

Effective Instruction for English Learners

Margarita Calderón, Robert Slavin, and Marta Sánchez

Summary

The fastest-growing student population in U.S. schools today is children of immigrants, half of whom do not speak English fluently and are thus labeled English learners. Although the federal government requires school districts to provide services to English learners, it offers states no policies to follow in identifying, assessing, placing, or instructing them. Margarita Calderón, Robert Slavin, and Marta Sánchez identify the elements of effective instruction and review a variety of successful program models.

During 2007–08, more than 5.3 million English learners made up 10.6 percent of the nation’s K–12 public school enrollment. Wide and persistent achievement disparities between these English learners and English-proficient students show clearly, say the authors, that schools must address the language, literacy, and academic needs of English learners more effectively.

Researchers have fiercely debated the merits of bilingual and English-only reading instruction. In elementary schools, English learners commonly receive thirty minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction but attend general education classes for the rest of the day, usually with teachers who are unprepared to teach them. Though English learners have strikingly diverse levels of skills, in high school they are typically lumped together, with one teacher to address their widely varying needs. These in-school factors contribute to the achievement disparities.

Based on the studies presented here, Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez assert that the quality of instruction is what matters most in educating English learners. They highlight comprehensive reform models, as well as individual components of these models: school structures and leadership; language and literacy instruction; integration of language, literacy, and content instruction in secondary schools; cooperative learning; professional development; parent and family support teams; tutoring; and monitoring implementation and outcomes.

As larger numbers of English learners reach America’s schools, K–12 general education teachers are discovering the need to learn how to teach these students. Schools must improve the skills of all educators through comprehensive professional development—an ambitious but necessary undertaking that requires appropriate funding.

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During the 1960s, public schools in the United States served a student population that was about 80 percent white. Today, non-Hispanic whites make up 57 percent of the student population¹ and are a minority in most large urban districts. The fastest-growing student population in U.S. schools is children of immigrants, half of whom do not speak English well enough to be considered fluent English speakers. In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), held that school districts must take affirmative steps to help students overcome language barriers so that they can participate meaningfully in each school district's programs. The U.S. government requires every school district that has more than 5 percent national-origin minority children with no or limited English proficiency to "take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students."² To that end, school districts across the country determine whether children are Limited English Proficient (LEP),³ a federal designation for children whose English proficiency is too limited to allow them to benefit fully from instruction in English.⁴ Such students are also called English language learners and English learners.⁵ But although the federal government requires districts to provide services to English learners, it offers states no policies to follow in identifying, assessing, placing, or instructing them. States, therefore, vary widely in the policies and practices by which they identify and assess English learners for placing within and exiting from instructional programs.

For the past sixty years, educators' discussions of English language learning have focused on whether instructors should use

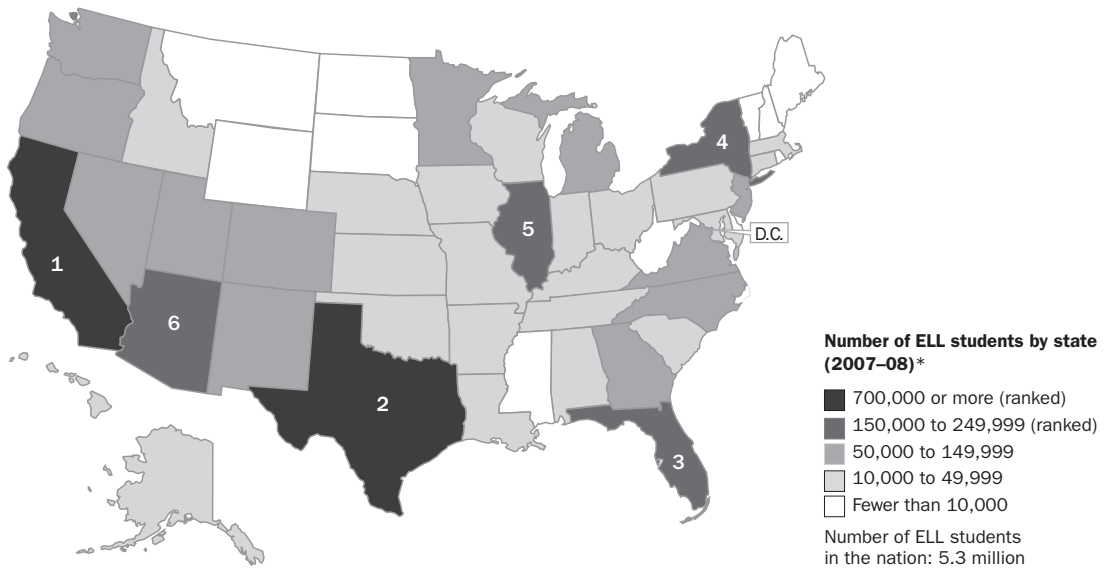
English or students' native languages to enable nonnative English speakers to become proficient in English and in core content. We focus instead on identifying the elements of effective instruction, regardless of the language in which instruction is carried out. We set our discussion in the larger framework of whole-school reform as the basis of all students' academic success and examine eight characteristics of instruction for English learners that have generated successful outcomes for students in elementary, middle, and high schools.

