

What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

“Nancy Akhavan has provided a much-needed, comprehensive approach to small-group literacy and language development for multilingual learners. She skillfully weaves research, theory, and application throughout the text while educating the reader about the unique needs of multilingual learners. This book values the assets multilingual students bring to the classroom and acknowledges the relationship between language and literacy development. *Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners* provides an excellent resource to teachers, instructional coaches, and teacher educators seeking to enhance their understanding of small group literacy instruction for multilingual learners.”

—**Norma Carvajal Camacho**

Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services,
Azusa Unified School District

“While there are many books on how to teach literacy to multilingual learners, few are as detailed and approachable as Nancy Akhavan’s framework. As I read this book, I felt like I was being mentored by a highly skilled educator who patiently models how to turn principles of reading into practical actions for teachers of multilingual learners. I predict that this will be an invaluable resource for many who want to provide responsive, assets-based approaches to teaching MLs to read.”

—**Tan Huynh**

English language development specialist, author, podcaster, blogger

“Nancy Akhavan began working with our district in 2020. She worked with . . . two pilot schools that were both willing and open to examining and changing their practices that would reduce the number of students qualifying for special education as well as realigning practices to concentrate on good first instruction. We have benefited from Nancy Akhavan’s expertise and look forward to reducing overidentification of students as having a disability. *Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners* can help districts, schools, and teachers to start this important work, too.”

—**Rebecca McHaney**

Director of Special Services, Madera Unified School District

“In *Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners*, Nancy Akhavan provides practical strategies for teaching foundational reading skills to multilingual learners at different stages of language development during small group reading instruction in just 20 minutes a day! An extensive menu of easy-to-implement strategies for each foundational reading skill makes this book especially practical for all elementary educators.”

—**Beth Skelton**

Multilingual consultant

“Nancy Akhavan provides a fresh look at supporting multilingual learners. She provides educators with research-based, easy-to-understand educational practices. She provides implementation guides that help leaders of schools and classroom teachers systemize instruction. I’ve seen firsthand the shifts that can be made in classrooms when using Nancy Akhavan’s recommendations and guidance. I highly recommend her book for any educator who wants to improve their practice.”

—**Janet Samuelian**

Curriculum Administrator, Clovis Unified School District

Do not copy, post, or distribute

Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners

Differentiating Instruction
in 20 Minutes a Day

Nancy Akhavan

CORWIN Literacy

Copyright ©2023 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.



FOR INFORMATION:

Corwin
A SAGE Company
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
(800) 233-9936
www.corwin.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
Unit No 323-333, Third Floor, F-Block
International Trade Tower Nehru Place
New Delhi 110 019

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
18 Cross Street #10-10/11/12
China Square Central
Singapore 048423

President: Mike Soules
Vice President and
Editorial Director: Monica Eckman
Executive Editor: Tori Mello Bachman
Content Development Editor: Sharon Wu
Editorial Assistant: Nancy Chung
Project Editor: Amy Schroller
Copy Editor: Karin Rathert
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
Proofreader: Lawrence W. Baker
Indexer: Sheila Hill
Cover Designer: Candice Harman
Marketing Manager: Margaret O'Connor

Copyright © 2023 by Corwin Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except as permitted by U.S. copyright law, no part of this work may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

When forms and sample documents appearing in this work are intended for reproduction, they will be marked as such. Reproduction of their use is authorized for educational use by educators, local school sites, and/or noncommercial or nonprofit entities that have purchased the book.

All third-party trademarks referenced or depicted herein are included solely for the purpose of illustration and are the property of their respective owners. Reference to these trademarks in no way indicates any relationship with, or endorsement by, the trademark owner.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 9781071904145

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

23 24 25 26 27 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DISCLAIMER: This book may direct you to access third-party content via Web links, QR codes, or other scannable technologies, which are provided for your reference by the author(s). Corwin makes no guarantee that such third-party content will be available for your use and encourages you to review the terms and conditions of such third-party content. Corwin takes no responsibility and assumes no liability for your use of any third-party content, nor does Corwin approve, sponsor, endorse, verify, or certify such third-party content.

