The primary objective of the NYC RBE-RN at Fordham University Graduate School of Education and the Center for Educational Partnerships is to assist schools, networks, and school districts across all five boroughs in creating professional learning communities centered on the education of English language learners (ELLs).

The RBE-RN team has dedicated this issue to the theme of authentically getting to know the students we serve. From the moment students arrive to school in September, teachers have a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the “whole child.” Gathering information about students should go beyond academics; include information about their interests, talents and abilities, and most importantly about their families, culture, and linguistic background. This information will enable us to develop an affective school and classroom environment that will set the stage for learning.

In this issue we will highlight strategies and activities that can be used to support teachers in the “getting to know you” process. Engaging with students in these activities will help teachers to create a classroom culture where their students’ voices are valued, students can feel that their needs will be attended to, and where they can trust and respect their teacher, so that learning can take place. As teachers continue to collect and compile student data, a meaningful and useful profile will emerge—gaining a deeper understanding and sensitivity to the needs of their students. Armed with this cadre of information, teachers can respond to individual differences when planning units of study. By placing an emphasis on “knowing” the students, will assist in supporting the development of a curriculum that connects to their lives.

On the back cover we highlight some of the professional development sessions that the NYC RBE-RN offered last year. We look forward to seeing you at this year’s events!!
Dear Colleagues:

As we began the 2013-14 school year, once again so much work lies ahead of us, particularly if we want to enable schools to capitalize on ELL’s greatest asset, their first language.

English Language Learners had citywide proficiency rates of 11.4% in math and 3.4% in English Language Arts under the Common Core Standards testing. The need is greater than ever before.

As stated and explained by renowned researcher and author, Dr. Nancy Cloud: “Ells are not alike; they vary by: age, first language, literacy and educational background, parental level of education, socio-economic status, life experiences (refugees, immigrant, migrant, language minority, sojourner).”

The NYC RBERN at Fordham University understands the needs of ELLS and will continue to work with you in providing much needed professional development and technical assistance. In partnership with NYC DOE administration, network leaders, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents, I am confident this will be a productive and beneficial year.

Warm regards,

Anita Vazquez Batisti

Dr. Anita Vazquez Batisti
Associate Dean, Fordham University

“T he principal is the school’s primary communicator of the vision of high expectations for student success.”

In Academic Achievement for English Language Learning, Betty J. Alford and Mary Catherine Niño

The beginning of the school year is the perfect opportunity to both reflect and communicate the values and expectations regarding high achievement for ELLs, and the critical ideas that foster and promote a multicultural and multilingual school culture. In this article, I offer a list of reflection questions to guide you and your school community in the development and implementation of a plan of action to address the needs of all students.
Reflection questions:

- **How is the school’s vision building a strong foundation for all students inclusive of ELLs?** Re-visit the school vision and engage the school community in a conversation about the school’s vision. Collaboratively develop and implement a plan with your staff that reflects the values and expectations for the varied ELL population that currently exits in your building.

- **How do teachers’ instructional schedules for ELLs maximize student learning?** Review schedules to see if there are sufficient opportunities for ELLs to engage in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

- **Are key personnel included when planning and setting learning objectives for the ELL population?** Key personnel involved in the planning of lessons and professional development should include all teachers working with ELLs. In addition, consider consulting with knowledgeable and experienced experts that can serve as advisors.

- **How do teachers differentiate instruction to address the needs of the varied ELL population (newcomers, SIFE, LTE’s)?** Assess newcomers’ native language proficiency and determine the level of literacy in their language. Use this information to plan for your CORE Program in literacy instruction. **Cognitive and academic development in one’s first language has been found to contribute positively in second-language learning** (Bialystock, 1991; Collier, 1989, 1992; Garcia, [E.] 1994; Genessee, 1987, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Assess literacy skills of Students with Interrupted Education (SIFE) in both languages and develop an instructional plan that supports their individual needs. Plan lessons in small groups for Long-Term ELLs (LTEs) using assessments to diagnose specific gaps in their literacy skills. When working with newcomers, SIFE and LTEs. Dr. Nancy Cloud recommends planning thematic units with age appropriate instruction.

