

# CHAPTER

# 1

## **EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN A GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING**

### **A SNAPSHOT OF THE CLASSROOM**

Ms. Larson calls her students to the front carpet by table and passes out this week's class storybook. Maria and Diego await their turn to reach the carpet, both already clutching their copies of this week's story. "Okay, class," announces Ms. Larson. "Today is Monday, so I hope you're ready to go on a quick picture-walk through our story for this week. Take five minutes to walk through your book and see what it's going to be about. I think you're going to love this one. Remember to mark your favorite pages with a yellow sticky note so you can share them and your predictions with the rest of the class."

Maria and Diego both look eager to start sharing. They have marked their books already with several sticky notes. Ms. Larson gave them copies of the book last Friday so they could read it with a family member at home over the weekend. They have several stories to share with their friends about the connections they made with the story and the new words they learned. "Okay, class, who wants to tell us what they think the story is going to be about?" Much to Ms. Larson's

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surprise, both Maria and Diego, two of her quietest students, shoot their hands straight up in the air, hoping to be the first students to share. This is a big change, given that both of these students began learning English only last year, when they started first grade in September.

Ms. Larson is a second-grade teacher at Conrad Elementary School. New to Conrad this year, Ms. Larson brings a raw passion for working with children and a desire to continue her growth as a teacher. She is driven to seek new ideas, strategies, and ways of creating a safe learning environment, exciting classroom space, and challenging lessons. Her students see her as a supportive adult who believes in their ability, holds high expectations, and includes them as part of the teaching and learning process.

### ABOUT CONRAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*The School Today.* Conrad Elementary School is part of a very large urban school district on the West Coast, with an enrollment of approximately 850 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The student population at Conrad is fairly representative of its surrounding neighborhood—primarily Latino (80 percent) and African American (20 percent) students. The majority of Latino families living in the area are immigrant families, with a large number from Mexico and the remainder from Central and South America. These families generally have a strong connection to their home countries. Most of Conrad’s students are first- or second-generation Latino American and often the first English-speaking members of their family. Many parents work multiple jobs, live paycheck to paycheck, and often experience financial distress.

*A Challenging Past.* Not too long ago, the neighborhood around Conrad School experienced a high crime rate, where shootings, drive-bys, drug trafficking, and school lock-downs were fairly regular occurrences both on and close to the school’s campus. This level of crime and violence led parents to keep their children home from school to ensure their supervision and safety. Chronic absenteeism and tardiness became the norm. Amid this constant unrest within the community, Conrad School, a local church, and other smaller agencies often served as safe havens for families wanting a safer environment for their children.

During this time the teaching staff at Conrad Elementary was primarily concerned with meeting students’ basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, and a safe home and school environment. Teachers felt unable to focus on academics when students reported being hungry and tired as a result of not

having slept the night before or coming to school filthy or in ill-fitting clothes. Lack of resources and professional development in meeting the needs of a diverse student population—including providing intense English language development—hampered teachers’ efforts to help their students achieve anything close to grade-level expectations. Few teachers implemented instructional intervention for struggling learners, and only a handful of students qualified for or attended after-school support programs. Families, many of whom spoke very little English, were unsure of their role in supporting their children’s education. Many felt unwelcome at the school or unable to provide direct home support given their lack of understanding of teachers’ expectations and their own family and work schedules.

*A Time for Change.* Conrad Elementary experienced a major turning point almost five years ago. Tired of its reputation of fostering poor student achievement, supporting minimum standards, and creating an unreceptive environment for parents, the school staff began focusing on high expectations, instructional support, and an inclusive atmosphere for families. Administrators, staff, parents, and students at Conrad have made great strides in beautifying the school and community by cleaning graffiti, painting murals, and planting trees. These efforts have made the campus a more welcoming and optimal environment for student learning. An outreach counselor and a social worker have joined Conrad’s staff to assist with more challenging issues.

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A team of school staff and parent volunteers address issues related to chronic absenteeism and students’ physical and mental health issues. They meet with families on site, host weekly coffee gatherings, accompany parents and guardians to appointments in the community as necessary, and conduct home visits. The team initiated a Saturday Food Bank to help struggling families obtain necessary food items for their children. Through this ongoing local effort, the school provides parents with information on obtaining clothes, employment, and medical services within the community.

