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Structured Literacy: A Framework for Teaching LESLLA

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Abstract

Structured Literacy is an umbrella term for methods of teaching reading that are based on sound reading science. Teaching with a Structured Literacy approach in the earliest stages of reading development is characterized by a focus on building strong oral language skills as well as the explicit, systematic teaching of decoding skills. In middle and later stages, an emphasis on building fluency and increasing attention to comprehension is added. Structured Literacy is also characterized by elements that are intentionally excluded, particularly the use of the three-cueing method in early reading development, which involves teaching students to use guessing strategies as a primary means to figure out unknown words. This paper offers a Bridge Model to help teachers easily remember the elements of the Structured Literacy approach. The purpose of this paper is to share a framework for teaching LESLLA using a Structured Literacy approach, and explain how it can help teachers plan instruction for LESLLA students at various stages of literacy development.

Keywords*:* LESLLA, science of reading, structured literacy

Introduction

The term "Structured Literacy" has been attracting attention in recent years. Structured Literacy is a name adopted by the International Dyslexia Association in 2016 to describe methods of teaching reading that are evidence-based and that advantage all students in learning to read, particularly struggling learners (IDA, 2019; Spear-Swerling, 2019; Cowen, 2016). Structured Literacy is associated with the Science of Reading (SoR), another term that has become popularized in the last few years. Goodwin & Jimenez (2021), define the Science of Reading as the body of knowledge, developed over decades, about "how humans learn to read and how reading should be taught" and that "prioritizes basic science and experimental work" (p. 57-58). *Science of Reading* is a name for the large and growing body of knowledge about evidence-based reading instruction. *Structured Literacy* is an umbrella term for teaching methods based on sound reading science.

Positionality

This paper is based on my reading of a wide variety of articles and books from reading science during the past few years, and my personal application of new ideas in my own teaching. For background, I have been a full-time teacher of LESLLA students for 23 years. Most of that time I have taught adult refugee and immigrant students located in Salt Lake City, Utah. I taught as a licensed teacher in a local school district's adult education program, and also served as a coordinator of a medium-sized workplace-based literacy program. In 2012, I started creating and sharing books and lesson slideshows through the website abc English (abceng.org). During the past three years, I have been a Reading Specialist offering intensive online literacy tutoring to LESLLA students. I value professional learning and regularly spend time reading about language and literacy development.

A few years ago, I became curious about the idea of *three-cueing*, which I had heard mentioned in a variety of popular literacy podcasts and blog posts (for example, Five from Five (n.d.); Hanford (2019, 2022); and Shanahan (2019)). Before that point, I hadn't considered that teaching students to guess at words using first letters or pictures while in the early stages of reading development might be a problem. I was intrigued that a common method of teaching reading might be controversial or problematic. I've since spent a lot of time following up on this idea through research of academic articles and books, often leading to more questions and more research. Along the way, I also found it interesting that the term *Balanced Literacy* seemed to be falling out of favor, and that the term *Structured Literacy* was often being promoted as an alternative (Gibson, et. al., 2021; Ordetx, 2020; Goldberg, 2022). Since I had both received and delivered Balanced Literacy training for many years, this led to yet more questions and more research.

In English there is an idiom about "going down a rabbit hole" that is used when you unexpectedly spend large amounts of time researching a topic and end up in a place you didn't expect. For me, the "rabbit hole" has been an appropriate metaphor for investigating reading science over the past few years. The topic is vast and complicated. There is evidence-based science and experience-based philosophy, and plenty of strong opinions and some disagreements. I consider myself to be somewhere along a long journey of learning, rather than at a settled destination. However, I've found my recent experience of learning more about reading science very relevant and useful to my work as a LESLLA practitioner. Since most of the literature surrounding reading science is written from a K-12 perspective, the work of

translating research to practice for LESLLA teachers is additionally challenging. The purpose of this paper is to help translate reading science to LESLLA practice. I'll share a framework for teaching LESLLA using a Structured Literacy approach, and explain how it can help teachers plan lessons for LESLLA students at various stages of literacy development.

Applying K-12 Based Research to the Adult Context

First, it must be acknowledged that the large body of knowledge about evidence-based reading instruction is largely centered on studies of young children learning to read in their L1. There is relatively little reading research centered on adult emergent readers, and even less on LESLLA type learners. In absence of a large body of LESLLA-centered reading science literature, is it reasonable to apply K-12 based research to the adult language learner context?

