Benchmark Workshop
and
Benchmark Taller
Research Foundation

Benchmark EDUCATION
Building Literacy and Language for Life ™

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Introduction

Seidenberg (2017) stated, in his book titled *Language at the Speed of Light*, "reading is one of the few activities you do every day whether you want to or not. Street signs, menus, e-mails, Facebook posts, novels, ingredients in Chex Mix" (p. 3). Reading is required for work, for school, and for pleasure, and therefore we read because we must, we want to, and because we can't help but read the words around us. Most would certainly agree that literacy needs continue to reach higher levels each year, making it more difficult for people to participate successfully in society without strong reading skills (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2013). Higher levels of literacy skills will continue to be a common trend.

The 2017 scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are clear: there was little to no movement in reading achievement from the 2015 to 2017 administrations on the NAEP[1] for Grades 4 and 8 students. One of the insights into achievement and student experiences, reported with the 2017 NAEP results, was about having a class discussion about something that was read. Students who had a class discussion about something they read, even once or twice a month, had higher results on average on the NAEP than their peers who reported having such a discussion only once or twice a year. While it seems impossible to read within a classroom instructional setting and not discuss what was read, one thought about why that might be is based upon the instructional materials and professional development available to teachers.

Benchmark Education Company has created complete Language Arts and Reading solutions, one in English and one in Spanish, using a flexible workshop model that allows teachers to provide comprehensive literacy instruction across Grades Kindergarten to 5. These programs are called *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*. Each of the modules for both solutions can be used as a standalone resource. And yet Benchmark Education Company has gone beyond standalone resources with *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* by providing a powerful, cohesive framework that integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction through the Reader's Workshop, Writer's Workshop, Phonics & Word Study Workshop modules and the companion set of resources that allow teachers to align reading, writing, phonics, and word study instruction seamlessly. For Dual Language classrooms, decisions must be made about what to teach in Spanish versus what to teach in English. At the same time, teachers must maintain a biliteracy trajectory that leads students to becoming biliterate: being able to read, write, speak, and listen in Spanish and English. Language and resource allocation is an important part of what Benchmark Education Company specializes in, assisting districts in making the appropriate instructional decisions to lead students toward becoming biliterate.

This research foundation provides insight into the research that has guided the creation and development of *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*. Complete information about how to implement *Benchmark Workshop* and/or *Benchmark Taller* is found in other documentation that accompanies the program and is provided during professional development sessions. The focus of this document is to identify the theoretical underpinning of the programs and how that relates to the practices incorporated within *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*. Topics in this research

[1] https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2017_highlights/files/infographic_2018_reading.pdf

foundation include transfer of learning; a discussion of the workshop model and its components (interactive read-aloud, whole-group mini-lessons, small group, independent work, conferring, and share and reflect); writing; and phonics and word study. Additional topics that cross these components include reading across texts; English and Spanish language development strategies; and social-emotional and culturally responsive learning combined with mindfulness.

Transfer of Learning

Perkins and Salomon (1992) state "transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts on performance in another context or with other related materials" (p. 3). Pai, Sears, and Maeda (2015) similarly state "transfer is the ability to apply or adapt prior knowledge to a novel situation" (p. 80). IBE-UNECSO (www.ibe.unesco.org) defines transfer of learning as the influence of learning in one situation on learning in another situation. One of the reasons for changes in standards that now look toward students being College and Career ready is related to transfer of learning. Adapting the knowledge, skills, and strategies learned in K–12 schooling to the novel situations encountered by students as they continue onto post-secondary education or become part of the workforce constitutes transfer of learning.

Perkins and Salomon (1992) discuss near and far transfer and ways in which teaching for transfer can occur. Near transfer occurs "when stimulus conditions in the transfer context are sufficiently similar to those in a prior context of learning to trigger well-developed stim-automatic responses" (p. 8). An example of near transfer would be making use of the writing skills and strategies learned in English Language Arts to write an essay in social studies class. Far transfer "depends on mindful abstraction from the context of learning or application and a deliberate search for connections" (p. 8). Bridging exploits far transfer where instruction "encourages the making of abstractions, searches for possible connections, mindfulness, and metacognition" (p. 10), or instruction that emphasizes "deliberate abstract analysis and planning" (p. 10).

Ferlazzo (2015) suggested strategies on how to get students to transfer knowledge and skills between classes and beyond. These strategies included:

- Maximizing the initial learning to make transfer more likely by making sure students gain a good understanding of the concepts and not just surface learning
- Using the activation of prior knowledge to strengthen and model transfer for students
- Providing deliberate practice with feedback
- Asking students to use their own words to explain what they are learning to help identify misconceptions and provide practice in generalizing concepts
- Simulating similar situations that not only create practice situations but allow students to take on other roles and play different parts or characters in a discussion or during role playing
- Providing group learning or shared learning situations that not only help with transfer of current learning, but also simulate the group situations that will be encountered more often in out-of-school situations
- Using analogies and metaphors to apply what was previously known to new situations that will help with transfer, for instance, comparing a heart to a pump

Klein, Zuniga, Briceño, and Torres Elías (2017) ask "why do support teachers pull out English learners and other students to drill down on sounds, spelling patterns, vocabulary lists, or similar items, and then expect students to transfer that learning to the classroom?" (p. 36). Using the metaphor of tennis, Klein et al. suggest that practicing isolated parts of the game of tennis may give you understanding of how each skill works, but until the parts are used in the game, these are just isolated parts. For transfer of literacy and language learning to occur, Klein et al. state instruction must move away from isolated practice that often occurs in a different setting to integrating and amplifying core literacy instruction in small-group support services.

Perkins and Salomon (1992), Ferlazzo (2015), and Klein et al. (2017) agree the ultimate goal of any educational program should be the ability to transfer knowledge learned during instruction to novel situations. The creation of curriculum that facilitates transfer of knowledge learned needs to start with the learning outcomes and then using those outcomes to establish coherent progressions (which allows the gaps to be identified and bridged) within and between levels of the curriculum and even with other subjects (Rawle, Bowen, Murck, & Hong, 2017). As Elmore (1980) suggests, this commonsense reasoning process of implementation "simply formalizes the thinking that follows from the question, 'What will this idea look like in practice?'" (p. 30). This process of design, more specific to this purpose, curriculum design, is known as backward design or mapping.

Backward design or mapping is not a new concept. In 1949, Tyler (as cited in in Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) described the logic of backward design by stating "educational objectives become the criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed, and tests and examinations are prepared" (p. 1). Further, Tyler stated why the statement of objectives is so important: they "indicate the kinds of changes in the student to be brought about so that instructional activities can be planned and developed in a way likely to attain these objectives" (p. 45).

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller* were designed and created with this end goal in mind, the transfer of learning. These curricula were mapped out first with focus on the outcomes, before any materials were created or identified as being necessary. From the initial mapping of the desired or expected results, the progressions were determined, identifying the means (both learning activities and assessments) to achieve the results. Once the structure, the bones of the curricula, was established, the creation of materials to accomplish this end goal was undertaken.

The knowledge strands in each unit (e.g., Character in Unit 2, Government and Citizenship in Unit 3, and History and Culture in Unit 7), are mapped across Grades Kindergarten to 5. The use of backward mapping (Elmore, 1980; Rawle et al., 2017; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) to map topics this way not only supports combined classrooms, but also provides the opportunity to build on prior knowledge and create a deep understanding of concepts year over year. In a school, having all grades working on the same key topic at approximately the same time facilitates opportunities for discussions between grades, tutoring and mentoring of younger students by older students, and reinforcement of key topic concepts on a school-wide basis.

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller* meet the needs of nearly all students by providing 100% parallel and equitable English and Spanish resources, with original English and Spanish literature,

creating a true biliteracy workshop and enabling transfer of learning in multiple languages. In Dual Language settings, transfer of learning between languages is critical and must be explicitly taught. The key difference between an English monolingual classroom and a Dual Language classroom is that transfer of learning needs to happen within and between learning both languages. Teachers must create the learning conditions for transfer to happen. Having all the critical parallel and equitable resources and components will facilitate this transfer of learning.

Workshop Models

There are several ways reading and writing workshop models are implemented. Atwell (as cited in Timlick, 2016) suggested the elements of a 90-minute reading and writing workshop include: reading and discussion of a poem (5 minutes); writing-reading mini-lesson (5 to 20 minutes); conferences about plans for writing workshop (3 minutes); independent writing and conferring (35 to 50 minutes); read-aloud from a chapter book for short story (10 minutes); and independent reading for students while teacher does class record keeping (15 minutes).

The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP; n.d.) structured its reading workshop to allow students to read every day for 35-45 minutes and to write at least four days a week for 45 minutes or longer each day. Additionally, it is recommended the instructional, interactive read-alouds occur several days a week for at least 20 minutes. The read-alouds can take place at any time during the school day. TCRWP makes use of whole-class mini-lessons, small-group work, and individual conferences to support a gradual release of responsibility, which often starts with demonstration followed by appropriate scaffolding, helping make the invisible mind work of reading transparent to students.

Other researchers (e.g., Chambré, 2016; Mounla, Bohous, & Nabhani, 2011) who used the workshop model in studies adhered to similar workshop model components where the students learn on their own levels and from teacher modeling. Both writing and reading workshop models use short mini-lessons to teach specific skills. Both models have independent work time, during which teachers can confer with students. The closing activities include a short period where shared reading or sharing of writing can be done.

