

# Supporting English-Language Learners and Struggling Readers in Content Literacy With the “Partner Reading and Content, Too” Routine

Donna Ogle, Amy Correa-Kovtun

The Partner Reading and Content, Too (PRC2) routine provides a scaffold for English-language learners developing skill in reading and learning with informational texts by incorporating the key principles that research has shown to support these learners.

**R**eading in the 21st century demands that all students develop high levels of literacy. State standards, state and national assessments, and district expectations reflect a “raised bar” for academic knowledge and literacy. For reading teachers this is particularly evident in the additional attention to informational reading in state standards and assessments. The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading framework has an equal number of informational and literary passages at 4th grade; at 8th grade, 55% of the passages are informational, and at 12th grade, 70% (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008). The press for higher levels of informational literacy is clear.

In this context, teachers are concerned about how best to help their increasing numbers of English-language learners (ELLs) succeed, particularly in the challenging content areas of social studies and science. Students often struggle with content-specific vocabulary and the need to read and learn from informational textbooks, where the academic vocabulary is often unfamiliar and the writing is

dense and structured differently than fiction. Our attention to these issues began as part of a collaborative project—funded by the Searle Funds of the Chicago Community Trust—between National-Louis University literacy faculty and area urban schools (Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project, 2008). The school-based literacy leaders needed and wanted help overcoming the “fourth-grade slump” that was evident when students who had been successful in the primary bilingual classrooms transitioned into general education in fourth grade. The literacy coaches wanted to know what they could do to better support these students, whose academic self-identities were threatened by the challenges of social studies and science content, particularly the academic vocabulary.

## The National Context

These coaches’ concerns are reflected across our country because “one in five children ages 5–17 [are] from immigrant families and more than ten percent of all K–12 students are English language learners” (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009, p.10). Many children who speak English as a second or third language possess a less extensive English vocabulary that often poses a hurdle for these students in reading informational texts, a challenge that is particularly frustrating when reading and learning social studies and science.

Cummins (1986) explained that conversational English develops quite rapidly for ELLs, generally

within two to three years, but academic language takes much longer. A recent California state analysis of the time needed to develop full English reported that an average of six years is needed for ELLs to acquire English proficiency (see Mora, 2009). Many students get stuck in the middle ground of being conversational in English but lacking in the breadth of English needed for content area success. These concerns are well documented in the professional literature as challenges for schools across this country (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Fitzgerald, Amendum, & Guthrie, 2008; Lesaux & Geva, 2006; Mora, 2009).

Helping ELLs develop their ability to read informational texts and acquire academic English vocabulary is critical, yet there is little research to guide teachers on how best to accomplish this. In their summary of research on literacy teaching programs designed to improve the reading of ELLs, Shanahan and Beck (2006) concluded there are surprisingly few studies, and only three address vocabulary development. The interventions that were reviewed had more impact on decoding and fluency than on comprehension. They suggested that “what is needed is sound reading instruction combined with simultaneous efforts to increase the scope and sophistication of these students’ oral language proficiency. There is a need for research testing that hypothesis” (p. 448).

## Addressing the Issues

Our team was composed of the literacy lead teachers from six schools who meet weekly with two faculty members from the University and a co-director from the Chicago Public Schools who had been a dual-language teacher. Early on in our conversations about how we could better support ELLs’ learning of academic content, teacher leaders expressed concern that not only the bilingual students but also many other struggling readers were falling behind because they couldn’t navigate content materials. As we began to observe instruction in the classrooms of teachers who agreed to partner in our work, we noted an additional problem: Teachers often read the textbooks orally to students, and students didn’t have opportunities to practice text reading or develop an understanding of the key vocabulary because it was all orally presented.

## Reflection Questions

- What factors in content literacy are most challenging for ELLs and struggling readers? How can these be addressed through the reading of shorter, instructional-level articles and books?
- What are some of the advantages of partner reading and discussion formats for ELLs? What are some particular ways teachers can make these settings most productive?
- How can attention to the visual and graphic features in informational texts help ELLs comprehend complex text materials?