A Fast-Growing Population

Mid-decade data reveal rapid growth in the U.S. English learner population.⁶ During the 2007–08 school year, English learners represented 10.6 percent of the K–12 public school enrollment, or more than 5.3 million students.⁷ In fact, English learners are the fastest-growing segment of the student population, with their growth highest in grades seven through twelve.⁸ Figures 1 and 2 show the dramatic increases in English learner populations, particularly in states that are not accustomed to serving their instructional needs. These students have lower academic performance and lower graduation rates than native white students and have affected the nation's overall educational attainment.⁹

About 79 percent of English learners in the United States speak Spanish as their native language; much lower shares speak Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Korean. About 80 percent of second-generation immigrant children, who by definition are native-born U.S. citizens, are what schools call long-term English learners. These students, who have been in U.S. schools since kindergarten, are still classified as limited English proficient when they reach middle or high school—suggesting strongly that preschool

Figure 1. Number of English Language Learners (ELL) by State, 2007–08



Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, State Title III Information System. © 2010 Migration Policy Institute. Note: Numbers on the map show the top-ranked states by numbers of ELL students. There were no states with ELL populations between 250,000 and 700,000.

*Includes ELLs from Puerto Rico and other outlying territories.

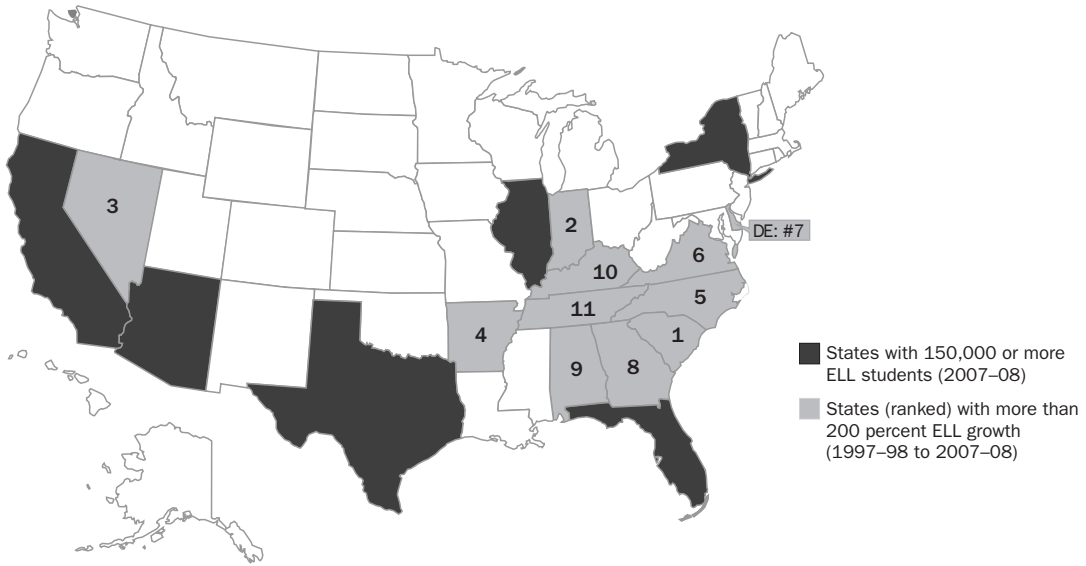
and elementary programs are not adequately addressing the needs of English learners.¹⁰

