

*ACCESS: Building Literacy  
Through Learning™*  
Research Base and Program Effectiveness



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## **ACCESS PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

*ACCESS* is an innovative, standards and content-based series to help newcomer to advanced English language learners build language and learning skills in all subjects including, English, mathematics, American history, and science.

*For intermediate to advanced English language learners:*

***ACCESS English, American History, Science, and Math* student books supported by complete program packages – one per teacher:**

- **focus on the big ideas in English, American History, science, and math** through high-interest lessons;
- **support and scaffold different levels of language proficiency** while teaching core academic content;
- provide **oral language and hands-on activities**;
- **complement classroom curriculum** and builds academic vocabulary;
- offer step-by-step models and a **highly visual design to make content more accessible for ELLs**;
- **support adequate yearly progress** and prepares students for high-stakes assessments.

### **Each *ACCESS* content-area kit includes:**

- **Student Book**—hardcover text with a clear, age-appropriate design and accessible standards-based content.
- **Teacher’s Edition**—step-by-step teaching support, guidelines for differentiating instruction, and a variety of activities and ideas for engaging students.
- **Student Activity Journal/Practice Book (for math) and Student Activity Journal Teacher’s Edition/Practice Book Teacher’s Edition**—content, vocabulary, and skills practice.
- **Assessment Book**—content area, language skills, and vocabulary assessment and progress records.
- **Assessment Folder**—a place to track students’ ongoing language development (one sample for the teacher).
- **Overhead Transparencies**—tools for whole-group instruction.

*For beginning English language learners:*

*ACCESS for Newcomers* is designed for students who have recently immigrated and have little or no English skills. Ideal for one-on-one, small group, and whole-class instruction *ACCESS for Newcomers*, allows teachers to differentiate instruction for students depending on their specific needs and level of English language proficiency.

The newcomer complete kit includes:

- **108 Lesson Cards**—with self-contained lessons and practice activities that visually reinforce vocabulary and lesson content.
- **Teacher’s Edition**—with implementation guidelines, frameworks for teaching grammar, and extension activities.

- **Pupil Edition**—to introduce 2,160 high frequency words, develop students’ reading and writing skills, provide oral language practice, and tailor instruction to students’ needs.
- **2,160 Word Tiles**—for tactile sorting activities.
- **CD-ROM**—with printable word tiles and sentence strips.

Also available separately are Lesson Transparencies.

***ACCESS* provides a plethora of benefits for students and teachers. The program—**

- develops students’ knowledge of English, American history, science, and math while developing English language proficiency through a highly visual approach that focuses on key concepts so English language learners don’t fall behind;
- supports adequate yearly progress and prepares students for high-stakes assessments;
- develops oral language fluency;
- builds students’ academic vocabulary and prepares them for success in all their classes.

**ACCESS RESEARCH BASE**  
by Aixa Pérez-Prado, Ph.D.

## **Introduction**

The number of English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms continues to increase throughout the United States. These learners must be able to comprehend content-area instruction in a language that they have not yet fully developed in order to catch up with their mainstream peers (Short, 1991). Because of the changing demographics of American classrooms, teachers need to modify and adapt their instruction so that language learners can receive both language and content instruction in a manner that is comprehensible and meaningful to them. Well-made, professionally-developed materials that take into account ELLs' specific needs in an integrated manner are essential to construction of the linguistic and content-area knowledge demanded in a high-standards curriculum.

By integrating language and content instruction, ELLs are provided the opportunity to participate in the curriculum as they are in the process of mastering the English language. This instruction must necessarily be enhanced and facilitated by materials that take both linguistic and content-area needs into account. The materials developed in the ACCESS series are an example of how high standards and high-quality content-area text can be modified and adapted to meet the specific needs of ELLs.

### **Visual scaffolds help to increase comprehension of content for ELLs.**

When learning both a language and content area at the same time, ELLs need constant support and assistance. This support can come in the form of scaffolded instruction. Scaffolding can be provided through activities that build on one another in a meaningful and consistent way. When students encounter a format that is predictable and prevalent in their materials, this can enhance their ability to understand the content. The repetition of certain formats gives learners an idea of what to expect and thereby an opportunity to prepare themselves to receive instruction (Peregoy & Boyle, 1990).