## Research-Based Priorities

As a result of our school observations and study, we established five key research-based priorities for our work:

1. Students need to read daily from materials at their instructional or independent reading level if they are going to improve as readers. This means that classrooms need to make available materials at a range of reading levels in the content being studied. (Allington, 2007; Allington & Cunningham, 2007; Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008)
2. Students need regular opportunities to talk and use academic vocabulary and discourse to make the concepts their own and to internalize the new ways of expressing ideas (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Marzano, 2004; Shanahan & Beck, 2007).
3. Learning is enhanced when students ask and answer their own questions. An inquiry approach to learning helps students become metacognitive and take ownership of their learning (Almasi, 2008; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ogle, 1986).
4. Factual knowledge is important in content learning; however, students need regular opportunities to think at higher levels. Time for

reflection and sharing of points of view help students clarify ideas and deepen their understanding (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2003; Medd & Whitmore, 2001; Nichols, 2006)

5. Students need to be guided in using informational texts and textbooks. Learning to identify and use external text features and identify internal text structures are tools that need to be taught in the intermediate grades (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008; Ogle & Blachowicz, 2001). Strategies for reading carefully, making notes of new ideas, and blending visual and narrative content are also necessary (Ogle, Klemp, & McBride, 2007).

### **Providing Content Materials at Comfortable Reading Levels**

With these five priorities, we decided to focus our work within the existing curriculums in both social studies and science and create instructional supports and scaffolded activities for students whose reading and vocabulary was not at grade level.

To realize the first priority, establishing daily content reading for all students, we needed classroom materials that were easy enough so students could focus on the content and develop vocabulary without

being overwhelmed. Therefore, the first step was locating informational reading materials that were accessible to students at the range of reading levels present in the classrooms. Fortunately publishers are providing a range of short, graphically enhanced books on many of the topics in the elementary curriculum. After identifying a key social studies or science unit being taught in those classrooms, we sorted through a variety of published books and began building collections of short content-specific books matching the range of reading levels of the students. A good set for a unit has at least 8–10 different titles on the content theme with two to three copies of each book. (See Table 1 for an example of a set of books for the science unit on simple machines.) These short, but fairly in-depth, books on the unit themes are usually inviting to teachers who then are more likely to include time for students to read content material.

Determining which books are appropriate for which students is the next step. The one-minute fluency snapshot (Blachowicz, Sullivan & Cieply, 2001) is quite easy for teachers to administer and provides a classroom profile of the range of reading levels. Teachers can then partner students reading at approximately the same levels and give them an independent-level book to share. The fluency snapshots

**Table 1**  
**Text Set for Simple Machines**

Book title	Author	Copyright	Publisher	Reading level
<i>Castle Under Siege! Simple Machines</i>	Andrew Solway	2005	Raintree	L/M
<i>From Axes to Zippers: Simple Machines</i>	Kathy French	2004	Benchmark	N
<i>Forces and Motion</i>	Lisa Trumbauer	1998	Newbridge	S
<i>Levers</i>	Angela Royston	2001	Heinemann	R/S
<i>Levers in My World/ Palancas en mi mundo</i>	Joanne Randolph	2006	Rosen	Grade 5
<i>Levers in My World</i>	Joanne Randolph	2006	Rosen	J
<i>Machines</i>	Joy Brewster	2003	Newbridge	R
<i>Machines Make It Move</i>	Stephen Tomecek	2002	National Geographic Society	V/W
<i>Simple Machines</i>	Lewis K. Parker	2006	Perfection Learning	N/O
<i>Simple Machines Reader</i>	Delta Science Readers	2009	Educators Publishing Service	S

can also be administered periodically to check for students' growth in oral reading. More important, teachers also want to monitor initial levels of students' knowledge and assess their growth in academic vocabulary and content knowledge. As part of the continuing evolution of the project, we developed, and many teachers use, pre- and posttests of conceptual knowledge (using a concept web), content organization (writing a table of contents), and academic vocabulary (morphology assessment). Teachers used these depending on their interests and needs. In this article, we focus only on the key outcome of the collaboration, the development of a routine for independent content reading: Partner Reading and Content, Too—or PRC2.

## Setting Up PRC2

We named our routine PRC2 to clearly distinguish it from other forms of partner or buddy reading. In PRC2, student pairs have *similar* reading levels and interests, and the focus is on content learning. Partners share one text on an independent or easy instructional level and take turns reading the two pages of adjacent text orally.