Contents

About the Author	vii
Introduction: An Abundance Mindset for Language Learning	i

PART ONE: SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

CHAPTER ONE

How Students Learn Languages	17
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER TWO

Apprenticeship Experiences in Small Groups	31
--	----

CHAPTER THREE

A Menu of Options for Powerful Routines	45
---	----

CHAPTER FOUR

Lesson Sequences	67
------------------	----

PART TWO: TEACHING IDEAS

CHAPTER FIVE

Oral Language Development	91
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER SIX

Phonics and Spelling	105
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER SEVEN

Vocabulary	129
------------	-----

CHAPTER EIGHT

Word Work	155
-----------	-----

CHAPTER NINE

Comprehension	173
Appendix	205
References	221
Index	233



For additional resources related to
Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners,
visit the companion website at
resources.corwin.com/smallgroupreadingMLL.

Do not copy, post, or distribute

About the Author



Nancy Akhavan, EdD, has spent more than 30 years as an educator and consultant. Her work focuses on student support through literacy instruction and intervention, English language development, leadership development, and organizational systems to increase student achievement. Currently, she is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Fresno State. She is the founder of Nancy Akhavan Consulting, Inc. Dr. Akhavan has been a bilingual teacher, principal of three

schools, and a district administrator of a large urban district for ELA, math, social studies, science, and world languages. She also served as Assistant Superintendent Secondary Division in a large urban school district. Dr. Akhavan is recognized for her expertise in teaching literacy practices. She has published 12 books that focus on instruction that increases student achievement and has worked with districts and county offices in multiple states and internationally to increase student achievement in reading, writing, and in content areas.

To all teachers who ensure students know the joy of multilingualism

An Abundance Mindset for Language Learning



iStock.com/martin-dm

Teaching multilingual students to read is one of the most rewarding acts we do as teachers. I have been an educator for more than three decades, and I still get misty-eyed when I am sitting beside a child and “suddenly” her reading aloud of a text is fluent. After days or weeks or months of hard work, it all comes together—the young mind has enough understanding of English language words to decode, to understand meaning, and to read in the natural cadence of speech. There is no turning back! It’s like watching a child finally ride a bicycle without wobbling.

I am writing this book so that all teachers can count on having these rewarding moments consistently, predictably, and

Small Group Reading With Multilingual Learners

with all students. Many of the research-based strategies will be familiar to you, as they are effective for any child learning to read, but I have put them in a framework for teaching multilingual learners in a small-group setting. Let's begin!

WHAT'S NEW: TWO LANGUAGES AS AN ASSET

This resource is designed to help teachers do this work through a contemporary lens on teaching multilingual learners; the term *multilingual* signals an asset-based, abundant mindset about children who are adding English to their language abilities. Instead of the older term, “English language learners,” the term “multilingual” communicates that we should all be so fortunate—and so wise—as to acquire more than one language in our lifetime.

Naturally, then, when we gather students at the reading table, we come with instruction that integrates English language development while supporting and leveraging students' home language, or heritage language.



iStock.com/FatCamera

Utilize Heritage Languages

Students' heritage languages provide support for them as they are acquiring English (Cummins, 2000; Genesee et al., 2005). Their heritage language helps them to communicate at greater

levels of complexity as they learn about the world and connect culturally with their families and their traditions (Campos et al., 2011; Perez, 2004). So the very first thing we do to help a student acquiring English is to openly value their heritage language and cultural background. From planned curriculum to asking in-the-moment questions that invite children to share, there are many ways to do this work as teachers. When children see that we respect the languages they speak, it goes a long way toward making them feel central in the classroom community. Students' identity is tied to their heritage language, and so when educators openly or subconsciously convey that one language is more important than another language, the child feels diminished. All languages are important (Campos et al., 2011).

By extension, then, as teachers, we shift from an outdated mindset that we are *replacing* their heritage language with English. Instead, we embrace an additive approach. Our goal is to *add* English to their language repertoire.

Terms of Note

In this book, for simplicity, I often use the term *students* to mean multilingual learners who are acquiring English as an additional language. I also use *multilingual students* and *students whose first language is English* in order to make a distinction between these two groups of literacy learners.

Embrace Integrated English Language Development

The framework and strategies I describe in this book are considered *integrated* ELD strategies. Our instruction at the reading table is *integrated* ELD because we are providing support to students in language as well as in reading. By attending to both, we can be responsive to students' needs in each area simultaneously. Integrated ELD extends throughout the day; teachers incorporate strategies that help multilingual students understand the language and the content. It goes beyond the reading table.

