

EL Education's Responses to The Reading League's Curriculum Evaluation

Comments and Scores

The Reading League's Comment	Score
<p>1.1: Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>EL Education's Response</p>	
<p>EL Education has always been aligned to the science of reading research which includes direct, explicit instruction in both word recognition and language comprehension skills. The EL's K–2 Skills Block focuses on the word recognition aspects of reading: phonological and phonemic awareness, decoding, and sight recognition of familiar words.</p> <p>At the time Skills Block 2017 edition was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To help teachers bridge their existing instructional practices to explicit, systematic instruction, we included a routine called the Reader's Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing as a resource for small-group instruction.</p> <p>EL Education revised the Reader's Toolbox Routine in 2022 to remove mention of three-cueing. The revised Reader's Toolbox routine provides instruction and practice using letter-sound correspondences, spelling patterns, and knowledge of syllable types to decode unfamiliar words, even in isolation. The routine provides direct, explicit instruction using a gradual release format that ensures students have the knowledge they need to successfully approach unknown words.</p> <p>In 2020 EL wrote Decodable Reader Routines for each decodable across grades K-2 to further support teachers during differentiated small-group instruction. The Decodable Reader Routines live on EL's website and within the Cycle Planner resource, which launched in 2022.</p> <p>The chapters on Skills Block in EL's 2017 Your Curriculum Companion resource have also been revised to remove any references to three-cueing.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Word recognition non-negotiables are “somewhat met.”</p> <p>1.10: Phonological and phoneme awareness is not assessed or monitored.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>The Skills Block curriculum includes a Benchmark Assessment that specifically assesses Phonological and Phoneme Awareness. This assessment allows teachers to gather information about the control level of mastery a student has over seven skills including rhyme production; isolating initial, medial, and ending phonemes; adding, deleting, or substituting an initial phoneme; counting and segmenting phoneme; and blending phoneme.</p> <p>After administration, teachers use the Student Scoring sheet to determine which Phonological awareness skills may require additional targeted instruction. Guidance on the Scoring Sheet helps teachers identify the instructional practices in the Kindergarten curriculum that can be used for the purpose of addressing these skills in differentiated small group work. This guidance offers teachers suggestions on how to adapt existing instructional practices (such as Feel the Beats), to focus on particular sounds in words (e.g., isolating the initial sound in a word). The table also identifies some Activity Bank suggestions for use in targeted instruction during differentiated teacher-led small groups. Teachers can adapt this assessment to use for ongoing progress monitoring.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Phonological and phoneme awareness non-negotiables proved challenging and are “somewhat met.”</p> <p>1.21: Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a “what would make sense?” strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>This instruction was part of the Reader’s Toolbox, which was revised in 2022. At the time Skills Block was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To be inclusive of teaching methods, we included a routine in the Reader’s Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing. EL Education revised this lesson to remove mention of three-cueing and to more closely align with the science of reading.</p> <p>The chapter on Skills Block in the 2017 edition of Your Curriculum Companion was also revised to remove any references to three-cueing.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Phonics and phonic decoding non-negotiables are “mostly met.”</p> <p>1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>EL’s Decodable Reader Routines, originally created as part of EL Education's Flex Curriculum in 2020, include a routine where students practice reading the Words of the Week. These words contain the sound-spelling pattern(s) that are aligned with the scope and sequence. While some are also included in the controlled text of the decodable reader, there are additional words with this pattern.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Fluency non-negotiables are “mostly met.”