Pairing students with similar reading and language development is important because both students need to feel comfortable participating in the ongoing exchanges. Students must feel safe and able to succeed. The partner format for this engagement with texts permits even very shy students to feel comfortable reading and discussing. Without this one-on-one experience, many ELLs are hesitant to speak even in small-group settings; partner reading and talking is more secure and affords all students in a class daily opportunities to talk about academic content.

Key to the process is that students are given enough time to read and reread the texts carefully and to talk in a safe environment with their partner about the ideas. In the talk time, they try out the key academic terms and use them in their focused talk as they answer the questions they pose to each other. The basic PRC2 routine (shown in Figure 1) lasts 20–30 minutes and consists of the following:

- Partners preview the whole book during their first engagement with the text.
- For each two-page spread, both partners first read the pages silently to get a sense of the text.

- Partners reread their page to prepare for their performance read and select a question to ask their partner either from a prepared question sheet or a question written using questioning approaches with which they are familiar (e.g., QAR [Raphael, 1986], thick and thin questions, and Bloom's taxonomy, [Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008]).
- Each partner reads a page or section orally and then asks a question of the listening partner; partners then talk about the text, providing them an opportunity to gain ownership of the academic vocabulary and concepts.
- Partners switch roles—reader and listener—as they read section by section.
- Each partner adds words to a personal academic vocabulary notebook at end of PRC2.

## Implementing PRC2

With appropriate content materials available and students grouped for success, teachers then model and explain the purpose and process for reading and discussing text content with a partner. Students need to understand that PRC2 is designed so they can deepen their understanding of the unit content and practice using the important academic vocabulary. Central to PRC2 is that students take seriously their roles as readers and discussers.

During each 20–30 minute session of PRC2, student partners read several pages of their informational book, reading and discussing each two-page spread as a unit, as shown in Figure 2. Students read each pair of pages three times to build their content knowledge and gain confidence in their abilities. The third, oral reading of each page is followed by oral discussion with their partner stimulated by the question the reader asks. This is when both partners have the opportunity to “own” more of the academic vocabulary and concepts by using them in their talk.

Helping students feel comfortable reading whole informational books takes teacher modeling and follow-up minilessons; how much depends on the prior experiences students have had reading informational texts and with asking and answering discussion questions. Periodic modeling of good discussion and academic discourse is also important. When a teacher notices a few partners doing a particularly good job of exploring ideas, these students can be

Figure 1  
PRC2 Guide

Process	Procedure
Getting ready to read together	Choose a book together. Find a place where you can sit next to each other. Come prepared with your PRC2 materials as well as your vocabulary notebooks and pencils.
Previewing	Look at the cover and title, and ask each other, "What do we think this book is about?" Look for a table of contents and ask, "How is this organized?" Look through the book together and ask, "Does the book have..." <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ chapters and heads?</li> <li>■ maps, diagrams, charts, or pictures and captions?</li> <li>■ index and glossary?</li> <li>■ special marked vocabulary or author's information?</li> </ul> Talk about any of the preceding special features.
Reading the text together	Decide who will read page one and who will read page two aloud. Read the first two pages silently, thinking about what they mean. If there are some words you don't know how to say, ask your partner. If your partner doesn't know, raise your hand and ask the teacher or use the glossary. Silently reread the page that you will read aloud, thinking of good expression and pace. Choose one of the four questions on the PRC2 question sheet that you want to ask your partner. If you are reading the first page, read that page aloud. If not, listen as your partner reads that page. If you are the reader, ask your partner the question you chose from the PRC2 question sheet. If you are the listener, answer the question your partner asks. Discuss the answer together and ask any questions you have. If you read the first page, listen as your partner now reads the second page. If you listened to the first page, read the second page aloud to your partner. After you are done reading, ask your partner your question and discuss the answer. Continue taking turns until finished. Be ready to share one thing about your reading together to the class.
Thinking and talking about the text	After reading the pages, share what you liked and learned about the text. Ask yourselves the following questions and record the answers in your vocabulary notebook: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Are there words we want to remember? What are they?</li> <li>■ What other questions might we have?</li> <li>■ Do we want to read another book on this same topic?</li> <li>■ What are some interesting facts or thoughts we want to share with the class?</li> </ul>

