Cultivating Oral Language and Literacy Talent in Students (COLLTS) is a research-based program that blends:

- Shared interactive reading and writing
- Vocabulary, language and foundational skills development
- Parent and family engagement

The COLLTS program engages children with high-quality children's literature and center-based extension activities to develop their oral language, background and conceptual knowledge.

COLLTS is designed for preschool children, including English learners, who would benefit from activities to build oral language and literacy skills. The program can easily be integrated into existing instructional programming. The shared interactive reading portion of each lesson requires only 15 minutes of time. Center-based activities require an additional 15 minutes.

The program features six children's books in English, purposely selected for their literary and informational quality, text type, rich language, appeal to young children, and the extent to which their content aligns with state college and career readiness standards. It also includes three books in Spanish that correspond to three of the books in English.

### Three Narrative Units
- Lola Loves Stories
- The Snowy Day
- The Paper Crane

### Three Informational Units
- From Seed to Pumpkin
- Fernando's Gift
- Over in a River: Flowing Out to the Sea

### Three Units in Spanish
- Lola Loves Stories
- The Snowy Day
- Fernando's Gift
COLLTS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

About the COLLTS Program

A targeted number of carefully selected vocabulary words and phrases are taught before, during and after shared interactive reading. Paraphrasing and questioning techniques are employed during reading to further develop children's language proficiency and background and conceptual knowledge. The program includes a component in which foundational reading skills are introduced and a component that uses shared interactive writing to elicit pictures and writing from children related to the focal text.

The researchers who created the COLLTS method have more than a decade of experience developing literacy curricula for bilingual students in the United States. Research on early language acquisition guided the development, as did the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts for kindergarten.

Support materials include Teacher Guides, picture cards with target vocabulary—key words, topic words and bonus words—and writing handouts and bilingual family literacy activity take-home handouts.
Research Foundations

Shared interactive reading. COLLTs uses shared interactive reading because it provides opportunities for teachers to engage children in activities that research indicates promote reading for understanding. Such activities include focused, high-quality discussions about texts (Shanahan et al., 2010) and conversations that develop inferential and narrative language skills and academic vocabulary (Foorman et al., 2016).

Shared interactive reading is based on three broad principles: “encourage the child to participate, provide feedback to the child, and adapt your reading style to the child’s growing linguistic abilities” (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000, p. 76). During shared interactive reading, the adult reader asks children questions about the story or the pictures in the book and responds to children in ways that further develop their language and comprehension—through repetitions, expansions and modeling of answers. As children become more proficient, the reader tailors the interactive reading to match children’s proficiency levels.

Research with monolingual speakers consistently indicates that shared reading has an impact on oral language outcomes, including vocabulary, as well as composite measures of oral language (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Recent work with mostly kindergarten and first-grade children indicates that these methods also benefit dual language learners (DLLs) (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Farver, Lonigan & Eppe, 2009; Silverman, 2007).

Vocabulary development. It is well established that vocabulary knowledge is important for both listening and reading comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2006; Baker et al., 2014).

The instructional factors that facilitate vocabulary acquisition for children are well researched (Graves, August & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013) and have been used in the design of the COLLTS program. These factors include:

- Exposure to words in rich semantic contexts, such as book reading
- Explicit instruction of general and domain-specific words, which are called key, topic and bonus words in COLLTS
- Definitions in context for other words important to understanding that are not explicitly taught
- Building word consciousness or an awareness of and interest in words

English-as-a-second-language methods. Research shows that although methods should build on effective practices used with native English speaking children, the differences in DLLs’ language proficiency make it important to adjust instruction to promote language development and reading for understanding (August & Shanahan, 2006, 2008; Baker et al., 2014).

The COLLTS curriculum uses research-based English as a second language (ESL) methods throughout (August & Shanahan, 2010; Baker et al., 2014; Graves, August & Mancilla-Martinez, 2013) to adjust instruction for English learners (ELs). Examples of these methods include:

- Partnering ELs who are limited proficient with bilingual partners
- Providing home language definitions
- Using gestures, body language, pictures and objects to accompany speech
- Modeling tasks before requiring children to engage in them
- Providing additional exposure to words, concepts and skills

Alignment with state standards. The COLLTS program was designed from the ground up to align with college and career readiness standards. Because of their widespread use, COLLTS provides references to the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and, where applicable, to the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards.¹

To accommodate states that have different standards in place or have numbered the standards differently, the program provides a page where COLLTS’ users can note their state standard numbers and descriptions for their state standards.

¹ As of July 2016, 42 states, the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the Common Core State Standards.
The COLLTS program consists of six read-aloud units in English and three in Spanish, each of which has five lessons. The lessons are systematically organized into pre-reading, interactive reading and post-reading activities. In Lessons One–Four, children listen to and engage in shared interactive reading of narrative or informational texts. In Lesson Five, children engage in activities to promote foundational reading and writing skills.

