Instruction of English Learners in Mainstream Classrooms

In the following report, Hanover Research examines the strategies and practices used to instruct English learners at elementary and secondary levels, particularly when these students are included in mainstream classrooms.
Executive Summary

The importance of effective curricula for English Learner (EL) students has grown in accordance with rapid immigration and the increasing number of American school-aged children who speak a language other than English at home. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, the number of ELs enrolled in public schools increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million students from 1997-98 to 2008-09.1 Further, it is projected that EL enrollment in U.S. schools will reach 10 million students by 2015, and that by the year 2025, one quarter of public school students will be English learners.2

Educating this quickly growing population of English learners has posed a significant challenge to educational systems throughout the country. In 2009, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that only 12 percent of fourth grade students with limited English scored “at or above proficient” in mathematics, compared to 42 percent of fourth graders not classified as ELs.3 The increasing presence of English learners in U.S. schools requires that administrators and educators develop methods to address the unique needs of these students and improve both their English language acquisition and overall academic performance.

Methodology

The contents of the following literature review were drawn from scholarly journals, the websites of public elementary and secondary institutions, and various branches of the U.S. Department of Education. As our member requested information regarding the instruction of English learners in traditional, mainstream classrooms, the majority of this report is focused on providing relevant information on this topic.

Report Contents

The following report is divided into two main sections, with the majority of the report containing a review of literature on EL instruction. The literature review contains three major subsections, beginning with a brief review of the various models used to improve EL instruction. Second, we provide an examination of the benefits of including ELs in mainstream class instruction. Third, Hanover details a variety of best practices designed to improve the instruction of EL students in mainstream classes, including the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model.

The second section of the report provides three examples of best practices from elementary and high schools in California with high percentages of students with limited English proficiency. Schools and districts examined are: the Sonoma Valley Unified School District, the Dr. Jessie Hayden Elementary School, and Glendale Unified School District.

Key Findings

- The range of EL programs includes three main classifications, based on the program model and goal: programs can be English-only, designed to develop literacy in English; bilingual programs designed to develop literacy in two languages simultaneously; or bilingual transitional programs designed to support English acquisition and the transfer of EL students into mainstream English classrooms.

- In a recent analysis of state reports conducted by the EPE Research Center, all but two of the 48 reporting states supported English-only instructional programs, while 36 states also provided programs which were taught in English and another language.

- The inclusion of EL students in traditional classroom settings can have many benefits for both these students and native English speakers, as all students benefit from the inclusion of explicit instruction in the development of academic language. Further, this strategy allows students to assimilate and may reduce the development of segregation or racism among student groups.

- Teachers of EL students should: screen for reading problems and monitor student progress; provide intensive small-group reading interventions; provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction; develop the students’ academic English; and schedule regular peer-assisted learning opportunities. Other best practices in EL instruction include providing students with comprehensive input, instructional conversations, explicit phonics instruction, various texts, background knowledge, and interactive and direct approaches of instruction.
Literature Review

The U.S. Department of Education defines English learners as “national-origin-minority students with limited-English proficiency.” Under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, a stronger focus was placed on ensuring the appropriate instruction of EL students in order to improve academic achievement. Although EL educators praise the Act for drawing increased attention to the challenges of English as a Second Language (ESL) education, debate has developed regarding the standards and expectations to which these students should be held. The following section of this report is designed to provide a comprehensive review of literature regarding the various models of EL instruction, as well as provide examples of strategies and best practices for EL education through traditional classroom instruction.

EL Models

School administrators, academics, and educators have developed numerous strategies and programs in an attempt to effectively educate EL students. Depending on the researcher and their methodology, these programs may be classified in a number of ways. Some researchers have classified EL programs into three main types, while others have classified them into six or more. In a 1993 review of ESL and bilingual program models, author Jeanne Rennie of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics breaks down programs as either “ESL” programs, “bilingual” programs, or “other” program models. These program classifications are elaborated in Table 1, below.

