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Teaching Spanish in Texas Schools

The Spanish Language Arts and Reading (SLAR), Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and Other Resources for Teachers of Spanish

By Adela Solís, Ph.D.

In 2009-10, Texas began implementing the Spanish Language Arts and Reading TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), giving teachers in Spanish-English bilingual education and dual language programs more specific criteria on which the performance of students who are taught in Spanish can be measured. The SLAR TEKS specify what students should know and do in Spanish just as in other content areas. Programs of bilingual/dual language instruction in Texas have either a transitional philosophy where Spanish skills are strengthened as the language is used as the vehicle for learning until students become English proficient, or a maintenance philosophy where Spanish, as English, is developed fully to create bilingual bi-literate students. Regardless of the program goal, Spanish language instruction should be rigorous enough to develop language competence at the highest levels.

The SLAR TEKS are an improvement from those that were in place back in the 1990s, which were essentially a translation of the English Language Arts and Reading TEKS. The mere translation of standards from one language to another was based on the belief that the two language systems are essentially the same and that, since the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing is the goal for both English and Spanish instruction, then all that was needed was for teachers to change the language of instruction and teach essentially to the same TEKS. This approach to standards development and implementation did not represent the best knowledge about the Spanish language nor did it value the importance of teaching Spanish to the highest level possible. Also not recognized was the reality that students who are exposed to two languages simultaneously use both of their languages for

literacy development. The new SLAR TEKS represent a change in perspective, one that gives Spanish a more elevated status in the classroom and, most importantly, recognizes the unique aspects of the Spanish language and the corresponding skills (TEKS) that students need to master to truly become competent in the language.

To better understand the SLAR TEKS and what is involved in the teaching of Spanish in bilingual and dual language programs in Texas (and anywhere in the United States) teachers need access to resources available for this purpose. Following is a summary of key information and links to selected resources and professional literature to help teachers to understand more deeply the nature of the Spanish language, the Spanish language arts curricula, and how to teach Spanish in the context of bilingual/ESL programs in the United States.

Texas Resources

The SLAR TEKS

The SLAR TEKS (documented in Chapter 128. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Spanish Language Arts and Reading and English as a Second Language Subchapter A. Elementary

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter128/c128a.html#128.11>) include the following strands:

- Reading, where students read and understand a wide variety of literary and informational texts;
- Writing, where students compose a variety of written texts...;

- Research, where students are expected to know how to locate a range of relevant sources and evaluate, synthesize, and present ideas and information;
- Listening and Speaking, where students listen and respond to the ideas of others while contributing their own ideas; and
- Oral and Written Conventions, where students learn how to use the oral and written conventions of the Spanish language in speaking and writing.

In Texas these are the specific criteria teachers must use to plan, deliver and assess the Spanish instruction for which they are responsible.

Excerpts from SLAR on the Uniqueness of Spanish and Spanish Teaching

In the Introduction to the SLAR and in the support materials provided by the Texas Education Agency to guide TEKS implementation, the state describes how the TEKS were developed, organized and also expresses its current view on the importance of Spanish language development and how Spanish literacy enhances students' ability to also become literate in English. Below are some excerpts from the SLAR document published on the state's website.

The Spanish Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) reflect language arts standards that are authentic to the Spanish language and Spanish literacy, not mere translations from English.

The Reading strand is structured to reflect major topic areas of the National Reading Panel Report as well as other current and relevant research on Spanish literacy development...

Research consistently shows that literacy development in the student's native language facilitates learning in English... Although English and Spanish look very similar on the surface (i.e., similar alphabets; directionality; cognates) the conventions of each language presuppose the reading process in that language. Consequently, systematic instruction in the appropriate sequence of skills is critical. For this reason, the Spanish Language Arts and Reading TEKS reflect language arts standards that are authentic to the Spanish language and not mere translations from English.
– SLAR Introduction

Materials and Professional Development to Prepare Teachers to Implement SLAR TEKS

Support Website for Standards for Ensuring Student Success from Kindergarten to College and Career – English and Spanish Language Arts and Reading

This website supports the professional development series for Texas teachers on the following state standards: the English and Spanish Language Arts and Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (ELAR and SLAR TEKS), the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), and the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). It is not intended to take the place of professional development offered by districts and education service centers.

<http://www.englishspanishteks.net/teachers/Default.asp>

Texas English Language Learner Portal

This site lists all resources offered by TEA relevant to English learner education, including instruction, assessment and professional development for teachers.

<http://elltx.org/resources.html>

Project TESORO and LEER MAS

LEER MAS are materials for professional development developed by the state to support the teaching of Spanish.

