them help their students achieve at higher academic levels. Figure 1.1 depicts our school change model.

There are of course many ways to operationalize the model in Figure 1.1. The important point, however, is that attempts to improve achievement or to improve any aspect of a school's operation cannot take place in a vacuum. There is a context—or culture—within which school personnel operate, and school improvement is as much a matter of shifting the context as of changing the specifics of instruction and curriculum (Fullan, 1991). Indeed, the premise of our work is that shifting the context (or culture) and changing the instructional and curricular specifics are inextricably linked—one cannot be done without the other. Space does not permit a full explanation of how the model was used at Freeman (interested readers are referred to Goldenberg & Sullivan, 1994). For purposes of this chapter, the origins and development of two particular change elements are most relevant—student goals and indicators of achievement. These two best embodied the balanced approach to literacy development described earlier.

**Goals for Student Learning.** Over a period of two years, a committee made up of teachers, administrators, and a researcher conceptualized and put into practice reading and writing goals and expectations (described later in more detail). Goals and expectations were informed by teachers' professional judgments, curricular materials in use, and key documents in the professional and research literature (e.g., Calkins, 1986; Chall, 1983a; Clay, 1985). Monthly full-day meetings of the Academic Expectations Committee were made possible one year by a restructuring planning grant from the California State Department of Education (SB 1274). Developing and finalizing the goals involved committee meetings, meetings with grade-level colleagues, meetings with the school's governing council (the principal and representatives from each grade level), and a meeting with parents. The goals and expectations went through numerous drafts and changes, as we strove to develop a comprehensive framework for the school's literacy curriculum that the entire school community would support.

Parents were also extremely positive, and when shown an earlier version of the goals, they urged us to write more-parent-friendly versions. One parent suggested that we make them "mas claro y en pocas palabras" (clearer and in fewer words) and that we distribute them to parents at the beginning of each school year. Another parent suggested putting the highlights on an overhead and showing that at back-to-school night as well. This parent was particularly pleased with the whole idea, saying that she thought "our standards are a lot

FIGURE 1. School Change Model



Note. From *Making Change Happen in a Language-Minority School: A Search for Coherence* by C. Goldenberg and J. Sullivan, 1994, Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

lower" than they should be and that we "really need to push our children." She saw these expectations as going in exactly the right direction. At back-to-school night in September 1992, we did as these parents suggested. Overheads gave the highlights of our goals and expectations; hard copies of the overheads were also available. When the parents visited their child's classroom, they got complete parent-friendly versions for that grade level. Several teachers commented that parents came into their rooms that evening more enthusiastic than they had ever seen them.

**Indicators of Student Learning.** Indicators gauge individual student achievement but also provide an overall picture of whether goals are being attained. Indicators answer the questions, Is what we're doing working? and Where are the data? At Freeman, we have used several indicators, including student book placement, to gauge progress. We found in an earlier study that

when reading achievement improves, students are more likely to be on grade level in their book placement (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991).

Perhaps the most important set of indicators we used consisted of performance assessments we have developed based on our language arts goals and expectations.<sup>4</sup> In the spring, a 20% random sample of students who have been at the school at least two academic years (or the entire year for kindergartners) are given two-day assessments. Students are asked about independent reading they have done and their attitudes toward reading and writing. They are asked to summarize and explain things they have read and to write original story endings. They are also assessed on their use of written conventions. In kindergarten and first grade, children are assessed individually on their knowledge of letters and sounds, beginning decoding skills, word and letter writing, comprehension of stories they either hear or read, oral and written comprehension, and oral reading skills. The assessments have been developed in collaboration with the Academic Assessment Committee, the immediate descendant of the Academic Expectations Committee. After school ends in the summer, teachers from Freeman and other schools participate in scoring sessions where they are trained to use rubrics to analyze and score student work. Results of the spring assessments are shared the following fall with the entire faculty.

