The Routledge Handbook of Teaching English to Young Learners

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Teaching reading and writing to young learners

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Introduction

Reading and writing are dynamic and interactive processes. They require skills and strategies to make meaning from and create printed text. For many, this ability to read and write is known as literacy. Unlike learning to speak, literacy is not acquired naturally. Children usually learn to read and write in their first or native language (L1) in school during early childhood, from kindergarten through third grade. Whether students are learning these skills in English as their first language or an additional language, the process requires instruction that is informed and deliberate. In the field of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), teachers of children at the primary school level (five to 10 years old) must first understand the process of becoming literate in an L1 as well as the challenges of becoming literate in English as an additional language.

Creating meaning from print

Literacy instruction should include the three main cueing systems that students utilise to create meaning from print: graphophonic cues, semantic cues and syntactic cues:

- Graphophonic cues: Students gain meaning by decoding – that is, using their knowledge of sound – symbol relationships of language to make mean from text.
- Semantic cues: Students gain meaning from text using their background knowledge.
- Syntactic cues: Students gain meaning from text using their knowledge of language patterns and grammar.

All three are essential to being able to read and write in a language. Effective literacy programmes provide opportunities for students to integrate these cueing systems. Walter (2004) suggests that 'Good readers tend to be flexible, using and integrating the systems interdependently. Developing readers, however, may rely too heavily on one system, typically graphophonic cues. Each system, used in isolation, presents special challenges for English learners' (48). For some EYL programmes, there is a heavy emphasis on phoneme-grapheme

correspondence, particularly through phonics instruction. This is commonly the case when students' L1 does not have the same alphabetic writing system as English. However, the process of decoding and encoding through sound-symbol relationships in isolation is only one part of the dynamic, interactive process of reading and writing.

Reading and writing are interactive processes

It is important to understand the interactive process that occurs between the reader and text, as well as the reader and the writer. Most people think reading is gaining meaning from the text. However, the reader actually brings meaning to the text and interacts with the meaning that is encoded in the text. Our comprehension of text is often based on making connections from the text to our own experience and background knowledge. This background knowledge is often referred to as schema. For instance, when children read a story about *Chicken Little*, they bring their knowledge or schema of animals who live on a farm to the text, which will help them understand the story more easily. Reading can be seen as an interactive process involving the reader, the text and the writer.

Writing is also an interactive process that involves thinking about who will read the text. Writers must make decisions about what to write and how to write it based on the reader. While these decisions involve word choice, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics (such as spelling and punctuation), they also involve more choices related to tone, style (formal or informal), and so forth, related to the type of text (e.g., the ways in which we communicate ideas by email to friends differs substantially from the ways in which we write more formally by memo or report to co-workers). We often read what we write multiple times to make sure we are communicating our intended meaning to the potential reader. For example, if we write an email, we may read it over at least once before sending it to make sure our information and purpose are clearly stated. The interaction between the reader and writer through text is a dynamic process that requires many skills to learn.

Historical perspectives

Towards a balanced literacy approach

Our understanding of teaching reading and writing has historically focused on early literacy approaches based on learning to read and write in L1. Educators have been discussing and debating the effectiveness of phonics versus whole language instruction for years (Adams 1997; Chall 1967; Goodman 2005; National Reading Panel 2000). Although this debate was grounded in first language literacy instruction, it has affected how we understand teaching young learners how to read and write in English as a foreign or additional language. A phonics approach teaches the sound-symbol relationship in order to decode written language. It is considered a bottom-up approach starting with building phonemic awareness, which helps discriminate sounds in English, and then moving on to learning the relationship between the sounds and letters in order to decode words. For example, vowel sounds in English can be represented by a number of different letters; note how the 'a' sound in English can be rendered in print: day, eight, train. A whole-language approach focuses on top-down processing skills, which starts from children's knowledge of the world and experience with language and texts and builds strategies for making meaning from text and creating text.

