

Jetta

Jetta is a second grader, currently at the Bridging level of language proficiency. Jetta came from the Philippines when she was in kindergarten and has two older siblings who are close in age and also reached high levels of language proficiency within a few years. Her mom speaks multiple languages and dialects. Although she is not comfortable holding a conversation with teachers in English, she seems to understand everything. Jetta's father always comes along to meetings; he speaks and understands English well and takes great pride in his three daughters' academic progress in the United States.

Jetta has had a strong command of conversation skills in English since she entered school. In kindergarten, she couldn't describe some of the pictures used during instruction, especially if they had anything to do with urban contexts. At times she would forget some words when she lacked a solid frame of reference. However, she quickly learned foundational literacy skills, and by the

end of first grade she was reading alongside her English speakers in her classroom. When she began second grade, her teachers noticed that most activities and lessons do not have to be adapted for Jetta. In fact, her teachers began to challenge her and regularly included her in enrichment groups such as solving complex math problems, working on creative writing assignments, and participating in maker education sessions (<https://makered.org/about/what-is-maker-education/>).

As a second-grade student, Jetta is in a reading group that is slightly above her English-learning peers. She is excited to read and talk about chapter books. She relates to characters and often makes connections to her own life and experiences. Her teachers are focusing on getting Jetta to engage with complex texts and slow down her reading to ask herself higher-order questions.



→ STOP AND REFLECT ←

What strategies could Jetta's teachers use to help her with deeper understanding of complex text? How can they use her creative strengths to improve in areas of literacy?

Francis

Francis is a sixth grader from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He came to the United States speaking three languages: French, the official language of his country and the language in which he received his education so far; Swahili, one of the most common national languages; and some English he picked up when his father was a visiting scholar in Nigeria for a year.

At this point Francis presents as a multilingual speaker, at the Bridging level of English proficiency. He is one of very few students his teachers have ever seen who can translate confidently among three languages, English, French, and Swahili. His teachers often look at him in amazement and affectionately call him a sponge. When he was a new arrival three and a half years ago, he tested at the Developing level of proficiency, and his teachers immediately noticed how much he loved to take risks and experiment with English. Whenever he was unsure of a word in English, he “anglicized his French words,” which meant he tried to say French words he knew with an accentuated

English accent. Although it worked many times, at others times it led to some confusion or even laughter. Francis heartily laughed along at his attempts and explained his strategy, “It’s French, I know, but it almost sounds like English, so why not try?” He participates in class discussions and has lots of friends. His social personality coupled with exceptional oral language skills makes it easy to recognize Francis as an outstanding student. Yet, he needs continued support with academic writing. He likes to explain his thoughts and elaborate orally but is a reluctant writer. When he does commit to writing a more extensive piece, his writing reads the way he speaks. His core subject teachers and his English language development specialist have agreed to approach this challenge in an interdisciplinary, collaborative fashion. They incorporate short, frequent writing tasks that build his disciplinary literacy skills and use more formal, academic word choices and sentence structures as well as multipart assignments that build up to more elaborate, longer pieces.

→ STOP AND REFLECT ←

What assets does Francis bring to the class and school that could be further utilized? How can his strengths be used to address the challenges he is facing with writing?