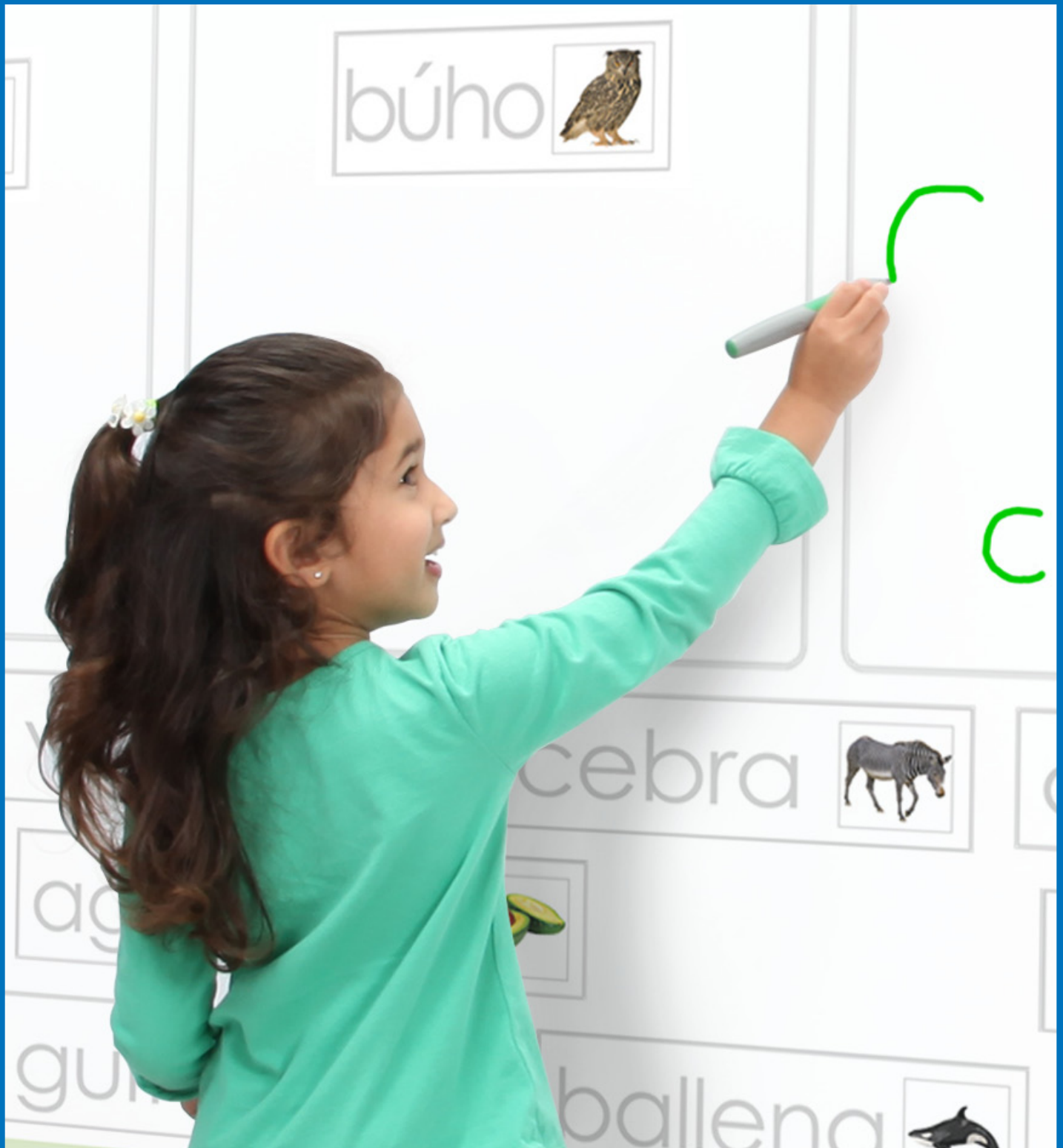


Guided Instruction Using the TeachSmart® Learning System Spanish



Teach Smarter, Not Harder!®



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Optimal Learning Using Educational Technology

To get positive outcomes using educational technology requires many of the same principles of an overall optimal learning environment. The TeachSmart Learning System (TSLs) Spanish Version is built on these principles, which include that the environment for English Language Learners (ELL) should:

- Support deep understanding, rather than superficial learning.
- Bring out and build on the prior knowledge of the learners.
- Encourage learning that is active and self-regulated by children as opposed to learning that is passive ¹.
- Provide tasks that are challenging and allow children to generate knowledge through having to read, write, and think in new and complex ways ².



The Vital Role of Oral Language Proficiency

A common thread that unifies the research on ELL children and monolingual English-speaking children is the emphasis on the development of oral language proficiency as a necessary prerequisite for later literacy ³. A well accepted finding at this point is that children taught in English-only classrooms or those transitioned to English instruction before they can fully demonstrate well-established oral language abilities in their own language and have achieved some degree of English oral proficiency, do not progress as well as those who have the chance to learn and become competent and proficient through and in two languages ^{4,5}. This is the cornerstone of the TSLs Spanish Version, which is designed for ease of moving back and forth from Spanish to English within activities. Further, this approach aligns with research on two foundation blocks for children to attain oral language proficiency: language of instruction and transfer of skills across languages. Key findings in these areas are presented below.