The workshop model is finding its way outside of the English Language Arts area also. Morabito (2016) used writer's workshop in the science classroom with three primary components. The first component was the whole-group instruction when an important concept or skill was introduced. In the science classroom, the whole-group instruction was the time when the teacher addresses topics related to the contents of the students' science notebook or the practices of science. These mini-lessons changed as the topic was further explored. The second component was dedicated writing time. This time was used, for example, to formulate questions and design investigation procedures, analyze and reflect on data, and summarize findings. The third component was the structured response during public sharing and critique in whole-group or small-group settings.

Workshop models have developed over a 30-year period along two different lines: reading and writing (Collins, Lee, Fox, & Madigan, 2017). Collins et al. discuss the theoretical foundations for reading and writing and why these two areas that would seem to be linked at all levels of schooling but are often taught separately. There seems to be several reasons, such as different professional organizations for reading and writing, and different pedagogical and developmental perspectives. These reasons seem to

have little to do with what is happening or should be happening in the classroom. Collins et al. found writing during reading improves reading comprehension. Constructivist perspective suggests "reading and writing are interconnected because both involve the active construction of meaning and draw on shared cognitive processes and knowledge representations" (Collins et al., 2017, p. 312).

Graham and Herbert (2011) focused on writing as a tool for improving reading. Writing about classroom material can help in the learning of content, and writing about materials read enhances the comprehension of content. The assumptions or predictions made about the meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Herbert were "writing about reading would enhance students' comprehension of text, that writing instruction would improve students' reading skills, and that increasing how much students wrote would improve their reading" (Graham & Herbert, 2011, pp. 713–714).

The meta-analysis, by Graham and Herbert (2011) found the overall effects of writing about reading on reading comprehension was statistically significant and generally robust. For the different types of writing activities examined, such as extended writing activities, summary writing, note taking, and asking or answering questions, the effect sizes were from 0.28 to 0.67, with an average weighted effect size of 0.41, meaning these writing activities are useful and a worthwhile effort. The meta-analysis also found writing instruction improved students' reading skills, with the 21 studies producing positive, statistically significant effect size of 0.22. The studies involved process writing, text structure, and paragraph/sentence instruction. The final area the meta-analysis examined was improvements in reading comprehension due to increased writing. The statistically significant average weighted effect size was 0.35 for this last area.

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Benchmark Education Company developed *Benchmark Workshop* to incorporate the components found in research. *Benchmark Workshop* provides a complete English Language Arts and Reading solution, including five workshop modules that fit into horizontally and vertically aligned knowledge strands across Grades Kindergarten to 5. Benchmark Education Company also developed *Benchmark Taller*, a 100% parallel and equitable Spanish Language Arts and Reading solution that can be used standalone or as part of a true Biliteracy Workshop. *Benchmark Taller* is aligned to Spanish Language Arts standards, provides language development for Spanish Learners at point of use, and contains authentic Spanish literature. A Biliteracy Workshop requires educators to make decisions about language and resource allocation. Programmatic decisions must be made so teachers know what to teach in Spanish and what to teach in English. *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* provide the resources for teachers to deliver instruction in Spanish and/or English based on their decisions.

The Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop for *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* are aligned by knowledge strand, genre, and mentor texts. The same mentor text is explored and understood as a reader before using it as a mentor text in writing, where further exploration of the genre characteristics and writing techniques and structures will be achieved. Both the Reader's and Writer's Workshops use similar workshop elements to provide both the explicit instruction students need, and the implicit support needed to grow as readers and writers. These elements include whole-group mini-lesson and guided practice, followed by small group, independent reading/writing, and conferring, finishing with a whole-group share and reflect.

Not only do *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* include Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop, but also the Phonics & Word Study Workshop that aligns to the reading and writing instruction seamlessly but can also be used as a standalone component. While the phonics instruction has two different scope and sequences, one for English and another for Spanish, the sequence and the instructional methodologies are authentic to the linguistic elements of each of the languages taught. Opportunities are then created for cross-linguistic transfer by explicitly teaching students to recognize the similarities and differences between sound-spellings of Spanish and English. The workshop elements found in the Phonics & Word Study Workshop are familiar, from the whole-group mini-lesson targeted to make efficient use of time, to the small-group time used to reteach and reinforce the whole-group mini-lesson and provide independent practice and partner work.

Interactive Read-Alouds

The practice of reading aloud to children has been researched for more than 50 years, with indications that "read-alouds are productive for children's language and literacy development" (Pendergast, May, Bingham, & Kurumada, 2015, p. 66). During conventional read-alouds, according to Burkins and Yaris (2016), the teacher selects a text due to the relationship to standards or the text allows for the introduction or reinforcement of certain reading strategies. The teacher will introduce the text, may preview vocabulary, and may stop at certain points to ask questions. The text features will also be discussed. Read-alouds offer a demonstration of proficient reading and "teaches the *how* of interacting with a text and the *why* of meaning making from texts" (Burkins & Yaris, 2016, p. 34). Additionally, read-alouds offer the experience for all students to focus on the meaning of texts. Read-alouds eliminate the barrier the texts impose on some students, allowing access to texts that would otherwise be too difficult.

According to Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey (2004), read-aloud texts are usually more difficult than students' independent reading levels and should be selected based on the needs and interests of the students. Fisher et al., based on a study of teachers conducting read-alouds in the San Diego County area, recommend the following practices for quality interactive read-alouds:

- Select texts that are based on the interests and needs of the students in the class.
- Preview and practice the text to allow for: choosing vocabulary to preview with students, ensuring effective use of pauses to ask questions and encourage prediction of what will happen next, and effectively modeling fluency.
- Establish a clear purpose for the lesson and for the text that has been chosen, including reminding students of the focus strategies and/or skills.
- Provide a model of fluent oral reading so pronunciation errors are rare, and the material is read with appropriate prosody.
- Show animation and expression by changing voice to denote different characters' emotions and moods, using movement, hand gestures, facial expressions, and props to enhance the reading of the text.
- Pause periodically to ask interesting questions that show the students are understanding the text, and ask questions that allow students to engage with the text and make connections between the text and their own lives.

- Connect the read-aloud to independent reading and writing, instead of using a text or the read-aloud as an isolated event that is not connected to the rest of the instruction.

Hilden and Jones (2013) described the benefits of interactive read-alouds as providing fluent models of reading where older students follow along in their own copy of the text. Teachers can make the comprehension process visible using the think-aloud method. Teachers can model and encourage the before-, during-, and after-reading comprehension behaviors and strategies used by good readers. And, finally, another benefit of interactive read-alouds, according to Hilden and Jones, is the development of students' vocabulary knowledge by having conversations about word meanings in context.

Hilden and Jones (2013) also provide instruction as to what interactive read-alouds are not. Interactive read-alouds are not a quick read, but rather they depend on planning to make them successful. They are not assessment where questions are only asked at the end of reading. Interactive read-alouds are not for limited questions, responses, and evaluations where the conversation may be shut down before multiple opinions and answers are explored.

Based on a 9-month ethnographic study in an urban Kindergarten classroom, Wiseman (2011) demonstrated

> how interactive read alouds were important learning opportunities for emergent readers because they provided opportunities for open-ended responses combined with specific reading instruction. The interactive read alouds created a space where meaning was constructed through dialogue and classroom interactions, providing an opportunity for children to respond to literature in a way that builds on their strengths and extends their knowledge (p. 431).

In Wiseman's study, the teacher used four main ways to construct knowledge orally and interactively: confirming, modeling, extending, and building. The teacher used confirming statements that showed support for others' responses and ideas. The teacher would model how to understand various aspects of a book, making her thoughts explicit for the students. The teacher and students pushed one another to extend ideas beyond the initial articulation, allowing them to build meaning together by scaffolding and building understanding in a social context.

Read-Alouds with Informational Texts

McClure and Fullerton (2017) studied a teacher and her class to demonstrate there are only slight differences in the quality practices of planning a read-aloud for an informational text as opposed to literary text. The needs of the students are still considered when selecting a text and planning the read-aloud. The purpose for the read-aloud and the focus strategies are still identified. The teacher still needs to practice and plan for pauses where questions can be asked and where thinking can be made visible using preplanned think-alouds. Students still need encouragement to participate in the collective sharing of ideas. Connecting the read-aloud text to other parts of instruction still must occur. The slight difference is informational texts have more and different text features than literary texts and may require the development of additional background knowledge.

Santoro, Baker, Fien, Smith, and Chard (2016) agree that informational text can often:

- Be complex in structure and based on different structures such as literary nonfiction (e.g., autobiographies or historical fiction), accounts based on history, science or technical perspectives, expositions or speeches
- Contain technical vocabulary
- Include more complex sentence structure
- Have visual displays of information

"Informational text can be very tough to use with students who struggle with reading because the content and difficult structure requires the intentional application of many comprehension strategies and an active monitoring of understanding" (Santoro et al. 2016, p. 283). For struggling readers, the use of read-alouds with before-, during-, and after-reading comprehension instruction to engage in complex, challenging texts allows the introduction of these texts "without the demands of proficient reading skills as a precondition for figuring out meaning" (Santoro et al. 2016, p. 291).

Most informational books are only available in English, making bilingual teachers reluctant to use them (Pappas, Varelas, Patton, Ye, & Ortiz, 2012). In a study involving the use of English language informational books in read-alouds in a Grade 2 bilingual classroom where most of the students were still primarily Spanish speakers, Pappas et al. explored using a dialogic, collaborative style of reading these books. The use of the informational books was an effort to connect science learning with language and literacy. These books provided photographs and illustrations that helped students who were "grappling with ideas, thoughts, and reasoning of others" (Pappas et al., 2012, p. 264), as well as provided language that was used by scientists.

