FOOTSTEPS2
BRILLIANCE®

EFFECTIVE LITERACY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS & EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Transforming Literacy for English Learners: Proven Strategies and Tools for Success

EFFECTIVE LITERACY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS & EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS

Almost one quarter of U.S. children speak a language other than English at home. When these students enter the school system, they face the challenge of learning a new language while building their skills and content knowledge. They are often met with a "one-size-fits-all" approach that ignores the asset of their potential bilingualism and biliteracy. As a result, English learners on average perform below grade level in every subject tested for federal accountability, are twice as likely to drop out as their native English-speaking peers, and are less likely to attend a four-year college.

Neuroscientists and educational researchers have developed significant insight over the last 20 years into second language literacy development. This research outlines effective approaches to literacy that are uniquely suited to the needs of English learners and emergent bilingual students. As schools embrace science-based approaches to literacy instruction, it is critical that they include the science addressing the needs of English learners.

What are effective literacy approaches for English Learners?

Learning to read and write in a second language is different from learning to read in one's first language. Students learn to listen, speak, read, and write in a second language on the bedrock of their first language. The elements of a new language (such as vocabulary, grammar, and phonology) are learned in relationship with and comparison to their first language. The degree to which this bedrock of language knowledge is leveraged spells a major difference between effective and ineffective literacy instruction. According to linguistic research, effective second language literacy instruction for English learners must include the following seven strategies:

1. Integrate meaning making, language development and foundational skills.
2. Strengthen background knowledge.
3. Develop oral language.
4. Emphasize writing.
5. Connect to what students know.
6. Establish an assets-based orientation.
7. Assess and differentiate.

FOOTSTEPS2BRILLIANCE FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS AND EMERGENT BILINGUAL STUDENTS (EL/EBS)

Footsteps2Brilliance supports teachers in meeting the unique needs of English learner and emergent bilingual students. With Footsteps2Brilliance, teachers can offer English learners a language-rich environment that supports their English speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Our unique approach enables students to "stop language in time", receive immediate feedback, listen to models and monitor their own language production, and engage in meaningful and relevant reading and writing activities.

For emergent bilingual students, Footsteps2Brilliance offers a comprehensive curriculum to support biliteracy in English and Spanish. Our English–Spanish toggle button and trans-adapted books and games provide crosslinguistic connections that allow for implicit instructional bridges and language transfer connections. The Footsteps2Brilliance curriculum aligns with the seven strategies for effective literacy instruction for English learners and emergent bilingual students. The following paper details the alignment.

Reading instruction is about more than the mechanics of decoding words. The central purpose for interacting with text is making meaning. English learners, in particular, suffer when teachers adopt an instructional approach that overemphasizes and isolates teaching sounds, letters, and words. This approach results in students who "sound" like they can read, but demonstrate limited understanding of the text. Effective literacy instruction for English learners integrates phonics into the context of making meaning and developing language skills.

1: Integrate meaning making, language development and foundational skills.

Footsteps2Brilliance provides a comprehensive bilingual English and Spanish literacy curriculum where students learn phonics and phonemic awareness in the context of reading and writing. Book units that focus on language development and meaning making also offer skill games where students study the words, letters and sounds in the book in order to master the mechanics of decoding. In addition to this rich natural language, students work through a systematic and explicit phonics sequence.

With Footsteps2Brilliance, phonics and phonemic awareness instruction is multisensory and multidimensional, with scaffolding to support comprehension and immediate application within the context of reading and writing. Target vocabulary is illustrated and audio-encoded. Students have unlimited opportunities to touch and interact with words, illustrations, and graphemes. They listen to connected text and record themselves reading words, phrases, and sentences in order to practice producing language. Lessons culminate in an opportunity for students to apply their newly-developed language and phonics skills as they respond to writing prompts. Writing activities offer optional sentence frames and word banks to support the language development level of each student.

Our approach also offers a bilingual English and Spanish curriculum that supports biliteracy where students learn to listen, speak, read and write in both languages.