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Language of Instruction

The Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth found that “English language learners may learn to read best if taught both in their native language and English from early in the process of formal schooling. Rather than confusing children, as some have feared, reading instruction in a familiar language may serve as a bridge to success in English because decoding, sound blending, and generic comprehension strategies clearly transfer between languages that use phonetic orthographies, such as Spanish, French, and English”⁶.

Transfer of Early Literacy Skills Across Languages

The potential for transfer, that is, the ability to apply one’s previous learning to a new skill, is crucial when determining the language of instruction. *L1=1st language/home language/native language; L2=2nd language/language of school. Recent research on the transfer of preschool literacy skills from Spanish to English supports the transfer hypothesis, where “building on a child’s language abilities in his or her L1 will not only help the child fully master that language, but provide him or her with the tools to deconstruct the L2. Early development of language skills, such as semantics, syntax, narrative discourse, and morphology, as well as phonological awareness, will provide the child with a ‘meta’ understanding of language that he or she can apply to language development and literacy skills in the L2”⁷.

Best Practices for Teaching Young ELL Children

Literacy

The following are instructional approaches recommended based on a review of three national data sets⁸. The TSLS-Spanish Version allows you to do all of these easily:

1. Use the children’s main language in a strategic manner.
2. Have expectations, instruction, and routines that are consistent.
3. Provide extensions of explanations and opportunities for practice.
4. Use visual cues and physical gestures.
5. Highlight the similarities/differences between English and the native/home language.
6. Build upon home language skills.
7. Frequently assess comprehension.
8. Restate children’s language and encourage them to expand on that language.



Mathematics

An incremental developmental process in instruction is recommended for ELL children by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)⁹. The TSLS-Spanish Version Math Activities support these for you.

1. Build a conceptual understanding of mathematics by starting each new concept with concrete examples and experiences.
2. Provide opportunities for children to make connections among concrete experiences, semi-concrete graphical depiction, abstract symbolic representations, verbal language, and written expression to allow them to construct a comprehensive understanding of the new math concept(s).

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As mathematics can be taught using many modalities, it has a distinct advantage for learning opportunities for children, an advantage in which the TSLS is uniquely suited and excels. In addition to verbal language, math ideas can be expressed through graphical depiction, symbolic representations, and the manipulation of concrete objects, all of which are fairly free of spoken language. This can contribute to ELL children being able to understand new concepts in math.

However, it is also important to take into account the linguistic complexity of the language used in math instruction and the language proficiency of the children. This is because if new concepts are introduced in a language that is not familiar, the children then must grapple with two unknowns: the language and the concept, which makes learning daunting¹⁰. Because the TSLS has such a robust set of Math Activities to teach concepts and because the TSLS Spanish Version moves children back and forth between languages to facilitate learning the 'labels', teachers can control and monitor that children are progressing in both math language and concepts.

Further, the National Research Council Committee on Early Childhood Mathematics points out that operations situations (e.g., addition and subtraction) and the word problems that describe them, allow excellent opportunities for ELL students to learn language, including integrating art, language practice, and pretend play to help generalize their budding knowledge about mathematics¹¹.

Progress Monitoring and Assessment

There are many drawbacks to current standardized assessment measures all around for ELL children. Two of the most widespread are measures having varying levels of attention to ensuring comparability across languages. The second is the norm group not matching or including too few children similar to those being assessed. To compensate for these issues, researchers recommend the use of multiple measures that may include standardized tests and curriculum-embedded assessments in addition to narrative language samples and observation of children's language usage in natural settings^{6,12,13}.

The TeachSmart Learning System Spanish Version is ideal for using two types of progress monitoring and assessment being recommended by research.

- The use of language samples, particularly storytelling, is one promising alternative approach to assessment as it matches well with showing a child's ability to comprehend and produce both oral and written narrative structure (e.g., introduction, character development, referencing)¹⁴.
- Equally exciting is using dynamic assessment in order to reduce test bias because it focuses on learning potential¹⁵. Major characteristics of the dynamic assessment model include a test-teach-retest format and a focus on the learning process, particularly strategies related to problem solving that underpin the ability to be successful during test taking. Much of the rationale behind this approach is based on Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal learning and scaffolding¹⁶, as are the assessments and all of the content in the TSLS.

The power of the assessments within the TSLS, particularly in such selections as "I Can Tell My Teacher A Story", combined with the ability to use the SMART Recorder to see in a dynamic and real-time manner how children progress in developing both oral and writing skills, is right in line with dynamic assessment.

Summary

The conclusions from this large body of research suggest that essential metalinguistic skills can be gained by young children through learning more than one language, that they are quite capable of learning early language and literacy skills in two languages, and that many early language and literacy skills learned in L1 positively factor into English language/literacy and mathematics development. That said, the research also shows that many if not most ELL preschoolers, especially if they are in low-income families, are already behind when they enter early childhood programs, and continue to fall behind. The good news is that there is a growing body of research-based best practices that have demonstrated positive results for these tenuous learners. By using the TSLS Spanish Version, educators will have the opportunity to align with and follow evidence-based best practices that have been demonstrated to be effective for young ELL children in preparing them for success in school.

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