Students acquiring English should receive both integrated and designated English language development (ELD). Research studies recommended that students receive a minimum of 30 minutes a day of designated ELD (Edelman et al., 2022). Edelman et al. found that students receiving 30 minutes of designated ELD at each grade level scored similarly to students who speak English as their heritage language by third grade as measured by English language knowledge assessments. ELD is specially designed instruction to help students increase their language acquisition in English (Wright, 2019).

Consider Current Research

.....
 “Our instruction
 at the reading
 table is *integrated*
 ELD because we
 are providing
 support to
 students in
 language as well
 as in reading.”

The research on supporting English language development has exploded in the last decade. Following are some highlights:

- We know that multilingual learners who don't receive strong and systematic support may not designate and maintain their English learner status through high school.
- We know that developing learners' academic vocabulary is central to their success in reading nonfiction; without it, students struggle to gain content knowledge.
- Studies have shown that academic vocabulary acquisition supports continued language acquisition.
- High-challenge and high-support lessons are the most engaging for students.
- Teachers need assistance for developing these highly scaffolded lessons that integrate language, reading, and writing skills.

—Calderón and Slakk (2018); Calderón and Soto (2017);
 Echevarria and Vogt (2016); Gibbons (2015)

Throughout this book, I address what these five research highlights look like at the reading table; the last two about high-challenge and high-support lessons are ones I want you to consider a moment longer. Why? Because they speak to the need to differentiate instruction in small groups for multilingual students. This means that rather than simplifying the reading task, we need to increase the scaffolding (Gibbons, 2015). The bar has been raised, and yet, despite all we know from the last decade's research, most teachers feel wholly unprepared for the task. They haven't seen a clear model of what the instruction looks like. Teachers often ask me questions such as the following:

How do I form groups?

How much do I need to know the stages of English learner development?

Do I mix multilingual learners with students who are native English speakers?

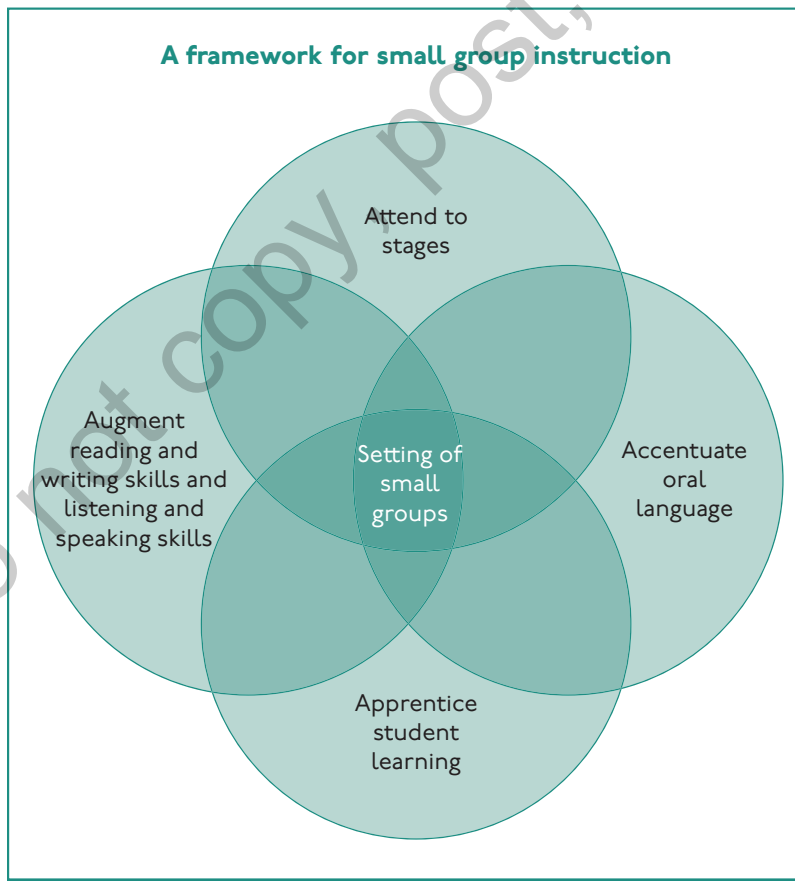
What texts should we read together?

What about phonics?

Whew! This list of questions could go on and on, right? Take a deep breath. I've got your back. Following and in the chapters ahead, I share a new framework for supporting multilingual learners that reflects current research. It's also grounded in my expertise as a California-based professor who has specialized in working with students who have diverse and rich backgrounds and who are acquiring English as an additional language.