Alongside the long-term English learners, whose language and literacy gaps must be addressed if they are to graduate from high school, exist other categories of English learners with very different needs. One group is in special education. A second group was inappropriately reclassified as general education students after passing their district's language test. As the National Literacy Panel has found, assessments used to gauge language-minority students' language proficiency and to make placement and reclassification decisions are inadequate in most respects.¹¹ And students who are not proficient in four essential domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—but are no longer classified as LEP continue to struggle with reading and academic coursework. Migrant

English learners, another group of English learners, are mainly U.S.-born but lack proficiency in English because their education is interrupted as their parents follow the crops from state to state. Transnational English learners return to their native countries for a year or a portion of the year and attend school in those countries. Some students classified as English learners move repeatedly within the same city, often returning to the same school during the school year, as their parents struggle to meet rent payments.

The remaining 20–30 percent of English learners are recent immigrants, but they too are a heterogeneous population. Some are highly schooled and know more geometry, geography, and science than mainstream twelfth graders and primarily need to learn the academic English language vocabulary, not core concepts. Other newcomers, called

Figure 2. States with Large and Rapidly Growing Populations of English Language Learners (ELL)



Note: Numbers on the map show the top-ranked states in ELL growth. There were no states with the size of ELL population between 250,000 and 700,000.

Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, State Title III Information System. © 2010 Migration Policy Institute.

students with interrupted formal education because their schooling was interrupted for two years or more before coming to the United States, have both literacy and subject matter gaps. Refugee children who have never attended school are yet another group of English learners whose academic needs go well beyond language learning, particularly if they enter U.S. schools in the upper grades.¹²

In spite of their striking diversity, English learners in secondary schools have typically been lumped into the same English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, with one teacher addressing the needs of students with dramatically varied English proficiency, reading, and writing skills. In elementary schools, a common practice is to pull out English learners across grades K–5 for thirty minutes of ESL instruction. For the remainder of the day these English learners attend regular classes in a sink-or-swim instructional

situation, usually with teachers who are unprepared to teach them.¹³

Researchers consistently find wide and persistent achievement disparities between English learners and English-proficient students—gaps that we believe signal a need for increased teacher and staff preparation, whole-school commitment to the English learner population, and home-school linkages and collaborations,¹⁴ so that schools can more effectively address these students’ language, literacy, and core content needs. Such institutional preparedness is critical to addressing the achievement gaps seen across various age groups and academic content areas—gaps that start early and persist even among second- and third-generation children of some immigrant groups.¹⁵ By disaggregating data and following English learner student achievement by cohorts, researchers can pinpoint more precisely the gaps in academic

outcomes between English learners and other student groups.¹⁶ Closing the achievement gaps means, in part, closing similar gaps in teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development. Today most English learners spend their time in regular classrooms with teachers who feel that they are ill-prepared to meet their needs.

There is considerable controversy among policy makers, researchers, and educators about how best to ensure the language, reading, and academic success of English learners. Among the many aspects of instruction important to guarantee that success, for years one has dominated all others: What is the appropriate role of the native language in instructing English language learners?¹⁷ Since the 1960s, most U.S. schools with large populations of Spanish-speaking English learners have implemented various types of programs to instruct English learners in Spanish and in English. Some schools teach in Chinese and English or other native languages and English. Schools that serve students from many language backgrounds have implemented ESL programs, which teach only in English.

