Literacy and FLES

Connecting to the Common Core Learning Standards

by Al Martino and Harriet Barnett

At present, WL teachers DO teach reading as a part of their curriculum. However, the new common core learning standards set the stage for FLES teachers to take a more active role, if not lead the way in developing important reading skills in our children. Although this new challenge may at first seem to be daunting, if not an impossible task, teachers will surely find activities which they may have used in the past which they may need to dust off, up-editing in the classroom; some writing (and might even need to take notes as well as be able to ask for clarification or repetition. This second type of listening activity is very different from the first one and is often not included in the repertoire of a FLES teacher’s plans.

Another example could be that in listening to a poem, students might focus on the sounds of the language, the emotions evoked by those sounds, and how it makes them feel. If they listen to a poem the same way in which they listen to instructions or directions, they will not fulfill the purpose of listening, and will be unsuccessful in the task completion. Still another example is that of listening for fact or opinion. In this case, the learner needs to listen for a series of details and needs to determine the source of these details in order to form his/her own opinion. In summary, while there are other purposes for listening, here are the 4 examples cited above:

- to understand the main idea
- to ask for clarification or repetition
- to complete a task
- to form an opinion

Many oral/aural activities can, as students’ language proficiency and vocabulary grow, be easily transformed into reading activities.

For the topic of shapes, the students read a simple story, perhaps one created by the FLES teacher. The students find and underline the words for the shapes on it and they must draw the shape for each word. Or, the teacher calls out the shape word from the story and might follow up with a worksheet with the words for the pictures in random order. For example, “the pear is number one, the apple is number two, etc…” Once they have cut out or torn apart the pictures they can place them according to the written directions in the text.

FIGURE 1

A Word Wall is a strategy used by teachers to help develop literacy skills. It usually is a wall-mounted visual, containing key words (sight words) on the wall which are the focus of a given lesson. The individual words are printed large enough so as to be seen by all students at their desks. Teachers teach this wall as a reference tool, for drill, pronunciation, spelling word recognition and the students use it as needed. A Word Wall might look like samples one and two below.
HEALTH AND BODY PARTS

WORD WALL

The teacher will print five-ten high frequency words and place them on the wall. These need to be printed large enough so that they are easily seen by all students.

These words should be changed as the students learn them and/or as the theme and topic changes.

---

THE TEACHER CREATES ACTIVITIES

The teacher now creates activities that engage the students as they interact with the words so that they are familiar with the words and can pronounce them easily and fluently, understand their meaning, and that they are easily recognizable on sight.

---

TEAM ACTIVITY

Charades: In a charade-type activity team A draws a card with a sentence from a previously read text and acts it out. Team B finds that particular sentence in the text and reads it aloud.

TEAM ACTIVITY

Pictionary: Pictionary is played like the activity above except that Team A draws a picture card from the pile and then continues as above.

WHOLE CLASS

Flashcards: Students see flashcards on which the first letter or the vowels are omitted and students must say the word and identify the missing letters in the TL. If the students have not learned the alphabet in the TL, the teacher might say the letters and the students would write them on the worksheet. This provides an interesting and contextualized way to learn the TL alphabet.

GROUPS

Flashcards: The teacher prepares the flashcards (as in the above activity) on small index cards sized paper and places them in a plastic baggie. In small groups, the students take turns drawing cards out of the baggie, providing the pronunciation, giving the missing letters and demonstrating the meaning through actions or drawings.

INDIVIDUAL WORK

Word walls: Providing individual word walls for the students allows them to check off the words as they know them by sight thus self-monitoring.

WHOLE CLASS

The teacher uses the word wall to spell the words out in the target language. The teacher asks the students to follow along, on their own paper, to say the letters aloud after the teacher and to write them on their own paper. This is a way to help teach the alphabet in context.

INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, SMALL GROUP

Categorizing: Once many sight words have been established, the teacher gives the students a selection of many words from different topics/themes for example: fruits which have appeared on previous and current word walls. The students say them according to the topic in which they belong. Certain words and phrases, although they might be learned in one topic, MAY be used with other topics. For example, words like in, on and etc., may be placed in more than one category. A variation is for the students (working in pairs, individuals, triads) to write these words into the categories so that they are practicing the spelling and phonemic awareness.

