**Reading, Writing and Learning in ESL**

**Introduction**

Returning to K-12 teaching after a five year hiatus, I was shocked by how much classrooms had changed. A regimented revolution had occurred and it seemed like I couldn’t be creative anymore. Elementary schools seemed to be emphasizing reading groups at the expense of writing.

As an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher, I felt even more panicked. My students were placed into the lowest groups where they had to complete simplistic worksheets that asked them to work at the lowest levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. They were not having deep and passionate conversations about their reading and they were definitely NOT writing.

I knew that my students *could* work at higher levels but that they just needed the right conditions and tools to support their journey. More importantly, these conditions and tools needed to be wrapped up in an integrated and engaging unit that inspired them to become more in charge of their learning. I decided to pursue an author study in order to incorporate teaching the following:

* reading strategies
* reading like a writer and writing like a reader
* ESOL development in listening, speaking, reading and writing
* mentor texts and writing craft
* providing scaffolding but NOT a rigid formula
* making cross curricular connections
* realizing that we all have the power to impact the world

Even if you are not *officially* an ESOL teacher, in reality, we are all language teachers! Our students – both ESOL and native speakers – pick up much of their social and academic language during the school day. The great news is that the strategies we use with ESOL students are strategies that work for ALL students and with which you are already familiar! Good luck!





















**FAQs**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**My school already uses a reader’s notebook where students document their reading and strategies. Isn’t this the same thing?**

Well…maybe! A reader’s notebook can mean almost anything, even something as basic as keeping a list of books students have read. The point of this notebook is not to just check up on students to make sure they are reading. Rather, it is to get them to go beyond comprehension and more towards developing a deeper understanding of literature and thus a love of it. Readers’ notebooks can also help students to keep track of thinking across books. This helps them identify themes, burning questions and topics that they enjoy reading and may want to explore in their writing.

**Won’t I frustrate my ESOL students by asking questions and assigning tasks at the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy?**

Yes, if you start the tasks and assignments with the highest levels…and you will probably frustrate a lot of native speakers as well. There will always be a few kids in our classrooms that can start with the most complicated tasks and perform quite well. This, however, is not the reality for most of our students, particularly our ESOL students who are at a level 1 or 2.

The great news is that studies have shown that ESOL students whose lessons include higher level thinking skills are able to reach higher achievement than those who receive instruction at the lower levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. But, we must all provide plenty of scaffolding and support as students move through our assignments. Start with lower level tasks and build up to those at higher levels.

**How do I organize this? My students already have a writer’s notebook and I really can’t read two notebooks for each student!**

This is really a personal choice. I struggled with this question myself as I wanted students to see that these two subjects were inherently intertwined but did not want to go crazy searching for their entries. I finally settled on having students use the same notebook that was divided into a 2-Subject notebook with tabs. This allowed them to have all their writing in one place and me to easily find their entries. Remember, if you or your students are confused about where an entry should go…celebrate! It means that students are making amazing connections in their literacy.

**Resources**

**Angelillo, Janet. *Writing about Reading: From Book Talk to Literary Essays Grades 3-***

***8.* Heinemann, 2003.**

This book is a fast read that is filled with practical ideas on how to support students as they learn to write about their reading. Angelillo includes day by day outlines for teaching book reviews and literary essays as well as several scripted lessons. The book also includes student samples of several types of writing about reading. I used it with my seventh graders several years ago and after returning to teaching, I found it just as useful for my third and fifth grade ESOL and native speaker students.

**Buckner, Aimee. *Notebook Connections: Strategies for the Reader’s Notebook.***

**Stenhouse, 2009.**

The tone of this book is inviting and conversational. You feel as if you’re chatting with a friendly and more experienced colleague. Buckner shares her lessons, student work and personal growth process in regards to using a reader’s notebook in the class. What I found particularly helpful was her inclusion of a Writing Connection at the end of each strategy. While I have not used all of these connections, they have helped me to think about how to make the Reading-Writing connection in all my lessons.

**Gottlieb, Margot. *Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges From Language***

***Proficiency to Academic Achievement.* Corwin Press, 2006.**

I know the title of this book includes the bad word, assessing, but Gottlieb uses the word in the most classroom-friendly manner. While the book does discuss formal standardized assessments, the focus is on formative and summative assessments you can do to better understand your English Language Learners.

**O’Malley, J. Michael and Valdez-Pierce, Lorraine. *Authentic Assessment for English***

***Language Learners: Practical Approaches for Teachers.* Addison Wellesley, 1996.**

Here is another book that includes assessment in the title but is more about the actual teaching of ESOL students! This book includes some chapters on ESL theory but I love it for all the practical applications and examples. There are many rubrics and checklists you can use straight out of the book or adapt to your own needs. The book is geared towards Language Arts instruction and focuses on all four domains of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

**Peregoy, Suzanne and Boyle, Owen. *Reading, Writing and Learning in ESL: A***

***Resource Book for Teaching K-12 English Learners. 5th edition.* Allyn and Bacon, 2008.**

If you can only buy one book about English Language Learners, this is the one to buy. If you are not that interested in the theory behind working with ELL, you will probably want to skip the first few chapters, as they can be a bit dry in that textbook kind of way. The remainder of the book, however, is FULL of strategies, activities, student examples and lessons that you can modify and adapt for your classroom.

**Ray, Katie Wood. *Study Driven: A Framework for Planning Units of Study in the***

***Writing Workshop.* Heinemann, 2006.**

I am a little biased because Katie Wood Ray is one of my favorite authors. I have read and used all her books but always secretly dreamed of a practical guide to accompany them. This is it! The book really supports new and veteran teachers in creating genre studies (and other units) that allow students to be immersed in the types of literature they will produce. One of my favorite aspects of the book is her inclusion of SO MANY examples, lessons and resources.