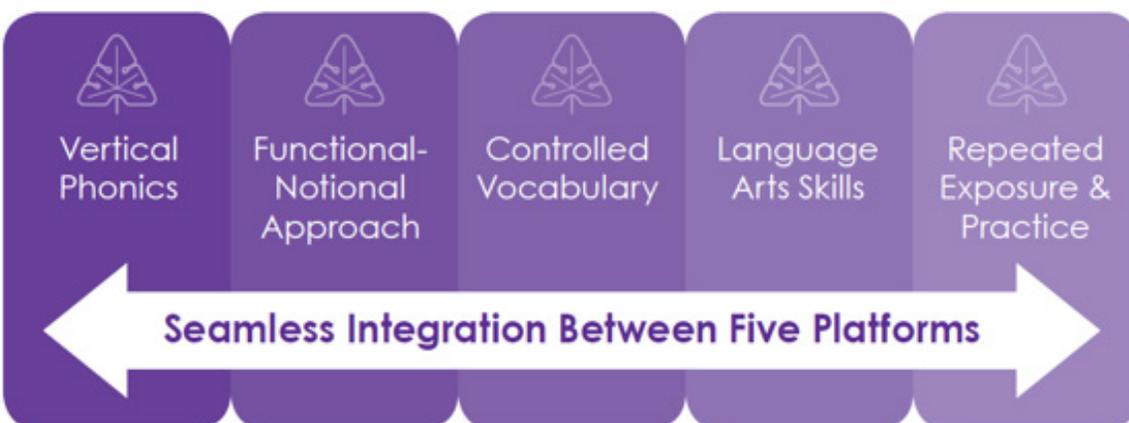


Why GrapeSEED Works: Its Theoretical and Scientific Research Basis

English Language Learners (ELL) are the fastest growing, lowest achieving subgroup of students in US schools today (Olson, 2014). The passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015, recognized this trend by shifting the accountability for ELL success from Title III to Title I. This change means that all schools are now responsible for the education and success of English Learners, not just those with significant non-native English-speaking students.

Research tells us that one of the biggest predictors of success in closing the ELL achievement gap is the development of oral language skills. Because oral language “functions as the foundation for literacy and as the means for learning,” schools should be devoting time and resources for students to develop oral language skills (Fillmore & Snow, 2002). GrapeSEED is an innovative curriculum that provides the path for schools to do just that. It breaks from the traditional grammar-based approach that is heavy in memorization of rules and vocabulary and instead uses a natural language acquisition approach to developing English oral language skills.

GrapeSEED is unique because it was created by building on the foundation of five carefully integrated platforms: **Vertical Phonics**, the **Functional-Notional Approach**, a **Controlled Vocabulary** chosen specifically for children, **Language Arts Skills** that support the development of oral communication ability, and an opportunity for **Repeated Exposure and Practice**. It is the purposeful way in which all five of these platforms are seamlessly integrated that make GrapeSEED the best way for children to develop English oral language skills.



Vertical Phonics

Vertical Phonics teaches students to decode words based on a list of phonograms and their respective sounds. With vertical phonics, students learn all the sounds of a letter or letter combination at one time and in the order of frequency, with those that are used most often presented first. Students learn to associate phonograms with the sounds they represent, and then they learn to read and write by assembling phonograms. Students practice with phonogram flash cards until they get to the point where they automatically associate the phonogram with its sounds, and then they learn to read by recognizing phonograms within text. With practice, students learn to decode unfamiliar words and improve their reading skills.

Functional-Notional Approach

GrapeSEED is based on a communicative approach and a carefully organized, functional-notional framework (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983). This framework was chosen for the GrapeSEED curriculum to assure communicative ability. As such, it also provides a fun, engaging environment in which all academic objectives are taught (i.e., phonemic and phonological awareness, phonics, spelling, and proper syntax). Students learn situational dialogue, correct use of tenses, proper use of irregular verbs, etc., through entertaining Songs, Chants, Poems, Big Books, Action Activities and Stories.

Language acquisition through the functional-notional approach is a simple process that uses the same methods by which infants acquire their first language. Children listen to the expressions of language and associate a sound or a series of sounds with its function (that is, what it accomplishes). They mimic sounds until they learn to reproduce the most basic of necessary functions. They add new notions (meanings/ideas) as they understand them and find opportunities to use them. It is difficult for children to become proficient in English oral language by memorizing lists of words and grammatically structured sentences. Instead, students must learn language function “templates,” hear them used repeatedly in various and proper ways and develop the confidence to personally interchange notions within those templates to express different thoughts.

