

## **Partner Reading: Engaging English- and Spanish-speaking Adolescent Readers**

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If reading is to become a thinking-reasoning process, we must provide second-language learners with strategies that promote interactive reading as they bridge the gap between what is known and what is new. Reading for the purpose of sharing information with a partner provides students cognitive as well as social benefits (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Kagan, 1995; Marcos & Peyton, 2000). The purpose of this article is to address the process of partner reading and to suggest practical ways to implement it with adolescent readers. Interactive structures provide learners opportunities for developing language proficiency within relevant, functional, communicative, and supportive environments.

### **Partner Reading: An Approach To Enhance English-Language Learning**

Empirical evidence demonstrates the acquisitional and literacy related benefits of partner reading (Carr, 1999; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, and Arguelles, 1999; Madden, 1986). According to Knapp and Winsor (1999), reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading were significantly improved when second and third grade delayed readers participated in a 10-week cognitive apprenticeship in reading involving an adult volunteer reading partner. Tutors scaffolded the reading material to enable the student to accomplish the authentic task of reading a personally interesting book beyond their independent capabilities. In addition, a study involving thirty-two children with language delays, investigating the effectiveness of interactive dialogues, demonstrated students' increased production of words, longer utterances, and enhanced participation in shared book reading (Crain-Thoreson and Dale, 1999). Interaction that occurs among children who read together, asserted Moore (1998), extends understanding of language as well as strategies involved in fluent reading.

### The Benefits of Partner Reading for the L2 Learner

1. Students engage in discussions through meaningful, functional communicative contexts.
2. English language learners can benefit from both written and oral language modeling.
3. Metacognitive factors such as access to prior knowledge based on materials in students' primary language as well as familiarity of themes can provide a basis for transition to reading materials in English.
4. Sheltered strategies, such as scaffolding, word study, paraphrasing, organizing concepts, and summarizing can be incorporated.
5. Affective issues such as levels of anxiety, motivation, and interest can be addressed as students engage in authentic social communicative activity.

### Implementing Partner Reading

The benefits that support cognitive as well as affective factors provide a pedagogical premise for the strategies that can be implemented to enhance language proficiency, to practice literacy skills, as well as to experience positive interdependence with classmates. The first strategy describes an interactive approach that can be incorporated prior to reading a text. The second strategy can be initiated during, and continue after reading periods have concluded. The final suggestion we present describes a dual language approach, designed to foster communicative exchange as well as to develop conceptual foundations through analogous themes.

#### 1. Prereading with a Partner

Because second-language acquisition reflects, to a large extent, an individual's first language development, second-language instruction must foster

purposeful, meaningful activity. Engaging in prereading activities, discussing new words, and sharing perspectives about themes, plots, and characters provide students authentic contexts within which to analyze and relate ideas. Moreover, the development of students' literacy skills will progress through opportunities for increased engagement with text and resulting intraskills transfer through connections with writing and speaking.

The following are activities designed to help students predict the theme or topic of a story, to access prior knowledge related to the concept, and to relate the personal connection to his or her reading partner.

### Prereading Partner Interview

1. What my partner already knows or thinks about the genre, topic, or theme:  
Example: My partner knows that this author has written other books about fantasy. She likes stories about princesses and princes.
2. A personal experience my partner has had related to the genre or theme:  
Example: My partner wrote a poem about a princess and the magical powers of a fairy who became her friend.
3. Comparing and / or contrasting my partner's knowledge and experience with my own, I would state that:  
Example: I have not read as many books about fantasy as my partner, but I remember reading some children's fairy tales such as *La Cenicienta/Cinderella* and *El enano saltarin/Rumpelstiltskin* when I was younger. I enjoy reading about magic and how it is used to help the characters in the story.
4. I predict that a theme I will encounter in this story will be \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_.  
Example: Persistence, because this books like a story where young people live in a mysterious place long ago, and they will experience many challenges.

*II. Responding with a Partner*

Concurrent as well as postreading exercises provide students an opportunity to check comprehension and then direct students to a deeper analysis of the text (Stein, 2000). Because general goals of real world reading include an ability to recognize diverse points of view, strategies used with second-language learners must also encourage students to analyze information and discern a specific theme. Strategies can include asking students to express their own perceptions related to the topic as well as to demonstrate an understanding of the author's or classmates' perspectives (Barnett, 1988).