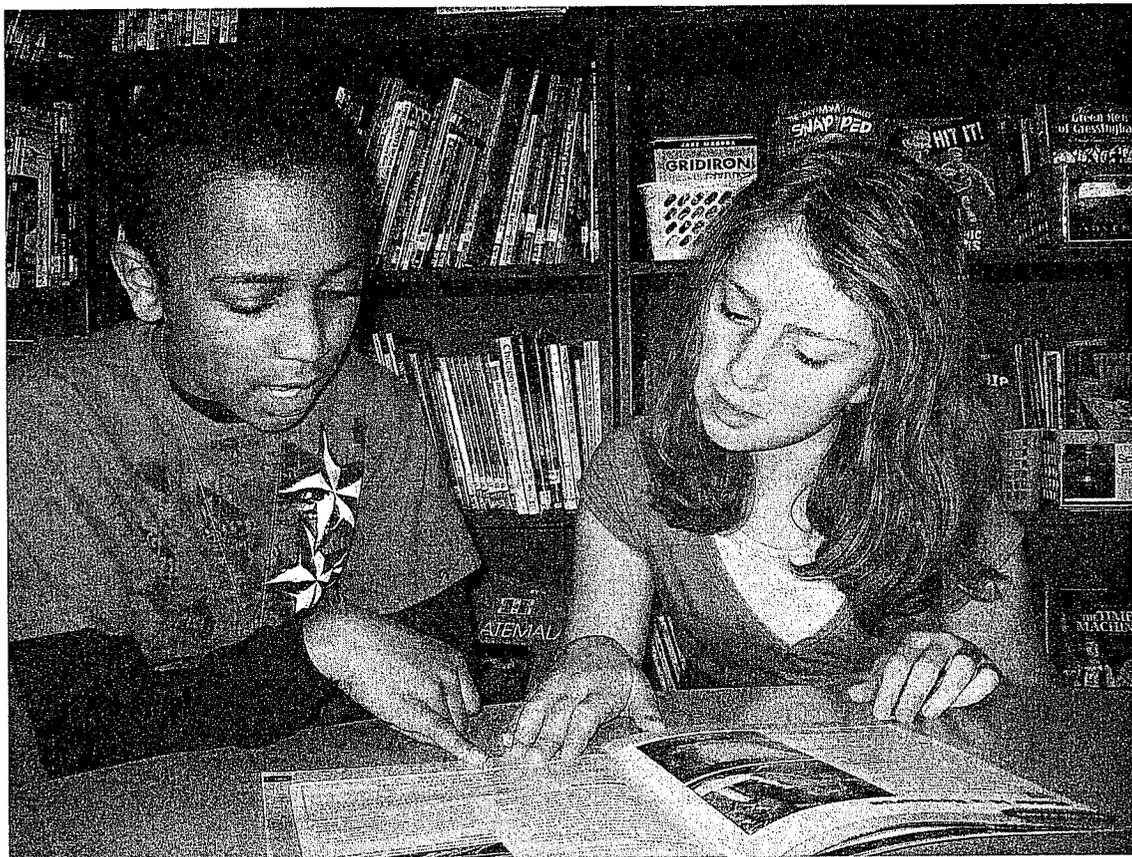
asked to reconstruct their dialogue at the end of the allotted PRC2 time for the rest of the class to observe, with the teacher pointing out what went well.

### **Getting Comfortable With Text Structure**

The first step in reading short informational books is to preview the whole book and attend to the structure and features of the informational text. Before

distributing individual titles to partners, teachers explain and model how to preview an informational book. The teacher either distributes a short informational book or article that serves as a mentor text for identifying text features to pairs of students or places text on an overhead projector. The teacher begins by doing a book walk focused on the structure of the short book noting the table of contents, chapter titles, special features, the glossary, and index. Then the

Figure 2  
Students Engaged in PRC2



Note. Photo by Julie Lyman.

teacher turns to the first chapter and models thinking aloud, pointing to different text features and noticing aspects of the content orally:

This *chapter title* seems really interesting, "Beware of What the Animals Tell You!" I wonder what it means; what do animals tell us? Oh, there is a *picture* of the elephant with its ears out straight. Um...what is he trying to say? On the next page is a *picture* of three wolves and a *caption* "Wolves show submission by lying down and licking the head wolf's nose."