Sample _**English**_ foundational skill activities infused with language development and meaning making:

Students learn English phonics skills using high utility Tier 2 words. Words and graphemes are illustrated and audio encoded.

Students work with words within connected text. Text is supported by audio and illustrations. Students record themselves reading connected text.

Students apply phonics skills through writing and illustrating, creating a digital portfolio.

Students listen to a model and practice recording themselves reading fluently with expression.

Sample _**Spanish**_ foundational skill activities infused with language development and meaning making:

Students learn Spanish phonics skills using highutility Tier 2 words. Words are illustrated. Illustrations and grapheme tiles are audio-encoded.

Students work with words within connected text. Text is supported by audio and illustrations.

Students apply phonics skills through writing and illustrating, creating a digital portfolio.

Students listen to a prompt about a book and record their answer to demonstrate meaning making.

Background knowledge describes a reader's understanding of the concepts and words in a text before reading. Research shows that the more a student knows about the topic of a text, the higher their comprehension. In fact, studies have demonstrated that background knowledge is a better predictor of reading comprehension than foundational reading skills. In order to support English learners' literacy development, it is critical that they activate and continue to develop background knowledge. English learners benefit significantly from the integration of language development—particularly academic language—with content knowledge.

2: Strengthen background knowledge.

Footsteps2Brilliance strengthens background knowledge with thousands of books and activities that are interactive and engaging, meaningful and relevant, and intellectually rich and challenging. Throughout the curriculum, students experience instruction and practice targeting background knowledge and Tier 2 vocabulary words in both English and Spanish. Footsteps2Brilliance designers referenced the work of Margaret G. McKeown and Isabel L Beck, in addition to reviewing the Fry and Education Development Laboratory's (EDL) word lists to ensure that targeted vocabulary in English and Spanish is both rigorous and high-utility.

Vocabulary exposure in Footsteps2Brilliance is not a passive experience. Children see and hear the word in the context of an engaging story. Interactive illustrations add a deeper level of word understanding. Footsteps2Brilliance naturally peaks students' interest and inspires repeated readings. Audio support helps all levels of readers to engage with the rich language of the books and games. Moreover, children can toggle between English and Spanish at any point in the book to enrich their understanding and develop their bilingual skills.

Each Footsteps2Brilliance book is part of a unit that includes activities to develop comprehension, vocabulary, and other foundational skills. Book units culminate in an opportunity for students to write.

Sample activities from the "Nellie the Newt" book unit (Students can toggle between English and Spanish at any time to experience a trans-adapted version of the activity)

Read the interactive eBook and explore illustrations (English & Spanish).

Answer text-dependent comprehension and vocabulary questions (English & Spanish).

Play vocabulary-based games to learn new contentspecific Tier 2 words (English & Spanish).

Explore and sort details from the text (English & Spanish).

After reading and playing the skills games, students are encouraged to apply and synthesize their understanding of text as they create their own story using the vocabulary, illustrations, and themes from the book. Create-a-Book and My Journal enable students and teachers to write, edit, print, and email books and expository texts using words and artwork from the books they read. All books are saved into a digital portfolio that students and teachers can easily showcase and review.

Below is an example of a Create-a-Book written by a second-grade English learner student after completing the activities in the book unit above:

Below is a Writing Sample from a 3rd grade bilingual student after working on the book unit for "Las máquinas simples." Note the level of language and concept knowledge.

Las Maquinas Simples

Escrito por Samuel
Thursday, July 22, 2021

Una polea se mira como una rueda y una cuerda. Se puede subir y bajar. Para que funcione, tienes que jalar la cuerda.

La palanca tiene un eje y una tabla. Se va ariba y abajo. Tienes que poner algo pesado y liviano. El objeto pesado sube el objeto liviano ariba.

El calzo se ve puntiagudo e inclinado. Hacen que cosas se rompan. Ejemplos del calzo son achas y cuchillos.

La rueda y el eje es una maquina simple que ayuda a mover cosas a larga distancias. La rueda es un disco redondo y el eje es un palo que va por el centro de la llanta.