- **How do school structures support Bilingual/ESL/ Mainstream teachers in planning lessons?** Transitional Bilingual or Dual Language classes require planning in two languages. Therefore, teachers planning for TBE and DL programs require additional time in preparing lessons and appropriate materials that will support students. In addition, consider planning content and language objectives to support students with language usage in content areas.

- **What are the professional development needs of teachers working with ELLs?** All teachers serving ELLs should receive professional development in the stages of language acquisition and language development, as well as on how to write effective language and content objectives. Bilingual/ESL teachers should receive the same training in CCLS, the new Bilingual Common Core Initiative which can be found at the following link: [http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative](http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative)

Other professional development topics may include: Text Complexity, Informational Text in the Second Language, and Recognizing a Rigorous Lesson for ELLs. For additional information, see work conducted by Diane August and Erin Hayes in partnership with NYCOffice of ELLs: [http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/ELL/EducatorResourcesSupporting+ELLs+Literacy+Development.htm](http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/ELL/EducatorResourcesSupporting+ELLs+Literacy+Development.htm)

In summary, reflecting and communicating your beliefs and your expectations about ELLs followed by the implementation of a plan of action will promote successful learning conditions.

For additional information, please contact Eva Garcia at evgarcia@fordham.edu
As August gives way to September, students and teachers alike are excited about going back to school. Students look forward to meeting a new teacher, reuniting with friends and making new ones. For teachers, it is a time to get to know their individual students and the diversity they bring to the classroom. It is a time to set the stage for learning and language acquisition in meaningful and authentic ways, based on the information about their students and their academic performance. Teachers usually gather this type of information by using interests and abilities surveys, questionnaires and interviews. This period of inquiry is a useful time for learning about all students, especially the ELL students, in order to create effective and differentiated lessons that will keep them engaged all year long.

In this article, I would like to suggest that middle school teachers consider carefully selecting a set of read aloud texts to launch the school year. Reading aloud is a practice that has been used in primary grades but, recent research has shown that reading aloud can benefit middle school students as well.

How can reading aloud help middle school teachers get to know their students?

As part of the “getting to know you” process that occurs in September, teachers can use read aloud sessions to springboard students into performance based assessments that will open windows into each student’s listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. By using authentic assessments, we gain valuable insight into what children have learned and how they have learned it. Students can choose from a variety of responses, which can include drawing a picture, showing and talking about a picture to a partner/ small group/ the class, to writing a paragraph or essay, etc. Through these activities, students can demonstrate their understanding of information and ability to use language. The artifacts collected by the teacher provide a clearer picture of the individual student’s current level of proficiency. Placing read aloud as part of your authentic assessment tool kit, at the start of the year, is a way of gathering information about student’s learning to inform your instruction.

An effective interactive read aloud stimulates students’ imaginations and emotions and involves them in asking and answering questions, and making predictions, rather than passively listening. Read aloud develops students’ listening skills and comprehension skills. It supports the development of both second language proficiency and literacy (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008; Trelease, 2006). Look for books with rich language, meaningful plots, compelling characters, and engaging illustrations (Gambrell & Almasi 1996). Through the use of gestures and pictures, as well as, think-aloud, the teachers invite children...
students to respond with enthusiasm and understanding. They can launch class discussions or small group activities. In addition, a read-aloud can stimulate writing, art, or drama activities.

The value of read aloud cannot be understated. The teacher models good reading behavior; exposes students to a range of literature; enriches their vocabularies and understanding of sophisticated language patterns; makes difficult text understandable; models the fact that different genres are read differently; and can support independent reading. Students need to see themselves as well as other people, cultures, communities, and issues in the books we read to them. They need to see how characters in books handle the same fears, interests, and concerns that they experience (Barton & Booth, 1990). Selecting a wide range of culturally diverse books will help all children find and make connections to their own life experiences, other books they have read, and universal concepts. (Dyson & Genishi, 1994).