During the modeling of the think-aloud, the teacher should draw students' attention to the specific ways content vocabulary is identified (bold face, italics, text sidebar). Some students may be familiar with informational text structure and features;

however, for those who aren't, additional activities can help reinforce their attention to these important elements of informational texts (headings, diagrams, pictures and captions, marked vocabulary, etc). The teacher guides students to attend to text structure and features each time they read from the books and use the guide sheet for PRC2 that lists these special elements (see Figure 1).

### **Modeling the Partner Reading and Discussion Routine**

Before students begin their own partner reading, teachers model the steps in the process. At this point, it is important to have two people model the process. Many teachers have the reading coach or

special education teacher or a student partner who has been introduced to the routine previously serve as their partner. In modeling and then initiating the process, some teachers have found it helpful to put 3 x 5 cards on partners' desks with the three readings identified:

1. Read the two pages *silently*.
2. Read *your page* again preparing for your "performance read"—and write a good question for discussion.
3. Read your page *orally* to your partner and ask your question.

As the teachers model the partner reading process—by first reading both pages silently and then rereading their individual page to prepare for oral reading—they also model noting unfamiliar words and figuring out how to pronounce them during their second, silent reading of their assigned page. The teacher modelers ask each other for help with new vocabulary so students can feel comfortable checking out their part of the text before their "performance read." For example, while preparing to read orally from a page on the human body, one teacher turned to her partner, pointed to the word, and asked, "How do you pronounce *melanin*?" Her partner responded, "I think it is *mel-a-nin*" (with accent on first syllable). The first teacher responded, "Thank you" and continued preparing her page.

### **Asking and Answering Questions**

Part of silently preparing pages to read aloud involves writing a question to ask one's partner at the conclusion of the oral reading of each page. Teacher modelers should write questions on colored sticky notes to help students attend as both partners write a question and later use the note to prompt their oral questioning. If a framework for questions is already in place in the classroom, students can be reminded to use the familiar frame in writing good questions for their partner. However, if teachers have not helped students analyze good questions or have not developed a way of talking about student-generated questions, a question matrix serves as a scaffold for questioning. This can be shown on the overhead projector so students can participate with the teacher modeler in thinking of the kind of question that will stimulate discussion. Later, students can be given

copies of the question matrix on which they can indicate which questions they want to ask for each page as they practice the process. The following are the four basic questions on the matrix:

1. What was most important? Why? Explain.
2. What was most interesting? Why? Explain.
3. What connections can you make? Explain.
4. What could the author make clearer? Explain.

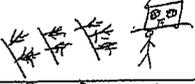
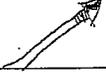
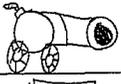
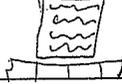
### **Reading and Discussing the Content**

The next step is for the partner on the left side to read orally the first page of text, ask the question, and engage in a short discussion around the question. Once the first page has been read and discussed, the other partner takes the leadership role, reading the next page orally and asking the prepared question. As teachers model this part of the PRC2 routine, they want to demonstrate both asking a question appropriate for the text and extending the talk about the answer; for example, "Thank you; that was a good answer. I hadn't thought of that connection. I was reminded of the book we read yesterday." In this way, the partners encourage elaboration on each other's ideas.

At the end of the 20–30 minutes allocated for partner reading, each student adds the new vocabulary words that they have identified as important to their individual vocabulary notebook. Teachers can use these words to decide which terms need the most reinforcement, which can take place during additional reinforcement activities. Figure 3 is an example of how one teacher extended the vocabulary notebook into an ongoing dual-language and visual word resource guide with students creating their personal entries.

After the teacher modelers have each read and led a short discussion of the first pages, the student partners try PRC2 themselves. For this initial practice, a common book or short article is useful so the teacher can easily guide the process and respond to questions. It is also helpful to distribute sticky notes on which to write questions; have students put their initials on the question notes they construct for each page. These notes are easy to review later to assess the initiation of the process.

Figure 3  
Vocabulary Activity

English	Spanish	Picture of Meaning	Definition
Abolish	Abolir		Put an end to, destroy.
Agriculture	Agricultura		Extensive/intensive farming.
Archive	Archivo		Inform file, batch file.
Bayonet	Bayoneta		Spears-like weapon.
Cannon	Canon		Heavy war weapon.
Constitution	Constitucion		Fundamental laws that govern a nation, structure or composition.