Table 1: EL Program Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Types</th>
<th>ESL Programs</th>
<th>Bilingual Program Models</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESL Pull-Out</strong></td>
<td>Generally used in elementary class settings, ESL pull-out programs have students spend time in a mainstream classroom for part of the school day. These students are “pulled out” for a portion of each day to receive English instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ESL Class Period</strong></td>
<td>Generally used in middle school settings, students receive ESL instruction during a regular class period and usually receive course credit for this class. Using this method, students can be grouped for instruction according to their English proficiency.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESL Resource Center</strong></td>
<td>An ESL resource center is a variation of the “pull out” design that has students from several classrooms or schools brought together to a resource center which concentrates ESL resources and staff in one space.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Early-Exit Bilingual Programs</strong></td>
<td>These programs provide initial instruction in students’ native languages for the purposes of clarification and reading intervention. Instruction in the students’ first language is rapidly phased out, often by the first or second grade. These programs are intended to allow students to acquire the skills they need to succeed in English-only classrooms.</td>
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**Late-Exit Programs:** These programs differ from early-exit programs “primarily in the amount and duration that English is used for instruction as well as the length of time students are to participate in each program.” Students in these programs continue to receive 40 percent or more of their instruction in their first language through elementary school and even when they are classified as English language proficient.

**Two-Way Bilingual Programs:** These programs, also called “developmental bilingual programs,” combine language minority students with language majority (English-speaking) students in a classroom, ideally with a 50/50 balance of students. Instruction is provided in both languages. There are a variety of methods for dividing instruction by language: some programs provide instruction in different languages on alternating days, others break up language of instruction by subject. This gives native English speakers and minority language speakers a chance to acquire instruction in a new language while continuing to build on their native language skills.

**Other Program Models**

**Sheltered English or Content-Based Programs:** EL students from different languages are grouped together in a classroom where they receive content-area instruction in English. Teachers in these classes can also use visual aids or gestures to help students understand instruction.

**Structured Immersion Programs:** Only English is used and explicit ESL instruction is not provided. English is taught through content-area instruction, with teachers using the children’s first language primarily to provide clarification regarding English instruction.

Source: Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics

A more recent study of instructional models for English learners by the Center on Instruction categorizes and groups EL programs in a different manner. According to the study, the range of EL programs includes three different main classifications based on the program model and goal: **programs can be English-only**, designed to develop literacy in English; **bilingual programs designed to develop literacy in two languages simultaneously**; or **bilingual transitional programs** designed to support English acquisition and the transfer of EL students into mainstream English classrooms. These three classifications are shown in Table 2, along with associated program types.

**Table 2: EL Program Types, Center on Instruction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model and Goal</th>
<th>Program (Typical Names)</th>
<th>Language(s) of Instruction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English-only:</strong> Developing literacy in English</td>
<td>English Language Development (ELD)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English as a Second Language (Pull-Out)</td>
<td>English; students are served in mainstream classrooms with ESL support provided in the classroom by a specialist.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sheltered English Instruction</td>
<td>English adapted to students’ proficiency levels, supplemented by gestures, visual aids, manipulatives, etc. Native language (L1) support may be provided separately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structured English Immersion</td>
<td>All instruction in English, adapted to students’ proficiency levels. L1 support may be provided separately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics

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A 2010 article on supporting success for EL students published through Education Northwest includes another EL program model: the **“push-in” model**. Using this model, specialists and/or aides enter the mainstream classroom of EL students to work with English learners.7

As our member is primarily interested in the improvement of English-only models for English language instruction in traditional classroom settings, only relevant models will be further examined. English-only models offer all classroom instruction in English, although teachers or bilingual aides may offer some support in the student's native language. Structured immersion programs teach all academic content in English and gradually decrease the frequency and availability of supports in the native language. The core curriculum in such a program includes English language development and academic content instruction focused on the unique needs of EL students.

Sheltered instruction programs also use an English-only curriculum, and allow native language to be used only as a supplement. Teachers adjust the language demands of their instructional models by modifying speech rate and tone, simplifying vocabulary and grammar, repeating key words, using context clues and models, and relating instruction to the students' background knowledge. Instructors may also use demonstrations, visuals, graphic organizers, or cooperative work to engage students. These strategies are further employed to encourage the development of academic English in the classroom.

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http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1039
Given the wide variety of program models used to instruct English learners, it is important to note which models are most commonly used. In a 2009 article for *Education Week*, author Debra Viadero provides a glimpse into commonly used program models. As Viadero notes, a 2009 analysis of 2006-2007 state performance reports by the EPE Research Center found that all but two of the 48 reporting states supported **English-only instructional programs**, while 36 states also provided programs which were taught in English and another language.8

**Benefits of Mainstream Classroom Instruction**

The inclusion of EL students in traditional classroom settings can have many benefits for both EL students and native English speakers. The Center on Instruction notes that the inclusion of explicit instruction in the development of academic language is not only essential to EL students, but also benefits native English speaking students. The Center’s “Practical Guidelines for the Education of English Language Learners” report states that “Targeted, class-wide instruction in this area is warranted to augment the skills of learners in the overall population, and possibly prevent some of the difficulties ELs have in this area.”9

