

Addressing the five pillars of reading instruction education essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This paper explores language acquisition using the five pillars of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel during the Bush administration. Through published articles, varying levels of instruction, importance and influence of each pillar are addressed. Research-based approaches and methods are discussed as they relate to struggling readers and English Language Learners (ELL) for language acquisition. Functional uses of these approaches in the classroom are discussed.

Language Acquisition: Addressing the Five Pillars of Reading Instruction

Each year for the past 13 years, many members of the reading community have been surveyed by Reading Today for relevance of current reading topics in reading instruction; this year was no different. Literacy leaders in the International Reading Association (IRA) evaluated different aspects of reading instruction for their importance, influence and effectiveness in language acquisition. It was no surprise that three of the five pillars of reading instruction were identified as “hot” topics. Almost a decade ago, the Bush administration identified five important characteristics of reading instruction. They are comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, phonics and phonemic awareness. These characteristics, though not equal in importance, each play a key role in language acquisition. As research of these characteristics began to surface, literacy leaders began to evaluate their importance through an annual survey. Once again, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency were identified as key characteristics for effective language acquisition through direct reading instruction while phonics and phonemic awareness fell to the background (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2009).

Explicit instruction in comprehension was identified as still “ hot” by almost 50% of survey respondents with 100% finding it extremely important to language acquisition (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2009). When direct instruction is modified with a multi-sensory approach all students benefit. Multi-sensory approaches include facial expressions, visual aids, gestures, opportunities to share with peers and defining key words in the directions, lessons and text before, during and after reading. These direct and explicit instructions can be coupled with code based instruction that compares similarities and differences of cognates for ELL students to facilitate comprehension. Additionally, accessing background knowledge and providing open discussions increase opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding, improve comprehension and relate to concepts (Manyak, & Bauer, 2008). Vocabulary is key to comprehension of text.

Vocabulary was identified as still “ hot” by almost 50% of survey respondents with 75% finding it extremely important to language acquisition (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2009). Both basic and rich vocabulary development are necessary for language acquisition. Research indicates that sustained instruction over multiple years is the most effective approach. Sight word vocabulary words account for half of all text while content vocabulary words account for the other half of all text according to Manyak and Bauer (2009). Once again, a multi-sensory approach to vocabulary development is an effective strategy for all students, especially ELL students and struggling readers. Acting out words and adding visual illustrations improve development of word meanings. The use of realia when introducing new words facilitates vocabulary development and motivates the learner.

Additionally, like comprehension, direct instruction of cognate recognition improves vocabulary development for ELL (Manyak, & Bauer, 2009). High Frequency Words (HFW) and phrases have been found to increase reading fluency.

Fluency was identified as still “ hot” by almost 50% of survey respondents with 50% finding it not as important to language acquisition (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2009). However, research shows that poor reading fluency results in poor readers for life. Fluency is defined as word recognition and prosody. That is, vocabulary and comprehension with expression. The National Reading Panel identifies practice as the most effective approach to develop fluency. This practice can occur as repeated oral reading or silent reading. Methods such as teacher assisted oral reading, reader’s theater, paired reading, tape-assisted reading, computer-assisted reading and buddy reading have all proved effective (Osborn, &Lehr, 2003). Research indicates that fifteen minutes practice daily improves reading fluency. Opportunities to practice, get guidance and receive feedback are key to effectiveness this approach. Additionally book selection, reading logs, book discussions and parent involvement improve outcomes. Readability levels of text are important factors to consider. Once again, sight word vocabulary and content vocabulary are integral to fluency for ELL and struggling readers. Osborn and Lehr (2003) suggest students practice using independent level text, where they recognize 95% of the words. Instructional and frustration level text require more intensive guidance and feedback. They caution that too much focus on fluency could have a negative effect on comprehension. A

balanced reading instruction should include direct instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness too.

Both phonics and phonemic awareness were identified as “not hot” by almost 50% of survey respondents with 75% agreeing they should not be focus topics for language acquisition (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2009). Phonics focuses on the grapheme/phoneme connection while phonemic awareness focuses a bit higher on the structure of the word. Gill (2006) identifies phonics as the mapping of sounds and letter correspondence. Through shared reading, students can gain knowledge of rimes and onsets through simple steps. Using 37 popular rimes, found in more than 500 primary level words, students can benefit from direct instruction in using rimes to identify similar words in text. These strategies have proved effective for early and struggling readers (Gill, 2006). Phonemic awareness takes it one step further and counts the rhythm of the syllables or vowel sounds in words. With a focus on the structure of the word and matching rhymes, students develop a strong foundation for reading proficiency (Stainthorpe, 2003). These skills can be mastered at a young age but require practice over the years to maintain phonemic awareness. In a study of college level students, many students demonstrated poor performance for recognizing syllables, phonemes, and alliteration matching. After review and direct instruction, the students performed better but still lacked proficiency in specific phonemic skills after six months. The data suggests that students require ongoing practice and use of phonemic awareness skills throughout their academic career (Stainthorpe, 2003). Cassidy and Cassidy (2009) caution that although phonics and phonemic awareness are not receiving the same level

of attention that comprehension, fluency and vocabulary are in the recent survey; many respondents remarked that they are an integral part of any reading program and considered best practice already.

Discussion

Cassidy and Cassidy (2009) have been conducting a survey of literacy leaders for years to ascertain what areas of language acquisition demonstrate effective use and what areas haven't. Since the National Reading Panel's recognition of the five pillars of reading instruction, many have focused on these areas for research and professional development. Each year, Cassidy and Cassidy (2009) publish a list of topics getting the most attention in reading instruction. Along with those researched here, many new topics are on the rise. This year adult literacy along with literacy and adolescent boys were added to the list for topics that should be hot. All respondents were in agreement. This bears further investigation and focus. Why are adolescent boys not meeting reading literacy proficiency? Why aren't adults? What socioeconomic or cultural groups are affected? Are we not providing a quality education to all students regardless of their English proficiency?

According to Manyak and Bauer (2008), many of the trends and issues addressed today in the classroom are designed for English speaking children. Children who are not exposed to English vocabulary suffer through comprehension assessments (Manyak, & Bauer, 2009). Excessive high school dropout rates and poor proficiency performance pushed English Language Learners (ELL) along with adolescent literacy into the very hot topic area of

the 2009 survey (Cassidy, & Cassidy, 2008). Recognition and concern is mounting but effective strategies for addressing language acquisition and direct reading instruction in older ELL readers is still sparse.

In order to gain a better understanding and grasp in the current situation, more professional development and training for teaching reading to ELL at every grade level is needed. Adult literacy programs are imperative for supporting second language acquisition. Using the five pillars of reading instruction as a foundation for developing English as a Second Language programs is a great place to start; why reinvent the wheel?