Modern day researchers and practitioners in the fields of first, second, and foreign language literacy promote taking a balanced literacy approach, which integrates aspects of both

whole language and phonics. Researchers recommend using an interactive reading process model, which proposes that readers use both bottom-up and top-down processing skills simultaneously during the reading process in both first and second languages. This process utilises both schematic knowledge as well as decoding skills at the letter or word level to comprehend text (Herrera, Perez, and Escamilla 2015). Just as reading is interactive – between the text and the reader – so is writing. Writing involves interaction with a reader. Writing is more meaningful if children have an audience and a purpose for their writing. Reading can provide a scaffold for children learning to write. Because both processes are interactive, reading and writing are frequently taught together in an integrated way.

EYL teachers need to be sure to take a balanced literacy approach that helps YLs build both bottom-up and top-down processing skills. The time spent on bottom-up focused phonics instruction could vary depending on how similar or different the L1 writing system is from English. In addition, teachers should work on both reading and writing in an integrated way.

Toward a sociocultural perspective of literacy

Traditionally, literacy practices were shaped by cognitive or psycholinguistic perspectives and focused on skills like phoneme-grapheme correspondence or fluency. However, sociocultural perspectives on literacy have become increasingly important not only as a theoretical framework but also in classroom practice. According to Gee (1996), language is always connected to social, cultural and political contexts. Barton and Hamilton (2000) describe literacy in terms of social practice, given that literacy practices are 'what people do with literacy' (7). They note that 'literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals' (8). As Perry (2012) notes, 'Conceptualizing literacy as something one does, as opposed to a skill or ability one has, helps us understand the real-world ways in which real people actually engage with real texts, which ultimately could help educators make formal literacy instruction more meaningful and relevant for learners' (62). This perspective broadens our understanding of literacy beyond linguistic skills to decode the printed page and situates literacy within a context that is bound by both cultural and social practices. Certainly for YLs of a foreign language, schematic knowledge essential to comprehend text in English could present challenges. When EYL teachers use authentic texts written for native speakers of English, the readers and writers will not share the same sociocultural background. Therefore, YLs may need more context and culture specific background knowledge in additional to linguistic knowledge in order to make sense of text.

Critical issues and topics

The balance between L1 and English literacy

In the field of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), children are often learning to read and write in English while they are working on first language (L1) literacy. Parents, teachers, school administrators and curriculum developers often discuss how to approach teaching reading and writing to children in EYL contexts while they simultaneously learn their L1. Some worry that learning English at young ages will affect children's language and literacy in their L1 negatively. In fact, some EFL programs delay reading and writing instruction for YLs in the early grades and only focus on listening and speaking skills. For

example, in Japan, English instruction in primary school grades focuses on oral language skills creating difficulty in the transition to secondary school where the emphasis is on grammar and reading (Gardner 2017). However, developing reading and writing skills in a foreign language can begin as early as foreign language instruction begins (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). In fact, as Dlugosz (2000) states, 'including the teaching of reading in language programmes will benefit all young beginners, including pre-schoolers, i.e., children who have not yet been taught to read in their native tongue . . . If reading is emphasized in their curriculum from the very beginning of their language education, these young children will progress faster not only in learning to read, but also in understanding and speaking the language' (p. 285).

Young learners (YLs) of English as a foreign language may already be literate in their native language or L1, which is an asset for building literacy in a new language. It is well-known that skills used in reading and writing in the L1 can transfer to another language, such as English, and serve as a foundation for literacy in a new language (Cummins 1999; Proctor, August, Carlo, and Snow 2006). Young learners can utilise their understanding of the relationship between oral and written language and how to make sense of printed text in their L1 and apply it to English. As we know, 'the better developed the conceptual foundation of children's first language, the more likely children are to develop similarly high levels of conceptual abilities in their second language' (Cummins 1999, p. 51).

For very young learners (VYLs) under seven years old who are still learning to read and write in the L1, studies have shown that they can transfer literacy skills successfully between the two languages (Dlugosz 2000; Verhoeven 1994). This transfer of literacy skills is bidirectional. In fact, the language of initial literacy does not need to be students' L1 (Dlugosz 2000; Lenters 2004/2005; Verhoeven 1994). For administrators or parents who worry about starting reading and writing instruction too early, studies show that integrating reading and writing instruction can actually assist in oral language development (Dlugosz 2000).

