

The Science of Reading in Multilingual K-12 Classrooms

Created for the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) at the New York State Education Department (NYSED) by Socorro G. Herrera, Ed.D. and Robin M. Cabral, Ph.D.

This brief examines the application of the Science of Reading (SoR) to multilingual K-12 classrooms, specifically addressing the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and multilingual learners (MLs). While SoR identifies common processes in reading development, the brief highlights the need for further study on how these processes uniformly apply to linguistically diverse students. It re-evaluates the “Big Six” skills and competencies (phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and oral language) in the context of ELLs and MLs, pointing out that existing curricula often fail to account for students’ unique linguistic and cultural assets. For each of the “Big Six” areas, the brief contrasts monolingual English assumptions with ELL and ML considerations, offering sample instructional strategies designed to leverage students’ prior knowledge and language assets, ensure meaningful engagement with text, and avoid common pitfalls (such as misidentification of learning disabilities or remediation that dampens language acquisition). The brief stresses the importance of integrating “learning to read” with “reading to learn” synergistically, providing case studies to illustrate the long-term impacts of differing pedagogical approaches on student outcomes. Finally, the brief advocates for programs that equitably benefit all students by recognizing and supporting their full linguistic repertoires.

The Big Six

Phonological
Awareness

Phonics

Vocabulary

Fluency

Comprehension

Oral Language

Learning to Read

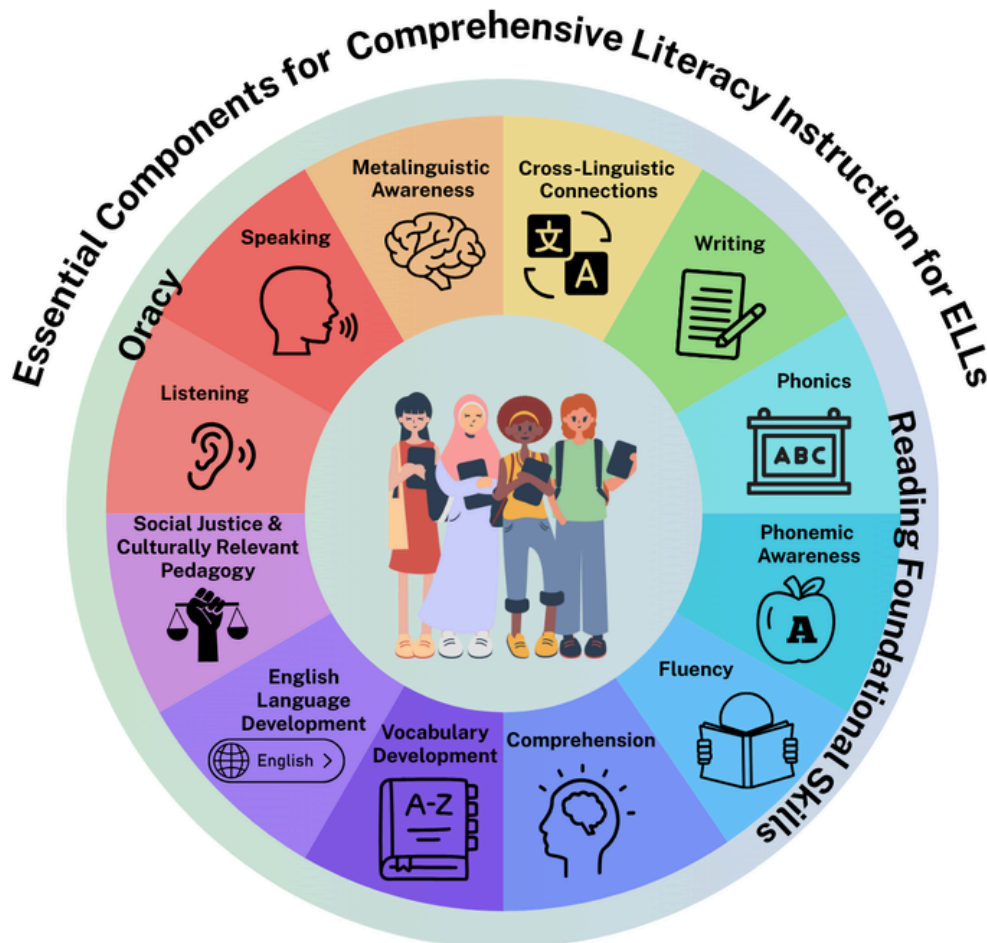
Students develop foundational reading skills.

Reading to Learn

Students develop the skills to acquire and assess content knowledge through increasingly complex print.

Beyond the Big Six

The model below illustrates how teachers can move beyond the Big Six in order to make literacy instruction more inclusive of ELLs and MLs.



Reflect and Apply

- How can screener data inform and misinform our sense of the effectiveness of literacy curricula/programs used with ELLs and MLs in our school(s)?
- Why is it particularly important for ELLs and MLs that meaning connections occur throughout all stages of learning to read?
- Discuss the pros and cons of structured instructional settings on ELL and ML students':
 - access to rich oral language models,
 - access to grade-level curricula, and
 - exposure to the vocabulary breadth and depth needed to support skilled reading.
- What does the data in my school/district indicate about our current implementation of SoR to support ELL and ML students' successful attainment of school and life goals?
- What plan does your school or district have to address teaching literacy to ELLs and MLs? Upon reflection of the information shared in this document, what, if any, changes should be made to improve support for these students?