It puts together the research and work of Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier, Jim Cummins, David and Yvonne Freeman, Diane August, and Kenji Hakuta with seminal teaching and learning theories of Vygotsky, P. David Pearson, and Gallagher, and important early reading and early literacy research by Birsch and Carreker (2018); Cunningham and Stanovich (1997); and Snow (2017). As such, it provides both the why and the how of what you do each day at the reading table.

Four Components for Teaching Multilingual Learners in Small Group Reading Lessons



THE FOUR COMPONENTS

Components	Research Support	Why It Matters
Attend to stages	<p>Researchers have defined these stages of language development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> entering beginning expanding bridging reaching 	<p>Knowing the stages of language acquisition will help you form groups, select texts, and plan lessons that teach into each student's current abilities and readiness for new learning.</p>

Components	Research Support	Why It Matters
Apprentice student learning	<p>Researchers Collins, Hawkins, and Carver contributed a helpful learning cycle as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> modeling coaching scaffolding articulation reflection exploration 	<p>This is a valuable lesson model. Think of it as the architecture of your 20 minutes together. For multilingual learners, the model helps teachers use most of the small group lesson to coach, scaffold, and release students to work.</p>

Components	Research Support	Why It Matters
Accentuate oral language	Researchers have added to our understanding of the critical importance of developing MLL's oral language. Students' ability to hear and speak develops before their ability to read and write; oral language provides opportunities for all learners to piece together letters and sounds and meaning. Oral language promotes fluency, a necessary skill for decoding and comprehension.	When multilingual learners come to our small group instruction, our role is to ensure that the language both in the books and as the language of conversation is understandable to every student. When students answer meaningful questions and talk with peers, it helps them understand ideas in texts and how those ideas relate to the world.

Components	Research Support	Why It Matters
Augment reading and writing skills and listening and speaking skills	A plethora of reading research supports instruction in the following skill areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> phonics oral language vocabulary word work comprehension writing to build reading comprehension oral language development 	As researcher John Hattie writes, "Every student deserves a great teacher, not by chance, but by design" (Hattie, 2008). To teach multilingual learners, we have a responsibility to go about teaching language and reading systematically, focusing on the five reading skill areas with deep roots in research.

LEARNING ABOUT THE COMPONENTS IN THIS BOOK



iStock.com/SeventyFour

.....
**When working
 with multilingual
 learners, you will
 be developing
 students' growth
 as a reader
 along with
 their growth in
 English language
 proficiency.**

Readers grow with time and practice. When working with multilingual learners, you will be developing students' growth as a reader along with their growth in English language proficiency. Let's do a big-picture take on the components and where in this book you will learn more about them.

Attend to Stages

Multilingual students progress along a predictable continuum of stages of language acquisition. As the teacher, you use your awareness of each child's current stage to plan, implement, and adjust lessons. Each stage requires subtle shifts in your teaching at the small group table. *You will learn more about the stages in Chapter 1.*

Apprentice Student Learning

Students grow as readers when they have practice reading texts with you alongside them to help them. So in the most basic sense, small group instruction provides students with guided and independent practice reading texts; reading

researchers agree, “eyes on print” is central to reading growth. Importantly, the quality of the teacher’s “alongside them” coaching is the make-or-break factor in students’ progress. It is for this reason that you use an apprenticeship model to scaffold independence. The framework spans from high teacher support (modeling) to lower teacher support (independent work). The six steps are the following: model, coach, scaffold, articulate, reflect, and explore.

Accentuate Oral Language

Talk is the foundation for thought and understanding—and human connection. I believe this whole heartedly, and I would go so far as to say that oral language development is the missing piece of the puzzle when it comes to teaching students to read—and especially those acquiring English. That’s why I elevated it to be one of the four components. We know from research that MLLs acquire English for social reasons before academic ones (Cummins, 1981, 1996; Haynes, 2007), and so opportunities to talk and hear the language of peers are vital. We also know that choral reading and other oral language strategies help multilingual learners develop fluency.

Augment Reading and Writing Skills

This component is a big one! In Part II of this book, I devote entire chapters to Oral Language Development (Chapter 5), Phonics and Spelling (Chapter 6), Vocabulary (Chapter 7), Word Work (Chapter 8), and Comprehension (Chapter 9). To give you a taste of what’s to come, here are some key details about each skill area.