Even VYLs who are not literate in their L1 can build reading readiness and phonemic awareness by reading aloud using big books with print or using songs and rhymes to focus on the sounds of English. They can also engage students in writing readiness exercises like tracing, connecting the dots and coloring. These are fun and effective activities for building early literacy with young EFL learners. Building children's motor skills for more control when holding a pencil and putting pencil to paper is essential and another example of skills that can be developed in both languages simultaneously.

The differences between the young learners' L1 and English

YLs can transfer many literacy skills to reading and writing in English. However, differences between L1 and L2 writing systems can create challenges for early learners. Here are some areas of difficulty depending on differences in students' L1:

1   L1 uses a non-alphabetic writing system (Chinese).
2   L1 uses a different alphabet than English (Russian or Greek).
3   L1 uses the Roman alphabet with sound or symbol differences (Spanish).
4   L1 is read from right to left (Arabic) or top to bottom (traditional Chinese).

All students will benefit from explicit instruction for decoding and encoding using English orthography. Naturally, children who share the same alphabet with English will have less difficulty learning to read and write in English than those who do not use an alphabet or

use a different alphabet (Cameron 2001; Nunan 2011). In fact, all children, including native speakers, find it challenging to learn the different ways in which English represents sounds. According to Moats (2010), English has 26 letters that represent 44 sounds with more than 500 ways to spell them. English has what is known as a 'deep' orthography. It can be difficult to sound out many words from the way in which they are written or spelled. In contrast, Spanish or German have a 'shallow' orthography, which makes them more predictable in sounding out words based on how they are written (Geva and Wang 2001). As Shin and Crandall (2014) point out, the sound /i/ in English can be represented in many combination of letters, e.g., *be, bee, key, sea, ski, skied, receive* (and more). Alternatively, there are many ways of pronouncing the same set of letters, such as 'ea' in *read, bread*, and *break*. This is why phonics instruction is necessary for all learners of English. Teaching students to decode words by transforming letters into sound can be used effectively with children ages five and older (Dlugosz 2000).

The stages of children's writing development

YLs learn to write their first language through several developmental stages although at different rates and in different sequences (Samway 2006). First, children engage in scribble writing and drawing. The scribbles often reflect the orthography of their L1, and the letters are often approximations that resemble standard letters. Then children use strings of letters to express themselves in writing. In this stage, there is no sound-symbol correspondence and spacing between letters is often absent. After stringing letters together, children begin to learn to use letters to represent whole words and thoughts. There is some sound-symbol correspondence, and children can usually spell high frequency or sight words correctly. Children begin putting spacing between words and show accuracy with beginning consonants, then ending consonants, then medial consonants and finally vowels. It is noticeable that children at this stage may have difficulty reading their own texts.

Next is the stylised writing stage. Children use patterns with lots of repetition, such as 'She is_____. She is _____.' They rely on familiar words, especially ones displayed in the classroom. At this time, children can usually read their own texts. As children start to write longer messages and take more risks with writing, teachers will notice invented spelling. This is unconventional spelling that may reflect how words sound, such as writing 'sed' instead of 'said.' Finally, children will begin to produce standardised writing that is more organised and focused. Children's spelling and punctuation becomes more standardised and word choice is more varied.

It is useful for EYL teachers to understand these stages. For instance, children from any language background may invent spellings to words they do not know. However, not all children will pass through all of the stages, e.g, scribbling is unusual for older YLs. Also, in some cases, YLs may stay longer in a particular stage. For example, children with Arabic L1 will often ignore spacing in English. Understanding the stages may support teachers in giving appropriate feedback; they might, for example, be more lenient when correcting spelling, particularly when children produce a good approximation, with a view to encouraging them to enjoy the writing process. It may also help them to plan effective writing activities, allowing plenty of opportunity and time for students to copy and practise forming letters and write very short texts (such as gap fill).