Once again, they might easily place some words in several different categories. The teachers might create a worksheet in the TL that looks like the sample below. The number of categories should be at least three.

TEAM ACTIVITY

Spelling bee: Students work in two teams. One team says the word, and the other word must spell it out loud or write it and show it to the teacher and to the other team for correction and/or approval. Whate boards are helpful for this activity.

---

ORAL READING

Oral reading has a place in the classroom is it helps to develop the connections between the oral and written word. Examples of texts for oral reading should be taken from fiction and non-fiction, should be short in length (except that can and should be used), age, proficiency level and interest appropriate. These texts may or may not be culturally bound, depending on the individual text and level of difficulty. Many sources for oral reading may be found on the internet.

A way to implement an oral reading activity is for the teacher to read aloud from a text while the students read along silently with him/her. It is important for the teacher to read aloud slowly, purposefully and meaningfully clumping two to three words that belong together at a time. (For example, “the tall blond boy” is one chunk, as opposed to “the tall, blond boy”). The teacher should also use inflections in his/her voice and pay attention to punctuation. Each student needs a copy of the text being read aloud by the teacher.

The text may be printed on easel paper for the whole class to see. A variation is to have the students read aloud, mimicking the sounds, pauses and inflections of the teacher. If the students have an individual copy of the text, they can be asked to follow with their fingers as the text is read aloud. Afterwards, the teacher may read aloud a specific sentence from the text and the students must find it and then echo it back to the teacher.

These techniques can produce good sound symbolic relationships. Although this activity is truly a very complex act. Comprehension is the main purpose of reading. For comprehension, we do NOT mean direct word for word translation to English, though under certain thing, in English word for word translation to English, though understanding is implied. The FLES teacher to employ many techniques in order to facilitate and enhance reading comprehension. For example, multiple passes over the text helps to teach students that comprehension of any written texts may require re and rereading. Another technique is for the student to circle all punctuation during a first reading to help them recognize the existence of the punctuation and its important role in aiding comprehension. Two classic examples in which the overall meaning is altered through punctuation is: A woman without her man is nothing. A woman: without her, man is nothing.

Let’s eat Grandpa!

Dramatizing as the student reads the text helps to put meaning into the written word. Peer-reading is another strategy in which students sit and read a given text aloud together, helping each other decode, pronounce and clump words together in a meaningful way.

Background knowledge is a critical factor in reading comprehension and begins before the act of reading. Once a text has been selected, it is important for the teacher to determine what students know about the topic before reading about it. In the case in which there are gaps in background knowledge, the teacher should provide an opportunity for this information to be shared by the class. For example, if the text is about a farm, and some children have never seen or experienced a farm in person, there should be a whole class discussion about a farm, in the target language, using visuals, video, the internet and dramatization in order to help the student to frame his understanding of the topic before actually beginning the reading. The teacher might even create a short anecdote in the target language about a farm in order to include some key aspects and vocabulary about a farm which may surface in the subsequent reading. The teacher should never assume that all students share the same background knowledge on any given topic. Students are able to help FLES teachers to understand what the background knowledge is about a particular subject, or they might even be able to provide that experience for the FLES teacher.

Questioning techniques are the backbone to developing and assessing good reading comprehension. In the past, teachers have focused too long on the lower levels of questioning; asking about basic and often explicitly stated information. In the new core-curriculum, teachers are asked to develop higher level thinking skills and the questions the teachers pose determine the particular level of cognitive involvement of the student. Questions that begin with “why” require deeper reading for meaning. An example would be to ask why a certain character behaved or acted in a certain way and the answer may require the student to infer a response from information provided in the text.

Asking why someone did something may require the student not only to understand the text, the actions of the character, etc., but also to make a personal assumption about the reason why something took place based on information in the text, but which is not explicitly stated.

Why?” questions also point out the difference between cause and effect and might easily tie in with the thematic content of other subjects.

• In a paragraph about a family or a family member you might ask: “Who is your favorite person and why do you like her/him based on the text?”