LEER MAS (Pk-1) materials and training address the essential components of early Spanish reading instruction and includes activities to address transferable skills for English language development. Teachers receive a full array of activities with linguistic accommodations for the English language proficiency level of their students.

LEER MAS II (2nd-6th) materials and training address effective Spanish literacy instruction in the upper elementary grades. It stresses moving towards transition with guidelines for transferring Spanish literacy skills into English for ELs in second through sixth grades.

<http://www.esc1.net/projecttesoro>

<http://myrnacastillo.wikispaces.com/Leer+Mas+II>

Literature on Bi-literacy and the Teaching of Spanish

There are many sources in the professional literature that address bilingual-bi-literacy pedagogy appropriate for bilingual and dual language programs in U.S. schools. Bilingual and bi-literacy experts specializing in Spanish pedagogy stress that it is critical to take into consideration the similarities and differences of Spanish and English when plan for bi-literacy instruction. The work of Dr. Kathy Escamilla is considered exemplary in this regard. There are other books and resources that illustrate how specifically how Spanish and English are different. Here are a few sources.

“Teaching Literacy in Spanish”

by Kathy Escamilla (In *The Power of Two Languages 2000*: New York: McMillan/McGraw-Hill, pp. 126-141, 1999)

This article discusses approaches to literacy instruction that may be considered to be universal or applicable to both Spanish and English. It also gives examples of the ways in which literacy instruction in Spanish should be different from English instruction. This article uses examples from a current approach to literacy instruction known as balanced literacy to illustrate why Spanish-English bilingual teachers need specific knowledge about teaching methods related to Spanish reading. It also discusses issues in adapting English literacy methods for use with Spanish speakers.

Teaching Reading to ELL: Differentiating Literacies

by Socorro G. Herrera, Della R. Perez, and Kathy Escamilla (Pearson 2009)

This book addresses a critical national need for teachers to have new and better information on how to address the literacy needs of ELs. It focuses on the unique ways in which all children learn and stress that children who do not speak English need different methods to help them learn English and their native language.

The Differences between English and Spanish

online article,

<http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/spanish.htm>

This article highlights key differences between the two languages – in alphabet, phonology, grammar and vocabulary – and suggests

difficulties that learners of either language may encounter as a result of these differences.

More Books and Materials for Teaching Spanish

Del Sol Books, Ray Vance (Manager)

www.delsolbooks.com • ray@delsolbooks.com •

Toll Free: 888-DEL SOL-1

Websites that List Bookstores, etc.

Resources from Latina America

<http://www.zonalatina.com/Zlchild.htm>

Magazine for librarians with lots of reviews of Spanish books for children. Highly recommended

<http://www.criticasmagazine.com/>

Resources for Libraries

<http://www.reforma.org/libresources.html>

Biblioteca Virtual del Español (con una sección para literatura infantil)

<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/index.jsp>

Selecting materials to teach Spanish to Spanish speakers

<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0203winke.html>

Publishers

Lectorum

<http://www.lectorum.com/>

National Geographic / Hampton Brown

<http://www.ngsp.com/>

Santillana

<http://www.santillanausa.com/>

Tesoros - MacMillan

<http://tesoros.macmillanmh.com/national>

Páginas web en español

Sitio para profesores del español como lengua extranjera

<http://todoele.net/>

Secretaría de Educación Pública en México

http://www.sep.gob.mx/wb2/sep1/sep1_Ninos_SEP

Red Escolar en Español de México

<http://redescolar.ilce.edu.mx/redescolar2008/index.html>

Club Literatura (información sobre autores, cine, etc.)
<http://www.clubcultura.com/clubliteratura/>

Websites for Teachers (Spanish Teachers, Bilingual Teachers, etc.)

Ayudas Gráficas
<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/spanish/>

Graphic Organizers
<http://www.region15.org/subsite/dist/page/graphic-organizers-3114>

Lists of cognates
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/pdfs/articles/cognates.pdf>

Has both a Spanish and English site (Great resources for teachers and parents)
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/>

Tesoro en español
<http://www.lenguaje.com/herramientas/tesauro.php>

Online Dictionary Spanish-English
<http://www.freedict.com/onldict/spa.html>

America Reads Spanish (Good resources for books)
<http://www.americareadsspanish.org/>

Website full of lesson plans, research, explanations, etc. Especially strong in the area of metalinguistic transfer and how Spanish is constructed.
<http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/>

<http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/Pages/Metalin gHandout%20CABETWBI09.pdf>

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