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A recently formed parent-teacher association (PTA) creates opportunities for parents to actively participate in social networking and training events. Other similar organizations allow parents to voice their concerns about school decisions and provide input on the effectiveness and implementation of various support and instructional programs. The PTA developed a Conrad Family Resource Manual so that teachers could tap into family members' expertise and assistance for particular lessons, instructional units, field trips, and other authentic experiences. Thus far, parents at Conrad have assisted teachers in creating flower and vegetable gardens for the science curriculum, modeled cooking of favorite recipes to reinforce math concepts, shared personal stories and expertise for thematic units on immigration, family heritage, farm life, and Mexican and Native American culture.

In the last two years, Conrad School has developed and piloted a building assistance team (BAT) to improve general instructional practices for all students. The reading coach, principal, school psychologist, and special education teacher at Conrad are members of BAT. Team members observe teachers' general classroom instruction at least once per quarter to insure implementation of effective teaching practices. These visits are meant to be supportive rather than evaluative observations, to provide teachers with concrete, constructive recommendations for improving instruction for all students. After classroom visits, BAT members meet with teachers individually to discuss strengths and areas of need where further support might be required. The members of the building assistance team meet monthly to discuss general issues observed during classroom visits and teacher meetings. The team also reviews ongoing concerns reported during student study team (SST) meetings that month, where teachers discuss individual student concerns and develop action plans to address those concerns. Conrad is committed to improving instruction for all students by supporting teachers through additional professional development, coaching, and individualized support.

### ***General Education Reading Instruction (Tier 1)***

Although students continue to perform below grade-level expectations across academic areas, the school has made strides recently to improve the level of instruction, intervention, and support for the purpose of improving student achievement. Conrad has hired a full-time reading coach to support teachers' implementation of the district's reading program, benchmark assessments, and direct intervention services. The reading coach models intervention instruction for teachers in their classrooms, provides ongoing professional development, and assists in overall classroom intervention implementation.

The school principal recently allotted weekly time for grade-level meetings on Thursday afternoons, when students receive specialized instruction (in physical education or technology, for instance). During grade-level meetings, teachers discuss their students' needs and review benchmark data or progress monitoring data to improve general Tier 1 reading instruction. Minimum instructional days on Tuesday afternoons were added to allow teachers time for additional professional development in areas of need like English language development and enhancing reading comprehension.

***Ms. Larson and Room 34***

*Meeting Ms. Larson.* This chapter highlights the instruction of an extremely bright and enthusiastic second-grade general education teacher at Conrad Elementary, Ms. Larson. Originally from the Midwest, Ms. Larson lives in an apartment in the heart of the city fairly close to the school. Like many of her colleagues, Ms. Larson is a fairly new teacher to Conrad. Although it is her first year at Conrad, Ms. Larson worked as a primary grade teacher the previous year after completing her credentialing program. Coming to the West Coast meant learning new standards and curricula, but most of all learning how best to meet the needs of a more culturally and linguistically diverse student population.

Ms. Larson had some preparation through her university teaching program, but very little experience actually working with such diversity, including a large number of second-language learners. As she began preparing for the new school year, Ms. Larson asked herself and her new colleagues some tough questions:

How can I make sure my English language learners finish second grade with the skills they need to read and begin comprehending content in a language they are only beginning to acquire?

How can I provide literacy experiences for my students that will tap into their existing knowledge and resonate with their personal experiences?

How will I connect with students' families and encourage their participation in the classroom?

*Continuing Her Professional Development.* Although Ms. Larson had completed her teaching credential program, she was required to take additional coursework as an out-of-state teacher. She found it valuable to build on the basic foundation of her previous teaching credential preparation. Her parents, both of them elementary school teachers, continue to attend workshops and trainings to fine-tune their teaching. They find that even with thirty years of experience in

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the classroom between them, there is a great deal they can still learn to improve their teaching. As Ms. Larson's father repeatedly says, "learning to be a good teacher is a lifelong process." Ms. Larson is determined to follow in her parents' footsteps and learn how to become a better teacher for her students.

*Ms. Larson's Classroom.* Room 34 is located in a new building that was constructed during the summer. The first- and second-grade classrooms have brand-new desks, whiteboards, televisions, VCRs, and computer stations. The new building is a breath of fresh air for staff and a place of safety and learning for students.