Recent federal policies have had the effect of restricting the time that can be spent teaching children in their native language. Federal accountability policies and diminishing funds make it impractical for local education agencies and schools to support native language instruction. Although federal policy has neither endorsed nor opposed instruction in the primary language, in recent years policy changes have discouraged bilingual education. Among researchers, the debate between advocates of bilingual and English-only reading instruction has been fierce, and ideology has often trumped evidence on both sides of the debate.¹⁸

Based on the findings from recent studies, as described in this article, what matters most in educating English learners is the quality of instruction. In our discussion of effective instruction, we highlight comprehensive reform models, as well as individual components of these models. Certain salient features or elements of quality instruction for English learners have been found to be effective from preschool to twelfth grades in either dual-language programs or carefully structured English programs. We discuss the following eight elements: school structures and leadership; language and literacy instruction; integration of language, literacy, and content instruction in secondary schools; cooperative learning; professional development; parent and family support teams; tutoring; and monitoring implementation and outcomes.

Methods

In reviewing research on programs and practices to improve reading and language outcomes for English learners, we emphasize those that have been found to be effective. The research that we review meets several criteria.¹⁹ First, it primarily involves English learners. Second, it compares outcomes for students taught using a given program or practice (the treatment group) with outcomes for students taught using alternative approaches (the control group). Assignment to the treatment group can be randomized or matched, but treatment and control students must be within a half standard deviation of each other on pretests given before treatments began. Third, measures of outcomes are in English if the goal of the program is English language or reading, in other languages if these are the goal. Finally, we use mainly long-term studies where they are available and exclude evaluations that take place over a period of less than twelve weeks. Programs and practices emphasized are

drawn primarily from reviews of research by Robert Slavin and Margarita Calderón, Alan Cheung and Robert Slavin, Diane August and Timothy Shanahan, Diane August and others, and from more recent research.²⁰

Comprehensive School Reform: Success for All

One approach to improving outcomes for English learners and other language minority students is to reform the entire school, providing innovative approaches to curriculum, instruction, assessment, provisions for struggling students, professional development, and other elements.²¹ Numerous comprehensive school reform models for students in general were developed and evaluated during the 1980s and 1990s, and some have shown strong evidence of effectiveness overall.²² One of the most widely studied comprehensive school reform approaches, Success for All (SFA), has been adapted for English learners, and these adaptations too have been evaluated.²³ In an analysis of school restructuring that meets the needs of all students, the National Research Council concluded that SFA has been the subject of the most research on effectiveness.²⁴

Now used in about 1,000 schools in forty-seven states, SFA provides schools with well-structured curriculum materials emphasizing systematic phonics in grades K–1, cooperative learning, and direct instruction in comprehension and vocabulary skills in all grades. It also provides extensive professional development and coaching for teachers, frequent assessment and regrouping, and one-to-one or small-group tutoring for children who are struggling to learn to read. Family support programs attend to issues such as parent involvement, attendance, and behavior. A full-time facilitator helps all teachers implement the model.

For English learners, SFA has two variations. One is a Spanish bilingual program, *Éxito Para Todos*, which teaches reading in Spanish in grades K–2 and then transitions students to English instruction beginning in second or third grade. The other is a Structured English Immersion (SEI) adaptation, which teaches all children in English with appropriate supports, such as vocabulary-development strategies linked to the words introduced in children's reading texts. Since 2004, SFA has provided video content shown on DVDs or interactive whiteboards to model key vocabulary content for English learners.²⁵

A National Institutes of Health longitudinal study found positive effects of SFA for English learners and other language-minority children.²⁶ A California study by Meg Livingston Asensio and John Flaherty²⁷ found substantial positive effects both for English learners initially taught in Spanish and for those taught only in English, compared with control groups. A study in Houston of the bilingual adaptation of SFA found positive effects on English and Spanish reading measures.²⁸ A Philadelphia study found positive effects of an SEI adaptation of SFA with Cambodian-speaking students.²⁹

An Arizona study by Steven Ross, Lana Smith, and John Nunnery³⁰ found that English learners who were taught with the SEI adaptation of SFA gained more than control students on English measures, and a Texas statewide evaluation found positive effects for Hispanic students in 111 SFA schools across the state, compared with other Texas schools serving Hispanic children. An evaluation of SFA with the video content just noted found strong positive effects on English reading.³¹ A national three-year longitudinal randomized evaluation of SFA found positive reading

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effects for all students, but gains were greatest among a group of Hispanic students.³²

The strong and consistent positive effects of SFA for English learners and other language-minority students show that comprehensive school reforms made up of many elements of effective practice can make substantial differences in children's outcomes. We discuss other studies that have provided evidence on the application of individual elements of SFA in following sections. A report by the Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, for example, offered a comprehensive agenda similar to SFA for re-engineering America's middle and high schools to support all learners.³³

Elements of Effective Practice for English Learners

Along with strong evidence for the effectiveness of comprehensive school reforms for English learners, solid evidence of effectiveness also exists for many individual elements of the comprehensive approaches.