Different dialogic discourse strategies were used by the teacher in the study by Pappas et al. to scaffold knowledge building and language use. Some of these strategies included: paraphrasing and translating the text; using intertextual links to ideas previously shared; extending student ideas by asking for further explanation; book illustrations being used to examine new concepts; and highlighting and reinforcing vocabulary to learn science discourse as well as second language acquisition. The read-aloud technique and the informational text were used together by a teacher who was knowledgeable about her students, leading to a successful conclusion.

Shared Readings in K–1

Shared readings are slightly different from interactive read-alouds. According to Burkins and Yaris (2016), during a conventional shared reading, teachers "present students with an enlarged text—usually a Big Book—which they read together, often in a singsong manner following the voice lead of the teacher" (p. 56). According to Seidenberg (2017), "reading *to* children is a misnomer inasmuch as people usually read *with* them, talking, digressing, and asking and answering questions" (p. 114), which is why reading with children is often called shared reading.

Shared reading is more often used in the earlier grades and takes on different forms based on the circumstances of reading with a child (Seidenberg, 2017). If shared reading takes place at home in the evening, the child may have picked a favorite book to read for the nth time. If shared reading occurs at school, it may involve exposure to new stories about very different places than where the children who

are listening live. The shared reading itself tends to have fewer interruptions for questions or instruction, allowing this type of reading to be a model of fluent reading. Shared readings often involve repeated readings with favorite books, allowing children to participate during the repeated refrains.

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Read-alouds and shared readings are important components of *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*. Resources are selected to reinforce grade-appropriate reading skills, such as metacognition and print concepts at the lower grades, and fluency and vocabulary at the upper grades, with comprehension skills and strategies across all grades. Teachers can use the supplied resources and/or choose titles from their classroom or school library. Additionally, a list of recommendations of read-alouds are included in the Additional Resources section of each unit.

Interactive read-alouds can be conducted at any point during the school day, based on schedules. Each week of each unit contains instructions unique to each read-aloud or shared reading. These instructions include but are not limited to: teaching points or learning goals (for shared readings) to establish the purpose of the readings; sections specific to the readings, such as introducing the book, building schema, or introducing vocabulary, with suggested salient points to cover; suggested stop-and-talk points that are provided with think-aloud examples that can be used during reading; and English and Spanish Language Development dialogic support suggestions that are made throughout the instruction.

The books used in the interactive read-alouds and shared readings in *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* are a combination of informational and literary text types. The texts are quantitatively and qualitatively evaluated based on the placement in the program. These measures help teachers decide the appropriateness of the books and texts. The books and texts include many genres, such as authentic literature, realistic fiction, personal narratives, and folktales, to name a few.

Whole-Group Mini-Lessons

Whole-group mini-lessons, for reading and writing, originated within the context of the workshop approach (Hagerty, 1992; TCRWP, n.d.; Timlick, 2016). During the whole-group mini-lessons, the strategies that will help students move independently through the reading and writing process are taught (TCRWP, n.d.). There are many examples of how whole-group mini-lessons were implemented. Two examples follow.

Hudson and Williams (2015) described the daily literacy schedule in the classroom where Hudson taught, which included a whole-group mini-lesson used “to model a comprehension strategy” (p. 532). Hudson and Williams state “through minilessons each day, I [Hudson] showed students how to go back into the text and find evidence to support their thinking” (p. 533). Additionally, Hudson and Williams state “each week, I [Hudson] began by thinking aloud and modeling my expectations” (p. 533) as a way of starting the whole-group mini-lesson.

Duke, Cervetti, and Wise (2017) describe the case study of a teacher named Jane, a Grade 3 teacher in a racially and culturally diverse school. Duke et al. describe Jane’s whole-class mini-lessons as being “inspired by the skills and strategies for which students demonstrate a need” (p. 396). Duke et al. continue to explain the whole-group mini-lessons by stating “her minilessons consisted of explicit

teaching of a specific skill or strategy, then modeling the skill or strategy with several texts and discussing why and how the skills and strategies are useful to good readers" (p. 396).

Gregg (2016) conducted a study that looked at the teachers' perception of their instruction during the whole-group mini-lesson compared to their actual behavior, using observational data. According to Gregg, whole-group mini-lessons are described in the literature as being a specific type of lesson that should be used to teach a variety of literacy content, such as "comprehension strategies (e.g., visualization, inferring, summarizing), skills (decoding, fluency, workshop procedures), literary content (e.g., literary elements, writer's craft) and even attitudes (e.g., becoming a lifelong reader)" (p. 82). The whole-group mini-lesson should be kept short and the interaction with students should be limited to the recommended guided practice.

The teacher participants in Gregg's study had a good understanding of what should be in a whole-group mini-lesson, but when it came to the actual teaching experience, teachers had a tendency to prioritize text information and the modeling was mostly absent, replaced by teaching moves that required covert thinking tasks of the students before the tasks were modeled overtly. Instead of the teachers being responsible for most of the task performance, the teachers and students shared equal responsibility. Some of this behavior was attributed, by Gregg, to the reading program being used by these teachers.

Metacognition, Targeted Gradual-Release, Explicit Teaching

"Metacognition is the process of thinking about one's own thinking" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 69). Metacognitive readers, defined by Block (2005), know how they comprehend and why comprehending is difficult at times. Attributes of metacognitive readers include activating prior knowledge and easily using newly learned information (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), determining the most importing ideas in a text (Brown & Palinscar, 1985; Reznitskaya & Anderson, 2001), asking questions and drawing inferences (NICHHD, 2000; NRP, 1999), and using a variety of fix-up strategies (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2003; Garner, 1987).

Metacognition and its relationship to understanding how reading comprehension occurs became a topic of interest during the late 1970s because of Durkin's (1979) research that found the current teaching practice of the day, the directed reading lesson, was not helping students to independently comprehend texts (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). In the search to find alternative methods of instruction, metacognition as a way of understanding the reading comprehension process was identified and used to determine that "proficient readers employ a number of metacognitive strategies during reading that help them understand the text" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 69). As a result of these findings, the effectiveness of teaching all readers to master metacognitive strategies used by excellent readers was explored.

At least two central notions have been identified because of the metacognitive instruction. "During metacognitive instruction, educators [must] provide *explicit* instruction on the use of metacognitive techniques that students can apply during reading" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 70). Explicit instruction is defined by Tracey and Morrow as the "attempt to be especially clear, organized, and detailed regarding the nature of the metacognitive strategy they are explaining, and when and how readers should apply that strategy during the reading experience" (p. 70).

The second central notion of metacognitive instruction is the idea that a gradual release, or transfer, of responsibility must take place between the teacher and the student for metacognitive instruction to be successful. Tracey and Morrow (2017) describe the instructional approach of gradual release of responsibility as beginning with

> the teacher's explicit description of the metacognitive strategy, and then the modeling of how, when, and why the strategy can be used. The modeling often takes place through think-aloud methods used by the teacher. The modeling phase is followed by a guided-use phase in which the teacher helps the students apply the strategy with teacher direction. Over a period of time, students gradually become able to independently initiate and use the target strategy. At this point, it can be said that the responsibility for that specific metacognitive tool has been successfully transferred from the teacher to the student. Then, the teacher can begin instruction of another metacognitive strategy (p. 70–71).

In a Dual Language context, teachers also facilitate the development of metalinguistic skills by providing students the opportunities to engage in comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between their native language and their new language. By intentionally providing a comprehensible connection between languages, explicit teaching for transfer promotes metacognitive and metalinguistic skills as students think about the languages they are using and learning (August & Shanahan, 2006, 2010; Lindholm-Leary 2016; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest the following five components be included in an instructional model that includes the use of gradual release of responsibility. Start with "an explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used" (p. 208). Next comes the "teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action" (p. 208). This is followed by the "collaborative use of the strategy in action" (p. 209), which starts the gradual release process. The fourth component is "guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility" (p. 209), where the levels of guidance and student responsibility are exercised as students become more competent. Finally, the student is ready for "independent use of the strategy" (p. 209).

Young (2017) confirmed there are four parts to guided release of responsibility, where the teacher moves from assuming all responsibility for performing a task to the students assuming all the responsibility. First, the teacher establishes the purpose and models thinking for students. During the guided instruction, students can attend to a task with the teacher who prompts, cues, and questions to help students do more of the work. The collaborative tasks allow students to work together to complete a project together. Finally, students can apply what they have learned to a new situation.

Young's study looked at the effectiveness of implementing the gradual release of responsibility model with Grade 4 students. Pretest to posttest comparisons between students who received instruction using the gradual release of responsibility model and a comparison group of students show a statistically significant increase for the treatment group while the comparison group showed a decrease, indicating the use of the gradual release model was effective. In fact, in Young's study, 100% of the respondents indicated use of the gradual release model was effective, (56% extremely effective, 24% very effective,

and 20% effective). When participants were asked which part of the gradual release model was most effective, 48% indicated modeling and demonstrating and 44% indicated guided practice.

Read, Landon-Hays, and Martin-Rivas (2014) focus on using a gradual release model when teaching writing and different genres. They found as they worked with teachers that "effective instruction involves teachers modeling for students how to write in specific genres or forms by writing *in front of* the students and writing *with* students through shared writing" (p. 470). Additionally, "before asking students to write independently, they [teachers] can also collaborate on coauthored pieces, which is especially helpful as a support to English learners as they write" (p. 470).