During the previous summer, Ms. Larson attended a summer training held at the local university and sponsored by her school district to support primary grade teachers' reading instruction. The training covered the necessary components of early reading instruction for diverse learners and conducting ongoing assessments and instructional intervention with struggling beginning readers. The university professional development team provided numerous examples and active discussions on how teachers could set up their classroom for reading instruction and intervention support. For example, the team facilitated small working groups where teachers were encouraged to design an optimal classroom space that encouraged student collaboration, access to different forms of literacy, and promoted self-directed learning and exploration. It was obvious from the start that Ms. Larson wanted to put these ideas to work right away. Room 34 is a complete reproduction and extension of Ms. Larson's summer training!

The room includes amazing examples of center and class activities to support reading: students' work samples and print cover the walls. In one corner of the room sits a small writing table, fit with what looks like a tablecloth from home. The table includes a colorful lava lamp on one corner, a jar of freshly sharpened pencils, and a basket of paper. It serves as room 34's writing center. Large inviting pillows and bean bags in one corner of the room welcome students to read in pairs or on their own throughout the day. Another corner has a bookshelf stocked with library and classroom books, decodable texts, and audiotaped books for students to borrow and read. Ms. Larson makes sure to offer books of various levels of difficulty, so that students have the opportunity to read text at their independent and instructional level. She also takes time during classroom meetings held once a week to ask students for additional recommendations for books in the classroom's library.

Under the window on the opposite side of the room sits a long bookcase fit with numerous cubby shelves. There, Ms. Larson keeps a variety of activity tubs for students to pull out and take to their desks, sit on the carpet, or take with

them to an activity table. Room 34 offers students a very flexible learning environment. Ms. Larson designs activities to reinforce her instruction during the week, provide practice for students in skills that need ongoing review throughout the year, and encourage students to extend their learning through more meaningful and authentic tasks.

### ***Ms. Larson's Reading Instruction***

Conrad Elementary requires its primary teachers to provide at least ninety minutes of reading instruction per day. Ms. Larson already is accustomed to this time block and has added an additional forty-five minutes of intervention instruction in reading. Ms. Larson likes to take advantage of this time to work individually or with small groups of students working below or above grade-level standards. Her general instruction consists of the district's adopted reading program, thematic units, benchmark and progress monitoring assessments, guided reading, and instructional intervention.

In her previous teacher preparation program, Ms. Larson learned to design her teaching plans by keeping students' individual needs in mind and also making the content accessible to all learners. The mindful and meaningful (M&M) lesson plans she designed will be put to good use at Conrad Elementary, especially for her students who are predominately English language learners.

*Mindful* lesson plans take into account the following elements:

1. Students' English language proficiency levels in all four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing
2. State English language development standards
3. Students' primary language proficiency levels
4. Instructional objectives according to grade-level standards
5. Essential reading skills: phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension

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*Meaningful* lesson plans require Ms. Larson to

1. Scaffold instruction using visuals, realia, and the like
2. Activate students' prior knowledge
3. Increase students' motivation to learn (and decrease anxiety)
4. Provide instruction within students' range of learning (zone of proximal development)

Ms. Larson conducts benchmark reading assessments three times a year to determine whether or not her instruction is assisting students to meet grade-level expectations in skills such as reading fluency and comprehension. After her initial screening, Ms. Larson determines which students need additional support through in-class reading intervention and progress monitoring. The key to Ms. Larson's reading instruction is to provide students with multiple opportunities to learn throughout the day and in diverse and accessible ways.

*Screening for Reading Problems and Monitoring Progress.* During her summer training at the university, session leaders encouraged primary grade teachers to conduct weekly ongoing progress monitoring of their struggling readers. Weekly monitoring allows Ms. Larson to make necessary targeted changes to her instruction for the entire class and particularly for those students experiencing difficulty with reading. Ms. Larson saw an opportunity to use progress monitoring as a way to involve and motivate students by posting their "gains" on the classroom's bulletin board. The display shows a large mountaintop, and each student is represented by a billy goat attempting to "Climb the Fluency Mountain." Ms. Larson moves each billy goat according to students' gains each week, specifically the number of words they are able to gain in reading fluency. To keep up with ongoing assessments, Ms. Larson trains her instructional assistant and a few classroom parents to administer individual reading fluency probes and update the classroom bulletin board. Ms. Larson makes certain to test the students who

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have been identified as needing additional support while her assistant and volunteers test the rest of the students in the class. Ms. Larson uses this information to gauge her own instruction. After assessing her students she often asks herself: What else can I do to help my students make progress? How might I change up tomorrow's lesson to make it more accessible? How can I provide my students with immediate support to meet their individual learning needs?