Graphic organizers provide a visual indication to learners of how to organize the content that they are in the process of learning. Graphic organizers are also beneficial in activating schema and facilitating retention of text-based information (Crandall, 1992). The activities in the ACCESS program provide a built-in scaffold for learners in the form of graphic organizers and visual presentation of information. Story mapping and cognitive mapping are included to help students visualize the basic structure of a text and, therefore, understand the text (Boyle & Buckley, 1983). Graphs and charts are also provided to convey the main ideas of a reading to students. This allows for the full participation of ELLs in activities that are present throughout the materials.

The ACCESS materials include a large number of illustrations and diagrams that provide visual models for what is being discussed in the text. Key concepts are frequently reinforced with a visual scaffold such as a line graph, bar graph, timeline, or chart. The use of other graphic organizers further enhances the comprehensibility of the materials. The use of bold type emphasizing key words, headings that divide the reading sections, semantic webs, Venn diagrams, and captions all work together as visual scaffolds. The newcomer materials are particularly rich in visual scaffolds. In this manner, the materials accommodate learners who have a lower level of language skills with increased support for comprehension.

### **Cooperative learning and small group activities promote learning through active interaction.**

Research in the area of second-language acquisition has led to the understanding among educators that a low-anxiety environment is an optimal environment for learning language (Krashen, 1981; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). According to Krashen (1981) a language is best acquired when learners are in a low-affective filter environment in which comprehensible input is introduced. Teachers can encourage this type of relaxed environment by promoting active interaction among students that encourages risk taking and takes the focus off of the specific language being practiced and onto the completion of a learning task.

When students are encouraged to interact and work collaboratively in small groups, the likelihood of a low-anxiety learning environment is enhanced. When students work with peers, multiple opportunities for interaction occur that can help build peer relationships. In addition, small group work that revolves around specified tasks leads to peer teaching and tutoring opportunities as students work together to negotiate both linguistic and content-area information (Crandall, 1994).

Cooperative learning activities provide students with numerous opportunities for language and skills development. Both social and academic language use are encouraged and increased with small group interaction (Cohen, 1986; Kagan, 1986). Optimal small-group activities for ELLs involve the cooperation of all group members. This cooperation includes face-to-face interaction, positive interdependence, and the use of specific language to accomplish a task. Activities that incorporate these characteristics give learners increased opportunities to both practice language and clarify understanding of content-area topics.

Cooperative learning activities can be found throughout the ACCESS materials. Students are asked to work collaboratively to solve problems, formulate opinions, and interpret text. These student-centered and student-led activities empower learners to assume an active role in the learning process and thereby increases their responsibility for their own learning (Short, 1991). Furthermore, the small-group activities scattered throughout the lessons in each content area increase the likelihood that students will be engaged and motivated by the content. These activities help to individualize instruction within a group context while concurrently making the learning more engaging. Partnered activities in the ACCESS materials can be found in the newcomer materials and each of the subject areas. Students are given the opportunity through task-based cooperative activities to share insights, test hypotheses, think critically, and jointly construct knowledge in an interactive manner (Crandall, 1994).

### **Social and academic language development helps promote student success.**

There is a marked difference between the language that individuals use to socialize and the language that is used in schools and places of employment. Although language learners may be able to converse in their developing language with ease, they often continue to have severe difficulties both producing and comprehending academic language. Cummins (1981) discusses the idea that individuals develop two types of language proficiency, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS is the social language that is used on an everyday basis both within and outside of school, while CALP is the more formal language that is used primarily in schools and professional work environments. Research indicates that social language can be expected to be acquired in about two years, whereas academic language can take students five to seven years to acquire (Collier, 1987).

The integration of cooperative-learning activities that incorporate both social and academic language greatly increases students' opportunities to interact in the target language using important content-area information. The specific vocabulary, grammar, and key content knowledge that is integral to understanding subject matter needs to be approached, practiced, and reinforced through a variety of learning activities that work together to build a context for understanding content.

The school as an institution demands that both formal and informal language be used. The informal language of the playground, hallway, cafeteria, and sometimes classroom is characterized by shorter

sentences, simple sentences, incomplete sentences, slang, contractions, frequent interruptions, and a heavy reliance on context. The formal language of the classroom, textbook, principal's office and educational video is characterized by more complex and lengthy sentences, the use of technical vocabulary, infrequent interruptions, and the lack of context clues.

Teachers not specifically trained in ESL instruction are often confused about the level of mastery of the English language that ELL students have. This is because students often acquire a native-like accent and become proficient in informal language quickly. While they may be very successful in social activities and while performing less academic activities in the classroom, their limited academic language skills can compromise their ability to comprehend content (Cummins, 1989). The potential difficulties of academic language and how these difficulties can affect student comprehension and academic performance are areas that teachers of language minority students need to recognize and address.