Multiple scholars and educational researchers further believe that English-only instruction in the mainstream classroom setting is most effective in teaching English to EL students. In an article on Scholastic.com, a professor and veteran ELD teacher references Dr. Stephen Krashen’s study of second language acquisition, called “the natural approach.” Krashen argues that the most effective method of learning a new language is through **total immersion**, as this allows EL students to learn English in a manner similar to the way they developed their first language. The article notes the importance of heterogeneous peer groups to surround EL students with native English speakers, and claims that “rather than getting caught up in grammar and the mechanics of language, non-native speakers learn by interacting with English-only models.”10

Finally, including EL students in the traditional classroom setting with native English speakers allows these students to assimilate and may reduce segregation. Native English speakers are challenged to expand their global perceptions and may benefit from the ethnic and cultural diversity of EL students. A 2009 article from *The New York Times* describes one highly diverse high school in Virginia, and the challenges and issues that have arisen from separating EL students

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10 Spillett, Andrea J. “Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners.” Scholastic. http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3747062
for the majority of their courses. Although school administrators argue that these students benefit from their segregated classes, this stark separation of student groups has led to the development of racism and bitterness among both traditional and EL students, resulting in fights and hatred. One Guatemalan student noted that “I am thankful to my teachers because the little bit of English I am able to speak, I speak because of them.” However, she added, “I feel they hold me back by isolating me.”

By addressing the needs of EL students in the mainstream classroom, schools empower all students to appreciate diversity and learn from their peers.

Best Practices for Classroom Instruction

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) has identified the four domains of language that should be addressed in the instruction of EL students, including: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although these four domains naturally interact, TESOL recommends that educators consider each domain separately in order to ensure all four areas of language are addressed in the development of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These four areas are defined as follows:

- **Listening**: Listening is an active skill. By highlighting an assortment of listening tasks across standards, the need to involve students in active listening and purposeful listening skills development becomes clear.
- **Speaking**: English language learners engage in oral communication in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes and in a wide spectrum of settings. As part of oral communication, students are constantly using language in meaningful interaction with others.
- **Reading**: English language learners process, interpret, and evaluate written language, symbols, and text with understanding and fluency. Learning to read in a second language may be enhanced or hindered by students’ level of literacy in their native language. Students who have a strong foundation in reading in their first language bring with them skills that can be readily transferred in the process of learning to read in English.
- **Writing**: English language learners use written communication for a variety of purposes and audiences. Writing can be used to express meaning through drawing, symbols, or text. English language learners may come with writing styles influenced by their home cultures.

Numerous educators, academics, and organizations have developed strategies and methods for effectively and efficiently educating EL students at the primary and secondary levels. A 2007 report from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) offers five recommendations for developing strong instructional strategies that improve the


12 Bulleted points quoted verbatim from: “PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards Framework.”  
learning of EL students. Figure 1 contains a brief summary of each recommendation, with more detailed descriptions of the strategies provided in the subsections that follow.

**Figure 1: Recommendations for Improving Elementary EL Student English Language and Reading Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen for Reading Problems and Monitor Progress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Conduct formative assessments with English learners using English language measures of phonological processing, letter knowledge, and word and text reading. Use these data to identify English learners who require additional instructional support and to monitor their reading progress over time.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Provide Intensive Small-Group Reading Interventions</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Provide focused, intensive small-group interventions for English learners determined to be at risk for reading problems... the interventions should include the five core reading elements (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Explicit, direct instruction should be the primary means of instructional delivery.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Provide Extensive and Varied Vocabulary Instruction</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Provide high-quality vocabulary instruction throughout the day. Teach essential content words in depth. In addition, use instructional time to address the meanings of common words, phrases, and expressions not yet learned.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Develop Academic English</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Ensure that the development of formal or academic English is a key instructional goal for English learners, beginning in the primary grades. Provide curricula and supplemental curricula to accompany core reading and mathematics series to support this goal. Accompany with relevant training and professional development.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<th>Schedule Regular Peer-Assisted Learning Opportunities</th>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Ensure that teachers of English learners devote approximately 90 minutes a week to instructional activities in which pairs of students at different ability levels or different English language proficiencies work together on academic tasks in a structured fashion. These activities should practice and extend material already taught.&quot;</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences

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Screening

As the IES “Practice Guide” report suggests, screening English learners in reading allows teachers to quickly identify students with reading problems and provide targeted intervention methods. It was previously thought that the absence of English oral proficiency prevented ELs from learning to read in English, resulting in many schools waiting until ELs attained a reasonable level of oral proficiency before testing them on reading measures. However, early reading measures can in fact screen English learners at the beginning stages of English language acquisition. Specific language skills are useful for assessment purposes. As the authors of the IES “Practice Guide” note:14

