

# Blending Evidence-Based Literacy Practices with Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices



This 12-minute video explores how educators can implement culturally and linguistically responsive practices in their literacy instruction. Created by Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest's [Strategies to Improve Reading \(STIR\) partnership](#), the video features REL Midwest's Christina Grayson and the American Institutes for Research's Lisa Hsin, PhD, describing the importance of leveraging multilingual students' home languages and/or dialects to support their literacy learning. The video affirms that all language knowledge is advantageous when one is learning how to read. Additionally, the video provides practical strategies that educators can use to engage students' oral language strengths when they are learning to read, write, and comprehend printed language.

*"There's no wrong way of speaking. There's just different ways of speaking to connect to different people at different times. This...is really about giving affirmation and giving additional access, that way when students come across words that they might not use in the same way in their oral language, they're prepared to navigate both [forms]."*

—Christina Grayson, REL Midwest

## Featured practical strategies

The video presents seven strategies that teachers can use to support multilingual and multidialectal learners.



### Strategy 1

Help students recognize overlap between their home language or dialect and the English they are learning in school.



### Strategy 2

Teach students how to recognize that words are made up of individual sound units (phonological awareness).



### Strategy 3

Teach students how letters or combinations of letters are linked to sounds (phonics).



### Strategy 4

Support vocabulary development and language structures alongside phonemic awareness and phonics development.



### Strategy 5

Ensure that selected texts and instruction are representative of students' backgrounds.



### Strategy 6

Incorporate students' language use as data to drive instruction.



### Strategy 7

Recognize and leverage the strengths that multilingual and multidialectal students bring to literacy learning.

## Definitions

Learn more about these key terms that are featured in the video:

- **Multilingual students** are students who speak or are learning to speak more than one language.<sup>1</sup>
- **Multidialectal students** are students who speak more than one dialect.
- **Dialects (also called *language varieties*)** are variations of a given language spoken by a group of people who can be categorized by factors such as geographic region, race, ethnicity, or income.<sup>2</sup>
- **Culturally responsive teaching** includes educator practices that recognize, value, and incorporate students' lived experiences and cultures into teaching, learning, and the school environment.<sup>3</sup>
- **Systematic instruction** is teaching that has a carefully planned sequence, including building from easier to more difficult tasks and breaking down harder skills into smaller parts.<sup>4</sup>
- **Explicit instruction** involves designing structured learning experiences that include segmenting complex skills into smaller tasks, modeling, promoting successful engagement using supports and prompts, providing feedback, and creating purposeful practice opportunities.<sup>5</sup>



## Intended audience

REL Midwest created this video as a tool for educators teaching literacy to students whose home dialects or languages differ from General American English (the dialect in which most reading materials are printed). REL Midwest suggests that educators watch the video, review the evidence-based considerations, and use the following questions as a starting point for discussing how teachers can support their culturally and linguistically diverse students by leveraging those students' language knowledge.



## Discussion questions

- ▶ What cultural and linguistic diversity, such as home language and dialect, exists in your classroom?
- ▶ What support or guidance does your school or district offer teachers regarding culturally and linguistically responsive practices?
- ▶ How do you use multilingual students' home language or dialect knowledge as an asset when teaching them? What would you like to do more of to leverage students' cultural and linguistic abilities?
- ▶ Think of a current or former student for whom these practices seem relevant. What strengths and needs do they bring to their learning, and how can you leverage these practices to support them and others like them?
- ▶ Where and when do you practice systematic and/or explicit instruction in your classroom? How else can you incorporate these instructional methods into your teaching?

## Related REL program resources

- ▶ [REL Midwest blog: Leveraging students' home language knowledge to support literacy learning](#)
- ▶ [REL Northwest video: Improving Language Acquisition Among English Learners: Four Powerful Evidence-Based Activities](#)
- ▶ [REL Southeast infographic: Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Elementary English Learner Students](#)

## About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven Midwest states to conduct applied research and provide training, coaching, and technical support to create a more evidence-based education system.

<sup>1</sup> Najarro, I. (2023, March 30). The debate over English learner terminology, explained. *EducationWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/the-debate-over-english-learner-terminology-explained/2023/03>

<sup>2</sup> Brown, M. C., Sibley, D. E., Washington, J. A., Rogers, T. T., Edwards, J. R., MacDonald, M. C., & Seidenberg, M. S. (2015). Impact of dialect use on a basic component of learning to read. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, Article 196. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00196>

<sup>3</sup> Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. (n.d.). *The importance of student sense of belonging*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/regions/midwest/pdf/RELMW-6-2-3-4-StudBelong-508.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> National Center on Improving Literacy. (n.d.). Systematic instruction. In *Learning literacy glossary*. Retrieved November 6, 2023, from <https://improvingliteracy.org/glossary/systematic-instruction>

<sup>5</sup> Vaughn, S., & Fletcher, J. (2021). Explicit instruction as the essential tool for executing the science of reading. *The Reading League Journal*, 2(2), 4–11. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9004595/>; National Center on Intensive Intervention. (n.d.). *Features of explicit instruction course content*. <https://intensiveintervention.org/training/course-content/explicit-instruction>

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This document was prepared under Contract 91990022C0011 by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, administered by the American Institutes for Research. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.