School Structures and Leadership

Schools that serve English learners and other language-minority children, especially in regions where most families are struggling

economically, provide children their best and perhaps only chance to achieve economic security. Such schools cannot leave anything to chance. They must be organized to capitalize on all of their assets, including students' and parents' aspirations, staff professionalism and care, and other intangibles as well as financial and physical assets. Effective programs contain four structural elements.

The first element is constant collection and use of ongoing formative data on learning, teaching, attendance, behavior, and other important intermediate outcomes. School staffs must always be aware of which students are succeeding and failing and why. They must also have well-conceived plans to prevent or resolve problems and must monitor progress over time to learn whether attempted solutions are having their intended effects.³⁴

The second element is a strong focus on professional development for all staff members, including administrators. Staff development must be intensive and ongoing, with many opportunities for both peer and expert coaching and information exchange among implementers of a given component as listed here, either in professional discussions in a school or with professionals from other schools.

The third element is standards of behavior and effective strategies for classroom and school management. It may involve specific programs, such as Consistency Management-Cooperative Discipline,³⁵ or training in methods for organizing, motivating, and guiding students in class and in the school as a whole.³⁶

The final element is leadership focused on building a "high-reliability organization" that shares information widely, monitors the

quality of teaching and learning carefully, and holds all staff responsible for progress toward shared goals.³⁷

Language and Literacy Development

A key indicator of verbal ability (which has long been the basis of grade-level tests, college entrance exams, and selection tests for graduate school) is vocabulary knowledge.³⁸ Recent years have seen a renewed interest in teaching vocabulary among educators at all levels, largely because of worrisome literacy among sixth to twelfth graders, English learners in particular.

As many studies attest, vocabulary is the first important step toward and, indeed, the foundation of, school success for English learners and other students. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice*, a compendium put together by experts from diverse fields, forms the basis of the vocabulary instruction that has helped many English learners and struggling students accelerate their English learning and academic success.³⁹

Researchers have found that young children in poverty hear, on average, about 615 words an hour; middle-class children, about 1,251; and children of professionals, about 2,153.⁴⁰ The average six-year-old has a vocabulary of approximately 8,000 words.⁴¹ A child's vocabulary in kindergarten and first grade is a significant predictor of his reading comprehension in the middle and secondary grades;⁴² it also predicts future reading difficulties.⁴³

Vocabulary instruction contributes to overall effective instruction by developing students' phonological awareness⁴⁴ and reading comprehension.⁴⁵ For English learners, vocabulary instruction must not only be long term and comprehensive,⁴⁶ but also be taught

explicitly in all subject areas before, during, and after reading.⁴⁷ Students benefit the most when teachers provide rich and varied language experiences; teach individual words, noun phrases, and idioms; teach word-learning strategies, such as looking for prefixes and root words; and foster word consciousness that makes clear the importance of learning as many words as possible throughout the day.⁴⁸

Explicit vocabulary instruction entails frequent exposure to a word in multiple forms; ensuring understanding of meaning(s); providing examples of its use in phrases, idioms, and usual contexts; ensuring proper pronun-

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ciation, spelling, and word parts; and, when possible, teaching its cognates, or a false cognate, in the child's primary language.