Helping children to make their own meanings through writing takes a good deal of effort, work and patience and it can be counter-productive when children are very young or when their English levels are low as it can discourage them or make them feel inadequate. Instead,

teachers should focus on modelling and providing simple interactive writing activities (see recommendations for practice), so that children can begin to learn the conventions of writing, such as spelling, spacing between words, punctuation, etc. with a view to eventually expressing themselves more fluently and accurately in writing.

The importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension

Because word recognition is essential for reading comprehension, vocabulary instruction is extremely important. Studies have confirmed that learners need to know as many as 95–98% of words in a text for independent or unassisted comprehension (Hu and Nation 2000; Laufer 1989; Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski 2010; Schmitt, Jang, and Grabe 2011). For young EFL learners, this is very challenging, particularly when using authentic texts in the classroom which can have a wide range of vocabulary meant for native speaker children. However, EYL teachers can help learners by focusing instruction on the highest frequency words, which are words that are used most frequently in all written text in English. Eldredge (2005) identified the 300 highest frequency words used in first-grade basal readers (collections of stories written at specific grade levels) and trade books (books written for a broad audience, not specifically leveled). These 300 words account for 72% of the words beginning readers of English read. Analysis of written texts in English show that 50% of all written text is made of up the 100 most frequently used words in English. The following are the 25 most frequently used words; they make up one third of all printed text: *the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, he, was, for, on, are, as, with, his, they, I, at, be, this, have, from*. It is believed that automatic recognition of these words helps children comprehend and create text more easily. These words have been compiled in lists, most notably the Dolch and Fry word lists, and are often used by teachers who focus vocabulary instruction on them.

Based on L1 literacy instruction for native speakers of English, EYL teachers often work on automatic recognition of these high frequency or sight words, from kindergarten through second or third grade. In fact, many EFL texts and graded readers are written to use these most frequently used words. Many of these words are used very frequently in children's lives and are easy to remember and then recognise in print, such as *big, little, blue, red, yellow, come, go, look, jump, play, run, see, one, two, three* (Pre-K Dolch sight word list).

Cultural differences and background knowledge in English texts

As we described above, many books used to teach children English come from contexts where English is the language of classroom instruction and often of the home. English language learners may face cultural barriers when they try to interpret these texts. These types of texts are often used for storytelling activities and to promote extensive reading. However, YLs in foreign language contexts may have difficulty understanding the cultural context of the stories and even the picture or visuals used. For example, in the popular storybook *Library Lion* by Michelle Knudsen and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes, which is an engaging story with lovely illustrations, there could be cultural references that are not familiar to students in other countries. Although children may have the concept of 'lion', the things the lion does in the story, such as going to a library with a circulation desk, might not be as familiar. Other cultural norms in the story such as 'story time' at the library and 'story corner' might also be unknown. Teachers might therefore need to build background knowledge before reading the text or may need to find books that have culturally familiar content to help students gain comprehension of text. It is more common now to find multicultural

storybooks, which represent diverse cultures and different ways of seeing the world. These stories, published by both local and global publishers, might provide more relevant content for young English language learners.

Current contributions and research

Review of phonological-based instruction

Huo and Wang (2017) conducted a review of 15 experimental and quasi-experimental studies published from 2000 to 2016 on the effectiveness of phonological-based instruction focused specifically on teaching English as a foreign language to young learners in Grades K–6. The implication for practice of this study is that including phonological-based instruction in the current English curriculum may be beneficial for young EFL students so that they can better learn to phonologically decode English words. It is interesting to note that the majority of the studies implemented *a synthetic phonics approach*, which focuses on 'explicit instruction of alphabetic principles and applying the knowledge to sounding out novel words' (Huo and Wang 2017: 9). Few studies used an analytic phonics approach, which focuses on 'phonetically analysing words which are already familiar to students' and utilises activities' such as sight word recognition and word family analysis' (Huo and Wang 2017: 9). Although a synthetic phonics approach may seem more appropriate for young learners in an EFL context because it does not require prior knowledge of English, studies by Wu (2005) and Yang (2009) showed that both synthetic and analytic phonics approaches can be equally effective. There is also evidence of the effectiveness of integrating an instructional method of comparing L1 and English writing systems with a synthetic phonics approach (Nishanimut et al. 2013).