## STOPANDTHINK

Monitoring students' progress is an essential component of Tier 1 instruction for all learners. Allowing students to monitor their progress can positively motivate them to improve their reading. What strategies might you implement to encourage students to monitor their own progress?

*Providing Small-Group Reading Intervention.* Students in room 34 begin their day in small-group instruction. Ms. Larson loses no time once students walk in the door and transition to their desks and centers to prepare for small reading groups. During this time students participate in individual or small-group instruction with the teacher, in addition to paired or small-group literacy-related activities. Ms. Larson uses this time to warm up her students early when they are fresh, to prepare them for later whole-group reading instruction.

Ms. Larson determines her instructional groups in advance based on students' benchmark and progress monitoring data and ongoing participation during whole- and small-group reading instruction, cooperative group, and independent activities. With her English language learners, Ms. Larson takes into account students' level of English language development and experience with literacy in both the primary and second languages. For all her students, she considers their parents' input about their children's individual needs.

During intervention instruction, Ms. Larson works with students on word and passage fluency tasks, including identifying word families, making and reading sentences with flashcards, repeated reading, and strategy instruction to facilitate reading comprehension. Ms. Larson wears a special hat with a stop sign pasted on the front during small-group instruction to signal the rest of the students that no one should interrupt her unless absolutely necessary. This instruction is strictly

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a time to focus on basic skills and supplements an existing reading and writing program embedded in authentic and meaningful activities.

*Designing Peer-Assisted Learning Opportunities.* When students are not working directly with Ms. Larson, they work actively at various centers around the room engaging in meaningful reading practices. Students spend approximately twenty minutes in each activity center before moving on to another activity. Often centers require students to work together in pairs or small groups on the same activity. Walking around the room, you see lots of activities that provide students with multiple opportunities for practice in essential reading and writing skills, including letter writing, computer use, listening to stories using books on audiotape, independent reading, and reviewing high-frequency words on the classroom's word wall. Ms. Larson changes or modifies centers as needed to match the thematic unit they are working on and to keep her students motivated. She wants to ensure that each activity appropriately reflects students' instructional levels, needs, and interests.

*Developing Meaningful Center Activities.* Initially Ms. Larson and her grade-level colleagues had a difficult time developing meaningful activities during small-group instruction, frequently opting for basic seat work including cutting and pasting tasks, puzzles, copying from the board, coloring, or tracing activities, just to keep the kids busy. The teachers decided to use their grade-level planning time to discuss students' needs and develop more rigorous and targeted activities that could support their students' reading, writing, and language development. Ms. Larson's center activities range in difficulty and authenticity. These activities definitely offer something for everyone.

One meaningful center in room 34 is a friendly letter writing center, where students write a letter to a soldier stationed overseas. When introducing this center, Ms. Larson shared her own sample of a friendly letter and reviewed the directions written on an easel at the table. At another center, Ms. Larson keeps word tiles in different colors for the various parts of speech (blue for nouns, red for verbs, and so forth) for students to make their own sentences. Students can write the sentences they make in a journal while color-coding the nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Another center requires students to read a book and complete a book review about the stories they read, so that other students can refer to the reviews. A specific word fluency center includes an activity called Up Against the Wall (see Exhibit 1.1). The goal of this activity is to help students quickly recognize high-frequency words, thereby increasing their overall passage fluency. Each center requires students to work actively in pairs or small groups in self-directed activities, allowing them to practice reading, writing, language, and comprehension skills.

## EXHIBIT 1.1. UP AGAINST THE WALL

Goal: Students read and recognize high-frequency words with mastery and fluency

### MATERIALS

- High-frequency words posted on the wall
- Sticky notes with students' names on them
- Timer
- Pointer

*[Use the following dialogue to teach the activity initially.]*

### MODEL

Say the following:

*"I'm going to set the timer for one minute. After I say "Begin," I will start reading the list of words as carefully and quickly as I can. After one minute, I will place a sticky note next to the last word I read."*

### NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Say the following:

*"After I say "Begin," you will start reading the list of words as carefully and quickly as you can. After one minute, you can place a sticky note next to the last word you read."*

### EXTRA SUPPORT

If a child has difficulty reading the words, read the list together and then ask the child to read the list alone.