Goals and indicators have helped provide focus for the change process by helping teachers prioritize areas of instruction that need emphasis or improvement (Saunders, 1995, April). By concretely representing the project's unambiguous goal—helping students achieve specific high-level learning goals—these goals and indicators serve as common, tangible representations of the collective enterprise. They also encourage active articulation and discussion among the faculty about whether student achievement is in fact improving. At the beginning of the school year, teachers hear a report about student performance on the spring assessments and plan areas to focus on in the current year, based on these results. In addition, at monthly grade-level meetings, teachers discuss and score (using rubrics) sample student products from each other's classrooms. This type of ongoing professional discussion is critical if meaningful and substantive change is to take place in schools.

## LEARNING LITERACY IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH

As just described, the backbone of our efforts to improve academic achievement at Freeman Elementary comprised grade-level academic goals and expectations in language arts. The goals and expectations for grades K–2 are shown in Tables 1.1–1.6. Tables 1.1–1.3 list the reading goals, Tables 1.4–1.6 the writing goals.<sup>5</sup>

Several features of the goals and expectations deserve specific mention.

**Table 1.1. Reading Goals and Expectations: Kindergarten**

READINESS BOOKS		CORE LITERATURE	
Spanish	English	Spanish	English
<i>Cuéntame Siempre felices</i>	<i>The Cat in the Fiddle; The Mouse in the House; Happily Ever After</i>	<i>Tortillitas para Mamá</i> <i>Caperucita Roja</i> <i>La liebre y la tortuga</i> <i>Nadarín</i> <i>Había una vez</i> <i>La Cucarachita Martina</i> <i>El gato con botas</i> <i>Cuando los borregos no pueden dormir</i>	<i>The Little Engine That Could</i> <i>The Three Little Pigs</i> <i>The Three Bears</i> <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> <i>Favorite Nursery Tales</i>
WHOLE-TEXT/PREDICTABLE BOOKS			
<i>Libros Palmas, palmitas (PP,)</i> New Zealand and other predictable read-along books	<i>Yellow Fish, Blue Fish (PP,)</i> New Zealand and other predictable read-along books (e.g., <i>Brown Bear, Spot</i> )		

### Readiness

Readiness skills on report cards and *Happily Ever After/Siempre felices*

#### A. Word recognition

- reads the names of 5 to 8 children in class/group
- reads 20 to 30 sight words—can be 50/50 mixture of words everyone is taught (e.g., from PALMAS or other books) and words in personal vocabulary list
- recognizes signs and labels at school (and at home and in community)

#### B. Letters/phonics

- names and recognizes letters in name
- names and recognizes the 5 vowels, in and out of order
- names and recognizes letters in alphabet (uppercase and lowercase), in order
- names and recognizes letters in alphabet (uppercase and lowercase), out of order
- recognizes beginning sounds of words
- uses knowledge of letter sounds to begin to decode words
- hears rhymes in words, distinguishes between words that rhyme and words that do not, and produces a word that rhymes with a given word
- writes letters, as dictated
- writes words and short sentences, as dictated

#### C. Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading

- reads or pseudoreads for pleasure age- and grade-appropriate books and materials (ongoing)
- reads or pseudoreads 3 to 6 favorite picture books
- makes reasonable predictions about story content, based on a key illustration
- orally answers questions about story read aloud, even without picture cues
- uses 3 or more sentences to describe a picture
- answers oral questions about books
- answers questions about familiar books by choosing correct sight word
- selects from group of sight words the word missing from sentence read aloud (auditory cloze)
- is familiar with and can retell 3 to 6 favorite stories from children's literature