In 2010, the National Institute for Literacy produced *Adult Education Literacy Instruction: A Review of the Research*, which includes this statement:

> Those practices based on a strong, carefully synthesized K-12 research base may provide the best source of promising ideas for instruction with adults. The skills necessary for successful reading are the same or, at least, very close to being the same in adults and children. (Kruidenier et al., 2010, p. 14.)

This statement and other similar notions are discussed by Vinogradov (2013, p. 19) in the Proceedings of the 8th LESLLA Symposium. In the Proceedings of the 17th LESLLA Symposium, Gonsalves (2023, p. 24) writes:

> Admittedly, there are many differences between children learning to become literate in their L1 (a language they already have an oral command of) and adults acquiring first-time literacy in an L2, a language that might still be extremely novel or even unknown; as such this comparison must be viewed with caution (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Marrapodi, 2013). Nonetheless, the literature on L1 emergent literacy in children can still provide key frameworks and theories as a starting point, to see which elements resonate with the acquisition of literacy by LESLLA learners.

In addition, within neurological science, an early-stage reader is viewed relatively separately from their age. For example, Coch (2021, footnote 1) states that although her research brief titled *Building a Brain that can Read* refers to beginning readers as young children, "the same principles apply to older and adult beginning readers."

In this paper, I base many of my ideas on articles, webinars, and books that are centered on K-12 based reading science. I propose that it is worthwhile to experiment with and transfer ideas from K-12 based reading science to our work with LESLLA students.

Structured Literacy: Bridge Model

After consuming quite a few articles, books, and webinars about reading science and structured literacy over the past few years, my summary for LESLLA teachers is this: Teaching language and literacy with a Structured Literacy approach is like building a bridge. In the earliest stages, you need to build separate foundations in both decoding and language. In middle stages, you bridge between the two foundations by adding a focus on fluency. In later stages, you

continue to solidify decoding, language, and fluency and also add comprehension work through practice with increasingly complex text. Figure 1 illustrates the Structured Literacy Bridge Model. I will explain the rationale behind the Bridge Model in the following sections.

The Simple View of Reading

The bridge analogy brings together several major ideas from reading science. At the core is the Simple View of Reading, which is a model introduced by Gough and Tunmer (1986) stating that reading comprehension is the product of two main components, Language Comprehension and Decoding. The Simple View of Reading is often presented as an equation: Reading Comprehension = Language Comprehension x Decoding or RC = LC x D. In other words, if you measure a student's skill level in LC and D separately, and then multiply those abilities together, you'll understand their ability in Reading Comprehension. A student's strength in one component cannot make up for weakness in the other component. Strong ability in both LC and D are needed to achieve independent Reading Comprehension. The Simple View of Reading was first proposed in 1986. There are several more recent models that conceptualize advances in scientific understanding of reading, many of which are outlined by Duke & Cartwright (2021) and are also useful to consider. However, it's notable that most of the more advanced or modern models still incorporate at their core Gough and Tunmer's two major components of reading, LC x D.

In the bridge illustration, the two main components from the Simple View of Reading make up the two sides of the bridge. Language comprehension (LC) is on the left side, and decoding (D) is on the right. Language comprehension is the ability to understand spoken language, and the ability to understand text read aloud. You can also think of it as "listening comprehension" (Duke & Cartwright, 2021, p. 526). Decoding is the ability to accurately and automatically read familiar and unfamiliar words, both in and out of context. If you have good language comprehension skills, you can easily understand spoken conversation or understand an audio book. If you have good decoding skills, you can figure out how to pronounce an unfamiliar word or even a nonsense word, with no context or meaning to help you guess. Strong reading comprehension is the product of strong abilities in both Language Comprehension and Decoding.