Source: adapted from Haager, Dimino, & Windmueller, 2007.

*Training Independent Learners and Student Leaders.* During grade-level meetings, the second-grade teachers discuss the process of training students how to complete activities and develop written directions for each task. Like her colleagues, Ms. Larson takes the time to introduce and demonstrate new

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center activities and provides instructions at centers to help students if they have questions. In room 34, Ms. Larson takes this process slightly further by training her students to serve as activity leaders. Like Ms. Larson, center leaders wear special hats to signal who is in charge. She expects student leaders to watch over their peers, answer questions about activities, maintain organization, and help students remember to use their “inside voices” during small-group time. Training her students to become independent learners serves as a lifesaving strategy for Ms. Larson, who needs to spend intense and uninterrupted instructional time with her students at least four times a week. She reminds students of the guidelines for small-group instruction every morning.

Ms. Larson: If you have a question during group time, where should you look first?

Students: At the center.

Ms. Larson: Who else can help you?

Students: The activity leader.

At the end of small-group instruction, Ms. Larson faithfully checks in with activity leaders about their work, future recommendations, and their ability to keep the volume down. By the end of the term, every student in the class has had an opportunity to lead a center activity and thus share in the responsibility of contributing to the classroom community. Teaching and learning is most certainly a shared responsibility in room 34.

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*Teaching and learning is most certainly a shared responsibility in room 34.*

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### STOPANDTHINK

Learning centers are an ideal method for teachers to reinforce necessary skills and build in small-group instructional time with struggling or advanced students. How can teachers help train students to work with their peers and become independent learners?

*Integrating Exceptional Teaching Practices.* This year Ms. Larson received professional development training as a new teacher in Conrad's reading program. The reading program appropriately and strategically outlines how teachers should teach the key areas of beginning reading, including phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. However, what makes Ms. Larson's teaching exceptional is not necessarily her school's chosen reading program. What makes her an exceptional reading teacher is the manner in which she makes otherwise dry, scripted lessons her own by infusing essential strategies of effective teaching.

Ms. Larson recognizes the need to model, give examples, highlight overt relationships among concepts, emphasize the distinctive features of concepts, provide cues and prompts to use strategies and skills, offer ongoing feedback, and monitor students' understanding, all within a warm and supportive environment for student learning. When she notices her students' puzzled faces, Ms. Larson knows it is time to modify a task and give that extra instruction or practice for individual students when they experience difficulty. Instead of anchoring herself to her desk or to the front of the classroom, Ms. Larson floats about the room checking in on students and keeping them all actively on task.

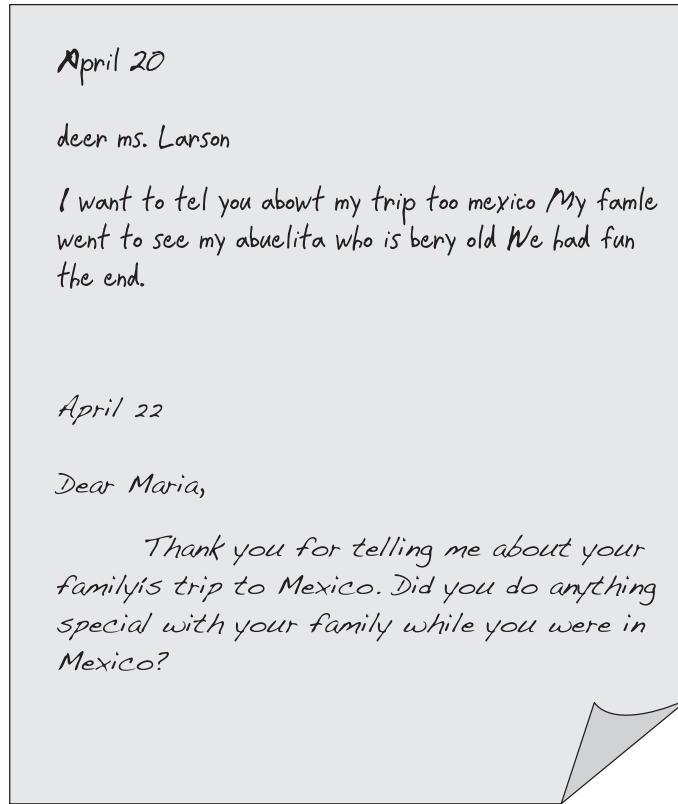
Room 34 buzzes with an intense eagerness to participate and learn. Ms. Larson encourages students to speak often and contribute their ideas. Even when students struggle to find something to say or they make mistakes, Ms. Larson validates their ideas, incorporates them into examples, and helps steer students in the right direction. Ms. Larson's constant scaffolding and encouragement promotes high expectations and confidence in her students. She often tells her class that learning to become a better reader means you have to take risks and practice. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 show examples of several of these effective teaching strategies at work in a brief interactive journal activity between Ms. Larson and one of her students.