**Table 1.2. Reading Goals and Expectations: First Grade**

READING BOOKS		CORE LITERATURE		
Spanish		English		
PP <sub>1</sub>	<i>Palmas, palmitas</i>	<i>Yellow Fish, Blue Fish</i>	<i>Habia una vez Cenicienta</i>	<i>My Favorite Good-night Stories</i>
PP <sub>2</sub>	<i>Osito, osito</i>	<i>My Friends the Frogs</i>	<i>Juanita y Margarita</i>	<i>Rumpelstiltskin</i>
PP <sub>3</sub>	<i>Matarile-rile-ró</i>	<i>Grab That Dog!</i>	<i>Sapo y Sepo son amigos</i>	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>
Primer	<i>Tara, tara, la guitarra</i>	<i>Little Duck Dance</i>	<i>Osito</i>	<i>Snow White</i>
1st rdr.	<i>El sol y la luna</i>	<i>My Best Bear Hug</i>	<i>Los zapatos de Munia</i>	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>
			<i>La luna de Juan</i>	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i>
			<i>Donde viven los monstruos</i>	<i>Cinderella</i>
			<i>Las dos cabritas</i>	<i>The Tale of Peter Rabbit</i>
				<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>

**A. Word recognition**

- has reading vocabulary of approximately 300 to 500 words (sight words and words easily sounded out)
- uses *both* context and phonic cues when encountering unknown (but familiar) words during reading of simple texts

**B. Letters/phonics**

- knows all letters and corresponding sounds (Span.)
- knows all letters and most common corresponding sounds (Eng.)
- uses knowledge of letter sounds to decode familiar words (Span.)
- uses knowledge of letter sounds to decode familiar 1-syllable, phonetically regular words (Eng.)
- writes words and sentences as dictated

**C. Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading**

- reads for pleasure age- and grade-appropriate books and materials
- independently reads books with high-frequency words, e.g., *The Cat in the Hat* and other Dr. Seuss books; *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, Will You Be My Mother?*
- reads simple texts at primer/first-reader level (about 50 to 100 high-frequency, sight and phonetically regular words) and answers questions asking for literal understanding, inference, and main idea
- answers written comprehension questions in simple sentences
- retells a story that has been read aloud, using correct sequence and appropriate narrative form
- describes a picture using more-complex language and making inferences about characters, motivation, etc.
- answers oral questions about books read aloud, imparting new information
- engages in oral discussion with teacher and classmates about texts read
- infers meaning of unfamiliar words from context
- is familiar with, and can retell, a large number of favorite stories from children's literature

**D. Study skills**

- uses book's cover and table of contents to gain information about title, author, chapters, and pages
- alphabetizes words by first letter
- uses a simple glossary to locate words and meanings
- follows simple written directions

**Table 1.3. Reading Goals and Expectations: Second Grade**

READING BOOKS		CORE LITERATURE		
Spanish		English		
2.1	<i>A ver, a ver, a ver</i>	<i>Cats Sleep Anywhere</i>	<i>China, China Capuchina</i>	<i>Frog and Toad are Friends</i>
2.2	<i>Pluma, tintero y papel</i>	<i>Come Back Here, Crocodile</i>	<i>Historia de una manzana roja</i>	<i>The Tortoise and the Hare</i>
			<i>El patito feo</i>	<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>
			<i>Historia de Dragolina</i>	<i>Alexander and the Terrible</i>
			<i>El maíz</i>	...
			<i>El libro de las adivinanzas</i>	<i>Ira Sleeps Over</i>

**A. Word recognition and word skills**

- has reading vocabulary of about 1,000 words
- uses knowledge of letter sounds to decode most words
- reading fluency is increased by coordinating the basic decoding elements, sight vocabulary, and intelligent guessing to figure out new words
- reads and identifies the meaning of words with prefixes and suffixes (Eng.)
- distinguishes among words that sound alike but have different meanings (homonyms) (Eng.)
- identifies synonyms (the same as) and antonyms (opposite from)
- writes words, sentences, and short paragraphs as dictated