</p> <p>2.9: Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>In ALL Block, students focus on word study and vocabulary. ALL Block includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practice with word analysis of additional words from the text ● Work with two academic words per week; practice using specific academic words in context ● Work with additional domain-specific words found in research reading and independent reading ● Word study games and activities <p>In Module lessons, students also learn about word study and vocabulary. Module lessons include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with words emerging from complex texts related to content and words of general academic value that cut across many domains with an emphasis on morphology, syllabication, spelling ● Use of vocabulary protocols, routines, and tools to figure out the meaning of new words; ● Use of new words in writing—both domain-specific and general academic vocabulary <p>Academic vocabulary is present in the learning target of every lesson as well and the vocabulary is often included in writing prompts which are translated into the writing itself. Learning targets are explicitly unpacked.</p> <p>In the 3-5 curriculum, the "Lesson Specific" Vocabulary that is part of the Vocabulary section of the teacher guide aligns with tier 2 words. The "Text-Specific" vocabulary would be closer to 'domain-specific' vocabulary.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Fluency non-negotiables are “mostly met.”</p> <p>2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>During ALL Block students work on grammar, usage, as well as mechanics and vocabulary. The skills build on each other and address all language standards.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Despite opportunities to learn both Tiers of vocabulary words, most student exposure to Tier 2 words was through Interactive Word Wall work. While the Interactive Word Wall promotes the use of quick, daily activities to engage students in interactions around words, its explicit instruction of targeted terms is limited.</p> <p>2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>EL Education teaches explicit grammar, punctuation and spelling instruction within module lessons and in ALL Block.</p> <p>For example, in Grade 4, Language Standards are taught and assessed in all modules. L.4.1a is assessed in Module 4; L.4.1b is assessed in Module 3; L.4.1c and L.4.1d are assessed in Module 2. L.4.1e is assessed in Module 3; L.4.1f is assessed in Modules 1 and 3; L.4.1g is assessed in Module 3. L.4.2 standards are assessed throughout the modules.</p> <p>The ALL Block addresses five areas: independent reading; additional work with complex text; reading and speaking fluency/grammar, usage, and mechanics; writing practice; word study/vocabulary.</p> <p>If students are going to read and write successfully and proficiently, they need to read fluently (silently and orally), and speak and write competently in standard English. Practice with these literacy skills has been put together into one section of the ALL Block for two reasons: 1) convenience in scheduling, and 2) understanding the standard conventions of written English helps students read more fluently.</p>	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
<p>Despite opportunities to learn both Tiers of vocabulary words, most student exposure to Tier 2 words was through Interactive Word Wall work. While the Interactive Word Wall promotes the use of quick, daily activities to engage students in interactions around words, its explicit instruction of targeted terms is limited.</p> <p>2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.</p>	2
EL Education's Response	
<p>The module lessons include teacher modeling and discussion prompts in the opening, work time, and closing. For example, in Grade 4 Module 1 Unit 1 Lesson 2, the following modeling and discussion prompts are provided:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Guide students through the steps of the Think-Pair-Share protocol, leaving adequate time for each partner to think, ask the question, and share:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"What happens on these pages?" (Jack begins the poetry journal, reads a poem about a red wheelbarrow, and writes a poem about a blue car.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"How does Jack feel about it? What can you infer from what he says?" (He doesn't want to write poetry, he doesn't understand the red wheelbarrow poem, and he doesn't like his poem--and perhaps he is ashamed or afraid of others seeing it.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"How do you know?" (He writes, "I don't understand the poem about the red wheelbarrow and the white chickens ..." and he writes, "I don't like it" about the blue car poem, and he asks that it not be read aloud or put on the board.)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Model how to log independent reading without the prompt. Explain to students that they will log their research reading in the front of the book and choice reading in the back. Ensure students understand the difference between independent research reading (topical texts) and choice reading (any texts they want to read).</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Similar to morphology, the scope and sequence provided for instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, and the team was unable to locate a separate, stand-alone document. Additionally, there is limited direct, explicit instruction around sentence-level skills. There is minimal teacher modeling/think-aloud or explicit instruction on how to deconstruct sentences. Reviewers noted that the Language Dives activities seem more inquiry-based rather than direct and explicit instruction.</p> <p>2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.</p>	<p>2</p>