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FIGURE 1.1 Sample Student Letter

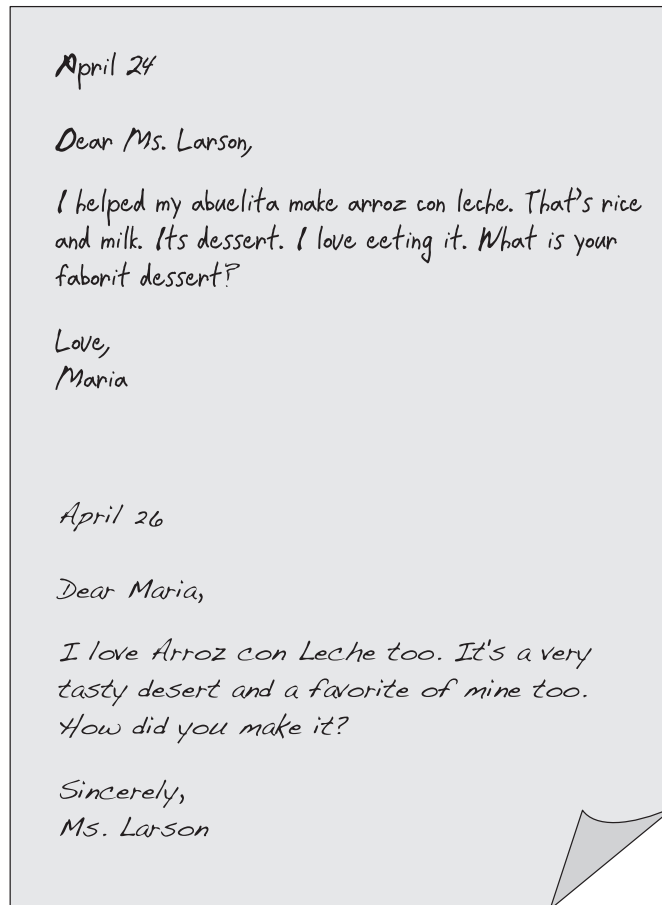


*Providing Extensive Vocabulary Instruction.* Another example of Ms. Larson's teaching approach involves making connections with concepts previously reviewed, even when they are not covered in a particular lesson. She often finds the need to make connections when reinforcing vocabulary and language development, especially for her English language learners. Ms. Larson reviews

## STOPANDTHINK

Ms. Larson uses interactive journals to develop and model various skills. What exactly do you think Ms. Larson is trying to model in Figures 1.1 and 1.2? How do you think this method might assist English language learners?

FIGURE 1.2 Sample Student Letter, Continued



vocabulary throughout all her lessons, even when certain words are not highlighted in her teacher's manual. In the following example, Ms. Larson does just this while explaining the meaning of the words *camouflage*, *prowling*, and *hunting*.

Ms. Larson: Some animals hide in plain sight, but they're hard to see because they have camouflage that helps them blend into their surroundings. Look at the animals in the picture. If you were outside, these animals would be hard to see because they blend into the background.

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Student: Yeah, sometimes my cat, Cleo, sleeps on the couch in our living room. One time my mom sat on him because she said she couldn't see him since they're both orange.

Ms. Larson: Wow, yes, that's a great example! Cleo's orange fur made him hard to see on the couch even if he wasn't trying to hide. Many times animals try to blend in and hide on purpose by using their camouflage while prowling around for food.

Student: What does prowling mean?

Ms. Larson: Well, many animals can be found prowling around at night looking for food.

Student: They're hungry.

Ms. Larson: Well, if I'm a cat I might be prowling around the neighborhood because I'm hungry. *[Ms. Larson pretends to be a cat to demonstrate the example. Students begin shouting out their responses.]*

Students: You're sneaking around! You're trying not to get caught!