**B. Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading**

- reads for pleasure age- and grade-appropriate books and materials
- independently reads—with increased fluency and comprehension—simple books and stories
- reads passages at second-grade level (about 150 words) and answers questions asking for inference, main idea, topic, literal details, and sequence
- answers written comprehension questions in complete sentences
- predicts the outcome of a story read to self
- engages in oral discussion with teacher and classmates about stories read or heard
- has these specific comprehension skills:
  - can identify the cause of an event, feeling, or situation
  - can identify the sequence of events in a story
  - can distinguish between what could really happen and what is make-believe
  - can identify the setting of a story
  - can infer meaning of unfamiliar word from context
  - can read question mark and exclamation mark correctly
  - knows quotation marks signify someone is speaking
- has begun to acquire these skills:
  - can paraphrase sentences
  - can state the main idea of a story
- is familiar with and can retell at least 4 core literature stories

**C. Study skills**

- uses parts of a book (contents, glossary) to locate information
- alphabetizes words by the second letter
- follows written directions
- uses key and grid on map to locate objects and identify them

Table 1.4. Writing Goals and Expectations: Kindergarten

## General

- prints own name (first and last) using capitals and lowercase letters appropriately
- prints about 10 to 40 other favorite words
- uses some letter sounds to “estimate” word spellings
- uses the following *forms* to accomplish one or more *purposes* (recount a personal experience; tell/create a story; convey/explain factual information; persuade/influence):
  - picture story with accompanying oral narrative
  - rudimentary written story or narrative
  - journal entry
  - language experience story (dictates a story written down by someone else)

## Handwriting

- begins to use correct manuscript writing
- copies short language experience story legibly and neatly

Table 1.5. Writing Goals and Expectations: First Grade

## General

- prints words by sounding them out or from visual memory
- can “estimate” spellings of most words, at least to some degree
- writes simple story or narrative comprising a number of connected sentences
- uses the following *forms* to accomplish one or more *purposes* (recount a personal experience; tell/create a story; convey/explain factual information; persuade/influence):
  - letter to a friend or relative
  - story (original or a retelling)
  - recounting of a personal experience
  - daily journal entry
- uses a word processor to write stories or personal accounts
- begins to use capitals and ending punctuation (e.g., period, exclamation point, question mark) as appropriate to level of writing (relatively simple sentences and texts)

## Handwriting

- continues to improve printing mechanics and correct manuscript writing
- uses correct manuscript writing when recopying own text (e.g., for publication, for final draft, to prepare for an audience)

### A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development

First and most fundamental, the goals shown in Tables 1.1–1.6 represent a balanced approach to early literacy development in whichever language a child is learning to read and write.

Table 1.6. Writing Goals and Expectations: Second Grade

## General

- writes phrases/sentences making comparisons and contrasts
- writes new endings for familiar stories
- writes more complex story or narrative comprising a number of connected sentences, organized coherently
- uses the following *forms* to accomplish one or more *purposes* (recount a personal experience; tell/create a story; convey/explain factual information; persuade/influence):
  - original story
  - simple letter
  - daily journal entry
  - relating of one or more facts about an event or area of interest
  - simple story summary
  - personal invitation
- demonstrates progress in use of capital letters at beginning of sentences and proper names
- demonstrates progress in appropriate use of capitals and periods
- begins to use question mark and exclamation point correctly

## Handwriting

- continues to improve printing mechanics
- uses correct manuscript writing when recopying own text (e.g., for publication, for final draft, to prepare for an audience)

On the one hand, there is emphasis on bottom-up processes, reflected by skills-oriented goals such as word recognition, knowledge of letters and sounds, and printing. In kindergarten, children are expected to name and recognize letters, recognize the sounds in words, and discriminate between words that rhyme and words that do not (see Table 1.1, “B. Letters/phonics”). They should also be able to print their own name and begin using some letter sounds to estimate word spellings (Table 1.4). By second grade, children are expected to have a reading vocabulary of approximately 1,000 words (Chall, 1983a), be able to use knowledge of letters and sounds to decode most words, and read with increased fluency (Table 1.3, “A. Word recognition and word skills”). They are also expected to have essentially mastered the mechanics of getting spoken speech onto paper and to be able to use writing functionally (Table 1.6).

