

IMAGINE LEARNING ESPAÑOL
Compendium of Research
Principles

Kathy Escamilla, PhD

Professor of Education

University of Colorado at Boulder

Served two terms as the president of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

Research

Skills and strategies

Literacy skills and strategies learned in one language transfer to a second language without the need to be relearned. A balanced approach to literacy incorporates synthetic, analytic, and socio-psychological strategies. These include phonological awareness skills and decoding (the more mechanical practices), along with language- and literature-rich activities. Teachers teaching Spanish literacy must know the basic alphabetic, orthographic, and phonemic awareness principles of the language.

Best practices in Spanish literacy instruction

- Teach letter sounds before letter names since the first are more useful for emergent readers and writers
- Teach frequently used words and develop fluency by teaching them as sight words
- Model construction of syllables
- Include literature that represents the cultural experiences of Spanish-speaking students
- Include daily opportunities to practice reading—importance of choral and echo reading

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

Letter sounds

In Imagine Learning Español, we focus on teaching the letter sounds first. Students learn and review letter sounds with four unique and engaging letter activities. In these activities, students hear letter sounds and names, see orthography modeled, trace letters, and identify graphemes from an auditory cue.

High-frequency words

An activity to frontload vocabulary explicitly teaches frequently used words and prepares students to read beginning books.

Syllables

An introductory syllable activity allows students to focus on all the possible syllables that can be made with each consonant. The activity models how combining the consonant sound with a vowel creates a syllable and how syllables are combined to make words.

Latin American culture

A cultural exploration activity helps students experience different cultural aspects of Latin American culture. Students listen to books about different Spanish-speaking countries. Each book is narrated by a native speaker of that country.

Claude Goldenberg, PhD

Professor of Education
Stanford University

Research Recognition Award recipient from the University of California Office of the President in 1992 for his work on “instructional conversations” in classrooms serving predominantly Spanish-speaking students.

Research

The traditional way to teach Spanish literacy

Programs and practices teaching early Spanish literacy have traditionally adopted a very bottom-up approach (part-to-whole approach): phonic-based and heavy on syllable analysis. There has been little focus on meaning and very few opportunities to read connected text.

A balanced approach

There is a need for a balanced approach in literacy instruction combining bottom-up and top-down experiences, and supplemented by other skills that positively affect literacy development such as language development activities, letter-sound and letter-name recognition, writing words and phrases, word recognition activities, hearing and discriminating rhymes. Goldenberg describes a successful model that progresses through “vowels, syllables, words, short phrases, and eventually, the basal reader.” (Research Directions, Goldenberg, p. 595) The principles of appropriate reading material for beginner readers include the use of connected, meaningful, and predictable text. “Opportunities to read, share, and even memorize meaningful texts probably make important contributions to early literacy development.” (p. 593)

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

A comprehensive learning experience

Imagine Learning Español uses a balanced approach to teaching early Spanish literacy. This program includes phonic-based activities, such as learning letter sounds and constructing syllables, but it also showcases connected, meaningful, and predictable text throughout its My First Book series and the Vocabulary Comics activity.

Sofía A. Vernon

Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, Querétaro, Mexico

Emilia Ferreiro, PhD

Psychologist, writer, and educator

Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Mexico City

Sofía Vernon and Emilia Ferreiro present the results of an experimental study that looks at the relationship between the development of phonological awareness and the development of writing in Spanish-speaking kindergartners.

Research

Developing syllable awareness

Syllable awareness develops at a very early age: at about 4–5 years old. Sensitivity to syllables can be developed even without a solid knowledge of a writing system (which means that even illiterate individuals can segment words into syllables). In contrast, phonemic sensitivity develops as a result of knowing and analyzing one's writing system.