El plano inclinado es una subida. Es como un nivel bajo o alto. Puedes subir cosas en una subida y bajar cosas en una bajada.

Un tornillo es un plano inclinado que esta torcido. El tonnillo algunas veces puede ser puntiagudo. Puede ayudar a sostener cosas juntas.

Las maquinas simples nos ayudan para jalar y empujar objetos mas dificiles para mover. Tambien nos ayudan a cortar y a sostener. Hacen el trabajo facil.

The End!

Oral language is often called the "bedrock" of reading and writing. Students must be able to understand language at an oral level in order to understand it at a text level. For English learners, oral language learning accelerates literacy acquisition, particularly when English learners develop oral language that is connected to and aligned with their reading and writing program.

3: Develop oral language (oracy).

Footsteps2Brilliance develops listening skills by creating a language rich environment where students direct their learning. Footsteps2Brilliance offers a unique opportunity for students to "stop language in time" by allowing them to click any element on the screen to hear it read aloud or labeled orally. For language learners, this becomes a powerful tool for exploring language in a safe environment where they can be guided by their own interests and they can repeat words, sounds, and music without limit. Students can even record themselves reading text or answering questions and then listen to their own recording.

Footsteps2Brilliance develops students' speaking skills through active engagement and gradual release. Because oral language is so critical to literacy development, Footsteps2Brilliance has created powerful features in the apps that encourage students to speak. As students read books, they are guided through a routine of repeated readings. On the first reading, they listen to the model. Next, they touch each word and read chorally with the narrator. Finally, they record themselves reading and listen to the recording. Students naturally build fluency through this routine that fostered gradual independence and emphasizes oracy.
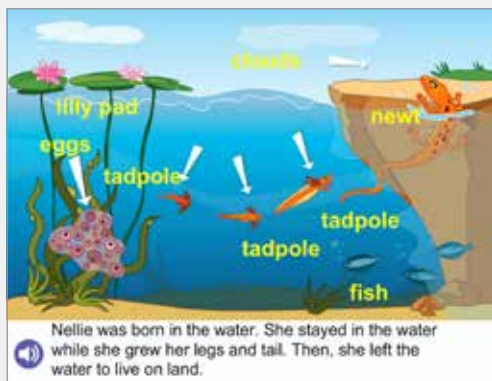
Interactive text and illustrations enable students to actively explore language as they toggle between English and Spanish.
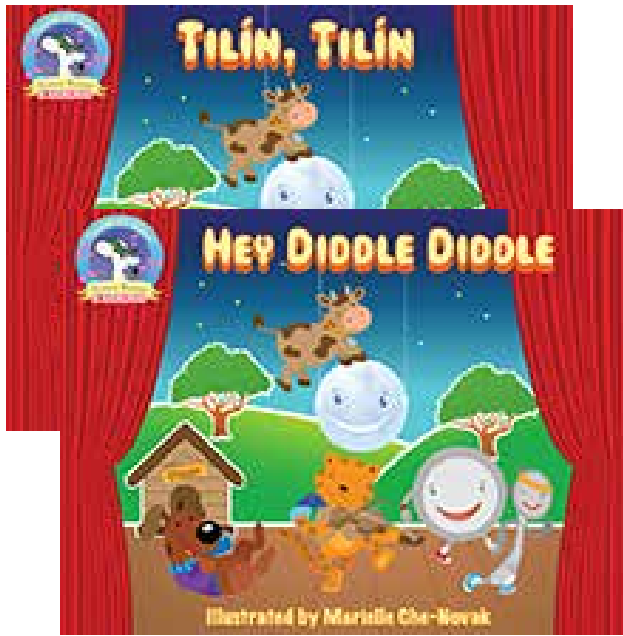
Music and nursery rhymes are another important strategy Footsteps2Brilliance offers to develop oral fluency. Nursery rhymes and chants can be a gateway toward learning language. Rhythm, music, repetition, and language play create a foundation for students to sing along and develop their oral vocabulary and fluency. With Footsteps2Brilliance, English or Spanish language learners are often willing to take risks with the language and engage orally where they may be silent in a classroom environment. Teachers often report that students engage verbally while using the program—repeating words and phrases as well as singing along with the songs.