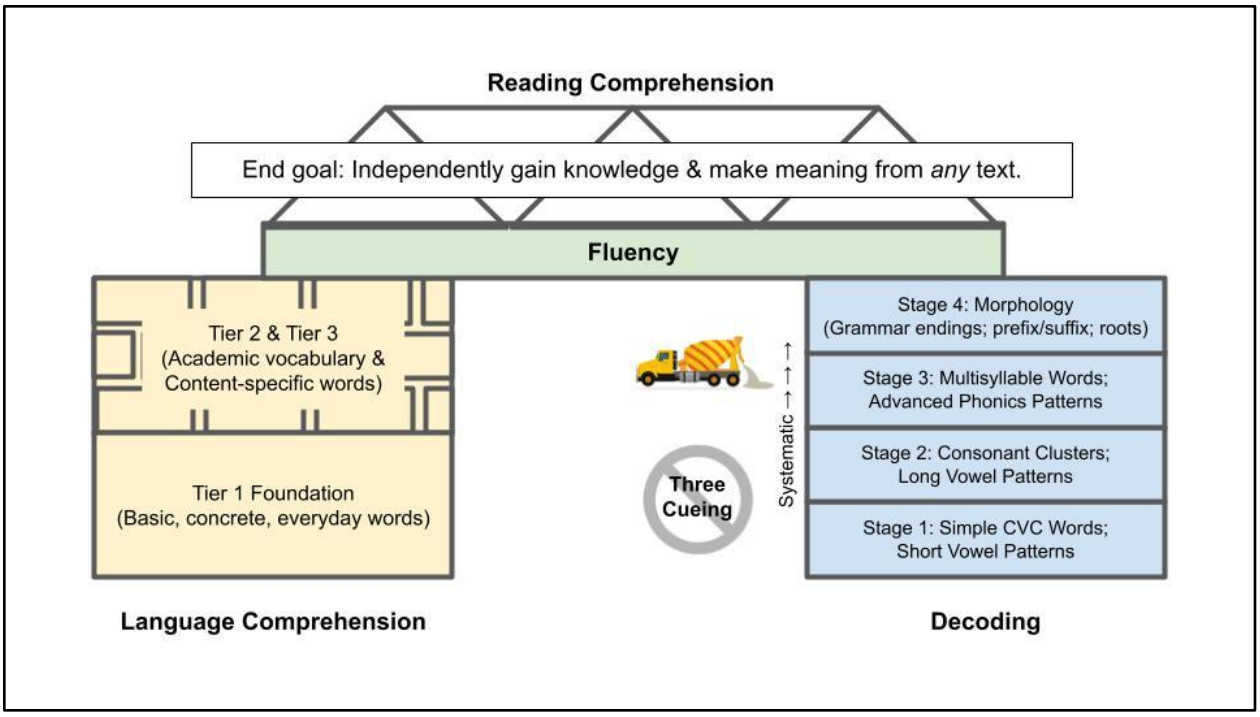

Figure 1. Teaching Structured Literacy: Bridge Model

Fluency: The Bridging Process

Fluency is also an essential skill that is needed for reading comprehension. (Rasinski, 2014; Cunningham, et. al., 2023). Fluency is considered a bridging process between language and decoding (Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). In other words, a student needs to have a basic foundation in both LC and D in order to begin to practice and improve in fluency. The main inspiration for creating the bridge illustration in Figure 1 comes from the idea that fluency is a bridging process between LC and D, and is a precursor to RC.

The bridge model illustrates how decoding, language, and fluency are the main building blocks that support reading comprehension. This is in line with the five pillars of reading instruction outlined by The National Reading Panel (2000): Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. In the bridge model, Phonemic Awareness and Phonics are represented in the Decoding side of the bridge. Vocabulary is represented in the Language Comprehension side of the bridge. Fluency spans across the two foundations, and Comprehension rests on top. When language, decoding, and fluency skills are strong, reading comprehension is the outcome. The end goal of reading instruction is independent reading comprehension – for students to be able to independently read any text and gain meaning from it.

Language Comprehension

Language Comprehension (LC) is one of the two foundations in the Bridge Model. Language comprehension involves understanding spoken language or text read out loud. Language comprehension is all about meaning. Scarborough (2009) defined several sub-strands of language comprehension, including vocabulary and background knowledge. In the bridge illustration, as in the Five Pillars of Reading, the sub-strand of vocabulary is particularly highlighted.

Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) have proposed that vocabulary can be divided into

three word types or "tiers" for teaching and learning purposes. The three tiers of vocabulary are represented in the LC side of the bridge illustration as base, bricks, and mortar (Dutro and Moran, 2003). Tier 1 words form the base. Tier 1 words are concrete and easy to teach and learn through pictures and actions. For a LESLLA teacher, Tier 1 words are "survival English" words. Examples are words such as *house, bedroom, bathroom, look, come, call, I, you, 2:00, $1000, money, now, tomorrow*.

Tier 3 words are like bricks, and Tier 2 words are like mortar (Dutro and Moran, 2003). Tier 3 words are specific to a topic. For example, in the LESLLA context, a typical teaching topic might be "Looking for Housing." Some Tier 3 vocabulary words specific to this topic are *unfurnished* or *utilities*. Tier 2 words are more abstract than the basic, concrete words found in Tier 1, but are also not tied to a specific content area like words in Tier 3. In other words, Tier 2 words are abstract, and useful across many contexts. In a lesson about looking for housing, some examples of Tier 2 vocabulary words are *immediately* or *available*. Words like *immediately* or *available* are less concrete and as a result, are more difficult to teach with simple photos or actions. When teaching, Tier 1 and Tier 3 words will be needed to explain Tier 2 words. However, Tier 2 words such as *immediately* or *available* are useful across a variety of contexts. They are useful in the current context of looking for housing, but also useful in other contexts such as applying for jobs, online ordering, scheduling appointments, and so forth. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) suggest that explicitly teaching Tier 2 words is particularly advantageous for building a student's vocabulary and language comprehension abilities. For LESLLA teachers, it's important to point out that a student will need to have a minimum base of Tier 1 words already established in order to benefit from targeted instruction in Tier 2 and 3 words.