Huo and Wang's (2017) review found inconclusive results in word recognition, which showed that children had difficulty transferring phonological skills to word recognition. Based on the results, they suggest: 'Semantic and syntactic information of words are not the focus on phonological-based instruction and are often gained from large exposure to print and oral language' (10). Their review also highlighted the importance of vocabulary and oral language proficiency and emphasised that none of the studies solely used phonics and phonological awareness in their English programme, but as a supplement to daily English language classes, stating that it was 'most effective when delivered regularly and discretely' (11).

Making sense of different writing systems

Nam (2017) recently conducted a qualitative study to understand how young EFL learners understand and develop more than one writing system simultaneously, particularly with two completely different scripts, e.g., Roman and non-Roman alphabetic scripts. This is one of the first studies of its kind conducted in an EFL setting. The study focused on Korean EFL learners who are five to six years old and examined how children understand two different writing systems: Korean alphabet (Hangul) and English alphabet (Roman) in a peer-teaching setting. In each tutoring pair, a six-year-old tutored a five-year-old learner. The findings showed that children could discover key orthographic principles which characterise each script as well as find similarities and differences between Hangul and English. They could articulate differences in shapes of letters/words (block shaped vs. linear), language

units (syllables vs. letters) and sound-letter relationship (shallow vs. deep orthography). As Nam (2017) explains, 'young children are able to look for key concepts in different writing systems by constructing their own ideas about the principles of reading and writing from an early age as active language learners' (1). This provides good support for literacy instruction in two languages simultaneously and the relevance of comparing two writing systems during instruction with VYLs.

Use of technology-enhanced storybooks

Two recent studies show positive effects from technology-enhanced storybooks for improving a variety of reading and writing skills. Walker, Adams, Restrepo, Fialko, and Glenberg (2017) focused their study on Spanish-speaking dual language learners in Grades 2–5 in an American context. Children were given one narrative text and one expository text. They read the texts using an iPad application called EMBRACE (Enhanced Moved by Reading to Accelerate Comprehension in English), which has interactive features that simulate the story events. As students read the text, they can touch the screen and manipulate the images on the screen to match the text. The findings showed that when children read grade-appropriate texts that were written in a familiar narrative style, the simulation of text content using EMBRACE helped their comprehension. However, with advanced expository text, simulation of text content using the iPad application helped good decoders gain comprehension but did not help students with poor decoding skills. In another study, Alsamadani (2017) implemented the use of 'talking story books' – illustrated storybooks with audio from the Lady Bird series – with 11–12-year-old Saudi students. The results showed positive effects on their reading and writing skills, i.e., understanding stories, phonics skills, spelling skills and story retelling skills.

   These studies support the use of interactive tablet applications and talking storybooks (audiobooks) to enhance literacy instruction. It also promotes a balance between top-down and bottom-up instruction, perhaps with additional supports for students struggling decoders with unfamiliar texts.

Recommendations for practice

Young learners of English are more successful when they receive meaningful exposure to language and plenty of opportunities to practise. EYL teachers can integrate reading and writing activities with oral language instruction for children at an early age, focusing as well on helping children to understand speech-to-print differences, as well as similarities between their L1 and English. Some helpful ways to ensure your EFL literacy programme is meaning-based and balanced, include the following:

*   Immerse students in print and literature
*   Give explicit instruction in phonics
*   Build vocabulary and automaticity of high frequency words
*   Utilise and build students' background knowledge
*   Model and teach various reading and writing strategies
*   Involve young learners in literacy activities
*   Use a 'To/With/By' approach.