Footsteps2Brilliance also encourages active dialogue. Talk Time activities direct students to record themselves answering questions related to a book they have read and then listen to their recording. These activities give language learners a unique opportunity to generate novel verbal responses and monitor their verbal abilities.

In order to support classroom dialog, **Lesson Plans**, Family Fridays, and Together Time activities include prompts with meaningful questions that give students opportunities to talk about what they have read and what they are learning. For more advanced learners, the Aesop's Fables books and lesson plans include opportunities for students to strengthen their vocabulary knowledge through activities that focus on words with multiple meanings, analogies, and shades of meaning as well as idiomatic expressions. Such activities are particularly valuable for language learners who may not have been exposed to this kind of figurative language.

Finally, a Printable Materials, Game Card Maker and Recipes for Success activity library in Footsteps2Brilliance enable teachers to create language-rich activities for their classroom in English and in Spanish.

4. Emphasize writing.

Footsteps2Brilliance emphasizes both reading and writing. Writing enables students to apply their understanding of language and phonics while they demonstrate deeper, analytical thinking and learning in every content area.

To encourage student writing, Footsteps2Brilliance has created a unique digital writing tool called Create-a-Book. Create-a-Book is both a word processor and graphic design tool that encourages students to write and illustrate variations of the books they read to demonstrate their comprehension, use of language, grammar, and creativity. They can also create books on any topic. Create a Book supports students in both English and Spanish.

All students, including English learners, need writing to help them learn about reading, and they need reading to help them learn about writing. Writing can and should be taught to English learners even before they have developed high levels of English proficiency. Writing instruction for English learners should focus on communication of meaning within a rich and challenging curriculum. Teaching English learners to be successful writers depends on quality instruction with appropriate scaffolding and a classroom climate that creates a community of authors.

All books are published into a digital portfolio that students and teachers can easily showcase and review. Teachers also can use Create-a-Book to model writing strategies, create collaborative books and reports, or even to author their own books. The student-authored books provide authentic assessments and showcase each student's deep thinking and command of language.

In order to support the unique needs of English learners, Footsteps2Brilliance offers teachers a wealth of resources designed to scaffold writing instructions. These writing lesson scaffolds include:
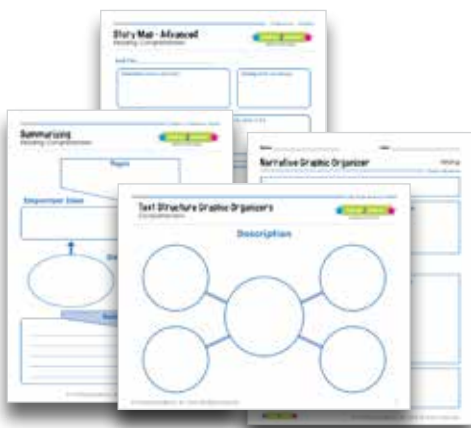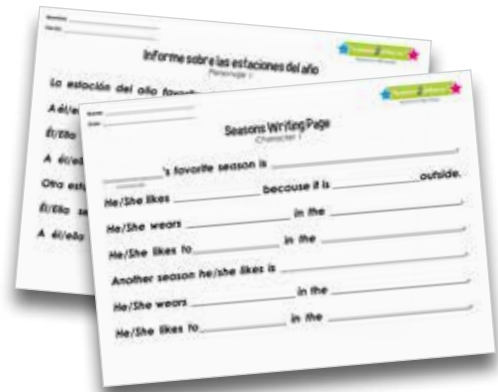
Printable Word Cards

English and Spanish word cards accompany many of the books, with activity recommendations to support fun practice of thematic vocabulary.

Printable Activity Sheets in English and Spanish

Teachers can easily model language structures and enable English learners to write above their proficiency level.