Each unit includes:

- A Teacher Guide to support pre-reading, interactive reading and post-reading instruction. The Teacher Guide also offers suggestions for school and home extension activities to reinforce and extend skills and concepts taught during the lessons.
- Picture cards with target vocabulary—key words, topic words and, for some units, bonus words.
- A writing handout.
- A bilingual family literacy activity take-home handout.

Center-based activities build on each book’s content with games, songs, chants and hands-on activities that include experiments for informational texts.

A bilingual family literacy activity take-home handout offers parents and caregivers opportunities to support learning with activities, such as going to places in the community together, talking about experiences and documenting these experiences with logs and pictures. Each take-home handout is sent home with children at the beginning of the unit.

**UNIT OVERVIEW**
Each Teacher Guide begins with an overview of the unit that orient teachers to the book and the focus of instruction. Each overview provides a story synopsis and important things to notice about the book, highlights target vocabulary in the lessons and offers teacher notes about preparation, materials and extension activities.

**Lessons One–Four**

**PRE-READING**
1. Book introduction and story recall
2. Background information
3. Pre-teaching of key vocabulary

**INTERACTIVE READING**
1. Prompts aligned with college and career readiness standards
2. Partner talk
3. Embedded vocabulary support
4. Closure

**POST-READING**
1. Topic word centers for further language development

**Lesson Five**

**FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**
1. Phonological awareness
2. Concepts of print

**WRITING DEVELOPMENT**
1. Informational
2. Argument
3. Narrative
LESSONS ONE–FOUR
Each Teacher Guide presents Lessons One–Four in a consistent format, which supports teachers with developing a robust instructional routine for children. Each of the seven instructional components described below provides:

- Teacher notes with guidance on preparation, the focus of the instruction or instructional activities
- Carefully crafted teacher talk for developing children’s oral language and literacy skills and eliciting their responses about the stories and target vocabulary
- Anticipated responses from children (where appropriate)

1. **Book Introduction.** Lessons One–Four begin with a book introduction using the title to orient children to the day’s reading.

2. **Warm-up.** Lessons One–Four get children ready to read with a warm-up exercise that provides them with background information, if necessary to support their comprehension of the text, and reviews information from previous lessons using a picture walk.

3. **Vocabulary Development.** Lessons One–Four introduce a key word that children will either hear in that day’s reading or that is related to the lesson’s content. The selected key words are the focus of pre-teaching before the day’s interactive reading because:
   - They are important for understanding the meaning of the story.
   - They are words that are multidimensional, or have depth of meaning, as opposed to words whose referents are more concrete.
   - They provide opportunities for children to hear and use other words that are connected conceptually with the target words, thus extending children’s oral language and background knowledge.

   Key word picture cards facilitate this instruction. Each card shows a picture that illustrates the word and provides a definition in English, a Spanish translation, a Spanish definition, an example of how the word is used in the text, a partner talk activity, a kinesthetic activity to reinforce the word’s meaning and an opportunity for children to say the letter name and sound for the first letter of the key word.

4. **Interactive Reading.** Lessons One–Four feature shared interactive reading, which employs questioning techniques designed to support children’s language proficiency, comprehension of story content and development of their conceptual knowledge. Depending on the book, the questions typically are asked after teachers read a page or two to the children.

5. **Read-aloud Closure.** Interactive reading activities in Lessons One–Four are followed by read-aloud closure, where teachers ask children questions to help them recap key information from the day’s reading, infer meaning from the text and/or make a prediction about what will happen during the next day’s reading.

6. **Language Development.** Language development instruction provides children with additional time to work with language presented in the texts. During Lessons One and Three, children work on specific language; they learn about word parts, prepositions, plurals, interrogatives or words with multiple meanings. During Lessons Two and Four, teachers use the picture cards to reinforce the meanings of two key words taught earlier. To reinforce these word meanings, teachers lead children in a game of thumbs up/thumbs down to identify examples and non-examples of each key word.
7. Center Time. Lessons One–Four provide center time activities, including additional instruction in topic words, designed to be taught during another part of the school day. Topic words come from a category (e.g., occupations, weather, plants and animals) that is aligned with the theme of each read-aloud book. Grouping words thematically in this way emphasizes the connections that exist among word meanings and helps children develop semantic networks, or associations between a given word and other related words. Topic word cards include a picture of the word, a description of the picture, a definition in English, a translation in Spanish, and partner talk or a kinesthetic activity that reinforces the word’s meaning.

Language development and center time for some COLLTS units feature picture cards for bonus words. Some bonus word cards help develop children’s language and represent prepositions, plurals, numbers and words with multiple meanings. Other bonus word cards help develop children’s background knowledge. Bonus word cards generally include a picture of the word, a definition in English and a translation in Spanish.

**LESSON FIVE**

Each Teacher Guide presents Lesson Five, the culmination of each unit, in a consistent format. Lesson Five concentrates on building foundational skills and writing.

1. **Foundational Skills Development.** Foundational skills development activities build children’s phonological awareness and concepts of print through songs and games that use language from the texts.