Several goals also speak directly to the development of phonemic awareness, the understanding that words are made up of smaller units of sound that can be segmented and identified. Phonemic awareness is considered one of the most important understandings children must develop if they are to become successful readers in an alphabetic language (Adams, 1990; Adams & Bruck, 1995; Jiménez & Ortiz, 1993). Kindergarten and first-grade goals that promote phonemic awareness include naming and recognizing letters,

recognizing beginning sounds of words, hearing and discriminating rhymes, writing letters and words from dictation, and “estimating” the spellings of words when writing. In addition, several of the books listed for kindergarten and first grade contain rhymes and chants that also contribute to phonemic awareness.

On the other hand, the goals and expectations also emphasize top-down processes. These are reflected in meaning-oriented goals such as reading or pseudoreading for pleasure, talking about books, and encouraging attempts at communicative writing. In kindergarten, children should be reading (or pseudoreading; Chall, 1983a) books appropriate for young children, listening and comprehending when books and stories are read aloud, and retelling favorite stories (Table 1.6, “C. Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading”). They should also be making rudimentary attempts to write narratives or journal entries, including the use of pictures to accompany narrative, and be dictating language experience stories to someone who can transform them into written text (Table 1.4).

By second grade, children should be reading age-appropriate books and stories independently, with increasing fluency and comprehension, be able to discuss what they read or hear, and further develop comprehension skills such as identifying the sequence of a story and distinguishing cause and effect (Table 1.3, “B. Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading”). They should also be able use a variety of written forms (e.g., letters, original stories, summaries, invitations) to accomplish a range of purposes in writing (e.g., recount a personal experience, convey or explain information; see Table 1.6). Goals and activities that help children develop insights into the nature and functions of print are an important part of the literacy framework developed at the school.

### A Developmental Approach to Literacy

A second general characteristic of the grade-level goals is that they reflect the developmental nature of learning to read and write. Children acquire increased knowledge and skills as they progress through the grades, and the understandings they construct change qualitatively and grow in complexity and sophistication.

For example, kindergartners are expected to be able to read or pseudo-read at least a half-dozen favorite story or picture books, know the letters and sounds of the alphabet, begin making rudimentary attempts to write or dictate narratives, and ask and answer questions about favorite children’s books. As they get older, the expectation is not simply that students will read and know more books, know more letters, and be able to write more. They are also expected to have a more complex understanding of how to read and derive meaning from what they read, of the purposes of reading and writing, and of the various meanings and purposes authors have. In addition, they should have increased skill and sophistication in accomplishing and interpreting these purposes.

Thus, second-grade students should be increasingly adept at improving reading fluency by coordinating their knowledge of basic decoding, their sight vocabulary, and their increased ability to figure out new words. They should be able to discuss, summarize, make inferences, and state the main idea of stories. They should be able to write original stories, simple letters, journal entries, and personal invitations. By fifth grade (goals and expectations for this grade are not included here), students should be able to pronounce virtually any written word they see. They should understand, appreciate, and be able to discuss works from different literary genres, read for pleasure a range of books and other materials, have extensive reading vocabularies (particularly in areas of personal interest), compose (drafting and redrafting as needed) original stories with conflicts and resolutions, and keep daily journals to record personal experiences. The nature of literacy and its demands change qualitatively and become more complex as students themselves grow and develop (see Chall, 1983a).

### A Common Framework for Spanish and English

Students at the school, as is typical of students in bilingual programs, learn to read in either Spanish or English. Most of the limited-English-proficient students learn to read in Spanish then and transition into English sometime in third, fourth, or fifth grade; a small number of limited-English-proficient students learn in English from the outset. A third feature of the goals and expectations shown in Tables 1.1–1.6 is that they represent a common framework for literacy development in both English and Spanish. Of course, there are accommodations for the different spelling systems of the two languages (Spanish is syllabic and much more regular phonetically than English) and for the titles and languages of the books students are reading, but essentially the framework is the same for both.