Decoding

Decoding is represented on the right side of the Bridge Model. Decoding is the ability to accurately and automatically solve words both in and out of context, and is a prerequisite to independent reading comprehension. There is wide consensus among researchers that decoding skills should be taught explicitly and systematically (Ehri, 2020; Buckingham, et. al., 2019; NRP, 2000). *Explicit* means that teachers clearly introduce and model decoding skills and provide practice and immediate feedback. This is in contrast to allowing students to construct knowledge of decoding on their own through exposure or experience. *Systematic* means that decoding skills are presented in a logical and sequential manner, starting with the most simple skills and advancing to more complicated skills. In contrast, non-systematic phonics instruction may be organized around authentic texts or a whole-part-whole approach. This can be counter-intuitive to LESLLA teachers, because meaning and authentic language is so important in building oral language skills. However, in developing *decoding* skills, explicit, systematic instruction is more efficient and effective than non-systematic teaching of decoding skills (Spear-Swerling, 2022, p. 3).

In the bridge analogy, you can think of building the decoding side of the bridge as systematically pouring layers of concrete. You pour the first layer and wait until it is relatively solid, then you add the next layer. When that layer is solid, you pour the next. Skills are built layer upon layer. In other words, to teach decoding skills explicitly and systematically, teachers should choose a logical sequence of phonics skills, assess students to know where to start in the sequence, and then build up skills systematically.

For example, if assessment shows that students are at the earliest stages of decoding

development and cannot yet decode an unfamiliar CVC (Consonant-Vowel-Consonant) word, teachers using a systematic approach would start by teaching students to use individual letter sounds to sound out simple one syllable CVC words such as *man*, *bed*, or *sun* before working on more complicated single syllable words such as *black*, *brush*, *stairs*, or *smoke*. According to a systematic approach of teaching phonics, before students spend time practicing the decoding and encoding of multisyllabic words, they should already be competent with the major phonics patterns of single syllable words. If students don't have a solid understanding of an earlier step, it will be an inefficient use of their learning time to work on decoding more advanced words (Spear-Swerling, 2022, p. 3).

You can see within Bridge Model in Figure 1 this general suggested sequence for systematic phonics instruction: Stage 1 - Simple CVC Words and Short Vowel Patterns; Stage 2 - Consonant Clusters and Long Vowel Patterns; Stage 3 - Multisyllable Words and Advanced Phonics Patterns; Stage 4 - Morphology, including grammar endings; prefixes/suffixes, and Greek & Latin roots. The Assessment of Basic Literacy for Adult and Adolescent Emergent Readers (ABLE Test) is an assessment tool to help teachers determine where to start within this systematic sequence (Christenson, 2022).

To summarize, a Structured Literacy approach emphasizes teaching decoding explicitly, using a systematic sequence of lessons that gradually builds from simple to complex, and matching decoding lessons to a student's decoding stage based on assessment data.

Differences between LC and D

There are some important differences between Language Comprehension and Decoding. LC develops naturally. Decoding does not develop naturally (Castles, et. al., 2018, p. 11; Moats, 2020, p. 6). It's easiest to understand this difference when you think about children and their mother language. Almost all children develop speaking skills, whether or not they have formal instruction. People generally do not learn to read if they aren't formally taught to read.

Language Comprehension develops around meaningful topics while Decoding develops through systematic skill building. To develop Language Comprehension, a teacher should choose topics that are relevant and useful to students. Decoding is not topic based, but skill based. To develop decoding skills, a phonics assessment can be used to determine which skills the student already knows and doesn't know, and where to start within a systematic sequence of phonics skill lessons.

Another difference is in the order of teaching. Within Language Comprehension, it doesn't make a difference if you teach about the topic of transportation first, and then the topic of housing next, or vice versa. Relevance is the key factor in deciding a topic to build LC skills. In decoding, the order of skills *is* important. According to a Structured Literacy approach, students need to master basic blending of sounds in simple one-syllable words before they move on to words with advanced phonics patterns, or words with multiple syllables. Teaching decoding skills out of order is less efficient, and for most students, not as effective (Ehri, 2020; NRP, 2000; Buckingham, 2019).