It is very important to assess phonological processing, alphabet knowledge, phonics, and word reading skills. These measures, whether administered at the middle or end of kindergarten (or at the beginning of the first grade) have been shown to accurately predict later reading performance in all areas: word reading, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

Various assessment tools and measures may be implemented in the instruction of different grade levels. For students in kindergarten and first grade, assessment measures which meet the standards for valid screening instruments according to the American Psychological Association include measures of “phonological awareness” such as rhyming and segmenting the phonemes in a word, and measures of “familiarity with the alphabet and the alphabetic principle.” Especially useful are measures of “speed and accuracy in letter naming and phonological recoding.” In first grade, measures of reading single words and “knowledge of basic phonics rules” can be also useful. In the next several grades, measures such as “reading connected text accurately” and oral reading fluency can be valuable.15

The IES report further recommends that schools should consider collecting data on EL students’ progress more than three times a year, depending on available resources. These data should be used in making decisions regarding the modification or intensification of reading and English language development interventions. Schools that have reading performance benchmarks in place for students in the early grades can use the same standards for English learners and native English speakers, adjusting instruction when the progress of these students is not sufficient. While using the same standards for EL students and native speakers may require more intensive intervention for many EL students to reach the benchmarks, the IE report notes that “this early emphasis on strong reading instruction will be helpful in the long run.”16

14 Ibid., p. 10.
15 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
16 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
Interventions

Aside from supporting robust assessment and proactive screening for EL students, the authors of the IES “Practice Guide” also note several aspects of intervention programs for English learners which may have beneficial effects for EL students. Based on several high-quality, randomized controlled trials of three successful reading interventions for struggling English learners, the report concludes that programs which provide direct and explicit instruction of essential reading elements through student participation in small groups demonstrated beneficial effects. In particular, the major instructional components that characterized the successful reading intervention programs included:17

- Students had multiple opportunities to respond to questions.
- Students had multiple opportunities to practice reading words and sentences in small groups or with a peer.
- Students received clear feedback from a teacher when they committed an error.
- Reading intervention programs included sufficient coverage of all areas of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).

The IES “Practice Guide” also recommends that schools institute intervention programs for EL students for at least 30 minutes daily. Students should be divided into small, homogenous groups of three to six students, though it is not necessary for all students in the group to be English learners. Teachers, reading coaches, and other personnel who participate in these programs should be provided with training and ongoing support to ensure the effective implementation of specific instructional or supplemental assistance strategies. This professional training should focus on how to deliver effective instruction generally, regardless of the exact components of a specific program. For example, instructional personnel should be taught techniques such as how to provide proper feedback to students.18

Vocabulary Instruction

Additionally, EL students should be provided with explicit, daily vocabulary instruction. Research indicates that effective vocabulary instruction “includes multiple exposures to target words over several days and across reading, writing, and speaking opportunities.”19 Other research suggests vocabulary instruction can be successful when students are provided with “student-friendly” definitions, regular review of vocabulary, and opportunities to use vocabulary words in a variety of different formats, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

17 Ibid., p. 16.
18 Ibid., p. 17.
19 Ibid.
Academic English

Teaching English learners “academic English” should also be a key goal for instructors of EL students. The IES “Practice Guide” argues that academic English should be taught beginning in the earliest grades. Instruction can build on students’ work with text, as instructors can discuss texts that contain academic English with students. Instruction should also teach EL students to use “specific features of academic language related to tense agreement, plurals, and proper use of adjectives and adverbs” and allow students to practice the use of these concepts in both verbal and written formats.20

The importance of instruction in “academic English” has been highlighted by various researchers, including a 2008 article in American Educator journal, which argued that mastery of academic English is essential for success in the mainstream classroom. The article defined Academic English as follows:21

Academic English involves such things as relating an event or a series of events to someone who was not present, being able to make comparisons between alternatives and justify a choice, knowing different forms and inflections of words and their appropriate use, and possessing and using content-specific vocabulary and modes of expression in different academic disciplines such as mathematics and social studies.

However, as the study noted, academic English requires more time to master, as it is not frequently spoken outside of the classroom. Therefore, it is essential that instructors prioritize the inclusion of such language even at the youngest elementary grade levels in order to allow students to develop this vocabulary over time.