Printable Graphic Organizers and Thinking Maps in English and Spanish help students to organize their thinking, gather the language they need, and prepare for writing.

Finally, Footsteps2Brilliance recognizes that having an audience and purpose is both motivational and necessary for writing. We encourage teachers to create a community of writers where work is regularly shared and celebrated. Footsteps2Brilliance enables teachers to easily print class books and student writing to put in a class library. In addition, Footsteps2Brilliance periodically sponsors communitywide and nationwide writing challenges. Students can submit their work for recognition from Sherlock Mouse.

Literacy instruction for EL/EB students should recognize and build on what students already know. Biliteracy research finds that bilinguals who recognize, understand and can articulate the differences and similarities between their languages reach higher levels of academic achievement and higher levels of language development in both languages.

5: Connect with what students know.

Through a fully bilingual and trans-adapted curriculum, Footsteps2Brilliance enables Spanishspeaking EL/EBs to leverage their home language in order to create a bridge to English learning, Footsteps2Brilliance offers an unprecedented level of English and Spanish language and literacy development to support dual language and emergent bilingual students. A unique toggle switch in Footsteps2Brilliance allows students to switch between English and Spanish at the touch of a button to experience a rans-adapted version of the same material in the other language.

Moreover, Footsteps2Brilliance enables language transfer with books and games that highlight the similarities and differences between languages. For example, students can toggle between English and Spanish while learning letter sounds to see the how some letters have a consistent pronunciation between languages, while others do not. We emphasize the similarities and differences by using cognates or consistent vocabulary.

In this example, students leverage a cognate (guitar/guitarra) to learn the common pronunciation of the Gg sound in English and Spanish.

Here, students learn how the letter Jj is consistently the first letter in the word for juice (jugo), but the letter pronunciation is different and the words are different between languages

For skill games, students can toggle between languages to find research-based strategies to support each language's literacy development. For example, whether a child is learning to read English or Spanish, the ability to hear the sounds of the spoken language (phonemic awareness) is crucial. In English, beginning phonemic awareness games present children with interactive phoneme tiles to build simple consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words. By comparison, in Spanish, the natural gateway to hearing sounds in language is open syllables (e.g., ma, me, me, mo, mu). When a child toggles to Spanish in Footsteps2Brilliance, they build Spanish words using interactive syllable tiles. The Spanish version of this game also follows a research-based sequence to support children toward decoding multi-syllabic words much more quickly than they will in English.

English
wig
c-v-c

Spanish
mano *(hand)*
two open syllables

English learners excel in environments that recognize their culture and first language as assets—rather than focusing on their English deficit. Assetsoriented school climates and the use of culturally inclusive and relevant curriculum result in stronger academic outcomes, literacy engagement, and skills.

Footsteps2Brilliance honors and celebrates cultural diversity. The program includes a rich library of both fictional and informational text that provides the children with a broad range of characters representing different cultures and backgrounds. In honor of diversity, Footsteps2Brilliance includes a series of books that present the traditions and history of 26 holidays from around the world. Children read about each holiday and then mark that holiday on an interactive calendar.

Spanish culture with authentic Spanish songs, chants, and texts. Each book is trans-adapted from the original Spanish to English in order to support implicit bridging and language connections. Moreover, by maintaining the musicality and rhythm, students are provided with a powerful opportunity to develop oral fluency as they sing and read along to these books in both English and Spanish.

Because second language literacy is built on the bedrock of first language skills and understanding, it is important to assess and monitor each English learners needs and progress. Many literacy skills can be transferred between languages, allowing students to accelerate through some skill development while they focus on content and language development. An effective strategy for ongoing formative assessment is critical to accelerate literacy development.

7: Assess and differentiate

Footsteps2Brilliance automatically provides real-time insight into each student's development as a reader. Moreover, detailed reporting enables teachers to evaluate development in English or in Spanish. As students read, play, and write on the programs, their performance and proficiency are automatically monitored. There is no need for teachers to interrupt important instructional time with frequent assessments. Using sophisticated scoring algorithms that evaluate a student's performance within the context of millions of scores nationwide, we are able to present teachers with the insight they need to easily differentiate learning, target interventions, and monitor progress.