Three Cueing

Structured Literacy is defined by practices to *include* such as attention to oral language development and explicit, systematic phonics instruction, but also by practices to intentionally *exclude*, such as three-cueing methods (Spear-Swerling, 2022, p. 6).

Three Cueing is a method of teaching beginning readers to use context or picture clues as

a primary method to figure out unknown words. For example, when a student comes to a word they don't know, a teacher using three-cueing methods might ask the student to look at the picture to guess the word, or to look at the words around it to guess the word. Although common, three-cueing is not supported by reading science. Petscher, et. al, (2020, p. 9) clearly explains that "the three-cueing approach to support early word recognition… ignores 40 years of overwhelming evidence that orthographic mapping involves the formation of letter-sound connections to bond spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of specific words in memory." In other words, instead of learning to guess based on pictures or context, students need to develop phonics knowledge and sounding-out skills as the primary method of figuring out unknown words. Interestingly, some U.S. states have even enacted legislation in recent years banning the teaching of Three Cueing in elementary school literacy instruction (Peak, 2023). Three Cueing stems from the work of Goodman (1970) who proposed that reading can be thought of as a "psycholinguistic guessing game." To learn more about three-cueing, see Ehri (2020), Hempenstall (2003), Adams (1998), and Center for Literacy and Learning (2023).

Summary

In summary, the Bridge Model is based on these major principles from reading science, as referenced above:

- Strong abilities in both Language Comprehension (LC) and Decoding (D) are needed in order to achieve independent Reading Comprehension (RC).
- Fluency is a bridging process between LC and D, and a precursor to RC.
- Explicit, systematic phonics instruction is more efficient and effective than non-systematic phonics instruction.
- Use assessment data to guide decoding instruction.
- Avoid teaching students to use three-cueing methods in early-stage reading.

Lesson Planning with the Bridge Framework

Teaching basic literacy skills is like building a bridge. First you have to build up the two foundations, next you bridge across foundations, and then you work to strengthen the bridge. As always, lesson plans should be created with student needs and abilities in mind. Students at different stages of literacy development need different types of lessons. The following sections will describe how the bridge analogy can be useful as a framework for planning lessons for LESLLA students at several different stages of literacy development.

Assessment

Teaching with a Structured Literacy approach is data-driven. As a first step, teachers should assess students to understand their current abilities in both Language Comprehension (LC) and Decoding (D) and then make instructional decisions based on that assessment data. To quickly determine a general level of both LC and D, this 5-Minute Literacy Screener can be used: https://bit.ly/5minlitscreener (Christenson, 2019). Tools such as the CASAS Life and Work Listening Test available at casas.org or the BEST Plus 2.0 available at cal.org are common assessments used in adult education programs in the United States used to measure progress in LC. To determine a student's baseline ability in D, the Assessment of Basic Literacy for Adult and Adolescent Emergent Readers (ABLE Test) can be used: abceng.org/assess (Christenson, 2022). For example, if a student scores less than 80 points on the Level 1 ABLE Test, the student

would be considered at the earliest stage of decoding development.

Lesson Planning for Early Stage Decoders

Table 1 shows a 1-week sample lesson outline for LESLLA students who are at the earliest stages of both language development and decoding, that is based on a Structured Literacy approach. To see a full-size document that is easier to read, go to https://bit.ly/er1outline.

Within the 1-Week Sample Lesson Outline (see https://bit.ly/er1outline), notice these elements of the Structured Literacy approach:

- There are two major instructional segments: Language Comprehension (LC, represented in the lesson outline in yellow) and Decoding (D, represented in blue).
- During the D segment, the focus is decoding and encoding, following a systematic sequence of lessons that gradually build from simple to complex. In past lessons, students have been explicitly taught individual letters and sounds. In the current block of lessons, students are practicing blending and encoding simple CVC words with short vowel sounds. In the next set of lessons, students will add a small number of high frequency words such as *in, on, a, the, and, very* and continue practicing simple CVC words within controlled text sentences and simple decodable stories. In future steps, students will advance to lessons that systematically add digraphs, long vowel patterns, and simple suffixes such as -ing, -er, and -est.
- During the LC segment, the focus is on speaking and listening. The topic is relevant and authentic. There are no activities that teach students to use three-cueing or guessing strategies to read text that is beyond the students' current decoding ability. At this stage, students are building their vocabulary and language comprehension primarily through speaking and listening.
- LC and D are separated. The target words and text in each segment are chosen to best meet the segment's instructional goal. The instructional goal during the D segment is to build foundational skills according to a systematic sequence. Accordingly, the target words for the D segment in the lesson outline are CVC words with short vowel sounds. In the LC segment, the instructional goal is to build a student's oral vocabulary base of everyday, concrete words. Accordingly, the target words are topic-based Tier-1 vocabulary words, practiced within authentic and natural language activities.

