



Letter to Readers

Valentina Gonzalez and Melinda Miller Address
the Science of Teaching Reading and ELs

Dear Readers,

As avid learners and professionals in our field, we are always growing and striving to provide the most current and relevant resources to our readers. We are often asked about the Science of Teaching Reading and phonics when teaching multilingual readers and writers. We both are advocates for children first, the joy and love of literacy, reading and writing, and neither of us feels that pitting educators against one another is constructive. [Our intention is and always will be to grow readers and writers and to support educators.](#)

Research is ever-evolving and as master practitioners, we can and we have done research in our own classrooms. We have tried techniques, observed students, studied the effectiveness of methods, and measured growth. We also know that as we learn new information, we add it to what we already know.

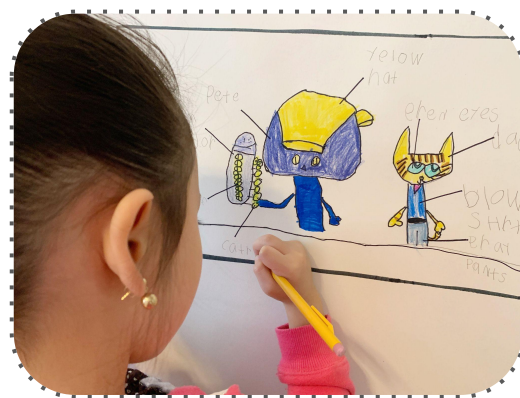
We agree with the overarching ideas upon which the Science of Teaching Reading is based. The science reminds us that we should do what is best for each individual child, including multilingual students and students with special needs, by basing our teaching techniques, strategies, actions, judgments, and decisions upon learning theories and upon children's needs, always taking into consideration the backgrounds and interests of individual children, as well as their literacy stages.

We also agree that instruction should be guided by assessments. Based upon assessments, teachers must differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each individual child. Using an assets-based approach, we must determine what each child knows and can do in order to understand what they need. We then build upon what they know, basing instruction on the familiar and helping them make connections. Specifically, it is important to assess our students' reading levels, the words they know, the strategies they use, and areas of strength and need in order to provide materials and strategy instruction that are best for them.

We use our assessments to determine what our students need in terms of oral language development, alphabetical knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, syllabication and morphemic analysis, comprehension of both literary and informational text, and reading strategies. Assessment must be ongoing as we measure our students' progress over time.

We believe that readers use a combination of graphophonic (phonics/visual), semantic (meaning), and syntactic (structural) information as they read. It is important for teachers to assess students through running records or miscue analysis to determine which sources of information they are using or neglecting in order to plan strategy and phonics instruction.

Phonological awareness and phonics are integral components of early reading instruction. Children first become aware of the sounds that make up speech, then they are able to segment and blend sounds within spoken words. Once students become proficient at manipulating sounds within spoken words, they begin to learn to represent those sounds with letters..



They are able to understand that you go from left to right and put letters together to make words. Conversely, they learn that they can read words by decoding those letters into sounds and words. [Children who are learning to understand and speak a new language while simultaneously learning to read and write in it may need additional, specific, and targeted support with vocabulary while learning to decode.](#) We recognize that reading, writing, and spelling are reciprocal processes and students benefit from their integration.

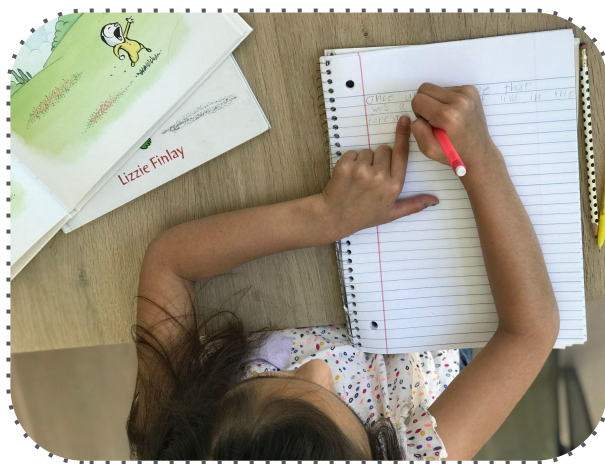
When words cannot be decoded, or "sounded out", the reader must use meaning and structural information in order to make sense of the text. All students are different and will rely on different sources of information as they read. It is the teacher's job to closely observe students as they read to determine the scaffolds they need in order to develop a self-extending system.

We embrace science as it overlaps with what we know about our learners as individual people.

We believe that all learners benefit from the gradual release of responsibility, which progresses from heavy teacher support to less and less support until the child is ready to work independently. Heavy teacher support has been referred to as “I DO” and looks like explicit teaching, modeling, read-aloud, and write-aloud. The next step in the progression is referred to as “WE DO” and includes group work that is guided by the teacher. This might be guided reading, shared reading and writing, and guided writing. Finally, “YOU DO” is independent work, such as independent reading and independent writing. Students must have daily, sustained times for both in order to practice orchestrating all the strategies they have learned as they read and write. The teacher is always nearby for any needed support.

We believe that reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking are interconnected and that all students benefit from multiple daily opportunities to read, write, listen, speak, and think. Students must have sustained time every day to use each of these language forms to grow as literacy learners and thinkers. Students should have a choice in what they read and write in order to find joy in reading and writing and become life-long readers.

We agree that families play an important role in students' literacy development. It is important to welcome families to school and value the cultural and linguistic characteristics of each family. We must also provide culturally inclusive texts so every child can see themselves in the literature. *We must make every child feel valued, celebrated, and supported in the classroom.*



Our goal is to provide educators of multilingual students with the tools and support they need to teach to the individual child and provide scaffolds that will help them thrive as they learn English in a comforting, accepting environment.

Our view is that as educators we teach children first. We teach them to read and write. Each child is as unique as a fingerprint, joining our classrooms they bring with them their own lived experiences, background knowledge, interests, motivation, culture, traditions, language, and more. All of which play an active role in reading and writing. We embrace science as it overlaps with what we know about our learners as individual people.

It's important to us that we meet the needs of the multilingual readers and writers that we serve. We want educators of our multilingual students to understand that literacy in any language holds value and can be leveraged to support English learning. Our goal is to provide educators of multilingual students with the tools and support they need to teach to the individual child and provide scaffolds that will help them thrive as they learn English in a comforting, accepting environment.

With love and admiration,

Valentina Gonzalez and Melinda Miller,
authors of *Reading & Writing with English Learners*