Read aloud works especially well in middle school classrooms because it enables teachers to offer texts with more challenging concepts and or language than students can read independently. What follows is a peek into Laura Alvarez’s middle school classroom. This short excerpt offers a strong rationale for using interactive read aloud to get to know your middle school ELLs, as well as, set the stage for a unit of

### Read-Alouds in Laura Alvarez's Classroom

Though this strategy may seem as basic as simply choosing a book and reading it aloud to the class, Laura Alvarez uses the technique strategically: she chooses books that address the reading level of her students; considers how to make points about the reading process; and fits the chosen reading into the overall curriculum. For example, Alvarez begins her class with a read-aloud of *My Name is Maria Isabel*, by Alma Flor Ada, a book that her transitional bilingual students have already read in Spanish. Because some of them are not yet able to read the book in English, Alvarez makes it accessible to the whole group by stopping to comment, ask questions, and help students make personal connections to the story. Teacher educator Sonia Nieto points out that this is also an excellent choice of read-aloud for Alvarez's classroom because second-language learners experience identity struggles, and using Ada's book encourages connection to their own stories. The story, in which injustices are immediately clear, also sets the stage for an entire unit on the problems immigrants face. Alvarez also uses the read-aloud strategy in another way: after her students have done their research, she reads aloud difficult materials they have found. This time, she asks her listeners to say "stop" if they hear something about the problem they are researching or its solution. Because their listening skills exceed their reading skills, this helps the students comprehend the material (http://www.learner.org/workshops/tml/workshop7/index.html)

As we reflect on Ms. Alvarez’s read aloud choice, we can see that using literature, stories, and folktales from other cultures is a way of encouraging students to connect what they are reading to their own experiences. This may seem like a logical place to start, but it will take some research to find just the right additions for an educational unit. In the end, the efforts that teachers make to add a rich, cultural dimension to the curriculum will enhance student learning and comprehension, and create excitement in the classroom. It is a way of letting your students know, especially your ELLs, that their diverse experiences and backgrounds are valued in your classroom. As students share insights with you and with each other, they may be motivated to explore content and deepen their understanding of the material, as well as, develop an appreciation for other cultural perspectives. And perhaps the greatest accomplishment of all will be to help teachers build relationships that are so important in any community, especially in the middle school classroom.

What read aloud selections have you used in your classroom? I invite you to share your experiences like Ms. Alvarez has done. Please submit your responses to Aileen Colon at: AColon21@fordham.edu
For these struggling adolescents, comic books and graphic novels can become the bridge from ‘learning to read’ to ‘reading to learn’.

We are immersed in a performance-oriented society with goals often adorned as commercials about what to eat, what to wear, how to look or what gadget to purchase to better communicate with friends and family. Some of these goals may respond to our needs and wants, but many of them are targets that create unnecessary demands. Similarly, if we set learning targets for our students, but they are not clear, or students do not share our intent, these targets will have little value for them. As a result, and despite our efforts to provide learning targets, students may feel poorly motivated and their performance may fall below their capabilities.

On the other hand, most rewarding experiences – ours, as well as those of our students, are the result of clear goals: ‘My family and I had made a list of all the sites we wanted to visit during our tour of New York City. We hit them all; it was a great trip!’ ‘My team was mentally and physically prepared for a winning match, and we did it!. We won the game 75 to 60.” Thus, learning is much more relevant and engaging when students are involved in setting personal as well as academic targets. A clear learning target, for middle and high school adolescents is to read with understanding to learn new concepts and acquire content knowledge. Although this goal is clear to all students, it poses a challenge for those who can’t read to learn because they are still in the process of ‘learning to read’ focused on decoding and comprehension.

Why Comic Books and Graphic Novels?