Table 1. 1-Week Lesson Outline using a Structured Literacy Approach. (https://bit.ly/er1outline)

Activity	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Attendance Routine	Review names of classmates/teacher	Review names of classmates/teacher	Review names of classmates/teacher	Review names of classmates/teacher	Review names of classmates/teacher
Opening Activity	Calendar; Weather	Calendar; Weather	Calendar; Weather	Calendar; Weather	Calendar; Weather
Sound Review (review using Embedded Mnemonics picture cues)	a, m, n, s, d, f, v, b, g, c, t, h*	e, r, d, l, g, p, n, t, b, y, s, w*	i, s, t, l, p, r, z, k, d, p, n, b, g, h*	o, m, p, l, g, j, b, g, d, t, h*	u, r, n, s, g, m, b, c, t, p*
	*Note: Students have already received explicit instruction in letters and sounds during several past lessons.				
Blending practice & Encoding (handwriting) to Reinforce Decoding	man, sad, fan, van, bag, cat, bad, hat See abc English Phonics Lesson 2.1	red, leg, pen, ten, bed, get, yes, wet See abc English Phonics Lesson 2.2	sit, lip, rip, zip, kid, pin, big, hip See abc English Phonics Lesson 2.3	mop, log, job, jog, dog, pot, top, hot See abc English Phonics Lesson 2.4	run, sun, rug, gum, bus, bug, cut, cup See abc English Phonics Lesson 2.5
Break	Brain Break	Brain Break	Brain Break	Brain Break	Brain Break
Personal Information mini-goal	Practice writing first and last names	Practice writing first and last names	Practice writing first and last names	Practice writing first and last names	Practice writing first and last names
Topic: Looking for Housing • Speaking & Listening Focus • Task-based Language Instruction • Backwards lesson design	• Listen and repeat numbers 1-10. • Verbally count classroom objects up to 10. • TPR - hold up fingers 1-10 • Student acts as teacher, asks class "Show me 5; show me 3; show me 8" (show fingers)	• Review numbers 1-10. Use play money $1 bills to verbally count 1-10. • Use play money $100 bills to verbally count by hundreds from $100-$1000 • Use play money in bundles of $1000 to verbally count $1000-$10,000.	• Review numbers 1-10 & hundred, thousand. • Use photos to practice bedroom, bathroom, living room, kitchen. • Distribute photos of toilet, bed, refrigerator, sofa. • Practice pattern: "The _(sofa)__ is in the _(living room)_."	• Review numbers • Review rooms • View online listings of houses or apartments for rent • Look at photos in listings: identify as "house" or "apartment"; Identify bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, living room. • How many bed-rooms/bathrooms?	Practice simple dialogue based on 4 online listings of houses/ apartments for rent: • How many bedrooms? • How many bathrooms? • How much is the rent? (use made up round numbers: $2000, $1000, $3000, $5000)
Tier 1 Vocabulary target words:	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	hundred, thousand	bedroom, bathroom	house, apartment; How many BR/BA?	How much is the rent?
Closing Routine	Circle Speak	Circle Speak	Circle Speak	Circle Speak	Circle Speak

Figures 2 and 3 show images from a systematic sequence of lessons for teaching Stage 1 and Stage 2 decoding skills, taken from the books *abc English Phonics: Level 1* and *abc English Phonics: Level 2*, available at abceng.org/books (Christenson, 2021a and 2021b).