EL Education’s Response	
<p>The chosen texts are ones that all students either read themselves or hear read aloud. The text in bold is the central text for a given module: the text(s) with which students spend the most time. Recall that texts can be complex based on both qualitative and quantitative measures. Texts are listed in order from most quantitatively complex (based on Lexile® measure) to least quantitatively complex. Texts near the bottom of the list are often complex in ways not measured by the Lexile tool: meaning/purpose, text structure, language, and/or knowledge demands. Within a given module, the list shows the wide variety of texts students read, write, and speak about using evidence as they build knowledge about the topic. For a procurement list of specific texts that need to be purchased for use with the curriculum, visit our website.</p> <p>Students are taught about different text structures as they read complex texts. Text structure is also assessed throughout the grades and modules. For example, in Grade 5 Module 2 Mid Unit assessment, students are assessed on text structures for informational texts. This assessment centers on CCSS ELA RI.5.2, RI.5.5, and RI.5.10. Students apply what they have learned about the structure of informational texts to read, summarize, and compare two new texts. After reading passages about the destruction of the rainforest, written in two different text structures, students create an appropriate graphic organizer, record the main ideas and details of each text, and write a concise summary. Finally, they answer selected response questions comparing the structure of the two texts.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Non-negotiables for Literacy Knowledge were “mostly met.”</p> <p>4.19: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically.</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>When specific grammar pieces are aligned to Language Standards there will be explicit practice, but the EL approach is focused more primarily on the language features rather than having a scope and sequence 'from simple to complex.'</p> <p>Both GUM in ALL Block (once a Unit, usually U2) and Language Dives are the primary components that serve as our 'grammar strategies' embedded within the curriculum.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
<p>Non-negotiables for composition were “mostly met.”</p> <p>5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed</p>	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>The Skills Block curriculum includes a Benchmark Assessment that specifically assesses Phonological and Phoneme Awareness. This assessment allows teachers to gather information about the control a student has over specific phoneme awareness skills including isolating initial, medial, and ending phonemes; adding, deleting, or substituting an initial phoneme; counting and segmenting phoneme; and blending phoneme.</p> <p>After administration, teachers use the Student Scoring sheet to determine which Phonological awareness skills may require additional targeted instruction. Guidance on the Scoring Sheet helps teachers identify the instructional practices in the Kindergarten curriculum that can be used for the purpose of addressing these skills in differentiated small group work. This guidance offers teachers suggestions on how to adapt existing instructional practices (such as Feel the Beats), to focus on particular sounds in words (e.g., isolating the initial sound in a word). The table also identifies some Activity Bank suggestions for use in targeted instruction during differentiated teacher-led small groups. Teachers can adapt this assessment to use for ongoing progress monitoring.</p> <p>The teacher guidance for Phonological Awareness Benchmark Assessment includes administering this assessment to all Kindergartners at the beginning of the year and then repeating the administration at the middle and end of the year for students who are still working towards mastery of these skills.</p> <p>For first and second grades, the guidance is for teachers to first administer the Spelling Assessment. The Phonological Awareness Assessment is then given to students who score in or below the Early Partial microphase on the Spelling Assessment.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	2
EL Education’s Response	
No response from EL Education.	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
5.11: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>In Module lessons, ALL Block, and Skills Block, students practice reading aloud to improve fluency. In Module lessons, students read aloud new and familiar excerpts of literary and informational text, and speak to audiences during planned presentations. In ALL Block, students practice reading aloud texts from module lessons; set goals and monitor progress. In Skills Block, students practice oral reading with Decodable Readers.</p>	