- They can motivate reluctant readers who are intimidated and frustrated by the amount of text found in traditional books.
- The comic book offers a unique combination of words and pictures that is captivating. The words within the pictures are part of the picture. They are not just pictures with captions.
- A comic book is a literary genre with ‘sequential art’. The comic book format not only makes text relevant to students but prepares them to navigate the reading complex texts (CCLS).

What does Research say?

The pedagogical value of Comic books and Graphic Novels is supported by research. Krashen (1993) suggests that comic book reading and other kinds of light reading may serve as an important bridge from everyday “conversational” language to what Cummins (1991) terms “academic language.” This view is supported by studies showing that comic book texts contain more rare words than ordinary conversation does (Hayes and Ahrens, 1988), as well as case histories of readers who credit comic books with providing them with the linguistic basis for reading more difficult texts (e.g. Mathabane, 1986).
**Learning with Comic Books and Graphic Novels**

Comic books and graphic novels are appealing to adolescents, but to scaffold their effective reading and motivate re-readings with purpose, consider prompting students to ask themselves:

- *Where am I going?* (Ex. I want to practice analyzing story characters)
- *Where am I now?* (Ex. I can interpret the character expressions but need to increase my vocabulary to talk about them)
- *How can I close the gap between where I am and where I want to go?* (Ex. I’ll use the images and context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words)

These are the core questions that guide the formative assessment process; they help determine what the teacher plans to teach, what the students will do and what teacher and students will do together. Most importantly, practice with these three questions builds students’ assessment capabilities, and their ability to ‘learn how to learn’ (Moss & Brookhart, 2012).

Any comprehension skills taught with traditional text can be taught with graphic text. Of particular interest, however, is the uniqueness of graphic novels to build inference skills. In graphic novels, as in movies, the reader or viewer can often deduce what happened in the interval between one image and the next, even when it is not explicitly stated. In graphic texts the gutter—the space between the panels—is the physical space that helps the reader to mentally construct the missing pieces, so that the story flows continuously. This unique element prepares students for reading between the lines in traditional narrative.

The table below offers some additional suggestions on how to teach with graphic novels or comics to inspire struggling adolescents to read with an authentic purpose, and support their transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self - Regulation Skills</th>
<th>Sample Learning Targets</th>
<th>Sample Reading Strategies</th>
<th>Sample Criteria for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Rehearsal</td>
<td>♦ I can practice reading for understanding effectively.</td>
<td>♦ I begin by ‘reading’ the pictures. Then, I revisit the story connecting the pictures to the words.</td>
<td>♦ Before I start work on my reading, I stop and figure out what I’m supposed to be doing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Defining expectations</td>
<td>♦ I can set goals and work towards them.</td>
<td>♦ I use the images and context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words.</td>
<td>♦ I take notes using my first language and use drawings as cues to remember what I read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Self-monitoring</td>
<td>♦ I can keep track of my own learning progress.</td>
<td>♦ I learn about the characters from facial expressions.</td>
<td>♦ I complete work on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Self-evaluation</td>
<td>♦ I can figure out why it’s important to learn the things I am studying in school.</td>
<td>♦ I evaluate the different elements of the novel and their connections to determine the plot of the story.</td>
<td>♦ I use my performance on previous work to decide how to use my time and effort on new work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Ascertain interest</td>
<td>♦ I love how the illustrators of comic books use, drawings text boxes, frames and movement to create interesting plots,</td>
<td></td>
<td>♦ I look for connections between what I learn from reading these stories and other subjects such as math, history and science.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Learning Targets by C. Moss & S. M. Brookhart, p. 127

For additional information, please contact Roser Salavert at rsalavert@fordham.edu
How can I get to know my English Language Learners (ELLs) better early during the school year, so that I can best meet their learning needs? What authentic data can I gather to assist me to learn more about their strengths as learners, so that I can plan instruction that is truly responsive? These questions were most often asked by teachers last year during my support of them as a Resource Specialist. There are various ways you can learn more about your ELLs. One way is to assess English learners learning style. This article will define and provide strategies to assess the various learning styles of ELL students.