Researchers have found that in addition to the reader's topical and linguistic prior knowledge, factors such as personal experience, attitude, and perspective determine how information is perceived, understood, valued, and stored (Holbrook, 1987; Pearson and Tierney, 1984). Literature response journals provide students the opportunity to write about the stories they are reading, including their feelings and personal reactions to themes, characters, plots, and other facets of the story.

**Sample Student Journal Entry**

<p>Today I read pages _____.</p> <p>I would describe the main idea of these pages by explaining that:</p>
<p>My personal response to today's reading is:</p>
<p>My partner is reading about:</p>
<p>A common theme the stories share is _____ because:</p>

*III. A Dual Language Approach*

Swain (1996) explained that English-language learners face a language gap that must be bridged within academic contexts. Furthermore, asserted Swain, the threshold levels of second-language skills required for successful participation may vary across content areas. Studies of second-language development indicate that an incorporation of the student's native language 1) promotes cognitive development (Tucker, 1999), 2) provides the basis for learning academic concepts in a second language (Dutcher and Tucker, 1994), and 3) 'facilitates the transfer of basic literacy as well as numeracy concepts in one language to a second or third language (Gonzalez, 1998; Hakuta, 1986). Dual language programs, according to Howard (2001), are implemented by schools and districts in order to strengthen and develop the language resources of all learners. The approach, she explains, provides integrated instruction for native English speakers and native speakers of another language. The goals of an additive bilingual environment, asserts Howard, include promoting high academic achievement, first- and second-language development, and cross-cultural understanding for all students.

Universal themes, such as perseverance, loyalty, collaboration, and challenges in life, are relevant and can be powerful catalysts for learning (Stevens, 1982). The concepts, explained Stevens, are common to the human condition and provide opportunity to form core connections with literature. Additionally, both personal as well as cultural development can be fostered as students grasp concepts and respond to the stories they read.

Common themes between reading material in a student's native language and English can provide a framework within which students become familiar with topics. Engagement with native language text material permits students to grasp concepts and vocabulary used by an author, as well as to generate the vocabulary to express the ideas they wish to convey. Content area themes are therefore presented and validated within familiar cultural and linguistic contexts.

The following are suggested texts in both Spanish and English that share common themes. Although the books presented are narrative texts, the dual language approach can be incorporated throughout all content areas with informational texts as well.

*Spanish*

*English*

1. Angelou, Maya. *Encontraos en mi nombre. (Gather Together in My Name)* Durbin, William. *The Journal of Otto Peltonen, A Finnish Immigrant*

Common Themes: Assimilation, Acculturation

This second volume of Maya Angelou's powerful autobiography maintains the heartbreak, passion, and wisdom in this eloquent Spanish rendition. With Angelou's characteristic pride and dignity, she tells about her life as a teenager and single mother, her unfortunate love affairs, her efforts as a dancer, and work in a house of prostitution. Spanish-speaking adolescents will rejoice in this honest testament to the dreams and struggles of a talented artist

Translated by Néstor Busquets. (Series: My Name Is America) New Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 2000. 299p. ISBN: 84-264-4955-7. Grades 9-adult.

2. Cisneros, Sandra. *La casa en Mango Street* Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*

Common Theme: Fortitude

Elena Poniatowska's talents as a writer and as a translator make a difficult job seem easy. Translating Told in a series of vignettes, *The House on Mango Street* is a novel of a young girl growing up in the Latino

Cisneros's vignettes from her Chicago neighborhood in which she tells about the poverty, racism, and tribulations experienced by her family and friends is certainly not an easy task. Yet Poniatowska has managed to capture Cisneros's humorous and piercing descriptions in this fluid translation with a masterful command of the vernacular of Mexico. It must be emphasized that translating colloquialisms is the bane of most translators; hence, this Poniatowska translation could be used as an efficient model when translating English colloquialisms of Hispanic America. Spanish speakers, especially those from Mexico, will enjoy it.

Translated by Elena Poniatowska. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. 112p. ISBN: 0-679-73477-5. Grades 6-12.