Reading instruction is quite complex, and all the more so because students use multiple cognitive processes in reading. Over the years, the focus of reading instruction has varied, shifting from decoding, to fluency, and, recently, to comprehension and word meaning. But reading entails more than decoding or fluency or comprehension. It makes use of multiple skills: oral language proficiency,

phonological processing, working memory, word-level skills (decoding, spelling), and text-level skills, such as scanning, skimming, summarizing, and making inferences.⁴⁹

The National Literacy Panel for Language-Minority Children and Youth found clear benefits from instruction that covers the key components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension).⁵⁰ Other research emphasizes the need for instructional practices to integrate oral language proficiency, reading, and writing. For English learners, for whom oral language proficiency plays an important role in acquiring reading skills, active participation by children during teacher “read-alouds” contributes to vocabulary growth.⁵¹ For example, open-ended questions and multiple exposure to words during shared reading help children know how to use those words.⁵² Because oral language, reading, and writing draw on common knowledge and cognitive processes, improving students’ writing skills should result in improved reading skills.⁵³ To help English learners catch up when they fall short in core knowledge, all disciplines must practice vocabulary knowledge, reading, and writing instruction.⁵⁴

To become good readers—to be able to recognize words and comprehend a text simultaneously—English learners require practice at both decoding and fluency.⁵⁵ Teachers must thus give equal attention to decoding, or word recognition, and comprehension. Once English learners can recognize words automatically (automaticity), the focus can shift to overall meaning. For mainstream students, word recognition simply means being able to read a word aloud. For English learners, it also means

being able to recognize the word’s meaning. Comprehension calls for knowing 85 to 90 percent of the words in a sentence, a question, a paragraph, or any text.⁵⁶ For English learners, therefore, instruction time and attention must be divided among word meaning, decoding, grammatical structures, background knowledge, and comprehension skills. Because English learners begin school, or arrive in the later grades, with a wide variety of educational and literacy backgrounds, schools must assess all language and literacy domains and identify areas where a student might need an additional intervention such as tutoring. Despite these unique demands in instructing second-language writers, however, research on how to teach writing to English learners is scarce. Because no single approach to writing instruction will meet the needs of all students, much more research is needed on interventions that work.⁵⁷

Studies also shed light on the strategic use of the primary language during instruction. For example, in programs where English is the primary language of instruction for literacy development, it is critical for teachers to show respect for the student’s primary language and home culture. Just as language and identity are interwoven, so are culture and identity. Strategies that send the message that this student’s primary language and culture are valuable might include encouraging the student to use his native language with language peers during activities to build comprehension but to use the new words in English once the task is understood; pairing a new student with a same-language buddy who is familiar with the classroom and school; and using a variety of cooperative learning strategies to create a safe context to practice the new language with peers.

Integrating Language, Literacy, and Content for Adolescent Readers

Recent research has identified instructional strategies that seem to be effective with struggling adolescent readers.⁵⁸ National panels and committees concur that these instructional approaches enhance language, reading, and writing skills.⁵⁹ They recommend that math, science, and social studies teachers provide explicit vocabulary instruction for each content area; provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction; use text-based cooperative learning to allow for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretations and for application of new vocabulary; ensure that each subject area involves intensive writing and use of new vocabulary; use technology to support instruction and learning; and conduct ongoing formative assessment of the students.

English learners in middle and high school present schools with a particular problem. Not only are these students expected to master complex course content, often with minimal background knowledge or preparation, but also they have fewer years to master the English language. Because the number of English learners is large and growing, all teachers must understand the factors that affect their language, reading, and content development and be prepared to address them. As of 2000, however, although 41 percent of teachers had taught English learners, only 13 percent had received any specialized training.⁶⁰

According to the Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, literacy instruction should focus on attacking multisyllabic and technical terms; assessing and providing repeated reading practice if necessary; expanding the emphasis on academic and technical vocabulary, polysemy

(multiple-meaning words), etymology, and morphological analysis. Content-area reading should involve explicit instruction in discourse structures, word use, and grammar needed for math, science, social studies, and language arts.

Beyond classroom instruction, the Carnegie panel recommends conducting literacy assessments to assign struggling students to appropriate interventions and to monitor progress. Assessments would cover the primary language as well as English to identify appropriate instruction for recent arrivals. Based on the assessments, the school administration and teams of teachers would meet to respond to variability among English learners.

