

Units of Study for Teaching Reading
A Workshop Curriculum, Middle School Grades

FAQ Video Transcripts

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Question: *How do the MSRUOS support English learners?*

Mary Ehrenworth:

A lot of you are teaching our units of study all around the world, I'm just back from a conference with teachers who are coming from North Africa, from Europe, from all places where kids are multi-literate. Teaching in international schools, or teaching in public schools around the world, and if you teach in the United States, like when we're teaching in New York City, almost 70% of the kids in New York City were not born in this country. So that's what teaching is going to be, and it's a challenge, and it's a beautiful challenge. That is, the kids in our classroom are going to be multi-literate. And when they're growing up multi-literate, there'll be some things that take longer, because they're learning in more than one language, and they're going to be learning to code switch. And so part of this teaching is to think, how does workshop support kids who are growing up with multiple literacies. Fortunately, workshop is a beautiful structure for that.

So one thing that we've thought about is, you'll see that when we are using language in our lessons, so we have sort of, pretty predictable sentence starters that teachers use, I use them too. I sort of fought them when I first came to the project. I was like, why should I say, "Today I want to teach you," and "Watch me as I do this work," and "Now it's your turn," but it turns out that it's really helpful for language learners if the language that leads into the parts of the lesson is similar. Because then they're not trying to decode that, and they're able to focus on what it is that they're trying to learn. So it turns out that predictable language for lesson structure is really, really helpful for language learners. So we sort of say it's not about us, it's about the kids, and we try to use a pretty predictable structure, with pretty similar language lesson to lesson to lesson.

Another thing that really helps kids is that, in reading workshop, kids could be reading very different level books, and some of your kids will be reading books at one level in their home language, and a different level in English, so you might have some kids who are reading in Spanish and English, and they might have an R-S-T book in Spanish, and a U-V-W book in English, or vice versa. And that's beautiful, because part of what can happen then is we know that advancing their literacy in any language helps with another language, so the work that you do to teach kids to say, for instance, trace more complicated characters in novels. If you teach that in one language, it's going to help them when they're reading novels in another language. It does mean, though, that you are going to want to be thinking a little bit about kids' multiple literacies, because what you don't want to end up is, we have some schools where kids have been very carefully taught academic discourse in

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English, but they were not taught academic discourse in their home language, and so you end up with kids who have social language, but they don't have academic language. So you do want to do the best you can whether you're a dual-language school, or you're a bilingual school, or you're just a teacher with a beautiful, big heart, to make sure that kids are developing their home languages as well as the academic English that they're going to be learning in school.

Another thing that the units really support language learners in, is there's a lot of very specific support for kids in learning academic discourse. The truth is, academic discourse is a new language for all kids. So you'll see that, just like in the writing units, the language of the checklist taught kids to have an academic discourse around writing, that here, we're teaching kids the kind of academic discourse of literary conversations. And so we're expecting to coach kids into that, in their partner talk, and then in their book club talks.

And the last is, we used to think that kids listening to other kids is a way for them to improve their language, and now we really know, kids trying out language is the way for them to improve their language. Kids get better at talking by actually talking. So the partner talk is, that's when kids are getting oral practice. They're getting rehearsal and they're getting practice. So they'll get to talk during, they'll get a partner talk during the lesson. They'll get partner talk during workshop, they'll always finish workshop with partner talk, then they'll be in club talk, and that practicing of oral language, that's critical for language learners. You don't get better at talking by just thinking about talking, you get better at practicing it. And the great thing about partner talk is, everybody's doing it, so everybody's getting practice. So that's high stakes, but it seems low stakes, because it's not 30 kids listening to me. It's just my partner listening to me. So that's a really beautiful and fundamental and very important part of workshop for language learners.

Increasingly, more and more teachers around the world are translating a lot of the tools into different languages. Heinemann has been really great about going to Spanish first, because it's essentially a second language or first language for so many kids in the United States. But we have teachers translating tools into Arabic, into German, into Urdu, and as that happens, we'll figure out ways to share them.