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Literacy instruction for English language learners pre-K–2, by Diane M. Barone and Shelley Hong Xu, Guildford Press, 2008, 278 pp., £18.95 (paperback), ISBN-13 978-1-59385-602-1

Literacy instruction for English language learners pre-K–2 is a very comprehensive digest of language development punctuated by practical suggestions and advice. Barone and Xu are both teacher educators in the USA. This is worth bearing in mind upon reading as some of the terminology is certainly rooted in that context. However, the principles underpinning this work and the pragmatism with which it is written make it accessible to a much wider audience.

The book is logically structured, beginning by encouraging the reader to think more holistically about how classrooms can be created to engage learners. The authors then consider English language learners' developmental journey through oral language development into proficiency in written English. Barone and Xu also deal with the reading processes of decoding and composition and finish very helpfully with some case studies of their ideas in practice and the effects the strategies they advise have on children's learning.

In the first chapter, the authors lay the foundations of effective learning and teaching by looking at the classroom environment. As well as the physical environment, they draw on the importance of the social/emotional environment and the importance of the teacher's ethos. They also suggest that the teacher needs to understand themselves as a learner in order for them to teach effectively. This critically reflective string to the teacher's bow is quite rightly emphasised throughout the book as frequently the authors invite the reader to stop and think about their own practice.

Within the idea of ethos is the importance of working with parents to support English language learners and this is the focus of Chapter 2. Barone and Xu give some very useful information about writing systems, semantics and syntax from different languages. They also emphasise the importance of cultural awareness and the role parents can play in this area.

The context for looking at speaking, reading and writing is concluded in Chapter 3 with a look at classroom-based assessment. Some excellent practical assessment and recording ideas are given here as well as a strong rationale for each underpinned by the idea that a lack of proficiency in English should not hinder the child from being able to demonstrate their understanding.

The next four chapters deal with the development of oral language, written language and decoding and understanding language. Throughout these chapters an excellent balance of practical advice and theoretical underpinning is maintained. For the experienced teacher this would help hone practice and for the beginning teacher it would help give them reasons for the techniques they have been taught. I found the balance of theory and practice was a real strength of this book. It meant that it was accessible and incredibly helpful, to me as a teacher educator and the students I teach.

Barone and Xu draw heavily on the work of Cummins. They underpin a lot of their suggestions with Cummins' Basic Interpersonal, Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) – demonstrating how BICS can be gained relatively quickly through oral communication and immersion but also how oral language strongly supports the development of CALP. Within the book are lots of helpful suggestions to provide context for activities and give English

Language Learners opportunity to develop language proficiency as well as gaining academic and conceptual understanding in curriculum areas.

The information these chapters give on children's development, in particularly of writing, is very helpful. The writers provide examples of each developmental stage (stages identified by Read, Henderson, Beer and Barone) and analyse each one in terms of how the child is developing. This then follows logically into practical examples of how the teacher can facilitate this development.

Amidst this feast of language development is a very useful chapter on materials that support children's learning. The authors provide a mine of information about text structures of different genres including content factors that support or reduce ease of writing. They also provide a very helpful list of prompts to think through what makes a good text with lists of extensive examples. However the authors do not let the reader bask contentedly in the knowledge that they have a great resource list, they ask what you will now do differently, again encouraging critical reflectiveness.

The case studies that conclude the book could be seen at first sight as something they felt they had to do to prove their strategies work. However, they are written in a way that has children's learning at their very heart. The chapter follows several teachers who work with English language learners and follows their journey through some of the ideas in the book. The ideas do meet with success, but you know it is real, not just proving a point.

Overall, this book is an immense digest of practical ideas, information and theoretical perspectives and it hits a variety of readers on a variety of levels. However, I do think the title could lead it to be cast aside by those who don't teach English language learners and this would be a shame. The ideas offered are useful for any teacher as is all the information on development in speaking, writing and reading. During a session on working with children with English as an additional language (EAL), we were discussing strategies one might use to support EAL learners. As the ideas flowed, one of my students responded with 'But that's what good teaching is anyway'. This is an excellent book that does so much more to support all teachers and teaching than the title suggests.

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Learning through play – a work based approach for the early years, by Jaqueline Duncan and Madelaine Lockwood, London, Continuum, 2008, 251 pp., £19.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-84706-168-3

This is an excellent book for those working with and caring for young children in a variety of early years settings. It provides accessible information and practical ideas for those in training but is also particularly useful for those who are interested in leading and managing change in the area of play-based learning. The introduction provides useful advice and guidance for readers on how to make effective use of the book to develop their own understanding.

The book is very well structured and can be read as a comprehensive guide both to theory and to practice in play based learning, or each chapter can be read as a unit