Hart and Stebick (2016) indicate "learners who do not naturally activate innate problem-solving capabilities to understand texts simply don't figure out how to make meaning without explicit teaching" (p. 43). Further, Hart and Stebick state "when it comes to comprehension strategies, it is best to assume all students need some degree of being shown" (p. 43). Hart and Stebick summarize that "explicit teaching of key literacy concepts and processes uncovers the hidden thinking processes that competent readers go through. Explicit instruction makes the invisible, visible" (p. 44).

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Burkins and Yaris (2016) suggest the gradual release of responsibility, defined by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) and more recently described by Tracey and Morrow (2017), serves as a bridge between the read-aloud and the next step in the workshop model, the whole-group mini-lessons. In *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*, the whole-group mini-lessons include four components. The teacher focuses the attention of the students on the purpose of whole-group mini-lesson for the day. Based on that purpose, the teacher models his or her thinking and reading or writing behaviors. Then the teacher guides the students in practice. The final component is the bridge from the whole-group mini-lesson to the small-group and independent reading or writing.

The whole-group mini-lessons in *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* are designed to be concentrated yet brief, about 10 to 12 minutes. The whole-group mini-lessons are also designed to address grade-level standards and expectations. The teacher is encouraged to use observations and judgment about the materials being used and the teaching points upon which to focus. Included in the Guide Practice portion of the whole-group mini-lessons are supports for English and Spanish Language Development. At the end of each whole-group mini-lesson are formative assessments that include suggested observations and literacy or writing behaviors to help teachers determine appropriate students on which to focus during small-group instruction.

Small Group, Independent Work, and Conferring

The last component of the whole-group mini-lesson in *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* is the bridge to small group, independent work, and conferring. According to TCRWP (n.d.), "small group work and conferring are what a teacher spends a bulk of the workshop time engaged in, which provides the teacher with multiple opportunities to personalize instruction" (p. 13). Additionally, according to TCRWP, "the routines and structures of a workshop are kept simple and predictable, as mentioned, so that the teacher can focus on the complex work of teaching in a responsive manner to accelerate achievement of all learners" (p. 13).

Small Group

Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa (2017) summarize reasons small groups "are seen as an ideal setting to improve teacher' interaction" (p. 62) with students. First, the proximity of the teacher to the students "increases the opportunity to isolate moments of teaching" (p. 62). Working with larger groups makes it more difficult to "promote learners' verbal and non-verbal participation" (p. 62) than when teachers are working with smaller groups. The third reason given by Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa is "teachers are also able to provide targeted scaffolds such as visual cues, gesturing, repetition, and modified speech, thus providing individual assistance that cannot be accomplished in whole group formats" (p. 62).

In a study of 14 schools located in Virginia, Minnesota, Colorado, and California, Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000) investigated factors related to primary-grade reading achievement. These schools had moderate to high numbers of students on subsidized lunch plans. According to this study, students of teachers in the most effective schools spent more time in small-group instruction, about 59 minutes per day, than other students in the less effective schools. "The teachers in the most effective schools were very aware of the need to make sure that the groups were flexible, that students moved to another group when their performance…merited movement" (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 146).

Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa (2017) conducted a study that looked at what constrained teachers from making the transition to the use of small-group instruction. Findings from the study touched on several themes. When teaching in small groups, teachers need to conceptualize time differently. Many teachers in the study felt rushed to complete the instruction and to respond to students without cutting them off. The suggestion was to break a complex task or process into smaller components that could be accomplished and still leave time for discussion.

Students working independently while the teacher was working with a small group of students was difficult for teachers as they transitioned, according to Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa. Teachers felt students were either unable to finish independent work within the time frame or they were finished too quickly and didn't know what to do with the rest of their time. Independent work, according to Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa, needs to be at a level where students can complete the work without the help of the teacher. The activities should provide opportunities for review, internalizing previously learned content, and/or practicing collaboratively. There also needs to be some predictability for students in the independent work so they know what they can do if they finish their work early.

The shift from only whole-group instruction to small-group instruction in Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa's study presented "major challenges for both teachers and learners because it requires not only structural changes, but shifts in the way teachers and learners relate to each other and to the teaching and learning process" (p. 68). The role of the teacher shifts in the small groups from one of overseeing the participants to becoming more of a collaborator with the learners. This shift was reported to increase the engagement of the students when participating in the academic discussions.

Independent Work

Independent work, according to Wyatt and Chapman-DeSousa (2017) and discussed earlier, needs to be at a level where students can complete the work without the help of the teacher. This generally indicates the work should be at a level where the student is able to work independently. The activities

should provide opportunities for review and internalizing previously learned content, practicing collaboratively with peers, or interacting with technology.

In the study conducted by Taylor et al. (2000), also discussed earlier, students in the most effective schools, out of the 14 schools in the study, spent more time in independent reading, approximately 28 minutes per day on average, than students in less effective schools. The TCRWP (n.d.) suggests that during independent work time, "students should be reading texts they can read independently, with at least 96% fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, and supporting students to move up levels of text complexity" (p. 2). Not only is reading texts that can be read independently important, but so is having choice in the materials read, which is likely to "result in increased student involvement with the content and higher motivation" (Schcolnik, Kol, & Abarbanel, 2006, p. 14).

Time for independent reading in and outside of school is very important to the process of learning to read. Seidenberg (2017) suggested the serious way to improve reading is to "Read. As much as possible. Mostly new stuff" (p. 82). Seidenberg goes on to explain these statements. When we read, we learn about language and acquire information during the act of reading. Reading as much as possible allows us to practice and increase our understanding of the knowledge of language. Finally, by reading new stuff, we expand the knowledge of language by exposure to novel structures found in texts with varied styles and genres.

Seidenberg is certainly not the first to suggest independent reading is important. TCRWP (n.d.) supports this idea by saying "kids need to read a lot of texts, with high comprehension, in order to move up levels of text complexity" (p. 2). Atwell (2007) states "…the only way to become a strong, fluent reader is to read often and a lot" (p. 45). Wolf (2007) also contributes to the conversation by stating "…the experience of reading is not so much an end in itself as it is our best vehicle to a transformed mind" (p.18).

Role of Leveled Texts

Discussion of independent reading and the appropriate level at which students should read during independent reading brings up the role of leveled texts. Pikulski and Chard (2005) state the use of appropriate texts for fluency development and word-identification skills is necessary for students to make progress, especially for students who have difficulty with word-identification skills. Pikulski and Chard recommend matching students to appropriate leveled readers to increase success with fluency growth. Additionally, the control of the features of texts being used for fluency practices should also be considered.

When Fisher and Frey (2014) investigated current research on the use of leveled texts and instructional levels, they "could not find any compelling studies suggesting that leveled texts *beyond the primary years* [emphasis added] resulted in significant gains in achievement" (p. 348). During the primary years, when students are learning to read, "practice with highly decodable books filled with high-frequency words, sight words, and patterns is important so that students develop automaticity" (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 351). When confronted with complex reading materials above a student's instructional level, teacher participation by providing appropriate scaffolding is the key.

Blevins (2017) presents a study he conducted during the 1999–2000 school year comparing the use of decodable texts on early reading growth compared to the use of standard classroom literature, patterned and predictable text, as follow-up reading to phonics instruction. Blevins found "students in the decodable controlled-text group were more prepared to transfer their phonics skills to new words presented to them in formal assessments" (p. 166). Blevins concluded "the type of text for beginning readers does matter" (p. 166) and "student who use decodable controlled text in their early reading instruction get off to a stronger start in their reading development" (p. 166).

Hastings (2016), based on her review of research on leveled text instruction, stated "there does not appear to be one advantageous level at which to provide instruction" (p. 67). The progress made by students can be dependent on the group size, scaffolding received, and level of text being read. What does seem to be problematic, according to Hastings, is the "increased rigidity of school districts and teachers that restrict students from reading certain reading material due to text levels and students' decoding abilities. As a result, access to challenging and engaging materials is denied, leading to "students' detachment in reading, thinking, and school and leads to the underdevelopment of comprehension skills, vocabulary acquisition, and promotes learned helplessness" (p. 67).

As a follow up, Hastings (2016) points out the question of providing students with age-appropriate grade-level texts or reading-level texts does not have to be a one-or-the-other proposition. She suggests there can be a "dual commitment" (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, George, Hasty, & Highfield, 2004), meaning teachers provide daily instruction to develop the skills necessary to allow students to read independently as well as providing student with daily access and experiences with age-, grade-, and cognitively appropriate materials. Using the workshop model with whole-group mini-lessons, small groups, and independent practice allows Hastings' suggestions to be met.

Whittingham, Huffman, Christensen, and McAllister (2013) suggest one way to provide students with age-, grade-, and cognitively appropriate materials is to make use of technology. In a study conducted with Grades 4 and 5 students struggling with decoding issues, audiobooks were used to determine if this underused technology could lead to improvement in readers' skills and attitudes. The results of the Whittingham et al. study showed not only a significant increase of the scores and number of students in the proficient and above categories on the state assessment, but the results also showed a positive impact on the students' attitudes toward reading, as noted by students, parents, and teachers.

As is usual when determining instructional strategies for reading and writing, there is not one answer that will fit every student. The important concepts are to have materials that meet students' needs when necessary and exceed students' needs at times to stretch them and allow students to explore books and texts that interest them. Robust school or classroom libraries and technology with rich e-book resources would hopefully provide just the right book at the right time for each student.

Conferring

Conferring should be an opportunity for the students' thinking to become visible. The instructional exchanges that take place during conferring have "the potential to be a tool for modeling creative and critical thinking, sharing alternative text interpretations, and assessing student progress" (Gilson, Little, Ruegg, Brice-Davis, 2014, p. 103). Zwiers and Soto (2017) go further, using the term conversational

discourse, “which is the use of language for extended, back-and-forth, and purposeful communication among people…used to create and clarify knowledge, not just transmit it” (p. 12).