Despite differences between the English and Spanish writing systems, both are alphabetic languages. As such, there is a systematic—in the case of Spanish, a highly systematic—relationship between letters and sounds. Although many teachers argue that the basic building block of Spanish reading is the syllable (in contrast to the letter or phoneme in English), it is likely that similar underlying processes help children decode and read words in English and in Spanish (Jiménez & Haro, 1995).<sup>6</sup> If so, much of what we know about learning to read in English can be assumed to be true about learning to read in Spanish.<sup>7</sup> And certainly the functional and communicative uses to which English and Spanish are put have much in common. Both languages draw on rich literary traditions that comprise a wide range of genres serving numerous purposes and goals. Both languages are used for communication that ranges from the fleeting and casual to the literary and stylistic to the academic and formal. Thus in our project we have assumed generally similar models of literacy use and literacy education for English and Spanish.

### Traditional Features of Reading and Writing Instruction

A fourth feature is the number of fairly traditional items that teachers felt play an important role in literacy development and that are therefore represented in the goals and expectations. In addition to teaching phonics and comprehension skills, teachers also place emphasis on children's learning of reading and writing conventions, for example, how to use a book's cover, table of contents, and glossary to gain information; alphabetization to the first and second letters (Table 1.2, "D. Study skills"; Table 1.3, "C. Study skills"); understanding synonyms and antonyms (Table 1.3, "A. Word recognition and word skills"); using correct and legible manuscript (Tables 1.4–1.6, "Handwriting"); and the use of punctuation and capitalization (Tables 1.5 and 1.6).

We have also made dictation a part of our language arts programs, beginning with dictation of single letters in kindergarten and eventually leading to dictation of short paragraphs in second grade. Dictation is an excellent diagnostic tool, since in the early stages of literacy development it provides evidence of emerging phonological understandings (Clay, 1985). As children grow in their literacy understandings, dictations also reveal whether they are gaining in fluency and automaticity. Dictation can also play an instructional role, although I know of no study that has actually demonstrated dictation's effects on literacy development. Dictation is a common instructional tool worldwide, and several potential benefits have been suggested. According to Stotsky (1977), dictation enables students to practice grammatical constructions, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization while writing the sustained thoughts of others. Stotsky argues that use of literary passages for dictation enables students to develop language arts skills "in an interesting context, not in isolation," thereby "helping students acquire a greater 'feel' for the language of literature" (p. 4).

### Basals and Core Literature

Finally, we have not rejected the use of basal readers, but we have also made core literature and authentic reading (both independent and assigned) just as much a part of the goals and expectations (see "Core Literature" listing and various items under "Comprehension/literature/whole-text reading" in Tables 1.1–1.3). Basal readers evoke harsh responses from many critics (e.g., Goodman, Shannon, Freeman, & Murphy, 1988). Yet there is evidence that they can provide students—and teachers—with useful structure to guide reading instruction and reading development (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Teachers at the school felt that the basal series offered many useful resources for the literacy program, resources that included excerpts from children's literature, workbooks and other instructional materials, charts, posters, and suggestions for integrating reading and literature with other curricular areas.

One issue that did come up repeatedly was the cumbersome end-of-book tests that were part of the basal series. Many teachers felt they took up far too much in preparation and administration time, and in many instances they

provided little useful information about students' literacy development. As a result, the year after the Academic Expectations Committee finished formulating the academic goals and expectations, its successor committee—the Academic Assessment Committee—developed a set of procedures for teachers wishing to eliminate portions of the end-of-book tests from their classroom programs. Teachers had the option of replacing parts of the end-of-book tests with the authentic literacy assessments developed as part of this project.