The first step in this process is to recognize what academic language is and how it differs from non-academic language. The ACCESS materials address the academic language component of content-area lessons by implementing strategies that teach this language at the same time content material is being taught. Without these types of strategies—including advanced organizers, semantic webbing, visual aids, journals, and others resources—many ELL students would quickly fall behind their native speaking peers. It is important to remember that ELL students are continually learning both language and content simultaneously and thus need to be supported in their efforts in both areas.

#### **Academic vocabulary building within context increases retention and motivation.**

Academic language is characterized by specialized vocabulary and grammar. The introduction of new vocabulary in context is fundamental to providing students with the necessary tools to comprehend academic vocabulary (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Meaning should be illustrated whenever possible in the form of pictures or diagrams that accompany text (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). The teaching of semantically similar words concurrently allows learners to develop a cognitive “net” in which they can capture new vocabulary and store it for later use (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Good teaching materials take all of these vocabulary-building measures into account.

The ACCESS materials are written clearly and simply. The brief, focused text allows students the chance to negotiate manageable pieces of information rather than attempting to digest large quantities of dense text without sufficient support. The large number of pictures and graphics that are incorporated throughout the materials are closely related to the written text and therefore serve as important scaffolds for the learner. Furthermore, the text is clearly arranged with headings, subdivisions, and bold print that emphasize the key vocabulary that is being learned.

#### **ELLs can meet the same high academic standards as mainstream students with adequately supported instruction.**

Standards-based instruction helps to develop consistency and relevancy in teaching and materials development. Content standards delineate what students should know and be able accomplish at a certain level of learning. When materials are created with standards-based instruction in mind, those materials provide teachers with the necessary content objectives to ensure that students are prepared to meet appropriate grade-level expectations. Performance indicators are built into standards-based instruction as a vehicle to allow students to demonstrate that they are able to meet the standards in question (Laternau, 2003). Similarly, language objectives can best be organized and accomplished through a standards-based approach.

In order to ensure that ELLs are able to successfully participate in standards-based instruction, the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) organization has created standards for ESL instruction (TESOL, 1997). These standards correlate with curricular standards being implemented nationwide and allow for flexibility and functionality in content-based language learning. The TESOL

standards are derived from three primary goals: to use English to communicate in social settings, to use English to achieve academically in all content areas, and to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Short, 2000).

The ACCESS materials have been developed to meet TESOL, as well as state content and ESL standards. Cooperative learning and small-group activities ensure that the first goal of using English in social settings is achieved through using the materials. Furthermore, students are given multiple opportunities throughout the lessons to use English to construct knowledge in specific subject areas in order to achieve academically as stated by the second goal. Finally, the variety of activities present throughout the different lessons in each content area assures that English will be used for a multitude of purposes and in different socially and culturally meaningful ways.

*See page 10 for references.*



## ACCESS PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

### ACCESS: Building Literacy Through Learning Effectiveness Research Study—In Progress

#### Purpose of Study

RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, NH has contracted with the Great Source Education Group to design and implement an efficacy study of a product designed for middle school English language learners. The study, to be conducted from September 2004 through June 2005, will determine *the effectiveness of the American History component of the ACCESS ESL program in improving student achievement in English language development and history*. The study has a two-fold purpose:

- To determine whether the use of ACCESS: American History produces significant differences in student achievement in history and reading and writing proficiency, and
- To determine which factors in the implementation are associated with improved student achievement.

#### Study Design

This study uses a quasi-experimental research design in which treatment conditions will be implemented and studied in three middle schools in California. Control conditions will be studied in a matched set of three middle schools. Students will be intermediate and advanced English language learners enrolled in American History classes.

Student growth in language will be measured through a pre- and post- standardized assessment of language proficiency (Language Assessment Scale: Reading and Writing). To measure student performance in history, the study will use a pre-assessment that will be developed using items available from the California State Test (CST) item bank. The spring 8<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies CST will be used as the post-test. Other measures include four classroom observations, four five-day (weekly) teacher logs, and a pre- and post- teacher interview with all participating teachers.

#### Preliminary Qualitative Results

“The vocabulary and grammar spotlight helped the students gain more experience with academic and content language, this allowed them to feel comfortable enough with the language to begin incorporating these words into their vocabulary.”

“I loved the visuals in the book, the pictures made history come to life for the students and allowed them to make real connections with the material.”

“The text was accessible for my students and the illustrations and pictures were very helpful. They really helped tell the story.”

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