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**Book Review: Writing Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners K-8, S. Lenski, F. Verbruggen**

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## Book Review

**Writing Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners K-8, S. Lenski, F. Verbruggen. Guildford Press, New York, (2010)**

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition reported that today 11% of K-12 students in the USA are English language learners (ELLs). In 20 years, 25% of students in public schools will be ELLs (in [Goldenberg, 2008](#)). The growing number of ELLs creates a need for teachers who can implement culturally responsive teaching ([Lucas & Villegas, 2007](#)) and develop strong language and literacy skills among their students ([Goldenberg, 2008](#)). While veteran teachers adjust to the changing demographic and its demands, new teachers must be equipped with the right mindset and strategies to promote both language and literacy development simultaneously. ELLs need additional support to be successful in mainstream classes due to their language proficiency ([Goldenberg, 2008](#)).

Susan Lenski and Frances Verbruggen frame their book *Writing Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners K-8* with the example of Ms. Ramos. Ms. Ramos is a literacy coach who helps teachers at an elementary school to provide specific sheltered instruction tailored to the needs of the English learners. In each chapter, Lenski and Verbruggen use realistic classroom vignettes to address the unique needs of English learners at different language proficiency and grade levels who need support in order to make academic progress.

The intended audience for this book is broad, including K-8 veteran and new teachers. Experienced teachers will find validation. Pre-service teachers, in particular, will benefit from the get-go by learning approaches to assessment and literacy from this text. Readers will learn how to provide scaffolding and sheltered instruction to benefit not only their ELL students but all students in their classroom, and they will also find suggestions for tailoring writing strategies for ELLs. They will also find useful web resources at the end of each chapter. While the main audience for this book is teachers in the USA, the vignettes and information would also be relevant across international contexts as the principles of writing discussed in this book, such as strategies for developing fluency, teaching different writing genres, and methods of assessment, would be relevant for teachers teaching English as a second or foreign language or working with English learners in other contexts.

The book is informative and practical, allowing the readers to be empathetic to the vignettes described as well as to become proactive by using effective instructional strategies with which they may already be familiar but may be reluctant to try in their classrooms. Ms. Ramos addresses teachers' concerns at different grade levels. This narrative element adds vitality and authentic coherence to the text. Ms. Ramos shows how the content is applicable across levels, addressing the needs of a newcomer from India in 4th grade or a group of ELLs who have attended school in the USA and gets ready for the state's writing assessment. Ms. Ramos also guides teachers to use best practices while effectively explaining the rationale behind second language acquisition theory that supports those strategies or interventions.

Chapter One, English Language Learners and Writing Research, introduces a third grade teacher who wants to help her student Pedro to transfer his oral skills and convey his academic knowledge through his journal entries. When consulting with Ms. Ramos, the teacher learns about the increasing numbers of English learners in the USA. She learns about where they come from, the differences in immigrant attitudes toward school, and general challenges teachers face when teaching writing to ELLs. The teacher also gains a brief overview of what the research says about spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and organization – drawn from peer-reviewed articles to unpublished dissertations. Chapter One

also includes an overview of second language acquisition factors that affect writing in English, such as first-language proficiency, and reading and listening comprehension in English.

Chapter Two, *Writing Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners K-8*, moves from theory to practice, covering the different language proficiency levels in light of state standards broken down by writing expectations. Lenski and Verbruggen use Alaska's English Language Development Performance Standards for Writing (pp. 34–39) for grades K-8 to illustrate what ELLs could do at different language proficiency levels and grade levels. They are careful to point out commonalities and expectations in teaching and how each state in the USA has their own standards. In this chapter, Ms. Ramos assists Mrs. Littleford, a sixth grade teacher with whom many teachers would identify, to support her four ELLs who are at different proficiency levels. Ms. Ramos demonstrates models to teach cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) and how to structure and incorporate the teaching of brick and mortar structures (Dutro & Moran, 2003) during the writing process.

Chapter Three, *Facilitating Writing-Fluency*, addresses fluency in writing as Ms. Wilson receives support to help her newcomer student from India who has oral skills but freezes when it is time to write. The authors quote Herrera, Perez, and Escamilla (2010) and findings from several studies that emphasize that oral skills do not automatically transfer to writing. This chapter presents several activities and strategies to explicitly teach writing skills and enhance student writing fluency for beginning and intermediate ELLs. While experienced ESOL teachers may find only a couple of new activities in this section, pre-service teachers may appreciate the description of the concepts of print (Clay, 2000) and of alphabetic features among different world alphabets in comparison to the English alphabet.

Chapter Four, *Teaching Narrative Writing*, focuses on teaching narrative writing with Mr. Jones, a second grade teacher with 10 ELLs in his classroom – including 5 newcomers. Mr. Jones consults with Ms. Ramos and learns about how English discourse patterns may be unfamiliar to ELLs and need to be taught explicitly. The chapter discusses step-by-step how to teach narrative organization and select topics and audience for writing in the following mini-lessons: plot relationship chart, plot diagrams, transition words, sentence combining, and paragraph frames. The mini-lessons are illustrated through the book *Willy the Wimp*, by Anthony Browne. This section provides useful examples of student work and reproducible frames to encourage narrative writing. Although some of the frames are not new, they are useful for teachers who are unfamiliar with them or need to be reminded of their utility in the context of narrative writing.

Chapter Five, *Academic Writing Genres: Description, Exposition, and Persuasion*, goes over different writing genres – descriptive, expository, and persuasive. In addition to providing an explanation of each one and describing language demands that each genre poses to ELLs, the chapter presents reproducible graphic organizers and student examples. The authors carefully frame the instructional examples presented using the students' funds of knowledge (McIntyre, Rosebery, & Gonzalez, 2001), taking advantage of their background knowledge and interests.

Chapter Six, *How Language Works: Grammar and Usage*, sheds light on grammar and usage. The chapter is short for such an extensive topic, but is one of the most useful in the book. The authors provide succinct and useful information on language differences, interlanguage, and sample transfer errors, and discuss how to explicitly teach grammar in context. The chapter emphasizes teaching language within the context of literacy activities such as writing cinquains, using sentence frames, using children's books, teaching punctuation, and correcting spelling and usage errors. The information presented here will benefit classroom teachers as well as ESL specialists with its approach of teaching grammar through games and activities rather than drills and worksheets.

The last chapter of the book, *Assessing Writing*, is devoted to assessment. Here the authors present a general overview of formative and summative assessments for writing with a short description of their purposes and how they are used. There are a couple of examples of writing rubrics for different English language proficiency levels for grades 3–5 as well as rubrics written in student-friendly language. The assessment categories discussed here clearly explain several performance-based, traditional, and alternative assessments. However, the depth of coverage for these topics is less than the reader might expect based on the title of the book. Perhaps, Ms. Ramos could use the rubrics provided and analyze writing samples in a future edition where the chapter is revised and expanded?

Teachers of all experience levels in the USA should find this book to be a useful addition to their library. For pre-service teachers, this book clearly shows how to scaffold writing and instruction as they learn about writing instruction and assessment. Veteran teachers, new to the demands of teaching ELLs, will be grateful to see that several of the strategies they already use in the classroom support their students. They will also understand how and why certain literacy strategies and activities support language development as well. Literacy coaches should find the approach and modeling of Ms. Ramos inspirational and helpful as they guide and empower teachers among their staff to serve ELLs.

While the main audience for this book will be teachers in the USA, the book is also relevant for teachers of English as a foreign language concerned with developing students' English and writing skills.

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