## Refining the Routine

What seems like a pretty straight-forward partner routine at first actually can be challenging for students who have not had many opportunities to read and discuss informational texts. Three specific challenges students and teachers encountered and the ways we addressed them in refining the process are explained in the following sections.

### Self-Monitoring Rehearsals for Oral Reading

We learned by listening to the students read together that many students don't naturally monitor themselves as they preview their pages silently. Students stumbled over key academic terms during the rehearsed oral readings that should have been nearly flawless but weren't because the students didn't identify and practice pronouncing new terms beforehand. They seemed to lack a way to "hear" the text in their own mind. Both content vocabulary and prosody can create stumbling blocks for many students, and they didn't know how to identify or remedy problems with pronunciation. Some of the teachers decided that in addition to the introduction

to the key terms and the preassessment of students' knowledge of those terms, they needed to develop more activities for students to practice learning the words. Some conscious attention to using the glossary and pronunciation guides that were present in the book helped, too.

To develop students' awareness of their own performance, we purchased audiotape recorders and some of the lead literacy teachers periodically audiotaped students and let them hear and evaluate their own performance. In one school, a laptop computer with a video camera was available, which greatly facilitated taping partner sessions. Some classroom teachers encouraged students to write reflections on their oral performance with their partners. The team also developed a teacher observation sheet on which to make notes as they listen to partner reading and discussion. While these tools helped, students monitoring and rehearsal for oral reading were still issues that teachers continued to notice in their observations and that required their vigilance.

### Scaffolding Academic Talk

When listening to students ask and respond to questions, the team realized that many students lacked

knowledge and experience with ways to engage in content discussions. Some ELLs don't have enough understanding of the syntax of the English language to extend their discourse. In problem-solving this reality, we decided to make a list of prompts for students to use when talking with their partners. We identified several different "moves" or points when responses may be needed: to receive what the partner says, elaborate and extend an idea, clarify, make connections, and add a different perspective. Those students whose first language is English also benefited from having these responses explicitly in print to help them and to have teachers model and reinforce these oral routines. Attention to polite academic talk helped most students learn ways they could extend discussion and deepen shared thinking. The stems

students used to extend their talk are included on the bottom of the PRC2 question matrix for upper level students. Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers laminated small cards with the stems, which they then collected on metal rings. Many students used these scaffolds frequently as they learned to talk together. Both English and Spanish guides were available to students. See Figure 4 for these stems.

### Whole-Class Discussion

In our initial work with partner reading, classroom teachers who implemented the process often felt a desire to bring the students together at the end of the partner reading time to share what they were learning. All the books were on the same content unit theme so the information helped develop the

Figure 4  
Discussion Stems

Spanish	English
<p>Recibiendo lo que dice tu compañero</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Gracias.</li> <li>■ Esas son buenas ideas.</li> <li>■ Eso fue interesante.</li> <li>■ Me ayudaste a entender esto en una nueva forma.</li> </ul>	<p>Receiving what the partner says</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Thank you.</li> <li>■ Those are good ideas.</li> <li>■ That was interesting.</li> <li>■ You helped me understand this in a new way.</li> </ul>
<p>Más elaboración y desarrollo de la idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ ¿Puedes decirme más?</li> <li>■ ¿Qué quiere decir eso?</li> <li>■ ¿Puedes pensar en otro ejemplo?</li> <li>■ Lo que dices me recuerda....</li> </ul>	<p>More elaboration and extension of the idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Can you tell me more?</li> <li>■ What does that mean?</li> <li>■ Can you think of another example?</li> <li>■ What you said reminds me of....</li> </ul>
<p>Clarificación</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ ¿Puedes explicar un poco más?</li> <li>■ No estoy seguro(a) de lo que quieres decir, ¿puedes decirlo de otra manera?</li> <li>■ ¿Dónde encontraste esa idea en el texto?</li> <li>■ ¿Puedes decirme por qué piensas eso?</li> </ul>	<p>Clarification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Can you explain that a little more?</li> <li>■ I'm not sure what you mean; can you say it in a different way?</li> <li>■ Where in the text did you find that idea?</li> <li>■ Can you tell me why you think that?</li> </ul>
<p>Haciendo conexiones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Esa es una conexión interesante. Yo estaba pensando en otra cosa.</li> <li>■ Hice esa conexión con....</li> <li>■ Creo que esto es como....</li> <li>■ Recuerdo cuando....</li> <li>■ Recuerdo que leí acerca de....</li> <li>■ Eso me recuerda....</li> </ul>	<p>Making connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ That's an interesting connection. I was thinking of something else.</li> <li>■ I made that connection with....</li> <li>■ I think this is like....</li> <li>■ I remember when....</li> <li>■ I remember reading about....</li> <li>■ It reminds me of....</li> </ul>
<p>Agrega una perspectiva diferente</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Eso es interesante.</li> <li>■ No he pensado en eso de esa manera. Estaba pensando en algo diferente.</li> </ul>	<p>Add a different perspective</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ That's interesting.</li> <li>■ I hadn't thought of it in that way. I was thinking something different.</li> </ul>