Ms. Larson: You're right! I might be prowling around looking for food trying hard not to get caught. I'm doing this because I'm hunting for my next meal. What does it mean to hunt?

Student: Animals need to eat. Some animals have to eat other animals for food.

Student: My cat loves to chase mice in the backyard.

Ms. Larson: So hunting is when animals look for and catch something, usually other animals, for food. Like cats trying to hunt for mice. Hunting is also used to describe when we want to find something we've lost or cannot see easily. Like when your mom loses her car keys and needs to "hunt" them down. She needs to search very hard to find her keys.

Ms. Larson allows her students to dialogue about the words they encounter in text and through discussions. She writes students' generated definitions on the board, uses pictures and manipulatives whenever possible, and builds on and incorporates students' ideas and examples in conversations. These conversations occur throughout the day, not just at the beginning of a special science or social

studies unit or the first day of a new story they are reading. Talking about words and language is ongoing.

*Promoting Instructional Conversations.* Once students get settled, Ms. Larson immediately gestures to each table to sit on the carpet as a student passes out sets of literature books to every student. These books focus on a particular theme each week, which she reinforces in other activities and instruction during the day. Ms. Larson models appropriate reading and think-aloud skills, stopping often to clarify elements of the story and unfamiliar vocabulary words or phrases. She invites individuals, pairs, and whole groups of students to read portions of the text. Ms. Larson makes certain to seat her struggling readers next to more fluent reading buddies. All students have bookmarkers in hand to assist with tracking and sticky notes to mark their favorite pages for later discussions.

Although Ms. Larson often guides these discussions, she encourages students to lead these conversations and actively talk about the stories. She calls on each student with equal frequency to model reading, ask or answer questions, and share ideas. Ms. Larson encourages students to ask each other questions or comment on other students' ideas. Students often whisper their predictions and ideas with a peer to ensure participation. These instructional conversations help her students engage in text while improving their comprehension using a variety of narrative and expository writing. Carpet reading time is clearly a time for making sense of written text, learning vocabulary and concepts, and making connections with students' personal experiences and prior knowledge.

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*Carpet reading time is clearly a time for making sense of written text, learning vocabulary and concepts, and making connections with students' personal experiences and prior knowledge.*

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## STOPANDTHINK

Choral reading is a popular method to use during reading instruction. How can you ensure that all your students, especially your struggling readers, actively read or participate during this time?



## TEACHER'S VOICE

Creating an effective Tier 1 reading program for Ms. Larson's students required hard work, reflection, high expectations, collaboration, and planning. Let's see what Ms. Larson thinks of her first year at Conrad Elementary.

This first year was more about learning the school's reading program, getting to know my students and their families, setting up my centers, and conducting benchmark testing. The hardest part at the beginning was understanding how to interpret my ongoing assessments in light of my students' language and literacy background and integrate this information to improve my own instruction. Along with my day-to-day observations and feedback from parents, I feel the benchmark and ongoing assessments gave me a clear picture of my students' reading levels. As a teacher you can usually tell. But those conversations with parents and that initial testing gave me more perspective on how my students were performing and what aspect of my instruction was lacking. I feel now that my instruction is directed more toward students' individual needs.

The support I received from the building assistance team throughout the year was invaluable. Their observations and support helped me see things I never noticed about my overall instruction. They truly provided us with nonevaluative constructive feedback to help improve our teaching. Our reading coach helped us with planning and testing when we needed an extra hand and even came into our classrooms to model lessons. Our grade-level team found these visits so helpful that we started observing each other for lesson ideas and instructional feedback. This support has helped me concentrate on how I can respond to individual students more effectively, help students become independent and collaborative learners, and encourage oftentimes quiet and reluctant students to shine.

Setting up my centers provided me with more structure during small-group instruction, allowing students to work efficiently on their own. Although students were on board with how to work in centers at the beginning of the year, I found that they needed a review of how to work independently and collaboratively once we returned from winter break.

During this year I found working with other people an absolute must! I really believe that good teaching requires a collaborative effort. You can't do this job well on your own and realistically meet district and school requirements and address every student's individual needs. By working with my colleagues, we gave each other ideas for instruction and intervention and helped interpret grade-level and student-level assessments. Working with my students' parents enriched my instruction by making my lessons more culturally and socially relevant to their everyday lives. Students also got a big kick out of seeing their parents coteach with me for certain activities.