### IMPACT ON TEACHING AND TEACHERS

The goals and expectations shown in Tables 1.1–1.6 comprise the curricular framework for early literacy. They do not specify particular instructional strategies nor approaches. In general, reading is taught during a reading/language arts block that might last from one to two hours, depending on teacher and grade level. This in itself does not represent a significant change from previous practices, but we have seen instructional changes at Freeman as a result of the goals and of the larger overall project.

In kindergarten, teachers are explicitly teaching letters and sounds of the entire alphabet, not just the vowels and a handful of consonants. They use alphabet books developed as part of an earlier research project in early Spanish literacy (Goldenberg, 1994) as well as other materials they have (e.g., flash cards). Kindergartners are also receiving extended opportunities to "read" or otherwise interact with simple beginning texts, either commercially available or those developed for a previous research project. Children hear stories, are encouraged to become independent readers, and take books home to share with parents and other family members. Kindergartners and first graders are also learning explicitly how print functions, and how print and speech relate—individual and groups of letters represent sounds; aggregations of sounds comprise words that have meaning. These lessons are taught at school and reinforced through homework, which has also received emphasis schoolwide. Students at all grade levels are also engaged in far more writing than ever before. Teachers use writing-as-a-process approaches or otherwise encourage and show students how to represent thoughts, ideas, and stories on paper.

Here is what one teacher said about the changes in teaching at the school:

In the writing group that I'm in<sup>8</sup> . . . every single meeting we discuss what we've done in our classroom, we discuss how to make it better, we discuss where we want our kids to go after that, we discuss so we know what the teachers are working on, and we can see—we pick up new ways to get across skills, we pick up new types of lessons to do, to address what our goals are in a particular subject area. So that alone has been better. I'm sure that [the other work groups] *have contributed to [those teachers'] classroom environment and their classroom teaching* [italics added].

Another had this to say about a quite traditional, but still useful and powerful, strategy:

The upper-grade teachers have always given homework, but now they give more of it, and they give it more consistently. Less of it is busywork, although there's a wide variety in the kind of homework they give. I think the students respond positively—they're more serious and responsible about schoolwork when they have homework regularly. The homework in-service reminded teachers how homework fits into classroom lessons, how valuable homework is for the kids.

As mentioned previously, it is perhaps impossible to separate the effects of a more balanced and comprehensive approach to literacy instruction from the effects of our larger schoolwide efforts to improve achievement. One was inextricably a part of the other. There is no question that the changes in the early literacy program at the school were accompanied by many other changes that would be expected to influence student learning. That, indeed, was the whole point of the project. Our intent was never to isolate and manipulate specific, narrow features of the school's program. Instead, we assumed at the outset that many things would have to change to produce an impact on achievement.

Here is what a veteran teacher in the district, teaching first grade at the time, said at the end of the fourth year of the project:

I think a lot of things have changed [at the school] in the past four years. . . . First of all, we as teachers, we're looking for common goals and directions for the curriculum. We want [our curriculum to be more] defined, and so when a group of teachers went to the principal and asked that this happen, that we define what were goals at different grade levels, she responded to this by starting a group that worked on that and continued to work on it for I think three years. . . .

[D]efining these goals has made a difference in two things. One is our expectations have [become] higher and more the same across the school. [They have also become] more defined, so I think that that in turn has affected positively [what] the students are able to [achieve] academically. I think we probably have better reading instruction going on and probably more kids becoming fluent readers faster. . . . Certainly in writing, that we have defined the expectations and the way that we assess. It has all made a difference in what the kids are actually able to do. First graders, for instance, are able to write. Kids are able to write better and more, and reading comprehension for those of us that have worked on [that] specifically, I think it's made a difference for them.