• In a reading about healthy living you might ask: “What foods mentioned in the text do you eat and are they good for you?” (Topics: science/health)

• In a reading about the environment you might ask: “Name three ways the environment helps us.”
In a reading about travel you might ask: “Where does Mrs. Smith travel in the reading, and what does she do?” Then you might ask if they would like to travel to that sample place and why. (Topic: social studies/geography)

In a reading about the old and new Olympics you might ask: “What are some of the sports played in the ancient Olympic games that are still played in modern day Olympics?” Then ask them which sport they would want to learn to play and say why. (Topic: physical education)

In even the simplest text, the teacher can draw the students to higher order thinking by carefully choosing the questions. At times, students may need help in formulating their responses to these questions which demand higher thinking skills as they require the use of higher level language. They may need to know how to use expressions such as “I need,” “I want,” “I practice,” “I wish,” which can be given to the students as needed.

One technique is to give a question based on a text. The students will answer (either orally or in writing) and then they must indicate the particular section of the text that contains the answer. Then they may be asked to highlight that section or even to copy it onto their own paper.

Open-ended questions can also create higher levels of language use as well. Questions such as “Do you think ...?” “Would you like ...?”

Text selection is a critical aspect of teaching reading. The new CCLS as well as other state standards emphasizes the value of fiction, but also draws new attention to the use of nonfiction texts. The purpose of the activity determines whether the text should be one or the other. Nonfiction texts may be a new source for FLES teachers. These texts are unique in that they are used to teach core concepts through reading in the TL. FLES teachers are encouraged to check with the classroom teachers to determine the reading and skill levels and interests of their students. This will make a difference in the selection of text and questioning techniques the teacher will use.

In conclusion, we maintain that aligning second language instruction to the new emphasis on reading in the ELA section of the CCLS can prove to be the best thing for FLES. It establishes the value of FLES in the education of the whole child, creates opportunities for strong collaboration with the core teachers and provides a solid springboard for the focus on communication skills in the TL.

Harriet Barnett started a FLES program in 1960 and taught for more than 35 years as a foreign language classroom teacher in primary, middle and high schools and as an outreach person for ACTFL. She has given speeches and conducted numerous workshops regionally, nationally and internationally for major foreign language and other conferences.

Al Martino taught French, Spanish and Italian for 21 years in grades K-12. He worked for six years as the Associate in Foreign Language Education at the New York State Education Department where he undertook the revision of the former NYS Proficiency and Regents Examinations. He developed the curriculum documents for grades K-12 based on the NYS Standards and the NYS LOTE languages other than English examinations. Martino then worked for eight years as a district administrator where he supervised programs of foreign languages and ESL. He also designed and implemented a Spanish FLES program and has worked as an adjunct in many universities in NYS for the past 10 years mostly teaching secondary and elementary foreign language courses. Most recently he is a clinical supervisor for the State University of New York at Albany (SUNY Albany) where he supervises students in both the foreign language and English as a second language classrooms. Al has won several awards from the New York State Association of Teachers of Foreign Languages, as well as from SUNY Albany and the American Association of Teachers of Italian. Al has written several articles and co-authored a middle school Spanish textbook. Al has consulted locally, across New York state, and nationally. Al currently is an adjunct at two colleges where he teaches foreign languages, supervises student teachers, and teaches classes in education.

SAVE THE DATE

JULY 12-14, 2013

NNELL SUMMER INSTITUTE

In Partnership with

ACTFL and Glastonbury Public Schools

Friday - July 12, 2013

Regional and State Representatives Advocacy Workshop
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. (open to all members)

Optional site visit to Mandarin and Russian STARTALK programs
9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Saturday - July 13, 2013

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Sunday - July 14, 2013

9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Common Core Crosswalk and the Early Language Learner

Building Intercultural Competence from the Earliest Years

Building Interdisciplinary Units

Creativity and Innovation in Language Learning

Time to network, collaborate and communicate!
To learn more, please visit www.nnell.org

More information to follow in January, 2013

A block of rooms will be reserved at the Hilton Garden Inn and Homewood Suites Preferred airport-Bradley International, Windsor Locks, CT