One of the reasons conferring or conversational discourse might not happen is due to the interaction between the teacher and student. “There is some evidence that indicates teachers continue to use the traditional teacher-dominated Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) pattern of interaction, in which a teacher initiates the interaction by asking a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates that response” (Porath, 2014, p. 627). Porath suggests a more student-centered conference is necessary, which “provides more authentic student responses, better awareness of the student’s needs, and deeper conversations about books with the student” (p. 627).

According to Porath (2014), strategies that can be applied to conferring include: being aware of the impact of individual, in this case the teacher, likes and dislikes with regard to reading to make sure those preferences are not influencing reading opportunities for students; asking more open, or thick, questions that get at students’ thinking; probing further to encourage students to further elaborate; and using wait time to invite the student into the conversation. Porath suggests that teachers “talk less, listen more” (p. 634).

Asking questions is a long-standing instructional strategy (Gilson et al., 2014). Analysis by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD, 2000) showed one of the eight effective strategies for improving reading comprehension was students answering questions posed by the teacher with the teacher providing feedback. Hattie (2009) also found a positive relationship with effective teacher questioning on student achievement, with an effect size of 0.48[2], almost a half a standard deviation or about a one-grade leap.

Feedback

Hattie and Timperley (2007) made it clear there is a difference between instruction and providing feedback. Feedback is delivered because of a performance where there is a gap between what is to be accomplished and the current understanding of that accomplishment. Feedback is aimed at reducing this gap through a few different cognitive processes, “including restructuring understandings, confirming to students that they are correct or incorrect, indicating that more information is available or needed, pointing to directions students could pursue, and/or indicating alternative strategies to understand particular information” (Hattie & Timperley, p. 82).

Feedback, Hattie and Timperley continue, does not stand alone and is not the first thing that happens. Feedback is part of the teaching process and comes second, after a student has responded to initial instruction. Feedback works best when there is a faulty interpretation rather than a general or total lack of understanding. Feedback can be accepted, rejected, or used with modification. Finally, feedback can be given by teachers, students, peers, etc., and can also be initiated and sought by students.

Hattie and Timperley indicate there are many types of feedback; some are quite powerful and some are not. An analysis across more than 7,000 studies and 13,370 effect sizes “demonstrated that the most effective forms of feedback provide cues or reinforcement to learners; are in the form of video-, audio-,

[2] https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/

or computer-assisted instructional feedback; and/or relate to goals" (p. 84). On the opposite end of feedback, "programmed instruction, praise, punishment, and extrinsic rewards were the least effective for enhancing achievement" (p. 84).

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

In *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*, the small group provides time for teachers to work with groups of students, making use of decodable or leveled texts along with Teacher's Guides and other support materials to support the strategy transfer in reading or reinforcing the skills and strategies of writing. The small group is where the largest amount of time is allocated, regardless of which literacy block is selected for implementation. Resources and texts are provided for the small-group time, freeing the teachers from having to spend time searching for available materials.

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller* provide a wide range of resources to give teachers options to meet the needs of the students in their classes. The small-group texts come with Teacher's Guides and Text Evidence Question Cards. These resources provide well-thought-out, open ended, complex questions and ideas to stimulate the type of discourse needed to encourage deep thinking about the texts being read by students. Additionally, tools such as Peer Coaching Menus, which provide writing in response to reading opportunities, are provided for use during independent reading. Choice in reading material is provided through the book box, from previously read texts, and from Interactive e-books.

Writing

Writing is the other part of literacy that by definition includes both reading and writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a). According to Graham and Perin (2007a) at the time they wrote *Writing Next*, there was little research on what writing instruction looked like or should look like in schools. In 2008, Cutler and Graham published a study that included a random sample of primary grade teachers (N = 178). These teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire that "provided information about themselves, the composition of their classrooms, their attitudes and perceptions about writing and writing instruction, and their writing practices" (p. 909). This study yielded support for seven recommendations for reforming writing in the primary grades. These recommendations included:

> (a) increase amount of time students spend writing; (b) increase time spent writing expository text; (c) provide better balance between time spent writing, learning writing strategies, and teaching writing skills; (d) place more emphasis on fostering students' motivation for writing; (e) develop stronger connections for writing between home and school; (f) make computers a more integral part of the writing program; and (g) improve professional development for writing instruction in teacher education programs (Cutler & Graham, 2008, p. 907).

Graham and Sandmel (2011) indicate the best writing instructional model to be implemented in schools is the process writing approach. The process writing approach is somewhat fluid in its definition, but Graham and Sandmel identify common underlying principles synthesized from several studies (e.g., Graham & Perin, 2007b, Nagin, 2006; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006).

> Students engage in cycles of planning (setting goals, generating ideas, organizing ideas), translating (putting a writing plan into action), and reviewing (evaluating, editing, revising). They write for real purposes and audiences, with some of their writing projects occurring over an

extended period of time. Students' ownership of their writing is stressed, as is self-reflection and evaluation. Students work together collaboratively, and teachers create a supportive and nonthreatening writing environment. Personalized and individualized writing instruction is provided through minilessons, writing conferences, and teachable moments (Graham & Sandmel, 2011, pp. 396-397).

In 2012, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers* (Graham et al., 2012) was published. This publication not only reinforced the importance of learning to write for all students but also offered recommendations. Each recommendation is ascribed with the level of evidence based on the high-quality experimental and quasi-experimental design studies that met What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards. For this practice guide, 34 studies were relevant to the panel's recommendations. Table 1 provides the recommendations, level of evidence, and a brief explanation for each recommendation.

Table 1. IES Practice Guide Recommendations

Recommendation	Level of Evidence	Explanation
Recommendation 1. Provide daily time for students to write.	Minimal Evidence	The amount of time suggested for teaching and practicing writing was 30 minutes for students in kindergarten and 60 minutes for students in first grade and beyond.
Recommendation 2. Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.	Strong Evidence	This was such a broad and complex recommendation that it was broken into two sections.
Recommendation 2a. Teach students the writing process.		The writing process included seven steps: planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, and publishing. Suggestions for implementing the recommendations included teaching appropriate writing strategies, using a gradual release of responsibility, and encouraging flexibility and changes in the use of strategies.
Recommendation 2b. Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.		Exposure to different genres and features of good writing through mentor texts are a large part of this recommendation. Additionally, expanding students' concept of audience and teaching techniques for writing for different purposes are necessary.
Recommendation 3. Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.	Moderate Evidence	Teaching handwriting can start with letters in isolation, then in the creation of sentences, and onto authentic writing experiences. Although often taught as a separate subject, spelling should be connected to writing as much as possible. Teaching students to write strong sentences allows them to convey intended meaning and engage readers.
Recommendation 4. Create an engaged community of writers.	Minimal Evidence	An engaged community of writers is one where writing is shared, students are given writing choices, students collaborate, give and receive feedback, and students' work is published beyond the classroom.

With the release of Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) followed by new sets of standards created by many states, writing became a central player in improving learning and education (Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015). Students were now expected to

> (1) learn to craft text that skillfully persuades, informs, and narrates imagined or real experiences; (2) use writing as a tool for facilitating reading, classroom learning, and building new knowledge; and (3) move beyond pen and paper to the additional use of digital writing tools (Graham et al., 2015, p. 499).

The purpose of the meta-analysis by Graham et al. (2015) was to identify effective instructional practices for teaching writing. The included studies "examined the effect of a writing treatment on overall writing quality, content learning, or reading performance" (p. 504), thus focusing on writing practices that had impact on more than just the skill being taught. Where appropriate, effect sizes (ES)[3] were included. Table 2 presents the findings of this meta-analysis.

Table 2. Graham et al. (2015) Meta-Analysis Recommendations

Recommendations	Average-Weighted Effect Size
Create a writing environment that is positive and supportive.	
Establish writing routines that create a pleasant and motivating writing environment.	
Implement a process approach to writing.	Writing quality = 0.37
Create routines that ensure students write frequently.	Writing quality = 0.37 Reading comprehension = 0.35
Design instructional routines where students compose together.	Writing quality = 0.66
Establish goals for students' writing.	Writing quality = 0.80
Use twenty-first-century writing tools.	Writing quality = 0.47
Provide feedback.	
Ensure students acquire needed writing skills, knowledge, and strategies.	
Teach handwriting, typing, and spelling.	Writing quality = 0.55
Teach sentence-construction skills.	Writing quality = 0.56
Have students gather ideas and information to write about.	Writing quality = 0.54
Teach students the basic elements of different types of text.	Writing quality = 0.41
Provide students with good models of written text.	Writing quality = 0.40
Teach students vocabulary that will improve their text.	Writing quality = 0.78
Teach students strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing.	Writing quality = 1.00
Use writing as a tool to support students' learning.	Content learning = 0.22 Reading comprehension = 0.65

There were enough research studies in the meta-analysis by Graham et al. (2015) to make five recommendations for students with disabilities. Table 3 contains those recommendations and effect sizes for students with disabilities. Please note, four of the five recommendations are also effective with

[3] The procedure to calculate ES was to "subtract the mean score of the writing treatment group at posttest from the mean score of the control group at posttest and divide this difference by the pooled standard of the two groups" (Graham et al., 2015, pp. 504–505). All effect sizes were adjusted for small-sample-size bias (Hedges, 1982). Often, the following are used to judge the size of the effect: 0.2 is small, 0.5 is medium, and 0.8 is large (Cohen, 1988).

students in general. The new recommendation, using dictation, was an effective treatment specific to students with disabilities.