Controlled Vocabulary

GrapeSEED’s early vocabulary development is child-friendly. The learning process is joyful because it comes in the form of singing, chanting, storytelling, and performing actions. In the course of carrying out these activities, students learn new words and how to use them correctly. Young children require multiple exposures to new words before being able to reproduce them. The GrapeSEED approach recognizes this requirement by limiting the rate at which new words are introduced, restricting vocabulary to those words and expressions that students need to use most often at their current point of learning, and reinforcing words that were introduced earlier. For example, Unit 1 of GrapeSEED includes only 200 unique words, and each successive unit adds no more than 100 words. This approach allows students time to learn language expressions without too much emphasis on learning new vocabulary. There is consensus in research that learners need repeated encounters with words in different contexts to fully learn them (Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998; Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Rott, 1999; Waring & Takaki, 2003).

Controlled Vocabulary Cont'd.

With GrapeSEED students acquire language patterns, expressions, and vocabulary in a variety of contexts including Songs, Stories, Action Activities, Poems, and Big Books. Reinforcement of learning increases with exposures to vocabulary in ways different from the original encounter. Students' interest is raised when they must search for meaning and different uses of the words. Additionally, using the language in unique, meaningful ways helps to embed the language in their memory and moves students closer to becoming fluent speakers at the expressive level. At the expressive level, students independently communicate in English, putting thoughts and words into sentences that make sense.

Language Arts Skills

Reading, spelling, literature, and composition develop students' written and spoken language skills. However, for students learning English, a tremendous amount of language acquisition must take place to provide a foundation for reading and writing. Accordingly, GrapeSEED begins by devoting most classroom teaching time to listening and speaking skills. As these skills develop, the curriculum gives more time to building a bridge to reading and writing.

Repeated Exposure and Practice (REP)

REP materials consist of a student book for each unit, and an interactive app, which includes a media player. These student materials provide additional exposure to oral language that students are learning in the classroom. REP materials extend the students' oral language practice and learning beyond the classroom by providing an opportunity for at-home use. They also provide new content to strengthen and expand student learning at the appropriate level.

Not only does GrapeSEED seamlessly integrate these five platforms, but it does so while utilizing current best practices in Natural Language Acquisition.

Best Practices in Natural Language Acquisition

Linguist and educational researcher Stephen Krashen (1985) used the term "affective filter" to refer to the negative emotional and motivational factors that may interfere with second language acquisition. The interference acts like an invisible filter that slows down, distorts, or hinders language acquisition and production. The interference is caused by anxiety, self-consciousness, boredom, annoyance, alienation, etc. When the affective filter is high, students may feel stressed, self-conscious, bored, or otherwise disengaged. When the affective filter is low, students feel confident, engaged, enthused, and/or excited and, therefore, willing to practice English in the classroom. Affective filters can be raised or lowered because of the classroom environment and interactions with teachers and peers. The best classroom environment is one that encourages using the language and views mistakes as part of the learning progression for students. Interactions between teachers and among peers should be joyful even when mistakes are made.

GrapeSEED Application of Affective Filter Concept

In the GrapeSEED curriculum, a low affective filter is maintained in the following ways:

- GrapeSEED uses engaging materials that capture students' attention and create a safe, joyful atmosphere.
- A language-rich environment is used to stimulate students' use of English.
- GrapeSEED includes activities that engage students in authentic use of meaningful language, language through Stories, Chants, Action Activities, Poems, Big Books, and Songs.
- With GrapeSEED, teachers monitor students' acquisition of language through formative assessments called Quick Checks. With the goal of eliminating a major source of anxiety and stress for students, daily lessons plans provide ample opportunities for listening, speaking, and writing in which the formative assessments can be naturally integrated.
- GrapeSEED allows children to speak or write as they are able and willing to do so. Speaking is voluntary and encouraged. As students progress in a unit, they join in with their peers and chant, sing, answer questions in a natural manner.

Progression of Learning

The goal of GrapeSEED is English language acquisition for the purpose of oral communication. Using the Natural Language Approach, students move from being listeners of English to being speakers of English. At the receptive level, students listen to teachers' speech and watch teachers' gestures trying to understand what is being said. If successful, the teachers' speech and gestures become comprehensible input; that is, input that is understood or received by learners. Once students have this basic understanding of what is being said, they begin the journey from a listener at the receptive level to a speaker at the expressive level of English. GrapeSEED teachers implement systematic movement from receptive to expressive or Progression of Learning to move students from receptive level to expressive level. This movement is similar to the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, defined by Duke and Pearson (2002), as the teachers move from assuming all responsibility for performing a task while the student assumes none, to a situation where students assume all responsibility and the teacher assumes none. In other words, students move from being listeners to being speakers of English.

Summary

By effectively integrating the five critical platforms of Vertical Phonics, the Functional-Notional approach, Controlled Vocabulary chosen specifically for children, Language Arts Activities integrated at the optimal time in learning, and materials for Repeated Exposure and Practice, GrapeSEED provides an ideal learning experience for English Learners. With a focus on materials and strategies that are conducive to maintaining a low affective filter and while integrating a strong progression of learning, GrapeSEED closes the achievement gap for ELL students by providing a solid foundation in English oral language acquisition.

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