With Footsteps2Brilliance, teachers and administrators have ongoing real-time data analytics to monitor academic achievement, classroom and home use, and family engagement.

Identify which students need help.

The Class Dashboard provides quick insight on which students need help in foundational skills, including Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Language Development, Comprehension, and Logic & Reasoning.
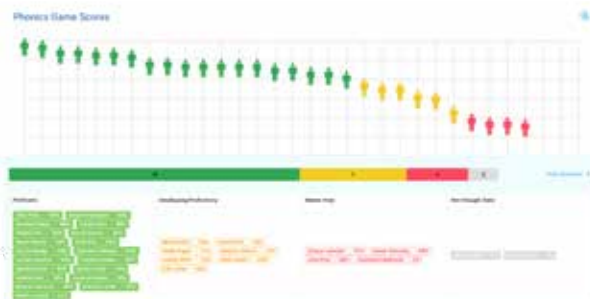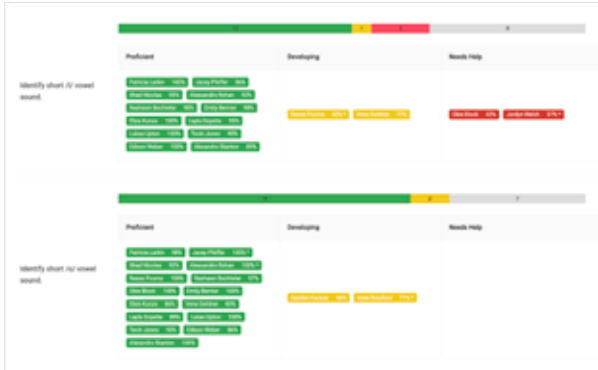
Track progress through the systematic decoding sequence.

Teachers can quickly identify which students need support making progress through the systematic phonics sequence.

Create flexible groups.

Class Dashboards enable teachers to identify which students have shared areas of difficulty in order to create small groups for targeted instruction.

Monitor learning growth.

Teachers can monitor student and class growth in the foundational skills of Phonics, Phonological Awareness, Language Development, Comprehension, and Logic & Reasoning.
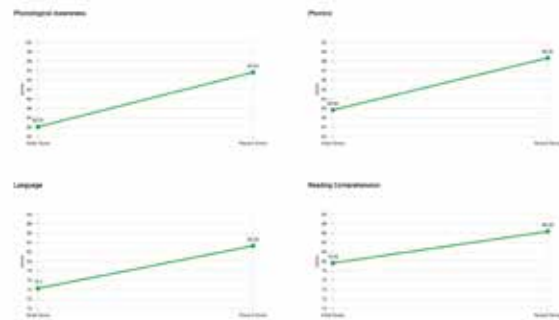
Identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

For each student, teachers can access a comprehensive view of performance on skills in order to create a personalized learning plan that addresses the student's unique strengths and weaknesses.

Access a portfolio of authentic student writing.

As students create books and writing in the system, teachers automatically collect a digital portfolio of authentic writing as evidence of student progress.

Monitor assignments, daily activity and performance.

Teachers can easily provide assignment links to students and track assignment completion. Daily activity is also presented in a log that allows teachers to analyze where students are spending time and how that is impacting their overall performance.

Monitor daily engagement.

Teachers can easily monitor where and when students are using the program.

ABOUT FOOTSTEPS2BRILLIANCE

Footsteps2Brilliance is the leading provider of effective next-generation digital tools, bilingual content, and learning experiences that connect school and home, and enhance, not replace, excellent teaching. Since 2012 we've committed our research and resources to closing the reading achievement gap for all students from birth through elementary school using a collaborative impact approach. In partnership with educators, families, and communities we are unlocking brilliance and empowering students to realize their full potential.

Learn more at www.Footsteps2Brilliance.com.

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