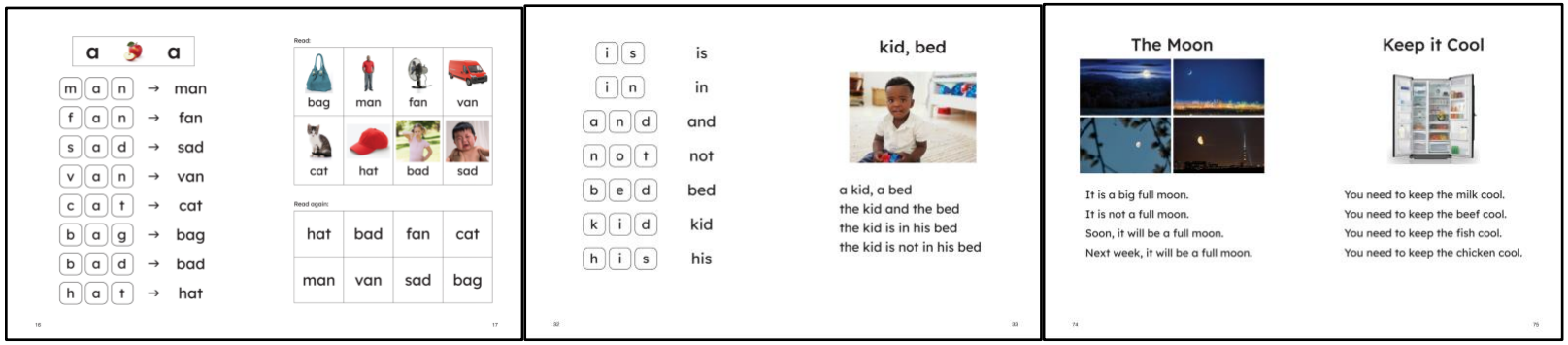

Figure 2. Examples of Systematic Lessons for Teaching Stage 1 Decoding Skills

Figure 3. Examples of Systematic Lessons for Teaching Stage 2 Decoding Skills

High-Low Students

The sample lesson outlined in the previous section is designed to meet the needs of students who are at the earliest stages of both decoding development (D) and language comprehension development (LC). In contrast, there are many LESLLA students who have relatively high LC ability, but low D ability. To meet the needs of a high-low student, the above lesson outline would be adjusted to focus during the LC segment on Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary words, rather than basic Tier 1 words. For example, the class could look at online listings for housing, brainstorm a list of questions to ask about the property, and engage in role-play conversations. The teacher would use an authentic text (such as online listings for housing) to identify a set of Tier 2 and 3 target words related to the topic such as *available, immediately, prime location, cleaning deposit, first and last month's rent, amenities, covered parking,* etc. Because the students in this example are still at an early decoding stage (determined through assessment), this list of Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary words are learned and practiced orally, and are not yet a good choice for decoding or spelling practice. In other words, if a student's assessment data shows that they aren't yet able to accurately and automatically decode a CVC word, it will be an inefficient use of lesson time to focus on decoding or spelling a word such as *immediately* or *amenities*. However, the LC segment of the lesson should not be limited to only the words a student is able to decode – thus the use of speaking and listening activities for vocabulary and background knowledge development.

Lesson Planning for Middle and Later Stage Decoders

In a Structured Literacy approach, the decoding segment of a lesson matches the decoding needs of the students according to assessment data. Students at different stages of decoding development need different types of lessons. In middle and later stages of decoding development, explicit instruction in Fluency and Reading Comprehension is added to lessons. In terms of the Bridge Model (Figure 1), once students have established some basic skills in both LC and D, they are ready to bridge between the two foundations by practicing fluency, and once Fluency is established, there will be an increasing focus on independent comprehension. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss teaching strategies for Fluency and Reading Comprehension in depth, however, Table 2 outlines the general characteristics that would be seen in lessons for early, middle, and later stage decoders, according to a Structured Literacy approach. To see a full-size document that is easier to read, go to https://bit.ly/stageplanning. The book *Shifting the Balance, Grades 3-5* by Cunningham, Burkins, and Yates (2023) is one good source to learn more about Structured Literacy teaching strategies for middle and later stage decoders, including chapters on background knowledge, comprehension strategies, vocabulary instruction, word study, fluency instruction, and independent reading.

Table 2. Lesson Planning Across Stages of Decoding Development (https://bit.ly/stageplanning)

Decoding Stage	**Assessment Data** (Examples based on ABLE Test)	**Systematic Sequence of Decoding Lessons**	**Use of Controlled Text** (Decodable Text)	**Explicit Fluency Instruction**	**Use of Authentic Text to build Language Comprehension** (Vocabulary and Background Knowledge)
Stage 1	<80 points on Level 1 assessment	CVC Words and Short Vowel Patterns	yes - a major focus	not much yet	Access authentic text primarily through listening / speaking activities.
Stage 2	80+ points on Level 1, but <80 points on Level 2	Consonant Clusters and Long Vowel Patterns	yes - a major focus	some	Access authentic text primarily through listening / speaking activities. Make some connections to words with known phonics patterns.
Stage 3	80+ points on Level 2, but <80 points on Level 3	Multisyllable Word Study and Advanced Phonics Patterns	less	yes - a major focus	Access authentic text through listening / speaking activities, along with scaffolded reading / writing activities.
Stage 4	80+ points on Level 3, but <80 points on Level 4	Morphology (Grammar endings, prefixes/suffixes, Greek & Latin roots)	no longer needed	yes - a major focus	Access authentic text with scaffolded reading / writing activities. Support with speaking / listening as needed.
Post Stage 4	80+ points on Level 4	No longer need intensive decoding instruction. No longer need decoding- specific assessment; transition to Reading Comprehension assessment.	no longer needed	as needed	Students are able to read authentic text more independently. Build fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge through close reading of authentic text. Teach comprehension strategies such as note-taking, summarizing, and text structure analysis. Write about what you read.