Joan Kang Shin and JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall

Immerse students in print and literature

Young EFL learners need a 'print-rich' environment where they are surrounded by environmental print (for example, maps, daily schedules and birthday calendars) and engage in multiple activities with that print, such as labelling objects in the classroom and adding words to word walls as they learn new vocabulary (Shin and Crandall 2014). They also need to participate in reading experiences with a variety of texts. Those texts should include not only stories, but also poetry and information texts (which can be drawn from their other classes), and a wide array of texts from the Internet. We also need to engage young learners in drawing and labelling pictures, as well as creating their own stories, poems and class books, all of which can be shared with their peers during independent reading time or with parents and the wider school community (Curtain and Dahlberg 2016; Pinter 2006; Collins 2004). 'For young learners to become effective and engaged readers and writers, they must have multiple opportunities to explore, read and write a variety of texts and to talk about what they are going to read or write or what they have read or written' (Shin and Crandall 2014: 164).

Give explicit instruction in phonics

As mentioned previously, effective literacy instruction needs to incorporate both bottom-up and top-down skills. Phonics instruction will help young EFL learners to develop bottom-up skills to decode text in English, and over time, they will be able to develop automaticity in decoding and spelling English texts. Even young native speakers need explicit instruction because of the complexity of English sound-symbol relationships. The amount of time needed and the specific kind of phonics instruction will differ depending on the writing system and literacy practices of the L1.

Build vocabulary and automaticity of high frequency words

Children need explicit vocabulary instruction to make sense of oral and written texts as well as multiple opportunities to see and use that vocabulary in various contexts. In order to develop a balanced literacy programme, young learners need a balance between authentic children's texts (trade books) as well as graded readers. Teachers can equip students with word-learning strategies that include figuring out the meaning of words using context clues. However, young learners can become overwhelmed with too many unknown words or language structures in authentic texts. As a result, teachers often use graded readers, which are purposely written to control the vocabulary and language in a text. Graded readers can help young learners become familiar with the most frequently used words in English, while also systematically introducing new vocabulary in a meaningful context. Graded readers also recycle vocabulary learned in preceding books. They are often based on stories that children have heard or read in their own language, promoting transfer of skills across the two languages.

Use and build students' background knowledge

Young EFL learners may have prior experience with different topics and text types from their L1 and can tap into their background knowledge to help make sense of text in English. For example, many cultures have a 'Cinderella' story with which children can compare and

contrast and build their intercultural understanding. After all, English is a global language and connected to cultures around the world. Building cultural knowledge helps prepare learners to be effective readers and writers of English across cultures. Teachers can also use content-area texts on a variety of topics, which help students make cross-curricular connections and promote comprehension of text.

Model and teach various reading and writing strategies

Young EFL learners need a variety of strategies to both understand and create different texts. One way to help young learners build reading and writing skills is to model the skills and strategies the students need to use. In a *read-aloud*, the teacher models how to read fluently and with expression, while also communicating interest and enthusiasm for reading. Some skills the teacher can model are previewing a text by focusing on visuals, headings, etc.; predicting what happens in the text; and highlighting text structures, such as the beginning, middle and end of stories or texts (Shin 2017). Teachers can model writing by providing simple writing activities, such as tracing or copying words and sentences, unscrambling words and sentences or providing gap-filling activities in order to help lower level students learn the basics of writing in English. They can also model more complex writing strategies in *writing think-alouds*, explaining their thinking as they write a text on the board or a flip chart. Some skills a teacher might model are brainstorming ideas to write; identifying a particular audience and purpose for the text; using a graphic organiser (e.g., word web, t-chart, or table) to help structure the text; and even paragraph writing for more advanced young learners.

Involve young learners in literacy activities

Children learn by doing and need to actively participate in literacy activities. Not only does this mean participating in the actual reading and writing activities themselves, but also engaging in discussions about texts, comprehension strategies and the writing process. This can be a gradual process after the teacher models. The following are some useful reading and writing activities that range from less to more independent.