A younger teacher, who was teaching kindergarten, echoed her more senior colleague's sentiments:

Back four years ago most teachers didn't know what other teachers were doing, especially new teachers. They didn't know the pacing, the direction on how to base their student's achievement, how to make it better. They basically were all in their own rooms and doing their own thing. And then the Academic Expectations Committee came around about four years ago and came up with the goals and expectations, and after that the teachers would come together and discuss them and said, well, how can we make this better for the students to make their achievement higher? And after I'd say about two years after that got started, the achievement was higher because of what the teachers were doing. Talking about it, getting together, trying to make it all come together.

The precise instructional impact of the goals and expectations is difficult to gauge. Yet it is clear that teachers' classroom efforts have galvanized around a shared and balanced set of learning goals to promote students' literacy development. Students receive instruction and learning opportunities that range from practicing and reciting letter names and sounds to participating in writers' workshops. Moreover, teachers have various forums in which they share and learn about instructional strategies to help them help their students accomplish the academic goals the faculty has established.

Whether they are learning in English or in Spanish, young readers and writers at Freeman Elementary stand a greater chance of becoming literate than ever before. A second-grade teacher captured the sentiments of most of the faculty:

From the children I've seen coming in here from other districts similar to ours, I don't think that a lot of places put such an emphasis on academic achievement [as we do]. [They just assume] the LEP [limited-English-proficient] child may be an economically disadvantaged child. There's more of an acceptance . . . [that] they're just going to be a year or two behind. [The principal at this school] doesn't accept that or just give up. There's no surrendering. We keep trying. We keep trying. And I think we've been pretty successful, so far.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding has been provided by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Spencer Foundation, and the California State Department of Education. No endorsement from any source is implied nor should be inferred. Portions of this chapter have appeared in Goldenberg and Sullivan (1994). My thanks to the many colleagues, teachers, administrators, students, and parents who have made this work possible.

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## CHAPTER NOTES

1. The many aspects of this debate are beyond the scope of this chapter. The interested reader is urged to consult, for example, Aaron, Chall, Durkin, Goodman, and Strickland (1990); Adams (1990); Adams and Bruck (1995); Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985); Carbo (1988); Chall (1983b, 1989); Edelsky (1990); Levine (1994, December); McKenna, Robinson, and Miller (1990a, 1990b); F. Smith (1992); K. Smith, Reyna, and Brainerd (1993); L. Smith (1993, September 29); and Stanovich (1993/94).
2. During the time this project was underway, the school district implemented Writing to Read™ labs in all elementary schools. Although there was some evidence that the labs helped boost early literacy scores districtwide (Goldenberg, 1995), improvement at Freeman was more marked than at the rest of the schools.

3. For the relationship between teacher attitudes and student achievement, see Ashton, Webb, and Doda (1983); Brophy (1983); Clark and Peterson (1986); Cooper and Burger (1980); Frieze (1976); Koehler (1988, April); and Winfield (1986). For teacher behaviors and student achievement, see Barr (1973/74); Barr and Dreeben (1983); Brophy and Good (1986); Rosenshine (1986); Rosenshine and Stevens (1986); Walberg (1984, 1986, 1990); and Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993).
4. Bill Saunders took the lead in developing the language arts assessments used in this project. I am indebted to him for this and for his many other contributions to the project.
5. The division into reading goals and writing goals is in many respects arbitrary, and in some cases—such as with dictation—it is not clear why an item is in one rather than the other. Originally, we had thought of developing language arts goals as a whole, but the committee decided to divide them into reading and writing for greater clarity. The goals and expectations are included here as they evolved and were finalized at Freeman.
6. There is some controversy over the relative importance of *syllabic* versus *phonemic* awareness in learning to read Spanish (see, e.g., the discussion in Jiménez & Haro, 1995).
7. This, in fact, is an area in great need of basic and applied research. Such a research agenda exists in Spanish-speaking countries, but there has been virtually no such research with Spanish-speaking populations in the United States.
8. As part of the larger project, teachers participated in work groups where they focused on various curricular and instructional topics, such as writing, general language arts, instructional conversations, and thematic teaching.