3. Conrad, Joseph. *El agente secreto. (The Secret Agent, a Simple Tale)* Love, D. Anne. *Three Against the Tide*

Common Theme: Irony

First published serially in New York in 1906-07, Conrad's popular novel is now available in this flowing Spanish rendition that maintains Conrad's rich, long sentences, melodramatic irony, and psychological intrigue. Like readers worldwide, The U.S. Civil War is the setting for this suspenseful tale of a young girl's search for her father, after he was called away to help the Confederate Army. When Yankee soldiers approach, Susanna and her two younger brothers, Neddie and Samuel,

Spanish-speaking adolescents will be intrigued by Verloc, a secret agent posing as a disheveled shopkeeper with anarchist leanings, and his efforts to satisfy the terrorists who demand that he blow up the Greenwich Observatory. Gatagan's black-and-white illustrations subtly convey the brooding atmosphere, conspiracy, and tragic results. A well-written appendix and bibliography add further to the readers' understanding of this novel.

Illustrated by Tino Gatagán. Translated by Fernando Santos. Madrid: Anaya, 2000. 304p. ISBN: 84-207-0026-6. Grades 9-adult.

4. Disher, Garry. *Cara de rata*. (Ratface) New York: Dell Yearling, 1998. 162p. ISBN: 0-440-41634-5. Grades 7-adult.

Common Themes: Optimism, Danger, Suspense, Family Unity

Max and Cristina are captives of the *Liga Blanca*, a white supremacist cult community. They are constantly indoctrinated and kept completely isolated from the outside world. When they realize that they and a younger victim, Esteban, have been kidnapped from their natural parents by the cultists, the teens hatch a daring escape plan and find themselves relentlessly pursued by the cult deputy, *Cara de rata*. Despite some weak characterizations, this

are forced to escape to a second family home in Charleston. When the house is destroyed by a fire, Susanna becomes increasingly committed to finding her father. Through the dangerous journey, readers will experience Susanna's ingenuity as well as her skepticism toward the acceptance and support of slavery.

New York: Dell Yearling, 1998. 162p. ISBN: 0-440-41634-5. Grades 7-adult.

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

suspenseful novel includes a daring escape, an impudent, audacious female protagonist, and compelling psychological issues. First published by HarperCollins, Australia, and written by an award-winning Australian author, this smooth Spanish rendition maintains the tension of the original English edition.

Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 1998. New York: Bantam Books, 1967. 283p. 206p. ISBN: 958-04-4901-5. Grades 5-9.

\**The Diary of Anne Frank* is also available in Spanish. *Ana Frank: El diario de una adolescente*. (The Diary of an Adolescent, Anne Frank). Translated by Diego Puls. Barcelona: Plaza and Janés, 1998. 297p. ISBN: 84-01-35198-7. Grades 9-12. This is a moving translation of the deeply touching *Diary of Anne Frank*.

5. Gisbert, Joan Manuel. *La maldición del arquero*. (The Curse of the Archer) Garland, Mark A. *Rescue Party*

Common Themes: Bravery, Fantasy

Set in the 1200s in the kingdom of Turania, this fantasy highlights the adventures of thirteen-year-old Arno, a brave archer, who encounters murderers, a powerful sorcerer, and a sacred bird in his attempts to serve the King. Gisbert's fast pace and vivid imagery are sure to appeal to lovers of fantasy. Some readers, however, may object to strong religious implications

constant threat of discovery and death. In her diary, Anne Frank recorded vivid impressions of her experiences. The entries provide the reader a fascinating commentary on human courage and frailty, and a compelling self-portrait of a sensitive and spirited young woman.

One in a series of stories, *Rescue Party* incorporates the themes of bravery, fantasy, and altruism. Set on a hidden island, intelligent dinosaurs and shipwrecked humans have joined together to help all to survive the devastations caused by deadly storms. When a hot air balloon crashes in the jungle, Loro and his young friends unite to rescue the survivors.

and admonitions. But readers in search of fantasy with adventure in castles filled with lords and vassals will enjoy.

Illustrated by Francisco Solé. Madrid: (Series: Dinotopia) New York: Random Editorial Espasa Calpe, 1999. 141 p. House, 1999. 108p. ISBN: 0-679-89107-2. Grades 6-10. ISBN: 84-239-9051-6. Grades 5-8.

6. Huidobro, Norma. *¿Quién conoce a William Shakespeare's Romeo and Greta Garbo? (Who Knows Greta Garbo?)* Retold by Bruce Coville.