Summary of Structured Literacy Shifts

For me, moving to a Structured Literacy approach in teaching LESLLA has involved a couple of important shifts. I now teach decoding skills in a much more systematic and sequential manner than I was before. I'm also using a decoding-specific assessment to better understand my students' abilities and progress in decoding skills. In a Structured Literacy approach, phonics instruction is systematic, comprehensive, and guided by assessment.

Second, I'm more intentional about choosing different types of text for different purposes and choosing *not* to use certain types of texts for independent reading practice in order to avoid situations that would encourage three-cueing methods of guessing at words. When teaching LESLLA students at the earliest stages of reading development, I choose a text such as a page of words and photos, a simple dialogue, or some sort of realia as a basis for authentic oral language development (the LC segment of the lesson). The focus of this portion of the lesson is oral language development, not independent reading. Then, during the decoding (D) portion of the lesson, I choose a text that matches the decoding instructional goal, usually a list of words that fits a specific phonics pattern that is the focus of that day's lesson, along with perhaps a few controlled-text sentences or a decodable-text story using those words and reviewing past patterns. The goal of this portion of the lesson *is* for students to independently read the text. Before moving to a Structured Literacy approach, I was more often teaching decoding skills non-systematically within an authentic text. Since making this shift, I can see that these adjustments are helping my students develop basic decoding skills more efficiently and effectively.

A third shift that I've made toward teaching with a Structured Literacy approach is to be more careful to avoid teaching guessing strategies, and to purposefully work to correct students' guessing habits. When I notice a student is guessing at words based on the first letter or context or pictures, I know that the student needs more instruction in understanding how individual letters or groups of letters represent sounds and how to blend those sounds into words. Several of the students I currently work with have learned deeply embedded guessing habits, but with daily doses of explicit and systematic decoding and blending practice, they have been able to overcome guessing habits to become much more accurate and independent in their reading.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for LESLLA-specific research in Structured Literacy methods. Most of the references I've cited in the discussion above are based on learners acquiring reading skills as children in the K-12 system, usually in their L1. There are a few research and practice summaries of Adult Literacy Instruction (NRC, 2012, McShane, 2005), but not many, and very few published within the last few years, or that specifically focus on language learners or LESLLA.

It would be interesting to conduct an experimental comparison of student progress outcomes over time between LESLLA teachers using Structured Literacy approaches vs. a control group of teachers using other approaches. It would be useful to conduct qualitative research by interviewing teachers and learners in classrooms on their views of using or receiving instruction via a Structured Literacy approach. It would also be interesting to survey and describe systems for providing intensive decoding and fluency instruction for adult learners who need it, including supplemental instruction or alternatives to traditional classroom instruction, such as small group or one-to-one online or in-person tutoring by a trained reading specialist.

Conclusion

This paper offers a Bridge Model as a framework for teachers to easily remember the components and process of building literacy skills using a Structured Literacy approach. Structured Literacy is characterized by attention to strong oral language development and explicit, systematic, comprehensive decoding instruction. In middle and later stages of reading development, fluency and comprehension strategy instruction are also essential elements of Structured Literacy. The Structured Literacy approach intentionally avoids teaching guessing strategies in early stages of decoding development, also known as three-cueing methods. The Bridge Model can help teachers conceptualize how to create lessons for different types of learners, depending on their stage of reading development. Assessment is important to determine a student's needs and approximate stage of decoding development.

Structured Literacy is an umbrella term for methods of teaching reading that are evidence-based and that advantage all students in learning to read, particularly struggling learners. As such, LESLLA practitioners can benefit from considering the ideas offered within Structured Literacy to try out in their teaching.

Note:
This article is a summary of a presentation that I created for the 2022 LESLLA Symposium in Tucson, Arizona, USA. You can see the original presentation slideshow at abceng.org/training. The slideshow and presentation notes are free for teachers or organizations to use as a professional development activity.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure:
I create and share language and literacy teaching resources at the website abc English (abceng.org) and earn income from that project. This paper references several of the resources that are available at the abc English website.

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