Table 3. Graham et al. (2015) Meta-Analysis Recommendations for Students with Disabilities

Recommendations for Students with Disabilities	Average-Weighted Effect Size
Teach students strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and editing.	Writing quality = 0.93
Establish goals for students' writing.	Writing quality = 0.57
Allow students to dictate some part of their composition (e.g., plan, draft) into a tape recorder.	Writing quality = 0.55
Implement a process approach to writing.	Writing quality = 0.43
Use twenty-first-century writing tools.	Writing quality = 0.35 Decreased errors = 0.42

In Table 2, one of the recommendations from the Graham et al. (2015) meta-analysis is to provide feedback. Feedback is one of the influences, identified by John Hattie, related to learning outcomes with an effect size of 0.73, which is close to a large effect and is certainly a positive effect on learning outcomes (Waack, 2015). McGee (2017) suggests feedback in writing matters as much (or more than!) the writing lessons taught in the classroom. McGee provides five research-supported essentials for creating classrooms where the complicated work of writing can take place while also having space for feedback. This best-practices writing classroom includes:

- Authentic audience-based writing experiences: Writers are invested and motivated when engaged with an immediate, compelling purpose.
- Goals that stretch each writer with support to reach those goals: Feedback is centered around reaching goals set by writers.
- Self-regulation in writing experiences with timely feedback: Writers own their process and are given, and give themselves, feedback on their choices.
- Routines and structures that promote writing and interactions with other writers.
- An environment that supports risk taking and reflection: When writers feel safe enough to take risks in the classroom, it deepens learning and makes transfer to other situations more likely. (McGee, 2017, pp. 22–23)

Application to Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Benchmark Education Company believes learning to write is an essential skill for students to learn and therefore developed Writer's Workshop as part of *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*. Writer's Workshop is designed to provide writers with space and time to write, with predictable, habitual day-to-day routines that create stability for writers and support for writing within a process that allows for writing to develop over time. The teachers using Writer's Workshop provide the kind of feedback that shows writers what is working and explains what to do next. Additionally, teachers modeling the strategies and techniques of writing and the modeling of courage to share their writing with students help students be courageous too. Peer collaboration and time to reflect are built into Writer's Workshop. Finally, students are given choices as to when and how to use strategies. They are also given authentic audiences to write for so they can picture who will read their writing. In *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller,* Writer's Workshop can be used as a complete stand-alone workshop model or integrated alongside Reader's Workshop.

Phonics and Word Study

The IES Educator's Practice Guide (Foorman et al., 2016), titled *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*, focuses on "the foundational reading skills that enable students to read words (alphabetics), relate those words to their **oral language** and read **connected text** with sufficient accuracy and **fluency** to understand what they read" (p. 1). The practice guide recommendations are intended for students from Grades Kindergarten to 3. The focus of the practice guide is on three interrelated themes for improving instruction in foundational reading skills. These themes include: 1) "reinforcing the effectiveness of instruction in alphabetics, fluency, and vocabulary"; 2) "providing instruction in broad oral language skills"; and 3) "integrating all aspects of reading instruction" (Foorman et al., 2016, p. 1). The four foundational skills recommendations made by the practice guide based on these themes are:

1. Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge.
2. Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters (phonological and phonemic awareness).
3. Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words (phonics and morphology).
4. Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. (Foorman et al., 2016, p. 2)

Fisher (2017) stated phonics instruction is a "necessary component of an effective literacy instructional effort," and "we need to be sure that students receive this type of instruction as part of their early literacy learning" (p. xiii). Fisher further suggests students need to understand the way language works, which needs to be "combined with oral language development, fluency, vocabulary learning, and comprehension," making it "a concerted effort…to teach every child to read" (p. xiii).

Kilpatrick (2015) defines phonics as "a system for approaching reading that focuses on the relationship between letters and sounds. Phonics helps with sounding out unfamiliar words" (p. 363). Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2018) state "systematic phonics refers to reading instruction programs that teach pupils the relationship between graphemes and phonemes in an alphabetic writing system" (p. 12). Castles et al. further state "systematic phonics instruction should be viewed as a natural and logical consequence of the manner in which alphabetic writing systems represent spoken language" (p. 12). Moats (2010) states "It is better to teach the code system of written English systematically and explicitly than it is to teach it randomly, indirectly, or incidentally" (p. 17).

Blevins (2017) states the research over the past 50–60 years is consistent: "learning the alphabetic principle is essential to learning to read, and phonics is best taught when it is systematic and explicit" (p. xxv). Blevins defines systematic instruction as that which "builds from easy to more complex skills with built-in review and repetition to ensure mastery" (p. xxv). Explicit in this instance means "that sound-spelling correspondences are initially taught directly to students, rather than using a discovery, or implicit, method" (p. xxv). When there is an understanding by teachers that there is a connection between phonics and comprehension, an observer will see strong phonics instruction taught where "the

bulk of the lesson is devoted to applying those skills to real reading and writing experiences (where learning occurs and is consolidated)" (p. xxv).

Blevins (2017) recommends the following characteristics of and suggestions for strong phonics instruction.

- **Readiness skills:** Alphabet recognition and phonological and phonemic awareness are the two best predictors of early reading success and will open the gate to reading.
- **Scope and sequence:** The better scopes and sequences work from the simplest to the most complex skills; they allow for as many words as possible to be formed as early as possible; the focus is on high-utility skills first; instruction on easily confused letters and sounds is separated; and the scope and sequence that works for most students is the one adopted.
- **Blending:** Blending is the main strategy used to decode; teachers who spend larger amounts of time on blending, modeling blending, and providing practice achieve greater student gains.
- **Dictation**: Dictation can accelerate students' use of taught phonics skills from reading into writing through guided spelling practice.
- **Word awareness activities:** These activities allow students to explore the new skills being learned and incorporate this new learning into the established learning. The two best activities are word building and word sorts.
- **High-frequency words:** Words that appear most often in print are referred to as high-frequency words; without mastery of these words, fluency could be compromised.
- **Reading connected text:** The more opportunities students have to practice decoding words, the better their word recognition becomes, the more words students recognize on sight, and the easier it becomes to read.
- **The teacher:** The teachers' background knowledge of phonics and linguistics, expertise in phonics practices, and attitudes about phonics are ingredients that play a critical role in the instructional success of students. The teacher is critical.

Graham and Santangelo (2014) authored a meta-analysis of 53 experimental and quasi-experimental studies, including 6,037 students in Grades Kindergarten through 12, that looked at the impact of formally teaching spelling on performances in the areas of spelling, phonological awareness, reading, and writing. Formal spelling instruction can include a variety of activities "including teaching students: (1) how to spell specific words (e.g., through direct practice in spelling them); (2) how to use skills, rules, and strategies to spell unknown words; and/or (3) how to connect and extend students' grasp of the spelling system using systematic word study activities" (p. 1705). This meta-analysis provided "strong support for directly and systematically teaching students how to spell" (p. 1738), instruction which improves not only spelling, but also improves reading and phonological awareness skills.

Application to Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

In *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*, the foundational skills instruction falls into the Phonics & Word Study Workshop and is reinforced in Reader's Workshop. As would be expected, there are two different scope and sequences, one for English and another for Spanish. The instructional process is the same. The instruction is explicit with modeling and then moving to guided practice of what was taught. Teachers are encouraged to gradually release responsibility and provide students with opportunities to

practice the skills. In both English and Spanish, students move to the connected texts for authentic practice, allowing the skill to be applied.

Generally, in Grades Kindergarten to 2 all students will benefit from some amount of grade-level-appropriate foundational skill instruction. The 15-minute whole-group mini-lesson will be a standard part of the daily plan. During the small group, differentiated support will be provided based on need. In Grades 3 to 5, the instruction will usually be limited to the students who are still struggling with foundational skills or continue to need reinforcement. These 10-minute lessons will generally take place during small group or could take place at another time, outside the literacy block.

Reading Across Texts

The expectation set by Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (CCSS for ELA and Literacy; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and other College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) is "students will be able to navigate multiple texts, evaluate the claims that authors make, notice and account for any conflicting points of view, and synthesize information as they develop an understanding of a concept or event" (Mancevice & Herman, 2016, p. 2). Insights from research, identified by Mancevice and Herman, leads to three recommendations: teach students strategies to use when evaluating sources of information; teach students strategies to use when comparing information across sources; and taking into consideration that students' purpose for reading affects how they tend to approach reading multiple texts, so care should be taken when framing the instructional tasks.

To read across multiple sources successfully, students need to be able to evaluate the texts as sources of information, evaluating the authors' expertise and credibility or trustworthiness (Mancevice & Herman, 2016). This type of evaluation is not likely to happen without the teacher's explanation and modeling (Britt & Aglinskas, 2002), along with many opportunities to practice. Students need to be taught that it is appropriate to question the content of texts, instead of just seeing them as a source of a "right" answer (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; Wineburg, 1991).

Experts in different fields of study, such as math, chemistry, and history, use different strategies to read their respective texts (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), making it necessary for teachers to know which strategies work best with different texts from different disciplines (Shanahan, Shanahan, & Misischia, 2011). Mancevice and Herman (2016) suggest such strategies or reading practices could include: sourcing or considering information about the person who wrote or created the text; contextualizing or reflecting on the content of the source from the appropriate context based on the field of study; and corroborating or comparing the similarities and differences across the sources.