Common Theme: Tragedy

Fourteen-year-old Greta is an only child. This fast-paced mystery with an intrepid protagonist is certainly a fast read. Sophisticated readers will question the unlikely coincidences that result in fortuitous events and actions, but the strong characterizations and the easy-to-read dialogue that resonates with the vernacular of Argentina, make this an enjoyable mystery, especially for Spanish-speaking adolescents who prefer the special flavor of Latin American cities and customs.

Young readers will enjoy the universal appeal of young love thwarted by misunderstandings and uncontrollable circumstances. Another aspect of the story that contributes to its appeal to youth is the theme of friendship as depicted through the caring and supportive relationships between Romeo and his friends. Geared toward young audiences that may be encountering Shakespeare for the first time, this abridged version of Romeo and Juliet provides access to the original story. The illustrations are rich, romantic scenes, including a stunning vertical gatefold of the famous balcony scene in Verona, Italy, where the story is set.

Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2000. 235p. ISBN: 987-9334-53-1. Grades 8-10. Illustrated by Dennis Nolan. New York: Dial Books, 1999. 38p. ISBN: 0-8037-2462-4. Grades 8-11.

7. Kay, Guy Gavriel. *El árbol del verano. (Summer Tree)* Vande Velde, Vivian. *A Hidden Magic.*

Common Themes: Values, Morality, Ethics

Maintaining the fast pace and excitement survive the wrath of Rakoth Maugrim, the powerful and malignant god. Spanish-speaking fantasy buffs will enjoy.

This is an original and delightful parody of the classic fairy-tale genre. A story of the quite ordinary but spirited princess-heroine Jennifer, finds herself in the position of saving the life of a spoiled prince and contending with an evil young sorcerer. Comprehension will be facilitated through crisp dialogue and illustrations.

(Series: Tapiz de Fionavar) Translated by Teófilo de Lozoya. Barcelona: Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1997. ISBN: 0-15-201200-1. Grades 7-12. Timun Mas, 2000. 419p. ISBN: 84-480-3192-X. Grades 9-adult. Illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman.

Learning a second language through meaningful and purposeful reading experiences provides learners with opportunities to contemplate and synthesize information during the acquisitional process. When second-language students are provided opportunities to summarize, evaluate, apply, and reflect on information, each learner may begin a journey of connecting learning events and acquired skills to new opportunities for acquisitional development and cognitive growth.

Through the partner reading experience, English-language learners are provided opportunities to increase language proficiency, to build literacy and critical thinking skills, and to practice communication within authentic contexts. The approach allows students to observe successful reading and writing behaviors, and to monitor language as it is being modeled by a peer. Through partnership formations, students can compare and contrast their personal perspectives as they share their impressions of story or text elements.

**Books on Related Topics**

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Schon, Isabel. *Recommended Books in Spanish for Children and Young Adults, 1996 through 1999*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2000. 363p.

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### What can we learn from narratology?

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Children's literature scholarship is a relatively recent academic discipline, more or less comparable in its status with feminist criticism. The first serious studies on children's literature in the West appeared in the 1960s. They were primarily historical and thematic surveys, with a strong pedagogical bias. Among the very first to bring forward the formal aspects of children's literature was a Swedish study: Vivi Edström's *Barn bo ken form* ("Form in Children's Literature", 1980). Since then, a number of narratological studies of children's literature have been published, focused on the specific features of plot, characterization, perspective and other narrative elements in children's literature as opposed to the mainstream.

In what way is a narratological approach different from conventional approaches to children's literature? (I am not using the word "conventional" in a pejorative sense). The decisive question for a literary historian is, for instance, "What makes *Alice in Wonderland* an outstanding children's book?" The question for a narratologist is: "What makes *Alice in Wonderland* a children's book?" The former question has been successfully answered by many critics, who have examined the portrayal of the child and the society, the linguistic acrobatics, the philosophical implications, and so on. The latter question has given those who have cared to pose it at all a lot of headache. We know by intuition that it is a children's book, but it does not match any conventional definitions. It is not uncommon to interrogate books that do not match our preconceived opinions about children's literature. We have heard critics say that *Alice in Wonderland* or *Winnie the Pooh* are great books because they in actual fact are not children's books.

Very often such statements are made without further reflections, based on assumptions like: "It is too difficult for children, children don't understand it" In doing so, critics apply readerresponse ideas and construct an abstract, ideal picture