2. **Writing Development.** Lesson Five concludes with a shared interactive writing activity connected to the read-aloud text. The writing focuses on genres highlighted in the college and career readiness standards—narrative, argument and informational. Children first co-construct a shared writing piece as a group with the teacher. Then children respond to a writing prompt by drawing a picture and describing and/or writing about it, generally with invented spelling. Each COLLTS unit includes a writing handout, which should be photocopied, preferably in color, for each child.
**COLLTS PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**Teaching Notes**

**Preparation.** It is very important that teachers read each book and review the Teacher Guide and vocabulary cards for each lesson before beginning the lesson with the children. This will build teachers’ familiarity with the instructional strategies and materials and support successful teaching within the time allotted for the lessons.

**Using teacher guides and picture cards.** It is important for teachers to follow the teacher notes and use the teacher talk as written in the Teacher Guide and on the picture cards, because this teacher talk uses a systematic method to develop language proficiency and conceptual understanding.

At the same time, while teachers should follow the Teacher Guides closely, they are encouraged to make additions (not replacements) to the teacher notes and teacher talk to accommodate the needs of the particular children in each group. For example, teachers might add further explanation and additional questions about the books and vocabulary for children who are less proficient, and provide less explanation and fewer questions for children who are more proficient.

**Interactive reading.** Ideally, teachers should work with groups of no more than eight children at a time. The small group size allows children to more easily see the book as it is read aloud and to engage in language building activities.

Teachers should gather children next to them on a carpet and hold the book so children can see the pictures. They should use the Teacher Guide to guide instruction. As they read, they should clarify the meanings of words and phrases in the text by pointing to pictures, gesturing and demonstrating/acting out meanings for words and phrases.

When questioning children, teachers should keep a fast pace to sustain children’s attention. One way to accomplish this is to limit responses to any given question to one or two children—but make sure all children have opportunities to talk during the lesson.

The questions are standards-aligned, requiring children to report on key ideas and details, demonstrate
knowledge of craft and structure, and integrate knowledge and ideas. Questioning techniques (adapted from Vitale and Medland, 2004) also promote conceptual development appropriate for young children, including knowledge of:

- Objects (what something is named)
- Actions (what something does)
- Places (where something is)
- Time (when something happens)
- Parts (what parts something has)
- Features (what features something has)
- Change (how something changes)
- Causes (why something happens)
- Classes and subclasses (what kinds of things something can be)

Anticipated responses in the Teacher Guides display children’s expected answers. Children will use their own words, and might not speak in complete sentences, which is all right. However, teachers should make sure that children’s responses are consistent with the anticipated responses. Teachers should use the Repeat, Rephrase, Elaborate (RRE) strategy described at left when responding to children.

If one child answers a question but children offer to say something related to the topic at hand, teachers should encourage them to chime in. They should not be confined to answering only questions teachers pose.

For children who are just beginning to learn English, if teachers know their home language they should translate challenging sections of the text into the home language and encourage children to respond to questions in their home language. Teachers might repeat what children say in English.

**English-as-a-second-language scaffolding techniques.** These techniques engage ELs and help them understand the text. Examples include:

- **Building background knowledge that is important in understanding the story.** In some instances teachers add relevant background information. In other instances, they ask children questions that draw on their prior knowledge.

- **Using examples, gestures and actions to accompany speech.** Teacher examples and gestures help clarify and reinforce word meanings. Engaging children in actions provides them with a break from passive listening.

- **Modeling tasks or responses before requiring students to undertake them.** These methods clarify for children task expectations and help ensure success.

- **Providing opportunities to develop productive language.** Teachers engage children in choral repetition of teacher and child responses. Abundant opportunities are provided for children to engage in discussions with teachers and peers.
Partner talk routine. Each unit includes partner talk that gives children opportunities to respond to a question or generate ideas related to the text. If children are unfamiliar with partner talk, teachers should explain the steps:

1. Listen to the teacher’s question carefully and think about their answers.
2. Partner 1 answers and Partner 2 listens with “bubbles” in their mouth—quietly.
3. Partner 2 responds while Partner 1 listens with bubbles in their mouth.

Teachers should explain that when children respond to each other, they say something about what their partners said and then add some of their own ideas.

Additional reinforcement. Children need repeated exposures to new words for word meaning acquisition. Teachers should display the picture cards in the classroom for the books they are reading. They should find ways to use the target vocabulary words in different contexts throughout the day (e.g., by asking children questions that involve target words while they are waiting in line).

Home connections. The bilingual family literacy activity handout should be photocopied, preferably in color, and sent home with children before beginning each unit.

We hope you and the children you teach enjoy the COLLTS program!
References


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The Early Childhood Team at AIR’s Center for English Language Learners is led by a nationally renowned expert, Diane August, Ph.D. She is supported by skilled AIR team members who have worked with schools, districts, universities, nonprofits and government agencies to improve outcomes for ELLs.

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