- *Shared Reading*. Teachers can use a big book to do a shared reading with the whole class, modelling reading strategies and skills while encouraging children to join in when they can, especially if there is a repeated line in the story. For example, in *The Gingerbread Man* children can repeat with the teacher, 'Run, run as fast as you can; you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man.' The teacher can also encourage students to participate in reading skills and strategies, including using new vocabulary through a repeated structure. For example, in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* when the story repeats 'I see a . . . looking at me', children can show they recognise each animal. For example, the teacher can pause, 'I see a . . .' and wait for students to say '. . . red bird looking at me.' (For more activities built around this book, see *Crazy Animals and Other Activities for Teaching Young Learners*.)
- *Choral Reading and Readers Theatre*. In choral reading, children (individually, in pairs or in small groups) take turns reading a text out loud. If the text is a story, children can do a dramatic reading, acting out or reciting character dialogue in an activity known as 'Readers Theatre' or 'Reader's Theater' (Young, Stokes, and Rasinski 2017). They can also dress up as the characters and act out while they are reading their parts out loud.

Many children's books already have a narrator and dialogue. If not, the teacher can pre-pare a script for the children to read. (See the Reading A–Z webpage: www.readinga-z.com/fluency/readers-theater-scripts/ for Reader's Theater scripts.)

*   *Guided Reading*. In guided reading, learners meet in groups with similar reading lev-els to read the same text together. They each receive a copy of the text selected by the teacher for their level and work together to make sense of it, with the teacher providing assistance when needed. They can also work together to produce a labeled drawing or simple text about the characters or plot in the story they have just read. In guided activities, learners should feel comfortable taking risks and experimenting. They may not always make the right predictions when reading or may end up inventing spelling (e.g., 'wuz' instead of 'was'). Teachers need to provide supportive feedback to help students improve their literacy skills and strategies, while also valuing students' ideas and encouraging them to keep taking risks.

*   *Language Experience Approach*. Teachers can use the Language Experience Approach (LEA), which is a shared writing activity. This activity encourages learners and the teacher to create a text together. Texts can include a summary of a story or a video, a letter or email to the author of a story and a thank-you note (Dixon and Nessel 1983; Nessel and Jones 1981; Shin and Crandall 2014; Van Allen and Allen 1976; Ashton-Warner 1963). Shin and Crandall (2014), suggest the following steps:

    1   Participate in a common experience (a field trip, a story, a celebration, a visitor, a picture that evokes feelings).
    2   Have a discussion (can be in L1, depending on students' level).
    3   Decide what to write, using a brainstorming web or other graphic organiser.
    4   Dictate the 'story' to the teacher, who writes it so all can see.
    5   Read back what the teacher has written (The teacher may read it first, with students following along, and then they read it together.).
    6   Decide if they want to edit anything.
    7   Copy what is written on the board into their notebooks. (176–177)

*   *Interactive Writing*. This activity is similar to shared writing activities like the Lan-guage Experience Approach, but the teacher does not do the actual writing (Shin 2017). Instead, the bulk of the responsibility for writing is passed to the students. However, it is still scaffolded thoroughly by the teacher though discussion. Interactive writing focuses on 'constructing texts filled with personal and collective meaning' (Button, Johnson, and Ferguson 1996: 446). Button et al. (1996) provide an example of a kin-dergarten teacher's use of interactive writing after children have heard 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' read aloud many times. Here are the steps:

    After a reading or telling a story, ask children about various parts of the story, such as *Who are the characters? Where are they? What happened?* As they dictate or share ideas in their L1, the teacher can record the key words and ideas on the board. Then the teacher uses the text as an opportunity to engage students in writing. While doing this, the teacher can draw students' attention to the text and engage in writing as well. If lower level students need more scaffolding, the teacher could point out some of the con-ventions of English writing, from left to right, from top to bottom, the spaces between the words, initial capital letters and use with names, etc. Children can also come to the board and write some of the words after the teacher has had them repeat the words several times and tells them the letters to write as they write them on the board and/or

at their seat. For higher level students, the teacher can give them time to draft the text themselves after discussion or write more independently, such as creating a new ending for a story or adding their own details.

Use a To/With/By approach

We know that young EFL learners need effective scaffolding to become independent readers and writers. After all, they learn language through social interaction with support and scaffolding from the teacher (Shin and Crandall 2014). The recommended practices above provide step-by-step scaffolding from the teacher through modelling as well as guided activities that help move children towards becoming more independent readers and writers. Teachers may find it helpful to conceptualise the process of scaffolding students to become more independent using the *To/With/By approach* (Cappellini 2005; Mooney 1990; Walter 2004).