understandings the teachers wanted to achieve. Sometimes teachers simply asked, Who would like to share something they learned today? Others experimented with the question matrix and used it to elicit ideas asking the four questions as a debriefing.

Seeing how interested students were in each other's content and information, this whole-class discussion can be an important part of the process. At the end of each 20–30 minute session, teachers reconvene the whole class for a few minutes of sharing. New ideas, interesting information, special graphics, and interesting ways authors explained events and phenomena are often highlighted by the students. The question, What could the author have done to make this clearer? can lead to interesting discussions.

Sometimes students read orally from confusing sections of their books. At other times, students noted misleading information or maps and tables that are unclear. Having students share their texts with the class produced some important benefits: students saw connections among the books, all students share a common vocabulary that they were learning and can bring to their textbook or whole-class activities, and when all students realized they have some information to share, they were more motivated. Often the voices of the struggling readers gained respect when they shared interesting information from their books or from connections they make.

Many ELLs start the year fearful of talking in the whole-class setting, and some are even hesitant to contribute to small-group discussions. The partner setting was much more comfortable. After reading and talking with a partner, they were often much more willing to participate in the closing sessions. We have seen many students share ideas that have come from their partner and give them credit, such as, "My partner is too shy to say this, but she noticed that the picture shows how embalmers used gold on mummy's fingernails sometimes. I didn't notice that." These opportunities to contribute to the class can enhance the learning for everyone.

## The Power of Partner Discussions

The PRC2 also gave students practice using informational books and helped them gain familiarity with the structure and features in these texts. The inclusion of a variety of forms of visual information

also supported students' comprehension of abstract content.

The vignette shown in Figure 5 provides an example of how partners support each other's learning during PRC2. This is an excerpt from an audiotape recording that occurred during a discussion between partners while reading a book on Native Americans during the class social studies unit. Maria and Alma (all names are pseudonyms) are both fifth-grade students for whom English is their second language. In this segment from their discussions, Maria provided Alma with both linguistic and cognitive support. When Alma discussed the selection, she seemed to have gaps in her comprehension of the meaning of the Great Law of Peace. She "dances around" trying

**Figure 5**  
**Transcript of Partner Discussion**

Two fifth-grade students discuss a shared text, *The Iroquois: People of the Northeast* by Rudy Maile, published 2004 by the National Geographic Society. The following is from a transcript of one of their discussions:

**Alma:** Now, my question is what was most interesting about the south and east of Lake Toronto? (Maria interjects, "Ontario") Ontario?

**Maria:** Well, basically...the Iroquois are a group of five nations and those five nations before they were all fighting, but now they have, now they...(Alma interjects, "they came together") together and had peace. They have the great law of peace, yeah, and everyone followed that. And basically [it] said not to kill each other.

**Alma:** So, but what exactly does the Great Law of Peace mean?

**Maria:** It means that the Iroquois Nations cannot kill each other.

**Alma:** Oh, that's interesting because I...here we don't have the Great Law of Peace, people kill each other, like you know, mostly we have here.

**Maria:** It's sad because like, I wish we had the Great Law of Peace everywhere around the world you know. You wouldn't see people in Iraq or you wouldn't hear on the news about all the people getting killed by crazy-minded people who just don't know what they are doing, you know?

**Alma:** Yea.

**Maria:** I wish we had all the Peace Law. Now it's my turn to read.

to get Maria to talk about it until she point-blank asks her what the Great Law of Peace means. With the clarification that Maria supplied, Alma was able to share this understanding with the class, something that without practice and time to work out her understanding in a safe context, Alma would not have been able or willing to do.