Peer Learning

Finally, the IES report recommends that approximately 90 minutes a week be devoted to peer learning opportunities, in which students can form pairs or small groups to peer tutor each other. This partner work can be an excellent way for students to practice and expand on what a teacher or other instructor has already taught them during other instruction. Partner work is effective for tasks in which a correct or incorrect answer is clearly determinable, though partner work can also be

20 Ibid., p. 25.
successful for tasks in which correct and incorrect responses are harder to determine.\textsuperscript{22}

In a report by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, researchers found that peer-assisted learning opportunities could have positive effects for EL students, but also stressed the importance of cooperative learning, in which students work together in small groups to “maximize their own and each other’s learning.”\textsuperscript{23} Such cooperative learning can be especially productive when groups are small and heterogeneous so that students exhibit a range of English language ability and content knowledge. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction also supports peer learning as an instructional method for ELs, and notes that EL students should have access to English-speaking peers who can assist with vocabulary acquisition and/or with “teacher talk” and adjustment to school culture.\textsuperscript{24}

The University of Southern Florida further argues that interaction with peers allows students to solve problems, develop projects, and discuss class topics. These practices encourage EL students to speak, write, and use critical thinking to fully participate in group work at a level that is not possible in whole-class activities. While EL students may be timid or afraid to speak in class, conversations with a small group of peers allow students to speak with confidence and discuss any questions they may have. EL students are further able to negotiate meaning from the conversations of their native speaker peers, as “research has shown that the focus on accurately conveying meaning through two-way negotiation is a very crucial condition for language development.”\textsuperscript{25}

**Other Best Practices**

Various researchers and experts have identified other practices not addressed in the IES report which may be effective in improving the performance of EL students of different ages. Several of these practices are discussed below.

*Comprehensible Input*

As English learners progress through continued levels of proficiency, they need “comprehensible input” at *all stages* in order to learn English. Dr. Stephen Krashen, who first developed this concept in 1981, argued that “**ELLs learn English when**

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Gersten, Russell, Op. cit., p. 28.
\item \textsuperscript{24} “AYP Handbook - Instructional Strategies that Support the Success of English Language Learners.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. http://dpi.wi.gov/ssos/pdf/ayp_ell.pdf
\end{itemize}
they are presented with messages just above their current proficiency level.”

This statement is further supported in a Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory report on instruction for English learners, which states that “Teachers should scaffold their instruction and assignments and provide multiple representations of concepts.”

When teachers scaffold instruction, they engage in a gradual release of responsibility to their students. A common example of this is the “I do it, we do it, you do it” approach, in which a teacher demonstrates a skill, performs it with the students, and then withdraws to allow the students to practice the skill on their own. Teachers can scaffold instruction for EL students through a variety of strategies. For example, teachers can engage in “modeling,” where they provide students with examples of the work that is requested of them. A second method of scaffolding instruction is “bridging,” in which teachers connect new concepts to topics previously covered to provide students with a familiar subject or theme.

As students gain proficiency in English, they will need fewer instructional modifications, and teachers can use longer sentences and more complex vocabulary.

Educators may also provide “comprehensible instruction” for EL students through the use of multiple representations. Multiple representations allow English learners to “connect words with meaning by utilizing nonverbal clues and representations of ideas, thereby providing opportunities for comprehension without mastery of English.” For example, teachers can use graphic organizers such as diagrams to help students understand a main idea and how ideas are related. Photographs or physical objects can also be used to help students learn words or concepts, or teachers can use various sources of literature to inspire learning. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction notes that for English learners who have reached a second- or third-grade English reading level, illustrated texts or comic books are excellent tools to inspire literacy development. Students can often use the illustrations provided in these materials to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words, thus allowing them to spend less time using dictionaries.

Instructional Conversations

Other strategies for teaching EL students that have demonstrated positive results include cooperative learning and instructional conversations. “Instructional conversations” refer to opportunities in which students explore ideas orally with their teacher and with fellow students. These instructional conversations deal with open-ended questions, instead of questions which have a single answer, in order to promote discussion and language development.

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., p. 9.
Explicit Phonics Instruction

Another key point to consider for schools and districts seeking to implement effective programs for English learners is that what is known about “good instruction and curriculum” in general often holds true for EL students. For example, the National Literacy Panel has found that just like English speakers learning to read English, EL students who are learning to read in English benefit from “explicit teaching of the components of literacy, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing.”

English learners need early, explicit, and intensive phonics and phonological awareness instruction so that they can properly build decoding skills. While English learners do not necessarily have difficulty in acquiring word-reading skills, research has found that as early as kindergarten, it is possible to identify English learners who may be at risk for reading difficulties due to underdeveloped awareness of phonics or difficulty making the link between sounds and symbols. As Goldenberg states, “In all likelihood, English learners are helped by instruction that points out both what does and does not transfer from their home language to English.”