*   Reading and writing *to* students: The teacher provides a model to learners of reading and writing skills and strategies, e.g., read-alouds and think-alouds.
*   Reading and writing *with* students: After modelling, the teacher reads and writes with students, gradually giving learners more responsibility for reading and writing, e.g., big book shared reading, the Language Experience Approach, Reader's Theater and small group guided reading.
*   Reading and writing *by* students: After guided practice with the teacher, learners can begin to read and write independently, e.g., through literacy centres, literature circles, interactive and collaborative writing and research projects.

The To/With/By approach is a simple but effective step-by-step framework for teachers to help young learners become readers and writers in English.

Future directions

Multiliteracies

In the twenty-first century, additional skills should be addressed in relation to teaching reading and writing in TEYL contexts. The notion of 'literacy' as a sociocultural practice can be further explored in relation to creating meaning from printed text. Furthermore, literacy instruction should also include 'new literacies' or multiliteracies, which Perry (2012) describes as viewing literacy as 'involving multiple modes of visual, gestural, spatial, and other forms of representation' (p. 58–59). This can include new media and digital literacies, which could be seen as an expanded view of printed text. They can also include visual literacies which involve students learning to understand visual media such as advertisements, photographs and film.

Reading and writing English as a global language

The status of English as a global language requires us to take a critical stance on the texts we incorporate into our classrooms, which should not only represent the dominant discourses from the USA or the UK, as is common for authentic texts in English. We will need further

exploration of how we produce and select texts we use to teach reading and writing in EYL classrooms. Such texts may include:

- Texts that represent other Englishes (i.e., varieties of English spoken around the world).
- Texts that integrate cultural information from other countries and cultures.
- Texts that are written for a global audience.

These texts will require cross-cultural interpretation skills to understand cultural content that comes from diverse cultures and represents other Englishes. This can include cross-cultural visual literacy since the images accompanying text will be diverse as well.

Conclusion

Teaching young EFL learners to read and write is a challenging yet exciting endeavor. EYL classrooms may focus primarily on oral language skills, but as the chapter has shown, integrating literacy instruction even in the early years is highly encouraged. We can produce effective readers and writers of English through engaging activities described in this chapter and provided in additional texts described and listed below. It is important to take a balanced literacy approach that is meaning focused but also provides explicit instruction in phonics and bottom-up processing skills. Young learners need to be actively involved in reading and writing, and teachers can effectively scaffold young learners to become independent readers and writers by using techniques such as the To/With/By approach. Hopefully teachers can connect young learners to literacy practices in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways and look ahead to new literacies in the future.

Further reading

1 Curtain, H., and Dahlberg, C. A. (2016). *Languages and learners: Making the match*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

   Curtain and Dahlberg provide an excellent foundation for teaching foreign languages to young learners in Grades K–8. They focus on foreign language instruction in the US context, but the well-researched practices can also be applied in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts effectively. This book, which serves as a guide for both administrators and teachers, has a robust chapter on building literacy, with many practice examples.

2 Shin, J. K., and Crandall, J. A. (2014). *Teaching young learners English: From theory to practice*. Boston, MA: National Geographic Learning/Cengage Learning.

   Shin and Crandall's foundational work on teaching young learners English as a foreign or international language bridges theory to practice. It has a comprehensive chapter on teaching reading and writing to young learners that provides teachers with a theoretical foundation in the process of reading and writing and gives numerous activities and a sample lesson plan with a diverse array of ideas to integrate into their classroom.

2 Tompkins, G. E. (2017). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon/Pearson.

   This textbook brings literacy instruction into the twenty-first century by promoting a balanced approach to diverse student populations. It provides both theory and practice for effective reading and writing instruction for learners of all ages and includes ideas for digital teaching and learning. This is the e-book version of the textbook published in 2013.

Related topics

Listening and speaking, teaching grammar, differentiation, assessment

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Joan Kang Shin and JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall

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