Oral language instruction shows up in myriad ways at the reading table, from whisper reading, choral reading, book discussion, and talk between teacher and student during coaching and scaffolding.

Phonics and Spelling Instruction

The phonics and spelling instruction chapter will reflect the stages of the readers at the table; it’s explicit, systematic,

and tied directly to the text you are reading. Your main role is modeling the strategies they will use to *apply these foundational skills as they read* (Foorman & Conner, 2011). Phonics includes phonemic awareness, decoding and encoding, syllabication, and root words and affixes.

Vocabulary Instruction

This chapter discusses vocabulary instruction that is explicit, direct, and ongoing—even when students attain a high level of English language proficiency, you provide extra support before, during, and after reading. You expand students' vocabulary in terms of basic words, academic vocabulary, and content area vocabulary. And as is true with all these reading skills, you tie the work to the text you are reading, so it's meaningful. Expanding vocabulary helps all learners read increasingly complex texts and fortifies content knowledge—which, in turn, helps readers access challenging texts.

Word Work

Word work is an extension of phonics work combined with vocabulary development. It is teaching about how words are put together. Our goal is to help students figure out the word meanings for themselves. Word work at the early levels includes phonics, but at heart it's more sophisticated than decoding words. As students understand how English works and how word parts are put together in order to spell, word work morphs into vocabulary work. For example, when students work on compound words, root words, prefixes, and suffixes, they are compelled to attend to word meaning.

Comprehension

Students acquiring English may learn to decode the words before they understand everything that they are reading. However, reading is all about making meaning with text. It should be the focus from the beginning in reading instruction for all students. For multilingual learners, it's especially important to embed phonics work in the context of high-quality,

engaging, meaningful texts and discussion so they can develop their oral language skills as well as their comprehension skills as they learn to read in English (Himmele & Himmele, 2009). Important comprehension strategies you will be teaching at the reading table include the following:

- Monitoring self for understanding
- Relating text to background knowledge
- Recounting or summarizing what was read
- Understanding text structure
- Synthesizing ideas and information from the text or from different texts
- Deductively thinking about text to identify cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem and solution, and sequencing

Writing to Build Reading

The chapter about writing honors that writing and reading are reciprocal processes. Young children solidify their understandings of recently learned phonics and reading skills when they apply them to writing. Writing tasks related to the text read in the small group lesson provides multilingual students with the chance to reread the text and use it as a scaffold for writing about it. Writing also consolidates their understanding of the text.

What's Unique to Multilingual Students

After this brief overview, let's pause to appreciate why learning to read is an especially steep climb for multilingual learners. Consider the following:

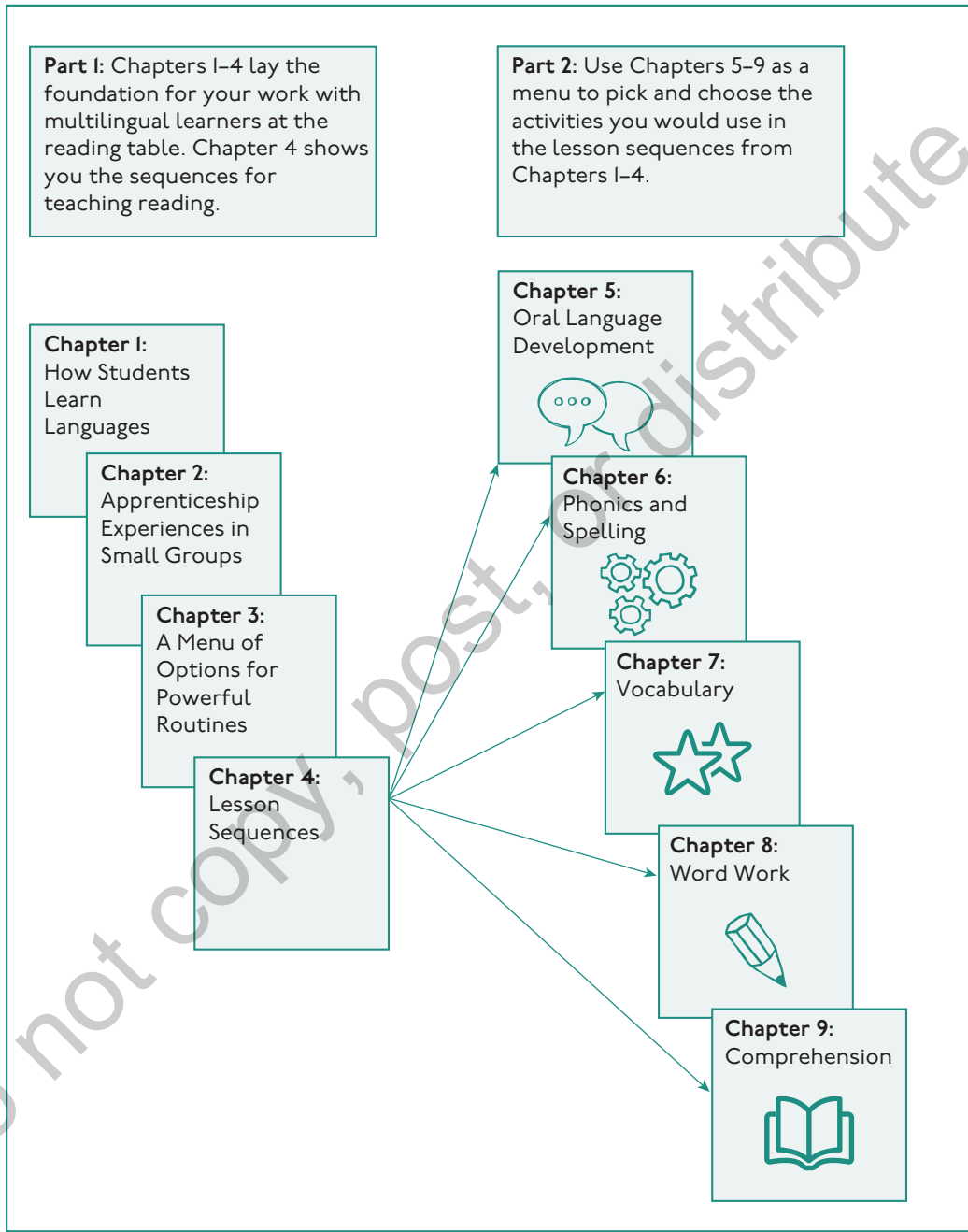
In the simplest terms, learning to be a fluent and accomplished reader involves the ability to decode text and use linguistic and background knowledge to understand what is read (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Scarborough, 2001). But the task is different for multilingual learners. Helman et al. (2020, p. 8) describe it like this: "For [multilingual learners] this process is more

complex . . . students are required to learn to read *what* the words mean at the same time they learn *how* to read them.”

What All Learners Have in Common

If you are a K–2 teacher, this bird’s eye view of the components will look familiar. That’s because when we support multilingual learners, we are amplifying and augmenting what we always do in beginning-level reading instruction. If you are not a K–2 teacher, it’s OK! Each chapter outlines the activities you can teach to build student reading skills. We want a tight connection between what students learn in phonics and what they encounter in the texts they are reading, so we use engaging, meaningful texts that provide sufficient challenges. We read and reread the texts together and individually to build fluency; we discuss the meaning to build and check comprehension and support oral language fluency; and we invite learners to apply their new understandings about phonics and words in writing. Emerging readers will be using their new knowledge about letters and sounds to write words and simple sentences. Fluent readers will use their knowledge of how words work to write about what they understand about what they read.

How This Book Is Organized



Looking Ahead

I've given you a taste of the **why**, **what**, and the **how** of supporting students acquiring English. In the next chapter, I share the predictable stages all multilingual learners progress through to help you plan small group lessons. What's the **now** of this book? Estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau (2021) estimate the white population that is not Hispanic or Latino to be 60.4 percent. This means that nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population is of an ethnic or racial minority. In 2015, there were nearly five million English learners in U.S. schools (Pew Research Center, 2016). According to Education Week (2020), enrollment of English learners in the United States grew by 28 percent between 2000 and 2017. It is reasonable to assume that these figures are even higher now. By 2050, people of European ancestry will no longer be the majority in the United States.

I work with teachers every week of the year. I've seen them through pendulum swings in reading pedagogy, severe budget cuts, and spikes of teacher-bashing in the media. The stress the pandemic has caused teachers—well, there are no words. I have been made speechless by teachers' dedication to doing right by their students. With this book, it's my duty to do right by them, to provide easy-to-follow routines for supporting multilingual students. So let's begin at the beginning, with a look at the stages along the journey to acquire English.