Students are likely to encounter conflicting information across texts and/or topics, especially with sources found online. Students will have to learn how to reconcile those differences and will need instruction about appropriate strategies to use in the reconciliation. Teachers not only have the responsibility to teach and model strategies, but also to provide an appropriate framing of the use of the texts. According to Mancevice and Herman (2016), "if a teacher frames texts as authoritative sources of information, for example, then students are not likely to see a reason to read and evaluate texts differently" (p. 15).

In a study by VanSledright and Frankes (2000), if the Grade 4 students participating in the study found sources with conflicting information, they would search for another source, instead of using the sources already found, due to not having the strategies to deal with the conflicting information. Mancevice and Herman (2016) state "through classroom instruction, and the tasks that they design, teachers send students messages about whether they should read texts as unquestionable sources of information, or whether they need to corroborate information across sources and weigh information in relation to its source" (p. 16).

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

In *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Tallier*, in each unit, each student is provided with their own book that contains the mentor texts for that unit. These books have dedicated space designed for students to annotate and write comments or questions about the text. In addition to the mentor texts, there are weekly activities to be completed by students in their Reader's Notebook. One of these weekly activities is specifically about reading across texts. The mentor texts are used as part of this activity.

Spanish Foundational Skills and Language Arts

Research consistently shows that language and literacy development in students' native language not only facilitates learning English and English literacy, but is foundational to cognitive development and learning (Coelho, 2012; Cummins, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Emergent bilinguals (Sparrow, Butvilofsky, Escamilla, Hopewell, & Tolento, 2014) are students who are in the process of acquiring two or more linguistic codes, becoming bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. Emergent bilinguals are often defined by their perceived deficits (semilinguals) (Escamilla et al., 2014). However, research has shown that bilinguals develop a unique interdependent system (Escamilla, Hopewell, Geisler, & Ruiz 2007; Grosjean, 1989; Valdés & Figueroa, 1994) in which languages interconnect to increase linguistic functionality. This linguistic interdependence of language acquisition facilitates a transfer of literacy skills from the primary language (L1) to the second language (L2) (August & Shanahan, 2006; Bialystok, 2007, 2009).

The strength of learning through formal instruction in Spanish determines the extent of transfer to English (August, Calderón, & Carlo, 2002; García, 2008; Slavin & Calderón, 2001). For transfer to be maximized, cross-linguistic connections between the two languages must be explicitly taught while students engage in a contrastive analysis of the Spanish and English languages (Cummins, 2007). Continued strong literacy development in Spanish provides the foundation and scaffold for literacy development, given that a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) exists between the two languages (Cummins, 1991). Consequently, direct and systematic instruction (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Sanders, & Christian, 2005) in the appropriate sequence of Spanish skills with early English as a second language-based literacy instruction is critical to student success. As a result of working within two language systems, students' metalinguistic and metacognitive skills are enhanced when they learn about the similarities and differences between languages (Escamilla et. al., 2014).

The research in metalinguistic knowledge development also addresses issues surrounding appropriate and effective approaches and methods for Spanish foundational literacy skills instruction. Goldenberg et al. (2014) address the question of the phonological and phonemic awareness instruction in Spanish among bilingual students who are native Spanish speakers schooled in the United States, as compared to their age-level peers in Mexico. Goldenberg et al. examine the prominence of Spanish-specific linguistic features and processes of literacy development among Spanish readers as the basis for reading

instruction methodology. Bialystok (2007, 2009) proposes that there are three prerequisite skills required for the development of competencies in literacy: 1) competence with the oral language; 2) understanding of symbolic concepts of print; and 3) establishment of metalinguistic awareness. Research in Spanish-speaking countries establishes that among Spanish early readers, syllabic awareness develops in conjunction with phonemic awareness because of the phonetics of Spanish, where vowels and syllables, including syllable stress, are the granular unit of phonological awareness (González & González, 2000).

Metalinguistic awareness and literacy are developmentally reciprocal. The specific metalinguistic competencies involved in fluent and proficient biliteracy that transfer across languages and writing systems can be identified according to the embedded and/or explicit knowledge of how spoken and written language are related through an alphabetic spelling system. Vernon and Ferreiro (1999) and Jiménez, Smith, and Martínez-León (2003) document how phonological awareness in Spanish is often taught in Spanish-speaking countries through writing rather than through explicit instruction in phonics. The Common Core en Español (SLA) standards (San Diego County Office of Education, 2012) address the issue of a Spanish foundational reading skills instructional sequence and the transferability of metalinguistic learning in Spanish L1 literacy to enhanced literacy learning in English.

Research shows that English Learners can transfer native language literacy skills to English literacy learning (August & Shanahan, 2006; Riches & Genesee, 2006). Therefore, ELA instruction for English Learners will need to be adapted based on each student's level of literacy in his or her home language, age, and schooling experience. When considering how to adapt ELA instruction for English Learners, there are other considerations, including 1) the student's level of oral proficiency in his or her home language as well as in English; 2) how closely the student's home language is related to English; and 3) for students with literacy in their home language, the type of writing system used (San Diego County Office of Education, 2012).

English Language Development

Many studies (e.g., Peercy, Artzi, Silverman, & Martin-Beltrán, 2015) make note of the fact that good instruction for students whose first language is English will also be appropriate instruction for English Learners, up to a point. These studies also point out, however, there are some differences between teaching English Learners and students whose first language is English. TCRWP (n.d.) indicates the structure and predictability of the workshop method, as well as providing opportunities to practice both receptive and expressive language skills, make English Learners feel safe and comfortable enough to participate.

Updated standards for English and Spanish Language Arts and Reading promote the same expectations and level of rigor for Spanish language norms and literacy skills as educators expect for English through quality curriculum and instruction (August, Calderón, & Carlo, 2002). The development of academic language, knowledge, and skills for English Learners includes using pedagogical approaches based on research in the areas of instructional scaffolding (Rodriguez-Mojica & Briceño, 2018), integrative and collaborative teaching practices (Klein, et al., 2017), and oral language and academic conversations (Zwiers, 2014).

Instruction and assessment for English Learners are informed by an ample body of research on language learning continua that empirically describe general second language acquisition as well as acquisition of

discipline-specific academic language (Snow & Katz, 2010). A clear articulation of the progression of language learning enables a grade-by-grade articulation of language development, with attention to areas of direct, explicit instruction in language structures such as morphology (Carlisle, 2010; Gebhard & Martin, 2010; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2008; Kirby, Bowers, & Deacon, 2009; Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010; McCutchen & Logan, 2011), grammar and functions (Christie & Derewianka, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Schleppegrell, 2004; Tyler, 2010), and sentence-level analysis and comprehension (Wong Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012).

Research supports a view of the progression of language acquisition as nonlinear, spiraling, dynamic, and complex that takes place through social processes where meaningful interaction with others is essential to students' language and literacy learning. Collaterally, the shift is toward interaction, collaboration, comprehension, and communication that is scaffolded and guided to support students in making appropriate linguistic choices. These shifts are supported by research findings on effective literacy teaching practices such as cooperative grouping of students for reading and writing instruction and attention to comprehension enhancement (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2012; Merino & Scarcella, 2005; Moje, 2010; Moschkovich, 2012; Quinn, Lee, & Valdés, 2012).

As English Learners progress through the grades, the amount and cognitive and linguistic complexity of the text they encounter increase. Consequently, the language demands placed on their native language skills, and most especially on their second language proficiency and skills, also increase (Gersten et al., 2007; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). A critical area of ELD/SLD research is on vocabulary acquisition and instruction (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Baumann, Kaméenui, & Ash, 2003; Graves, 2006; Nagy & Townsend, 2012). Attention to the language demands of text in terms of vocabulary and text structure and for oral and written production provides the means for analysis of the linguistic expectations embedded in specific texts and tasks according to text complexity, academic language, and requirements for students to be able to express opinion and argumentation and respond to text-dependent questioning (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012; Gibbons, 2002; Scarcella, 2003).

Perin, De La Paz, Piantedosi, and Peercy (2016) state key challenges for English Learners' writing include knowledge of word structure and meaning, syntactic knowledge, and spelling ability. Taking recent theoretical perspectives into account, Perin et al. state "writing depends as much on the genre, situation, and social activity system in which the writing takes place as it does on the characteristics of the writer and task environment" (p. 3), indicating the oral language ability of the individual and the relationships between the reading and writing processes are both involved in writing proficiency for English Learners.

August, McCardle, and Shanahan (2014) reported on experimental research about English Learners. Specifically, "second language learners benefit from explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing" (August et al., 2014, p. 491). Some of the instructional routines and activities especially helpful for English Learners, summarized by August et al., included:

- Increasing exposure and practice with English text
- Tailoring instruction to the language differences by spending more time on English sounds not in the students' home language

- Grouping English Learners according to need with frequent teacher modeling, opportunities for practice, and cumulative review
- Using students' first language as the basis for English vocabulary development
- Choosing meaning-oriented instruction for reading comprehension rather than decoding-oriented interventions
- Providing explicit writing instruction on how to revise with targeted feedback to support writing revision
- Using a cognitive-strategies approach to reinforce the reading-writing connection to encourage writing development of English Learners

The IES Practice Guide, titled *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* (Baker et al., 2014), focused on the language and literacy skills English Learners needed to be successful in school, including listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The report provides four recommendations regarding English Learners:

1. Sets of academic vocabulary should be taught in depth over several days, including teaching word-learning strategies, and be reinforced in multiple modalities, including writing, speaking, and listening.
2. Students should be given daily opportunities to talk about content in pairs or small groups, while integrating oral and written instruction.
3. Development of written language skills should be part of the routine in a classroom, with written assignments anchored in content, focused on developing academic language, and facilitating discussions about writing while working in small groups or pairs.
4. Students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development should be identified through assessment, followed by targeted, scaffolded instruction, with frequent opportunities to practice, to meet students' identified needs.