Interactive and Direct Approaches

Another major review of research on the instruction of EL students conducted by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) determined that the most effective methods of instruction for EL students combine interactive and direct approaches. “Interactive” instruction refers to instruction which features “give and take” between teacher and student, where students are allowed opportunities to pursue higher levels of “thinking, reading, and speaking.” Examples of such interactive instruction include brainstorming exercises and editing and/or discussing the writing of the student or the teacher. “Direct” instructional approaches, by contrast, refer to explicit instruction of knowledge or skills, such as “letter-sound associations” or vocabulary terms.

Additionally, proper reading instruction for EL students should include strategies to comprehend challenging texts. In a 2006 report on guidelines for instructing English learners, the Center on Instruction recommended that reading instruction in K-12 classrooms for English learners must give ELs “strategies and knowledge to comprehend and analyze challenging narrative and expository texts.” Effective reading comprehension instruction for English learners needs to be explicit

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 18.
and direct, and should engage students in thinking about their use of comprehension strategies. Effective comprehension instruction must also promote meta-cognition, or a student’s ability to reflect on, evaluate, and direct their own thinking processes. Several techniques can help students to engage in such meta-cognition. For example, teachers can encourage students to make predictions consciously before reading, thus forcing students to reflect on the prediction during and after the reading process. Meta-cognition can also be encouraged by asking students to monitor their understanding and ask questions during reading, or by teaching students to summarize what they have read after reading a text. Instruction on these and other reading comprehension strategies is most effective when it involves a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student.38

Use of Texts

While many of the elements of reading comprehension instruction are relatively constant across grades, the use of texts should be varied according to students’ grade level. In kindergarten through second grade, comprehension instruction should be focused on texts which are read aloud and discussed, as students are still in the process of acquiring word-reading skills. Conversely, in upper elementary school, effective comprehension instruction should be focused on “the academic language and sentence structures that are key to comprehension” and allow students to read a wider variety of texts.39

It is also essential for teachers to “permit and promote primary language supports” in settings where schools or classrooms are unwilling or unable to provide full instructional programs in the students’ primary language. According to research by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, teachers can provide primary language support for EL students in a number of ways. For example, teachers may allow students to read texts in translation or offer translations for individual words. Teachers may also repeat or clarify directions using the students’ primary language or provide EL students with a lesson “preview” in their native language. For example, a classroom instructor may provide EL students with an overview of a play or text they will read during class in the upcoming week so that students will be better prepared to follow the story and participate in the class discussion. However, teachers should be conscious of some potentially negative consequences of over-reliance on primary language supports, such as a tendency on the part of EL students to not attempt to follow along and understand an English discussion, and instead simply wait for an explanation in their primary language.40

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Background Knowledge

Finally, EL teachers should also remember the importance of background knowledge, or information which students have already acquired through education or other experiences. The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory notes that “having background knowledge helps reduce the amount of ‘figuring out’ that students have to do while reading, reducing their cognitive load and freeing them to concentrate more on making overall meaning.” Teachers can help improve the reading comprehension of their students by assisting them in building a schema, or a mental structure that organizes information, so that students can connect new information with background knowledge. Teachers can help students “activate” existing background knowledge by encouraging them to understand the links between texts and their experiences, or texts and earlier readings. Teachers can also help students to build newer background knowledge, for example by providing a demonstration on a subject related to the topic of instruction.

It should be noted that the above list of recommendations is in no way comprehensive. Research and debate continues concerning effective methods and instructional techniques for successfully teaching English learners. Readers may consult cited resources for still more recommendations on effective EL instruction.

The SIOP Model

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol model (SIOP) is one of the most popular models of all-English instruction for English learners, as it can be used in traditional classrooms, subject-area courses, or in two-way or bilingual programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the SIOP model is a “framework for planning and delivering instruction in content areas such as science, history, and mathematics to limited-English proficient students.” Past research studies have indicated that English learners in classes with teachers who received training under the SIOP model performed better than students in control classes. This subsection provides a brief examination of the SIOP model, given its popularity and universal applicability.

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
Components of the SIOP model are generally divided into eight categories, including:

- Lesson preparation
- Building background
- Comprehensive input
- Strategies
- Interaction
- Practice/application
- Lesson delivery
- Review/assessment

As demonstrated in our examination of these eight strategies, below, many of these methods have been previously highlighted as essential practices in the instruction of EL students.