A Learning style is defined as “an individual’s natural or habitual pattern of acquiring and processing information in learning situations.” A core concept is that individuals differ in how they learn. Why is it important to determine ELL’s learning style? Judie Haynes (2012) states “it is crucial to take ELLs learning styles into account when teaching them as they may be highly literate in their own language but experience difficulties when acquiring English because they are accustomed to learning through a different style.” For example, it has been noted that most ELLs are visual or kinesthetic learners. However, most teachers, (especially in upper grades) teach students with an auditory learning style, making it very difficult for ELLs in your class. She identified six learning styles, auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, global and analytical (See chart on the next page).

Determining ELLs learning style Two strategies you can use at the beginning of the school year to determine ELLs learning style, as well as their interests are surveys and learning or literacy centers.

Surveys They are best administered to students in grades 2-12. I recommend that a lesson be conducted first explaining what a learning style is and how all students learn in different ways. The first four learning styles, auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic, can be introduced and explained to students in grades 2-6. All six learning styles can be introduced to students in grades 7-12. Most students will be eager to learn more about themselves after you have shared this information and will be motivated to complete a survey. Find examples of learning style surveys in the links provided (References & Resources).

Learning or literacy centers They are most often used in grades K-3, but can be used in all grades. The four learning styles most often assessed are the auditory, visual, tactile and kinesthetic. Teachers design a task that will assess each learning style. For example, the first center may require that the students complete a task that requires that he/she listen to a short story on tape in his/her native language and respond orally to one or two questions. This activity is designed to assess whether students are auditory learners. Activities should be designed to be completed within five minutes. In September, each center is introduced to students. Then, at a designated time every day you can have one student at a time complete each of the four activities. Your role will be to observe and document what you see in order to identify his or her learning style. Through close observation you will be able to determine a student’s level of ease in completing a task and how well they complete it. Questions to keep in mind are: Does the student effortlessly complete the task? Does the student appear frustrated or disinterested? Does the student appear to think and then complete the task?
Asking yourself these questions will assist you to identify a student’s learning style/s, as some may have more than one. You will also learn about the activities that promote the most interest.

Organizing Based on ELLs Learning Style The data you have collected about ELLs learning style is very valuable to create an engaging and stimulating classroom environment and to plan effectively. Dr. Rita Dunn and Dr. Kenneth Dunn (2009), two researchers on learning style theory, recommend that teachers consider room redesign, the development of small-group techniques, and the development of “Contract Activity Packages.” These may include having learning stations and instructional areas, clearing the floor area, and incorporating student thoughts and ideas into the design of the classroom. Small-group techniques often include a “circle of knowledge” in which students sit in a circle and discuss a subject collaboratively as well as other techniques such as team learning and brainstorming. Their so-called “Contract Activity Packages” are educational plans that use 1) a clear statement of the learning need; 2) multisensory resources (auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic); 3) activities through which the newly-mastered information can be used creatively; 4) the sharing of creative projects within small groups; 5) at least three small group techniques; 6) a pre-test, a self-test, and a post-test. The more you read about applications of learning styles in the classroom, the more you will see your students immersed in their learning and participating in class.

References & Resources
2. “Learning Styles – Applications” (May 2009) Dr. Rita Dunn and Dr. Kenneth Dunn

For additional information, please contact Elsie Cardona-Berardinelli at ecardona3@fordham.edu
September Teaching Ideas
by
Sara Martinez
NYC RBE-RN Resource Specialist

“The more you know your students the better you can… teach ’em.”
Tom McSweeney Things you need to know about your students in September

This year the Citywide expectations clearly focus on setting up curricula and instruction to prepare all students to meet CCLS. As you get ready for the start of a new school year, you may be asking yourself, “How can I use my knowledge and experience to support higher expectations and move my students toward meeting the standards?” Below you will find two simple but engaging activities that will energize your students and invite them to share their cultural and linguistic backgrounds while establishing the conditions for rigorous academic instruction.