Our principal needed to be onboard 100 percent by creating the time for teachers to collaborate. Using our lunch and recess time to consult and plan was just not going to work. The principal worked hard at providing us with the necessary resources to work with students at varying levels of functioning. She was extremely hands-on, understood our programs, and cared about our students. With the assistance and input of the PTA, the principal spent time looking for creative ways to fund our requests for field trips, materials, assistive technology, and books.

Most of all, I found the biggest challenge this year was knowing how best to balance my focus on systematic instruction of necessary reading skills with an emphasis on reading for meaning that reflected students' everyday cultural, linguistic, and familial experiences.

*Encouraging Native Language Support.* At the beginning of the year, Ms. Larson had a difficult time getting her English language learners to participate during carpet reading. She knew the vocabulary and level of reading would be challenging, but she wanted her English language learners to participate in their oral discussions about the books they were reading. During Back-to-School Night, Ms. Larson spoke with their parents and together they decided that every Friday she should begin sending home a copy of the following week's read-aloud book. She connected with each parent to make certain there was an English-speaking adult, sibling, or cousin available to read and discuss the story over the weekend. She encouraged families to use their primary language

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when necessary to clarify the meaning of the text, compare English and primary language vocabulary and phrases, and help make personal connections with the stories. Once she began this practice, Ms. Larson saw an immediate change in her English learners' contributions during class discussions. Students were eager to participate during these conversations, giving them more opportunities to develop their English language and reading comprehension skills.

### CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented the general education reading practices of Ms. Larson, a young new second-grade teacher at Conrad Elementary. Ms. Larson's general education program provided students with a balance of whole- and small-group reading instruction and a range of experiences with text. Her teaching reflected practices known to be effective for early reading development and especially for those learning to read in a second language. In sum, these practices include the following components:

- Planning both mindful and meaningful lessons
- Designing activities that allow students to work collaboratively with peers
- Developing center activities that are meaningful and authentic
- Training students as leaders to facilitate learning experiences
- Encouraging families to provide in-class and home support whenever possible
- Encouraging appropriate English-language models outside of the classroom to support English language learning
- Promoting active meaningful dialogue using authentic text where students lead discussions that improve their reading comprehension as well as their overall English language skills
- Conducting universal screening and ongoing progress monitoring to inform instruction
- Providing explicit and direct instruction in necessary reading skills for students in small groups

- Using techniques that enhance learning, including making relationships among concepts, emphasizing the distinctive features of concepts, and providing cues and prompts to use strategies and skills
- Providing formal and informal instruction in English vocabulary and language use

## ACTIVITIES

1. Individually or in a small group, develop three new activity centers that would help support your students' ability in any of the essential reading skill areas of phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.
2. The chapter outlines Ms. Larson's mindful and meaningful (M&M) lesson planning for her diverse learners. With a partner, design a lesson in any of the essential areas of reading reflecting Ms. Larson's M&M planning components.
3. Ms. Larson depends on the assistance of families to support the reading development of her students. She encourages them to use the primary language whenever possible during home literacy activities. Develop a brief presentation for parents, teachers, or administrators with examples and basic research describing why participating in home literacy activities is extremely important, regardless of the language in which they occur.
4. In the chapter Ms. Larson works with the families of her English language learners to support their English reading and vocabulary skills. However, not all families have someone at home who can provide appropriate English language models. Develop a pamphlet explaining ways non-English-speaking parents can support their students' general reading and English language skills outside the classroom. (Assume that this pamphlet will later be translated into other languages.)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. One of the biggest problems facing teachers is often the lack of time to do all the work they need to do in the classroom. Ms. Larson's school scheduled time for grade-level meetings and professional development days to help teachers with their planning and instruction. How can schools and teachers find the time for collaborative and individual instructional planning and professional development?
2. In her interview, Ms. Larson mentions struggling with applying her students' assessment results to changes in her instruction. This is a common challenge for many teachers beginning to incorporate benchmark testing into their routine and planning. Discuss how teachers or grade-level teams might work through this process more effectively.
3. Ms. Larson worked hard at the beginning of the year training her students to work together and become independent learners. What skills might teachers focus on to help train their students to work independently or in small groups? Describe how you would teach these skills to your students.
4. Describe specific methods teachers can use to support their English language learners during reading instruction and independent activities. How might these methods vary depending on students' level of English language proficiency?
5. How can teachers incorporate the assistance of families as part of the classroom's English reading instructional program?