

Kindervention[®] and English Learners

K*indervention*[®] is a targeted program for kindergarten students who may not have had the literacy experiences in their early years that provide them with basic concepts of print. English learners (ELs) come to school speaking languages other than English and often lack the literacy experiences in English expected by schools. There is a need for support materials for these students as they begin school, especially in view of the large numbers of ELs in our schools.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, 25.2 million or 9 percent of the US population over age 5 are English learners (Pandya, Bartalova, & McHugh, 2011). In the past ten years the number of ELs in the United States has increased by 80%. The largest numbers of ELs are still found in traditionally diverse states including California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey, but these are not among the ten states with the greatest increase in ELs. For example, between 1990 and 2010, Nevada and North Carolina experienced an almost 400% growth rate, and Georgia and Arkansas had growth rates of over 300%. Georgia and Washington experienced the sharpest growth rates in the last 30 years. Georgia's English learner population grew from 165,000 to 512,000, and Washington's from 36,000 to 109,000.

Over 80% of the EL population are native speakers of Spanish, although more than 400 different first languages have been reported for these students (Bartalova & McHugh, 2010). Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2008) have shown that immigrant students attend schools that are ill prepared to meet their needs. These students are twice as likely to come from homes of poverty, and their parents often do not speak English and have low educational levels (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Students who have these characteristics in

the early grades are considered potential long-term English learners because, unless they are provided with specific supports, they will struggle academically throughout their schooling (D. Freeman & Freeman, 2011).

With the demands of the Common Core, states are finding it difficult to meet the needs of English learners. According to the US Department of Education report on English learners, in 2009–2010, only 13 states reported that 50% or more students scored at or above the proficient level in reading or language arts (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2013). Schools can close some of the educational gap that these students experience in early grades, but teachers and administrators often lack the understanding and materials to do so.

Although many school districts identify at risk students through early diagnostic tests, they often do not know how to meet their needs. Kindervention[®] is designed to provide this support.

Kindervention[®] is a targeted program that unlocks the magic of reading for kindergartners who need more support. Although many school districts identify at risk students through early diagnostic tests, they often do not know how to meet their needs. Kindervention[®] is designed to provide this support. Kindervention[®] includes frequent individualized assessment of students. The assessments provide information teachers can use to design the specific kind of instruction that is appropriate for each student.

While *Kindervention*® was not specifically designed for ELs, it does have several features that provide supports to ELs as they move through the program. For example, the program provides daily, targeted small group instruction. The entire program is set up to allow students to learn in small groups. Small group instruction benefits ELs. As Huebner (2009) notes, “One targeted approach to helping struggling ELLs is daily small-group instruction for students with similar needs.”(p.90).

Students acquiring English need the kinds of specific reading supports provided by Kindervention®.

Researchers point out that engagement is key for all learning (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995). *Kindervention*® uses music and rhyme extensively. Both music and rhyme engage children and are especially important for English learners (Saravia-Shore, 2008) because they support students’ acquisition of language. The Letter People® puppets also engage learners and help make the language more comprehensible.

English learners need to make sense of their instruction at all times. Smith (1985) explains that readers cannot learn what they do not understand. Since each week’s lesson is centered on one poem and related readings, students know what the topic is at all times, and this helps them acquire English and academic English vocabulary (D. Freeman & Freeman, 2011). The traditional anchor poems featured in each lesson are accompanied by illustrations that provide a good text-picture match. The teacher and children use gestures to make the content of the poems more comprehensible. Teachers are also provided with guide questions to help students make sense of the poems (Celic, 2009).

In addition, students acquiring English need the kinds of specific reading supports provided by *Kindervention*®. During read alouds, ELs hear the language read out loud by a proficient English speaker. This helps with students’ oral language development, and oral language proficiency is important for the development of literacy (August & Shanahan, 2006). The read alouds also help students develop reading comprehension (D. Freeman & Freeman, 2000).

Kindervention® encourages students to read at all times. Krashen (2004) has summarized research showing that when teachers provide ELs with engaging reading materials, this comprehensible input motivates them to read more. Each week during the daily short, comprehensible lessons, students read with the teacher and with peers. Besides working with the poem, students read limited text fiction and non-fiction books with excellent text-picture matches. The combination of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction exposes children to different genres. This prepares them to read the different kinds of texts they encounter as they move through the grades.

Kindervention® includes suggestions for working with ELs in each of the lessons. These suggestions are based on research-based best practices. For example, pointing out cognates, especially for Spanish speakers and speakers of other Latin-based languages, provides ELs with a way to draw on their first languages as they are learning English (D. Freeman & Freeman, 2011). The use of visuals helps ELs understand new vocabulary. Using gestures while reciting the poetry with the teacher also supports comprehension of the readings.

Kindervention® with its individualized assessments, small group structure, engaging materials, short, focused lessons, and the many built-in supports discussed above, provides English learners with comprehensible instruction that will help them become proficient readers of English texts.

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Consultants

For more than 25 years, **Drs. Yvonne and David Freeman** have been committed to helping teachers translate theory into practice to provide the best education for all their students. Professors emeriti at the University of Texas at Brownsville, the Freemans have researched and written extensively on the topics of bilingual education, academic language, second language acquisition, literacy and biliteracy, linguistics, dual language, and ESL methods. They present regularly at international, national, and state conferences and are the joint recipients of the 2013 Outstanding Educator in the English Language Arts Award from the National Council of Teachers of English.