



## ESL ReadingSmart: Program Pedagogy

Middle and High School ESL students are faced with a formidable task. In the few years of school that remain, they must learn both academic English and the challenging content of a state-adopted curriculum. The pedagogy that forms the conceptual foundation of the **ESL ReadingSmart Program** is scientifically based utilizing both educational research, as well as, practical instructional experience. **ESL ReadingSmart** employs strategies that have been demonstrated to facilitate and support second language acquisition in secondary ESL student populations.

The program's pedagogy addresses the following key areas of effective ESL instructional implementation:

**Multi-Genre Culturally Relevant Content:** Possibly the most powerful aspect within the pedagogy woven into the **ESL ReadingSmart** program is found within its emphasis upon both multi-genre and international literature. There are few instructional choices that offer a variety of reading genres in English for ESL students and typically, in many ESL classrooms only the area of fiction is addressed. As a result many ESL students struggle with expository reading in English. **ESL ReadingSmart** allows ESL students to interact and gain experience with a wide variety of genres, offering text that have been leveled with respect to their ESL language development. Many researchers have reported that the single most important factor that enables an ESL student to succeed academically in a target language lies in the area of the socio-emotional climate of the classroom. These students, who often are dealing a range of issues, need to feel "safe" and that they are a contributing member of the class (Collier and Thomas, 1996; Krashen, 1981). They often do not have access to literature that depicts their lives or cultures. The **ESL ReadingSmart** program, with its international themes, allows all students to see themselves in the literature, thus personalizing the learning of English.

**Instructional Delivery:** Teachers in many secondary programs have been asked to do the impossible. They have been asked to teach rigorous state-mandated curriculums to students with whom they often cannot effectively communicate. This can lead to feelings of frustration and failure by all involved in the learning process. It has been found that changes in a teacher's belief system are necessary for any meaningful changes to occur in teaching practice (Copley and Padron, 1999). Teaching materials utilized during this change process must support the teachers and the desired instructional practice modifications. Teacher's needs were an integral piece



of the pedagogical design of this program. The literature that is included in the program has been leveled and each ESL instructional level has several text options within the genre choices. In this way, teachers can more efficiently plan and deliver instruction to students, with differing ESL levels commonly found in many classrooms. Instructional depth has been added to the multicultural literature, with the inclusion of resources, lesson plans and activities. The instructional aspects of the system support both experienced and novice teachers. The program is much more than “cool” stories that ESL students enjoy reading. Accountability has also been enhanced in **ESL ReadingSmart** with the addition of assessment features, which allow teachers to easily track student progress and subsequently modify instruction. In this way, instruction becomes more responsive and individualized.

**Language Development/Academic Content Integration:** The **ESL ReadingSmart** program integrates language development and academic content course work into literacy activities facilitating both English language and content knowledge development. Effective ESL instruction, whether it is offered in the Social Studies or Science classroom, proceeds from a language learning perspective (Cummins, 1984). Supporting English language development speaks to the issue of comprehensible input. A major challenge for many teachers of ESL students is to create lessons that allow their students to access the academic content of what they are teaching in a student’s second language. This is typically accomplished by increasing the comprehensible input of their teaching. The entire pedagogy of the **ESL ReadingSmart** program was designed utilizing literature offered within the various genres to address both language skill development and content area knowledge. This literacy framework dramatically increases the comprehensibility of the material facilitating instruction.

**Incorporation of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Activities:** Lessons for each literature-based unit in the program contain activities that support all four modalities of language learning. The instructional pedagogy of the **ESL ReadingSmart** is balanced. The lessons designed to support each literature unit offer vocabulary development, reading comprehension, grammar activities, and writing opportunities. Each ESL instructional level has been designed to provide this comprehensive sequence of learning activities. The literacy development of ESL students is supported, because of the program’s focus upon the development of academic English. Cummins (1989), stated that the development of ESL student academic language is a major determining factor in subsequent academic achievement.



**ESL Instructional Modifications:** The **ESL ReadingSmart** program has many proven ESL instructional modifications woven throughout the design of the literature units. The actual reading of the text is supported with several modifications. ESL students can either read or listen to the text as needed. The text is further supported by the highlighted predetermined vocabulary. Students can receive immediate feedback concerning the definition of highlighted vocabulary words. The lesson plans that support each literature unit have a variety of sheltered English modifications. The three basic tenets of effective ESL instruction have been utilized. The interactive nature of the program increases the comprehensibility of the text. Students read the literature “actively” and from this interface develop academic vocabulary and a deeper understanding of the text. The vocabulary lessons provided in the program also increase the interaction among students. This student to student grouping facilitates the comprehension of the literature presented. ESL students can work together to make meaning from the text. The program highlights higher level thinking with the inclusion of application, synthesis, and evaluation level activities. The “create a comic” option found in the support activities is a good example of this strategy.

**Multimedia Computer-Based Instruction:** Time on task” is often a key feature in the research that has been accomplished concerning the instructional effectiveness of reading development programs for ESL student populations (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2000). ESL students must spend time reading in order to become better readers. The activities presented to these students must be accessible and motivating enough for them to interact with the text in a meaningful manner. The video game generation has produced students, who demand a high degree of interaction in their learning. The interactive nature of the **ESL ReadingSmart** program, within a computer based format, lends itself to active utilization by students. Additionally, the ESL instructional levels designed within the program also facilitate student access. Teachers are able to choose the correct ESL level for their students, so that they are engaged in literature activities that are appropriate and challenging.



## References

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