*Lesson Preparation*

Lesson preparation entails the steps for effective teacher preparation for daily classroom activities. Components of lesson preparation include:

- Content Objectives
  - Objectives should be in “student friendly terms” and displayed publicly so that all students are aware of the day’s goals
- Language Objectives
  - Should also be “student friendly” and easily accessible to students
- Meaningful activities
- Curriculum adaptations
- Supplemental materials
- Content concepts for all ages

*Building Background*

In order to facilitate the learning process for EL students, teachers relate material to students’ background and personal experience to better connect students to the lesson. Aside from linking new concepts to background experiences, instructors tie in concepts related to past learning, as well as introduce and teach new vocabulary. In building background, an emphasis should be placed on the instruction of academic vocabulary. Furthermore, teachers should utilize a variety of techniques

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44 “Helping Educators Work Effectively with English Language Learners.” CAL: SIOP. http://www.cal.org/siop/about/index.html
“to provide active involvement, personalize word learning, immerse students in words, and provide repeated exposure to words in more than one context” throughout the SIOP model.46

**Comprehensible Input**

Comprehensible input signifies that teachers ensure the clear articulation of words and sentences. This component of the SIOP model is intended to “make the learning tasks clear and easy to understand.”47 Additional aspects of effective comprehensible input include using visuals, body language, models, film, or other supplementary learning materials to make content accessible. Students may also be provided with supports – such as “prediction guides” or visual aids – to increase comprehension.48

**Strategies**

Strategies included in the SIOP model should: 49

- Provide opportunities for students to utilize the strategies used in class or developed independently;
- Use scaffolding techniques so that students are provided with the appropriate level of support; and
- Use a variety of question types to support higher-level thinking (e.g., predicting, summarizing, and problem-solving).

One example of a strategy used in the SIOP model is allowing students to use graphic organizers so that they can visually organize their learning. Teachers should teach a range of “metacognitive, cognitive, and affective strategies” and provide students with the time they require to develop an understanding of a strategy before they teach a new one.50

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Interaction

In the SIOP model, students are given continual opportunities to engage in peer interaction. Interaction among groups of peers involves four components:51

- Offering frequent opportunities for interaction;
- Using a number of small, pair, and other grouping configurations;
- Using wait time; and
- Engaging native language support when advantageous.

As previously cited research notes, interaction provides EL students with opportunities to develop English fluency by offering directed opportunities to produce language.

Practice/ Application

In order to apply the knowledge they have accumulated, students must be able to practice new skills in a safe environment where they are supported by positive teacher and peer feedback. In addition to providing opportunities for students to apply content and language objectives, the TEA also recommends using interactive activities and manipulatives to demonstrate understanding and integrate the four domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in all activities.52 This allows English learners to connect the abstract concepts they are learning with concrete experiences.

Lesson Delivery

Successful lesson delivery, according to the Education Alliance at Brown University, helps to “maximize students’ understanding, which increases student participation and enhances the quality of students’ work.”53 To these ends, strategies for effective lesson delivery include, but are not limited to:54

- Covering content and language objectives;
- Pacing delivery appropriately; and
- Ensuring active student participation.

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52 Ibid.
**Review/Assessment**

Finally, assessment of EL student performance may be systematically measured by a variety of processes. For example, the Texas Education Agency publishes a review of key components and vocabulary and regular student feedback.55 Teachers follow the “Effective Teaching Cycle for ELs” which is comprised of the following steps: teach a lesson; assess; review key concepts and vocabulary; make adjustments to improve student comprehension; and re-teach as needed.56

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55 Ibid.
EL Instruction: Case Studies

Several states, including Arizona, California and Massachusetts, have adopted English-only education policies that limit the amount and frequency of bilingual services for EL students. The following three examples from the state of California provide a brief review of best practices in EL instruction across all grade levels.

Sonoma Valley Unified School District

The Sonoma Valley Unified School District (SVUSD) is a small district with approximately 58 percent of students qualifying as English learners and 58 percent of students receiving free or reduced priced meals. Four of the five district elementary schools did not meet AYP for multiple years and have been categorized in Program Improvement. In order to address and improve the poor performance of EL students, the district has adopted a new professional development plan, designed to prepare teachers to integrate English learning concepts into traditional classroom content.

The program anticipated that greater levels of professional development and teacher training in the integration of English learning skills into the academic content area of science would result in higher rates of learning for all students, especially ELs. The project narrative provided by the U.S. Department of Education notes that “Effective language instruction enhances the learning of science concepts and effective science instruction enhances language development… Language functions to help students internalize ideas.” These two areas are reciprocally beneficial, as the skills that are essential to scientific inquiry strongly relate to language learning and literacy skills. These include observing, predicting, communicating, classifying, and analyzing.