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller* are 100% parallel and equitable English and Spanish resources that can be used in combination for a true Biliteracy Workshop. *Benchmark Taller* includes original Spanish literature, Spanish phonics scope and sequence and phonics instruction in Spanish, Spanish grammar skills instruction, and support for English and Spanish language development. Additionally, in the read-aloud lessons, shared readings (K–1), and the whole-group mini-lessons in *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*, three types of English Learner support are provided: Support for English Learners, Discussion Support for English Learners, and Supporting English Language Development. These supports are built into the instruction, align with the instructional goals, and are grade appropriate. The daily formative assessment, both for literacy behaviors and observations, provide teachers with guidance on areas that may indicate additional attention is needed by students.

Social-Emotional and Culturally Responsive Learning Combined with Mindfulness

Osher et al. (2016) indicate school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) has been researched for almost 100 years. SEL is defined as

> the processes by which children and adults acquire and apply core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle personal and interpersonal situations constructively (Osher et al., 2016, p. 645).

A primary goal of SEL is to "promote positive learning environments that are supportive, engaging, and participatory" (Osher et al., p. 646). SEL has been linked to outcomes such as: influencing classroom and school climate, being an important part of dropout prevention, preventing bullying, and, recently, creating positive outcomes related to mindfulness.

Black and Fernando (2014) state "mindfulness training is associated with improved self-regulation, attentional control, and reduces psychological stress in youth" (p. 1243). These self-regulation and attentional controls are "positively associated with school readiness, prosocial behavior, and academic achievement" (p. 1243). Black and Fernando's study evaluated a 5-week mindfulness-based curriculum at a Richmond, CA, public elementary school. The study included 17 teachers and 409 students in Grades Kindergarten to 6 who were mostly enrolled in the free lunch program and about 96% ethnic minority. A pre- and post-assessment were given, followed by an additional post-assessment seven weeks later. All of the studied behaviors (paying attention, self-control, participation, and respect for others) showed significant growth from the pre-assessment to the seven-week follow up post-assessment, with medium effect sizes (0.43 and 0.55) showing mindfulness training has sustained effects.

Meiklejohn et al. (2012) confirm the training of students in mindfulness has collectively demonstrated a range of cognitive, social, and psychological benefits to students of all ages, including working memory, attention, academic skills, social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) conducted a study with Grades 4 and 5 students that combined an SEL curriculum with mindfulness training. They found that even for a relatively short period of four months, this combination yielded positive behavioral and cognitive changes, including executive function improvements, increased well-being, and more prosocial behaviors, both self-reported and reported by peers.

Culturally responsive practices evolved from the school desegregation efforts during the 1960s and 1970s (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Carter (2008) indicates conversations about improving the educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students were sparked by the discontinuity of the experience of the teaching force compared to the students they were teaching. Ladson-Billings (1995) also articulated this concern when she stated, "I predicted the need for a culturally relevant theoretical perspective on the growing disparity between the racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics of teachers and students along with the continued academic failure of African American, Native American and Latino students" (p. 483). Ladson-Billings also stated, "culturally relevant teaching must meet three criteria: an ability to develop students academically, a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, and the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (p. 483). Gay and Kirkland (2003) stated "culturally responsive teaching (CRT) for ethnically diverse students should be a fundamental feature of teacher preparation and classroom practice" (p. 181), and the initial

conversations about CRT should be moved to before the teachers are already in the classroom with students.

Hammond (2018) states “the ultimate goal of culturally responsive teaching is to help students accelerate their learning by building cognitive learning muscles” (p. 41). Hammond focuses on the idea of learnable intelligence that requires early powerful instruction so underserved populations have the opportunities and tools necessary to build their brainpower and learning muscles. Hammond’s Ready for Rigor framework identifies four areas (awareness, learning partnerships, information processing capacity, and learning communities and environments) that must be integrated to help students become “leaders of their own learning” (p. 42) or more confident, independent learners. The focus is on the students and teachers rather than just teachers, meaning understanding “culturally responsive teaching as an adaptive challenge that requires change in how educators think about and do their work in partnership with students as learners” (p. 43).

Aronson and Laughter (2016) state “a significant part of CRE [Culturally Relevant Education] is a connection to students’ lives and an obligation to aid in the empowerment of students” (p. 188). Gay (2013) supports this statement when she states, “the education of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students should connect in-school learning to out-of-school living; promote educational equity and excellence; create community among individuals from different cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds; and develop students’ agency, efficacy, and empowerment” (p. 49).

Aronson and Laughter (2016) summarize the markers of culturally relevant education and how that applies to culturally relevant educators. Culturally relevant educators:

- Build on the knowledges and cultural assets students bring with them into the classroom
- Ensure that the culturally relevant classroom is inclusive of all students
- Use inclusive curricula and activities to support analysis of all cultures represented
- Believe the classroom is a place where students both learn about their own and others’ cultures and develop pride in their own and others’ cultures
- Work not only in the classroom but also in the active pursuit of social justice for all members of society (Aronson & Laughter, 2016, p. 167)

Research results summarized by Aronson and Laughter (2016) indicated engagement in culturally responsive practices resulted in positive impact on affective domains, including increases in: student motivation, student interest in content, student ability to engage in content-area discourses, student perception of themselves as capable students, and confidence when taking standardized tests (p. 197). Gay (2000, 2013) points out culturally responsive teaching is not enough to solve the major challenges facing groups of students. Not only do teachers and curriculum need to be responsive, but additionally the entire school culture and climate need to be responsive. Gay (2013) makes this point clearer by stating “instructional practices should be shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the setting in which they occur, and the populations for whom they are designed” (p. 63). Due to the “dynamic, shifting, and ever-changing nature of cultural practices” (Paris, 2012, p. 95), what worked yesterday may need modification today, and may require further modification tomorrow.

Application in Benchmark Workshop and Benchmark Taller

Classrooms across the United States are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, languages spoken, and ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. It is impossible to design and create a single program that will always meet the needs of every classroom. Additionally, any single program will not be sufficient on its own to address all the issues in a classroom or school. However, during the design and creation of *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller*, every opportunity was taken to include materials, strategies, lessons, texts, and so forth, that would contribute to the resources available for teachers so they could choose what was most appropriate for their particular setting and classroom. Collecting these resources will help teachers deliver social-emotional and culturally responsible learning combined with mindfulness.

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller* have 100% parallel and equitable English and Spanish resources for a true Biliteracy Workshop. The programs also include literary and informational text selections and trade books carefully selected using the lenses of cultural diversity and inclusion. During each week of every unit, there are activities and discussion topics devoted to culturally responsive perspectives and social and emotional mindfulness. Each unit has a shared inquiry project that not only helps students learn how to work collaboratively in small groups and pairs, but also facilitates deeper understanding of the unit topics and essential questions.

Summary

"If young people are to succeed in a world that is dominated by ever-changing digital technologies, and accordingly new literacies, and ever-growing competition in a global economy, they will need to acquire and maintain high levels of literacy skill and analytical ability" (Ford-Connors & Paratore, 2015, p. 50). That implies teachers need to be aware and knowledgeable about the latest teaching techniques and technologies. Part of this mission requires continued professional development and the other part requires a curriculum that meets the needs of students and teachers in an ever-changing educational environment. Underwood (2018) indicates the curriculum choice is critical and "such a curriculum would ideally be evidence-based with clear indications for how teachers should allocate their time" (p. 5).

Even though educators have been debating the correct way to teach reading since Horace Mann disagreed with his schoolmasters back in the 1840s (Seidenberg, 2017), and the methods of psychological experimentation needed "to unravel the mystery of reading were not developed until the mid-1970s" (Moats, 2010, p. 7), it took a long time before consensus findings about learning to read could be accepted and disseminated. Still, Moats (2010) states "research-based insights into language, reading and writing have only recently driven changes in funding mechanisms and policies affecting teacher preparation and professional development" (p. 7).

Benchmark Workshop and *Benchmark Taller*, from Benchmark Education Company, were designed and created based on the latest research, reviewed in this research foundation, and incorporate the components of the science of reading. It also is based on providing a cohesive framework, appropriate resources, and inspired instruction to meet state standards using a flexible workshop model. Overall considerations across the program include: keeping the goal of transfer of learning front and center; ensuring materials represent and support culturally responsive instruction; providing phonics and word study instruction to complement the Reader's and Writer's Workshops to be used as necessary, based

on student need; and enabling social-emotional learning that is so important to the maturation process students experience as they progress through elementary school.

The workshop model is a powerful framework for integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening that has been used and proven by many over several decades (e.g., Atwell, 2007; Chambré, 2016; Collins et al., 2017; Graham & Herbert, 2011; Morabito, 2016; Mounla et al., 2011; Street, 2014; TCRWP, n.d.). Teachers are provided with tools and strategies, read-aloud books, and classroom libraries for small group and independent time; mentor texts for whole-group mini-lessons; and support for English Learners, differentiation materials, and suggestions for other groups of students as needed. *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* put the teacher in charge, with sufficient materials for the experienced workshop teacher and greater depth of support and scaffolding for the teacher new to the workshop model.

The goal for *Benchmark Workshop* and *Benchmark Taller* is for teachers to deliver consistently high-quality literacy instruction that emphasizes student engagement and supports student development as autonomous, independent learners. Reaching this goal would mean sending students into middle school and beyond as readers and writers ready to comprehend the increasingly complex content that will be demanded in our ever-changing world.

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