Forging a positive relationship with your English Language Learners is essential for learning to occur and to nurture their social and emotional development.

As you engage your students in the types of activities highlighted in this article, you will set the stage for building strong teacher-student relationships while getting to know your students as individuals. That is, you will be implementing Danielson’s framework, particularly domain 2a—creating an environment of respect and rapport.

Bookmark Greeting: Get to Know Your Readers
Share a favorite book you read during the summer with the class and invite students to bring their favorite book from home or the library. Then guide students in creating a special bookmark about their favorite book, or favorite topic. Later, they take turns telling about the book or topic and why they like it.

The students LOVE this. You can make a list on chart paper of “Books We Recommend” to refer back to throughout the year. In the end, this activity will help you get to know your new students as readers, and students will get excited about reading. They may also find out that some classmates enjoy the same kinds of books they do! (Adapted from: Susan Heath, Grade 3, Shepard Elementary Columbia, MO, Scholastic Magazine, 2007-8)

Getting Acquainted: Create a Class Slideshow
Read a book such as Miss Malarkey Doesn’t Live in Room 10, and use it to talk about teachers as “real people” with normal lives. Next, create a PowerPoint slideshow about your class. To that purpose, prompt students to write an introduction about themselves and bring pictures of family, pets and fun things they did during the summer. With their collaboration, set up the PowerPoint and review it with the class. Together, come up with a unique title, e.g. “Getting Ready for the Best Year Ever.” It is a great piece to share at Parents’ Night. Update the slideshow later in the year to include student writing samples, math problems and other academic accomplishments. (Adapted from: Angie Kelly, Grade 3 teacher, Main Street Elementary, Shelbyville, IL, Scholastic Magazine, 2007-8)

What are YOUR September Ideas?
We’d love to learn about them. Please submit them to: Sara Martinez, smartinez37@fordham.edu
The start of the school year is the perfect opportunity to think of ways to welcome parents, students and their families, and particularly those families who are recent arrivals to the United States.

How can a school create a welcoming environment that demonstrates an appreciation and acceptance of the rich cultural diversity of their students and families? One way you can relay this message is to display welcome signs and bulletin boards in the home languages representing the school population. You can also welcome parents by offering workshops in topics related to language acquisition, grade level expectations and ways that the school will communicate with parents.

Throughout the school year, you can invite parents to participate in activities such as Choral Reading and Speaking which help develop rapport and/or strengthen relationships with the parent community. Choral Reading or Speaking is an engaging and participatory way to reach out to those members who are not proficient in English because it can be conducted in any language. See the example below.

**How can schools use Choral Reading during Family or Curriculum Night?**

Below is an example of how to prepare for a Choral Reading during Family or Curriculum, Night.

First, select a poem, e.g. The Tap, or text that contains words that will come alive when read aloud. For example, choose materials that contain descriptive words, vivid verbs, onomatopoeia, alliteration, and/or rhyming words. You can also opt to use texts that contain a mood that is enhanced through oral interpretation or dialogue. Then, introduce the selection to the students by reading it aloud while they follow along silently. Next, have everyone read through the selection aloud in unison several times. Finally, assign sections to different groups of students to take turns reading lines, stanzas, or paragraphs of the poem together. Students can be grouped by gender, physical attributes, month they were born, etc.

**On Family or Curriculum Night, parents listen,**

For additional resources or more information, please go to [www.fordham.edu/nycbern](http://www.fordham.edu/nycbern)
The commitment of the NYC RBE-RN to advance the achievement of English Language Learners was echoed in the training sessions conducted during the 2012-13 school year and illustrated in these pictures.

Contact the NYC RBE-RN at Fordham University for this year’s calendar!

nycrbern@fordham.edu