

Strengthening the Science of Reading with OCDE Project GLAD®: A Language-Rich Approach for Multilingual Learners

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Since 2000, when the National Reading Panel published the report: “Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction”, English reading instruction has undergone a transformative shift informed by the Science of Reading (SoR). The Science of Reading emphasizes the importance of teaching phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The emphasis on the explicit teaching of phonics for students learning to read in English has been welcomed by many teachers who may have never received explicit guidance in how to teach these skills during their teacher preparation courses. There is, however, a growing body of educators and researchers who are calling for adaptations in the use of SoR to meet the unique needs of multilingual learners (MLs), whose language development pathways differ from those of monolingual students.

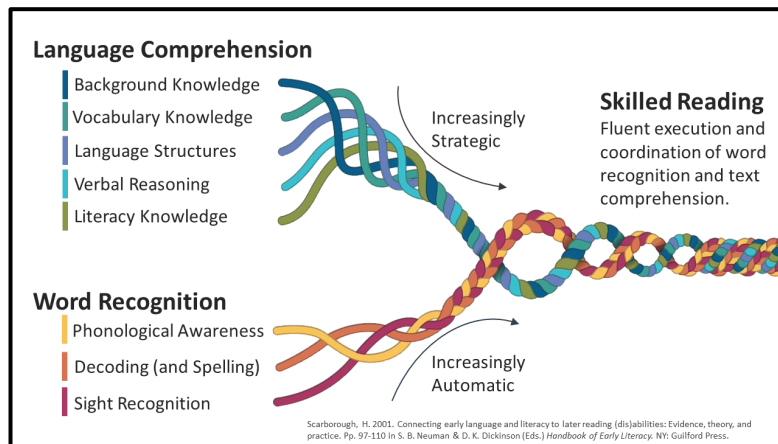
A concern for teachers of MLs charged with implementing SoR via a scripted curriculum is the tendency to devote more time to the development of decoding skills, with an emphasis on phonics, than time devoted to language comprehension skills. Research suggests that “English learners” (ELs) who are learning the language as they are learning to decode English, are just as likely as native English speakers to develop word recognition skills (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Geva & Yaghoub Zadeh, 2006; Lesaux et al., 2006; Lovett et al., 2008). In contrast, ELs are more likely to fall behind in reading comprehension beginning in second grade and continuing on

through the school years (Lesaux et al., 2006). Research by Cho et al. (2021) shows that while both ELs and non-ELs may struggle with word reading, ELs are more likely to face challenges with language comprehension. Thus, the most urgent instructional priority for ELs is building the linguistic comprehension skills necessary for long-

term reading success (Mancilla-Martínez & Lesaux, 2017).

OCDE Project GLAD® (Guided Language Acquisition Design) provides a bridge between the structured literacy framework of SoR and language-rich, culturally responsive instruction that especially benefits multilingual learners. With its emphasis on oral

academic language development (oracy), student engagement, and content-based literacy instruction, Project GLAD® aligns with SoR while expanding its relevance and accessibility. This article explores how GLAD® strategies support foundational reading skills, foster oracy, validate students’ cultural and linguistic identities, and promote academic achievement for multilingual learners.



Scarborough's Reading Rope illustrates skilled reading as the intertwining of word recognition and language comprehension skills.

Foundations of the Science of Reading (SoR)

The Science of Reading is built on evidence from cognitive science, linguistics, and educational psychology. It outlines how children learn to read, emphasizing the integration of decoding and language comprehension. Scarborough's Reading Rope is a frequently used model that illustrates skilled reading as the intertwining of word recognition (e.g., phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition) and language comprehension (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, syntax, discourse).

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While the SoR framework is robust, it has been critiqued by educators of multilingual students for its lack of attention to the linguistic assets and learning trajectories of emergent bilinguals. There is a need to adapt the SoR framework to incorporate an understanding of multilingual learners' home languages, cultural experiences, and oracy development as integral components of literacy instruction.

How Project GLAD® Aligns with SoR Principles

Phonological Awareness and Word Recognition

Project GLAD® strategies do not supplant but rather support the Word Recognition skills of SoR through structured, engaging, and repetitive language practice during content-area instruction. Chants and songs promote phonemic awareness by emphasizing sound patterns, rhythm, and prosody. Shared readings of Big Books and Input Charts, like the Pictorial Input Chart, can reinforce decoding strategies in context and allow for orthographic mapping—the mental process of connecting sounds, letters, and meaning to store words in long-term memory for automatic word recognition.