## Creating Competent and Confident Learners

The PRC2 routine provides a scaffold for ELLs developing skill in reading and learning with informational texts by incorporating the key principles that research has shown supports ELLs. First, PRC2 increases their actual reading of appropriate content materials by matching materials to students' reading development. Second, PRC2 also provides a setting in which students ask and answer their own questions and take control over their learning. Third, the process of partner questioning supports students as they extend their academic talk, and in that process to think at higher levels. In addition, the process introduces students to a variety of informational texts and helps them learn to use the structure and features of these inviting materials.

### References

- Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project. (2008). Partnership for improving literacy in urban schools. *The Reading Teacher*, 61(8), 674–680. doi:10.1598/RT.61.8.11
- Allington, R.L. (2007). Intervention all day long: New hope for struggling readers. *Voices From the Middle*, 14(4), 7–14.
- Allington, R.L., & Cunningham, P.M. (2007). *Schools that work: Where all children read and write* (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Almasi, J.F. (2008). Using questioning strategies to promote students' active discussion and comprehension of content area material. In D. Lapp, J. Flood, & N. Farnan (Eds.), *Content area reading and learning* (3rd ed., pp. 487–513). New York: Erlbaum.
- August, D., Carlo, M., Dressler, C., & Snow, C.E. (2005). The critical role of vocabulary development for English language learners. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20(1), 50–57. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5826.2005.00120.x
- Blachowicz, C.L.Z., & Ogle, D. (2008). *Reading comprehension: Strategies for independent learners* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford.
- Blachowicz, C.L.Z., Sullivan, D.M., & Cieply, C. (2001). Fluency snapshots: A quick screening tool for your classroom. *Reading Psychology*, 22(2), 95–109. doi:10.1080/027027101300213074
- Bransford, J., Brown, A.L., & Cocking, R.R. (2003). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(1), 18–36.
- Echevarria, J., Vogt, M.E., & Short, D. (2004). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP model* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- Fitzgerald, J., Amend, S.J., & Guthrie, K.M. (2008). Young Latino students' English-reading growth in all-English classrooms. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 40(1), 59–94. doi:10.1080/10862960802070459
- Garcia, E.E., Jensen, B.T., & Scribner, K.P. (2009). The demographic imperative. *Educational Leadership*, 66(7), 8–13.
- Guthrie, J.T., & Davis, M.H. (2003). Motivating struggling readers in middle school through an engagement model of classroom practice. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 19(1), 59–85. doi:10.1080/10573560308203
- Lesaux, N., & Geva, E. (2006). Synthesis: Development of literacy in language-minority students. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the national literacy panel on language-minority children and youth* (pp. 53–74). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Marzano, R.J. (2004). *Building background knowledge for academic achievement: Research on what works in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Medd, S.K., & Whitmore, K.F. (2001). What's in YOUR backpack? Exchanging Funds of language knowledge in an ESL classroom. In P.G. Smith (Ed.), *Talking classrooms: Shaping children's learning through oral language instruction* (pp. 42–56). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Mora, J.K. (2009). From the ballot box to the classroom. *Educational Leadership*, 66(7), 14–19.
- National Assessment Governing Board. (2008). *Reading framework for the 2009 NAEP*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Nichols, M. (2006). *Comprehension through conversation: The power of purposeful talk in the reading workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39(6), 564–570. doi:10.1598/RT.39.6.11
- Ogle, D., & Blachowicz, C.L.Z. (2001). Beyond literature circles: Helping students comprehend informational texts. In C.C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 259–274). New York: Guilford.
- Ogle, D., Klemp, R.M., & McBride, W. (2007). *Building literacy in social studies: Strategies for improving comprehension and critical thinking*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Raphael, T.E. (1986). Teaching question answer relationships, revisited. *The Reading Teacher*, 39(6), 516–522.
- Shanahan, T., & Beck, I.L. (2006). Effective literacy teaching for English-language learners. In D. August & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth* (pp. 415–488). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ogle teaches at the National-Louis University, Chicago, Illinois, USA; e-mail dogle@nl.edu. Correa-Koutun teaches at the National-Louis University and the Chicago Public Schools-Reading and Language, Illinois, USA; e-mail amy.correa@nl.edu.