Research in word segmentation and analysis shows the following sequence:

- Ability to find pieces in a word
- Recognition of syllables
- Intra-syllabic analysis focusing on the end of the word
- Full isolation of phonemes

Phonemes and phonological awareness

Manipulating syllables within words and separating words into phonemes is particularly important in early Spanish reading development. Recommended phonological awareness activities include syllable segmentation and blending, phoneme segmentation and blending, and phonetic spelling. Early phonological awareness instruction should include rhyming practice and exposure to songs and poetry, but these skills alone are not sufficient for more complex phonemic awareness skills. Research suggests there is a strong correlation between writing and phonological awareness.

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

Syllables in contextualized words

Imagine Learning Español includes a syllable suite that explicitly teaches that words are composed of syllables. Students hear syllables in contextualized words and are asked to segment and blend sounds to reconstruct the syllables. They use these syllables to form and read the words they hear.

Rhyming through songs

Students receive instruction about rhyming within the context of songs. Animated traditional songs provide an opportunity to reinforce rhyming while also serving the purpose of cultural exposure.

Tracing letters

Students are given an opportunity to trace letters as they practice the letter sound.

Elfrieda H. Hiebert

Adjunct Professor, Cognition and Development
University of California at Berkeley

Elfrieda Hiebert's research attends to the texts that are used in reading programs with beginning and struggling readers, particularly students for whom English is a second language.

Research

Principles of appropriate reading material for beginner readers:

- Multiple opportunities to practice target structures
- High predictability of text
- Word density ratio
- Use of high-frequency words in a logical sequence

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

Targeted syllables and high-frequency words

An original book series developed exclusively for Imagine Learning Español is designed to be predictable and also provide multiple opportunities to practice reading targeted syllables and high-frequency words. Each book focuses on specific vowels or consonants and review books are built in to provide multiple practice opportunities.

Douglas Carnine, PhD

Professor of Education
University of Oregon

Dr. Carnine has over 100 scholarly publications: over 60 research articles in refereed journals, 40 essays, over 20 chapters in books, and seven books (two on university-level computer science, *Teaching Higher Order Thinking*, *Theory of Instruction*, *Instructional Strategies for Diverse Learners*, *Direct Instruction Reading* and *Direct Instruction Math*).

Research

Guidelines for letter instruction:

- Teach the most common, and therefore the most useful sounds of the language
- Separate letters that are visually or auditorily similar to avoid confusion
- Teach lowercase before uppercase letters
- Teaching of letters must include an introduction and a discrimination phase

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

Introduce, practice, and assess letter knowledge

In the Imagine Learning Español program, letters are sequenced to teach the most common letter sounds first and then activities separate similar-sounding letters, such as b and v, to avoid confusion. Upper and lowercase letters are taught side-by-side. Imagine Learning Español uses multiple activities to introduce, practice, and assess letter knowledge.

Wayne P. Thomas, PhD

Professor Emeritus
George Mason University

Virginia P. Collier, PhD

Professor Emerita
George Mason University

Specialists in school-based programs and research for at-risk students, especially English learners, social science research and evaluation methods, statistics, and large-scale computerized data analysis.

Research

Correlation between Spanish and English fluency

There is a high positive correlation between learning to read in Spanish and subsequent English literacy proficiency.

How Imagine Learning Español Connects

Fluency in Spanish first, then English

The purpose of Imagine Learning Español is to help native Spanish speakers gain fluency in their first language. Research indicates that Spanish-speakers who learn to read in their first language also obtain subsequent English literacy proficiency.

Imagine Learning Español: Built on Proven Research Principles

Designed by educators to help pre-K and kindergarten students accelerate their language and literacy proficiency in Spanish, Imagine Learning Español is an educational software program that provides early academic vocabulary, sound instructional methodology, and a rich cultural experience.

Each activity in the Imagine Learning Español curriculum is based on current research principles taken from the United States, Mexico, and a sampling of other countries to provide a global perspective of Spanish. These confirmed instructional practices and trusted educational philosophies have been proven to facilitate language development. The following list details the key principles, practices, and philosophies that make up the foundation of Imagine Learning Español. Researchers associated with each item are listed below.

Research Principles

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