Ninety percent of SVUSD teachers were provided with professional development, which included workshops, study groups, and leadership development activities. In the professional development program, teachers are challenged to develop knowledge and strategies that include “fundamental ideas about ELD and inquiry-based science, the connections between the two domains, and pedagogical practices that support integration.” Through the workshops, teachers study the various aspects of English language development and the cues – such as visual representations, hands-on activities, or real world objects – that help students build the meaning of words. Multiple practices examined in the previous subsection of this report are cited as essential to this training, including the following student activities:

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58 All information drawn from: “Integrating English Language Development and Science: A Professional Development Approach.” Sonoma Valley Unified School District.
59 Bulleted points quoted verbatim from: Ibid.
Engaging in collaborative learning that supports them in using language to work with their peers and solve problems;

- Using visual representations of ideas to scaffold the association of new language with ideas;
- Providing vocabulary that will be encountered in an academic lesson; and
- Providing structures, such as sentence frames, to support academic description and discussion.

To administer its professional development services, SVUSD partnered with the Exploratorium Institute for Inquiry (IFI). The program has demonstrated relative measures of success, as Hispanic students increased overall performance from basic to proficient levels on the California Standards Test (CST), demonstrating a shrinking of the achievement gap. Further, student scores on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) increased from intermediate to the early advanced proficiency level.

**Dr. Jessie Hayden Elementary School**

Dr. Jessie Hayden Elementary School in Orange County, California was recognized as a Blue Ribbon school by the U.S. Department of Education in 2005. Midway City, where Hayden Elementary is located, is home to the largest population of Vietnamese citizens in the United States. Hayden Elementary accurately reflects this diversity, as 60 percent of students are Vietnamese, 32 percent are Hispanic, and only six percent are white. Thus, over two-thirds of Hayden’s students are classified as EL students.

The district employs a variety of strategies and programs to ensure English learners are appropriately educated and do not fall behind their native English-speaking peers. Principal Linda Reed has explained that “Some teachers in the district think they can’t teach students because the students don’t speak English very well… Our teachers believe the students can learn and so they just teach the curriculum.” English language arts instruction in grades K-2 utilizes Open Court, a research-based phonics program, and provides students with 90-150 minutes of reading and language arts instruction each day. Students take controlled reading books home for practice, and track their progress on the Accelerated Reader program.

Instruction in other academic content areas reflects the best practices outlined in the previous subsections of this report. Math instruction is closely related to state standards, and contains frequent review sessions to allow students to revisit concepts taught in previous lessons. For science instruction, the district has developed a ScienceWorks Consortium to “stimulate, preserve, and inspire children’s natural

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Students at Hayden Elementary outperformed the California state average on the state criterion-referenced tests in 2004, with all students and the subcategory of low-income students both strongly outperforming state averages. Hayden further achieved an Academic Performance Index above the AYP target goal, and is in the top 10 percent of similar schools in the state of California.

**Glendale Unified School District**

Clark Magnet High School in Glendale, California was recognized as a Blue Ribbon school in 2006. Only 15 percent of the high school’s students speak English as their native language, and over 40 percent of students are classified as socio-economically disadvantaged. These statistics posed extreme challenges for school administrators and teachers in the attempt to appropriately educate all students and ensure EL students gained a working knowledge of English.

EL students may enroll in mainstream courses or courses specifically designed for students with limited English proficiency based on their English skills. Traditional classes are instructed by teachers who employ “specially designed academic instruction in English,” and instructors are trained to identify and assist students demonstrating language needs. All EL students are supervised by the ELD specialist, who is responsible for developing “catch up plans” for individual students requiring additional support. The school further supports an English Learner Advisory Committee, which discusses any issues related to the education of the EL student population.

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As with the previously examined schools, Clark teachers use **project-based learning** to improve student participation, encourage discussion, and develop deeper thinking. The last 30 minutes of each school day are reserved for an “Enrichment Period,” which provides EL students with additional tutoring time. The school notes that this additional support time, along with professional development for staff and strong support from the school district, have allowed Clark to excel in educating EL students. Figure 2 shows the significant difference between the scores of EL students at Clark and the total EL population in the state of California.

**Figure 2: Clark EL Student Achievement vs. State EL Student Achievement**

Source: U.S. Department of Education
Project Evaluation Form

Hanover Research is committed to providing a work product that meets or exceeds member expectations. In keeping with that goal, we would like to hear your opinions regarding our reports. Feedback is critically important and serves as the strongest mechanism by which we tailor our research to your organization. When you have had a chance to evaluate this report, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire.


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