

## English Learning via the Effective Media Tool: GrapeSEED

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### Overview

With over 50 years of proven success, GrapeSEED English Language Acquisition is an English-only immersion program that taps into children's natural tendency to use language to communicate. The roots of the Natural Approach date back to the Committee of Twelve creation of the Modern Language Association in 1901 which describes the approach as series of "monologues by teacher" dotted with questions and exchanges with learners all in the foreign language [Krashen, S.D, Terrell, T.D., *The Natural Approach*. Prentice Hall, 1995,(10)]. A branch of this approach, the Audiolingual Method, expanded beginning in 1940s with the need for foreign language courses for military personnel [Ibid, (23)]. Research during 1990s contributing to the research-based design of GrapeSEED are reflected in the GrapeSEED design.

**Design:** GrapeSEED is designed on the Natural Approach to language acquisition, following four key principles: (1) Comprehension precedes production (I.e. listening comprehension precedes speaking ability; (2) Production emerges in stages; (3) Communication goals are organized by topic – not grammatical structure; (4) Language acquisition activities must foster low anxiety in learners. Using a functional-notional framework, or communicative approach, GrapeSEED capitalizes upon the way children think and acquire their first language. The Functional/Notional Approach begins with and is organized around what the speaker wants to communicate, allowing students to use the language for real communication. The term functional refers to language used to accomplish tasks (e.g. seeking information, conversing) and notional refers to language used to communicate concepts (e.g. location, quantities, days of week). In GrapeSEED, vocabulary words are always taught within relevant, real communication contexts and not as lists to be memorized and repeated in unnatural settings. A GrapeSEED classroom is intended to emulate a natural language environment: one in which there is modeling, practice, and language generation for a purpose. In a GrapeSEED setting, students learn to communicate using the English expressions in ways similar to the use of their first language. GrapeSEED is designed to promote and advance communication in students' daily lives.

**System:** Each of the progressive GrapeSEED units uses a variety of GrapeSEED teaching tools to present GrapeSEED content. Using a Teacher Student Interaction delivery method, teachers use engaging, artful instructional tools including teaching cards, vocabulary picture cards, phonics cards, DVDs, and CDs. Students' 'comprehension, communication skills, fluency, and proficiency, increase through repetition and extension activities. Repeated exposure to small portions of a language over a long period of time produces better retention and comprehension than does infrequent exposure to large portions of the language and attempted memorization of grammatical structures. A child's brain processes each method differently and stores the information from each differently. The long-term consistent exposure is preferred for language acquisition. GrapeSEED is designed to create many opportunities throughout the school year for students to hear and use words and expressions over and over in entertaining ways, deepening their comprehension and their verbal skills and language

arts skills. An English-only immersion system eliminates the need for students to mentally formulate the meaning of a word in their first language and then apply that meaning to an English word. Having to do a double-step process means that they are still thinking in their first language, thus hindering their English fluency and pronunciation.

**Approach:** GrapeSEED follows the key principle of natural language acquisition, ensuring that students will learn to hear and recognize English speech—and to process and speak their thoughts—without having to first think in, and then interpret from, their native language. By design, GrapeSEED is a child-centered curriculum based on the functional/notional approach. Children learn their native language naturally, from continuous exposure to their parent's flow of verbal communication. The functional/notional approach focuses on the ways that language is used (functions) and the ideas it communicates (notions).

### **Functional-Notional**

GrapeSEED is based on a carefully organized, functional-notional framework. Functions are the expressions of thought designed to accomplish verbal tasks. Notions are meanings expressed as parts of speech. A student listens to the expressions of language and associates sound with its function. The student mimics sounds until they learn to reproduce the most basic of necessary functions. Over time, students build a "memory bank" of language functions, which they selectively retrieve each time they want to convert thought into expression. Therefore, the more students hear language functions (memorization) and the more they use language functions (expression), the easier and faster they retrieve each language function (fluency) and fill in the blanks with known "notions" (proficiency). Through substantial research, GrapeSEED determined which language functions and notions were the most important and appropriate for early childhood education and then devised a focused and progressive system of presentation to take students from "first word" to fluency. The GrapeSEED curriculum begins with basic functions and notions that meet a student's situational needs, making it easy to learn and produce proper English without studying grammar. Instead, grammar is taught as the student needs to use it.

### **Phonics**

The ability to read is essential to bridging the divide between verbal communication skills and language arts. ELL students experience significant difficulty when crossing that bridge because text is usually filled with numerous unfamiliar words that are meaningless to them. It is difficult for ELL students to decode an unknown word because they have no idea whether they are saying it correctly. GrapeSEED uses a phonics system called "vertical phonics." Vertical phonics was developed as a simple memorization method to give students tools for coding and decoding words based on a list of phonograms and their respective sounds. Vertical phonics is very effective because it is NOT dependent upon vocabulary or word usage. Students simply learn to associate phonograms with the sounds they make, and then they learn to spell and read by assembling and disassembling phonograms.

### **Exposures**

The requirement for becoming proficient in a language is a minimum exposure of 120 minutes daily for at least 2 years. English learners must hear new vocabulary words between 10 and 35 times, and have an opportunity to use them many times in

different contexts. It is therefore essential to provide students with the opportunity to hear and say words and expressions many times in a relatively short period if they are to achieve proficiency. GrapeSEED ensures that students have the opportunity to hear and say new vocabulary words 60 or more times over an extended time period, in many contexts.

### **Assessment**

By frequently asking questions to verify that students have an understanding of what the current activity is about, ongoing informal assessments is achieved. These targeted questions will provide the teacher with the needed information to help him/her determine which areas need extra attention and reinforcement to ensure student learning. To further support this ongoing, informal assessment, each Unit has a set of objectives that will guide overall instruction. Language acquisition is difficult to measure and it is equally difficult to predict with certainty when an element has been covered sufficiently for a student to use it in conversation. However, since acquisition is directly tied to memory, and memory is directly tied to exposure, we can approximate the amount of exposures necessary to achieve the desired learning objectives.