Language Comprehension

GLAD® strategies are designed to build background knowledge and academic vocabulary of content through multimodal instruction. Pictorial Input Charts and Narrative Input Charts use illustrated informational “texts” and narrative oral storytelling to introduce complex content in a comprehensible, engaging manner. Students rehearse, retell, reread, and discuss the content material using intentional academic language supports, reinforcing listening comprehension and expressive academic language. The Learning Log and Cooperative Strip Paragraph strategies are used to move the students from work with reading and oracy to academic genre writing, supporting the literacy knowledge skill of the Language Comprehension strand of Scarborough’s Rope.

The Sentence Patterning Chart provides visual and oral practice with parts of speech, syntax, and sentence structure with meaningful content. It also reinforces the connection between academic oral and written language. These activities support the development of vocabulary, syntax, and discourse—skills that are key elements of Language Comprehension strand of Scarborough’s

Reading Rope. The Process Grid and the Cooperative Strip Paragraph allow students to synthesize information, engage in academic discourse, and apply new vocabulary in context—all of which directly support the language comprehension strand of the Reading Rope.

Oracy as a Bridge Between Language and Literacy

Oracy—the ability to express oneself fluently in academic speech—is central to the development of literacy. While the SoR has traditionally focused on print-based skills, there is increasing recognition that oral language is the foundation of reading comprehension.

GLAD® strategies embed oracy through structured routines such as the 10/2 (intentional question prompts for peer-to-peer processing of content and language with sentence frames or stems), whole and small group prompted discussions and team tasks. These practices develop listening skills, oral fluency, academic vocabulary, and sentence construction. In doing so, they create a strong oral language base that supports reading and writing development for multilingual learners.

Student Engagement

Project GLAD® is inherently student-centered, offering frequent opportunities for movement, collaboration, and visual learning. Strategies like Picture File Cards, Observation Charts, and Chants make content accessible and engaging. Students interact with content language through peer discussions, chanting, dramatizing, and writing, appealing to multiple learning modalities. These active learning structures lower the affective filter and increase student motivation and ownership for multilingual learners. By connecting content to students’ lived experiences and encouraging peer interaction, GLAD® fosters a dynamic classroom environment where multilingual learners thrive.

Cultural and Linguistic Relevance

One of GLAD®’s greatest strengths is its affirmation of students’ cultural and linguistic identities. Because teacher-created curriculum is a tenant of the Project GLAD® model, educators of multilingual students can integrate students’ home languages, cultural identities, and lived

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experiences into the instruction. This approach aligns with research on culturally sustaining pedagogy, which suggests that students learn best when their cultural identities are reflected in the curriculum. By lifting up students' languages and cultural backgrounds, GLAD® not only enhances comprehension but also fosters validation and belonging—integral components of creating both student and community engagement in the literacy development process.

GLAD® and Teaching for Cross-linguistic Transfer

Although OCDE Project GLAD® was originally designed to support students learning English as a second language, in recent years GLAD® strategies have been used in DLBE classrooms as tools for “bridging” English and the partner language of the classroom. Cross-linguistic transfer plays a crucial role in literacy development for multilingual learners. Highly visual GLAD® strategies such as the Pictorial Input Chart, provide a perfect opportunity to create a “Bridge” (Urow and Beeman, 2012) from one language to the other to analyze the similarities and differences in both spelling (supporting the decoding skill of the Word Recognition strand of Scarborough’s Rope), and the morphemic structure of academic words and phrases (supporting the vocabulary skills of the Language Comprehension strand). By leveraging students’ existing knowledge in their native language, educators can accelerate English reading instruction and outcomes for multilingual learners.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

Project GLAD® and the Science of Reading are not mutually exclusive. In fact, when integrated thoughtfully, they create a powerful framework for advancing literacy among multilingual learners. While SoR provides the foundational blueprint for how reading develops, GLAD® brings that blueprint to life in linguistically rich, student-centered, and culturally sustaining classrooms.

Educators should utilize the knowledge that the Science of Reading has provided while honoring the language practices, identities, and strengths that multilingual learners bring to school. By strengthening the Science of Reading with GLAD® strategies, teachers can cultivate inclusive learning environments where all students have the tools and confidence to succeed in literacy and beyond.

Resources

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For more information about OCDE Project GLAD®, please visit <https://dlenm.org/ocde-project-glad/>.