The Reading League’s Comment	Score
5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	2
EL Education’s Response	
<p>RI.4, RL.4, L.4, all L standards and all SL standards are explicitly assessed for all grade levels.</p>	

The Reading League's Comment	Score
5.13: Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.	4
EL Education's Response	
<p>Research tells us that multilingual learners need to be assessed at grade-level expectations, which includes being assessed in English when we're working in an English Language Arts context. (Math or science context could be a different case.)</p> <p>An assessment accommodation for multilingual learners could be assessment in home language, but with this accommodation, an assessment in home language would not show students' proficiency in the target content of English Language Arts (English).</p>	

Challenges

The Reading League’s Challenge

While Expeditionary Learning’s curriculum states there is no time set aside for “traditional guided reading,” the program makes references to all three cueing systems within the Reader’s Toolbox, and after the visual cueing system is sufficiently introduced to the whole class, the three-cueing system is introduced as a way to differentiate small group instruction.

EL Education’s Response

At the time Skills Block 2017 edition was written (2016), many teachers and schools were still using the three-cueing system. To help teachers bridge their existing instructional practices to explicit, systematic instruction inclusive of teaching methods, we included a routine in the Reader’s Toolbox that mentioned three-cueing as a resource for small-group instruction. EL Education revised the Reader’s Toolbox Routine in 2022 to remove mention of three-cueing and to more closely align with the science of reading.

To support the building of these skills, the revised Reader’s Toolbox routine provides instruction and practice using letter-sound correspondences, spelling patterns, and knowledge of syllable types to decode unfamiliar words, even in isolation. The routine provides direct, explicit instruction using a gradual release format that ensures students have the knowledge they need to successfully approach unknown words.

In 2020, EL wrote Decodable Reader Routines for each decodable across grades K-2 to further support teachers during differentiated small-group instruction. The Decodable Reader Routines Skills Block has also lived on EL’s website and within the Cycle Planner resource, which launched in 2022.

The chapters on Skills Block in EL’s 2017 Your Curriculum Companion resource have also been revised to remove any references to three-cueing.

The Reading League’s Challenge

While some explicit instruction in morphology takes place within the skills block and is embedded within the curriculum, the team could not find a separate scope and sequence of morphological skills for teacher use.

EL Education’s Response

There is not a separate scope and sequence for morphology. Morphology is taught during ALL Block when students study GUM and vocabulary.

The Reading League’s Challenge

Similarly, while a sequence of instruction in syntax is embedded within the curriculum, the team was unable to locate a stand-alone document for teachers' use. Additionally, the program features limited examples of teacher modeling and explicit instruction on sentence-level comprehension skills and the Language Dives activities appear to be more centered on inquiry-based learning rather than providing clear and direct examples of instruction.

EL Education’s Response

One of our supports is the Language Dives which are written for MLLs only. These are strong opportunities for small group instruction before or after whole group instruction so that multilingual learners receive the additional language instruction they need to succeed in the ELA content-based literacy instruction.

In G6–8, EL Education provides a separate “Teachers Guide for English Language Learners” at each grade with complementary ELD Teaching Notes, ELD instruction, and differentiated student note-catchers for every lesson. To ensure that multilingual learners along the proficiency continuum receive appropriate support, this Teacher’s Guide also includes detailed lesson-level recommendations for heavier and lighter support as well. In Grades K-5, this instruction lives in the Module Lessons Teacher Guides rather than as a separate volume.

Students deconstruct and reconstruct key sentences from the module’s complex texts, then they practice using similar target language to prepare for the module assessment. Sentence Language Dives empower students to independently analyze and use academic language. This habit of mind encourages language development for multilingual learners and helps native English speakers gain deeper insight into academic English.

Students use Conversation Cues with one another to promote independent, productive, and equitable conversation, based on four goals: Goal 1: encourage all students to talk and be understood; Goal 2: listen carefully to one another and seek to understand; Goal 3: deepen thinking; and Goal 4: think with others to expand the conversation.

Teachers strategically group multilingual learners with native or proficient English speakers or by home languages. They vary groups so multilingual learners can interact with a variety of speakers in different situations. Teachers provide frequent opportunities in each lesson for groups to discuss and complete content and tasks.