The panel sets forth an integrated curriculum for English language learners that includes a detailed developmental sequence for learning the English language within all subject areas, as well as traditional social English. In many states, however, the standards that guide the school or district curriculum for English learners differ little from those designed for native English speakers, and give little careful attention to second-language development. English learners need their own ladders of progressions. Unless concrete supports, direction, and examples are attached to the newly approved Common Core State Standards, these standards and the new generation of assessments and new materials to be published alongside them will likely double or triple the long-term English learner population.⁶¹

A more complex instructional challenge for middle and high schools is the curriculum and structural adjustments necessary to help adolescent newcomers with interrupted formal education or barely any education. New York City schools have

implemented one program, Reading Instructional Goals for Older Readers (RIGOR), that offers promise here by providing newcomers more time for learning through before- and after-school sessions, Saturday academies, and summer school sessions.⁶² The program consists of intensive English-language instruction through science and social studies instruction. For students with low literacy skills in their own language, RIGOR is offered in both Spanish and English during the day. The extended day schedules, with native language support, help accelerate language, literacy, and knowledge of science and social studies simultaneously. Refugees and students with interrupted formal education accelerated their learning more efficiently in the extended day programs than they did in unstructured English as a Second

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Language classes, remedial courses, or basal readers. Therefore, the central district office now offers grants to allow schools to implement these programs. For district offices to provide additional resources to schools demonstrates how much they value addressing the most needy of secondary school English learners.

Unlike students with interrupted formal education, highly schooled newcomers have substantial background knowledge and mainly need intensive accelerated English programs.

They need a different curriculum design to help them move quickly into general education classes.

Cooperative Learning

In cooperative learning, teachers plan for students to work in small groups to help one another learn. Cooperative learning offers a wide variety of approaches, but the most effective are those in which students work in mixed-ability groups of four, have regular opportunities to teach each other after the teacher has introduced a lesson, and are recognized based on the learning of all members of the group.⁶³

Cooperative learning has been found effective for elementary and secondary students across a broad range of subjects, and it is especially so for English learners who are learning to operate in English. The cooperative activities give them regular opportunities to discuss the content and to use the language of the school in a safe context. Many English learners are shy or reluctant to speak up in class for fear of being laughed at, but in a small cooperative group they can speak and learn from their friends and classmates.

Research has clearly shown the effectiveness of structured cooperative methods for English learners. Margarita Calderón, Rachel Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Robert Slavin⁶⁴ evaluated a program in El Paso, Texas, called Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, or BCIRC, among English learners who were transitioning from Spanish to English instruction in grades two through four. Compared with a control group of similar English learners, those in BCIRC had significantly higher scores on both English and Spanish reading measures. A second El Paso study, by Calderón and others,⁶⁵ evaluated a similar bilingual program among third

graders that emphasized cooperative learning and systematic phonics. Once again, students in the cooperative learning classes scored higher than controls on English as well as Spanish reading measures.

Other studies of programs using cooperative learning that have documented positive effects include Spanish-to-English transition approaches evaluated by Maria Carlo, Diane August, and Catherine Snow and by Bill Saunders and Claude Goldenberg.⁶⁶ A first-grade pair learning method called PALS (Peer Assisted Learning Strategies) helps Hispanic students to improve their reading performance.⁶⁷ A great deal of research has shown that SFA and Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL), both of which have a strong focus on cooperative learning, improve student achievement.⁶⁸

Professional Development

According to reviews of professional development studies, teachers who work with English learners found professional development most helpful when it provided opportunities for hands-on practice with teaching techniques readily applicable in their classrooms, in-class demonstrations with their own or a colleague's students, and personalized coaching.⁶⁹

Rafael Lara-Alecio and his colleagues⁷⁰ found that ongoing biweekly professional development improved kindergarten teachers' work with English learners. The teachers became more effective in the classroom after receiving training in eight specific strategies: enhanced instruction via planning, student engagement, vocabulary building and fluency, oral language development, literacy development, reading comprehension, parental support and involvement, and reflective practice through portfolio development. Fuhui Tong

and her colleagues⁷¹ attributed the acceleration of English learners' oral language development to well-planned professional development (at least six hours a month for teachers, and three hours a month for paraprofessionals).

The SFA professional development model begins with two days of workshops that group teachers by grade levels so that trainers can address instructional approaches specific to their grade levels. Trainers then provide each teacher three or more follow-up coaching days. Coaches and administrators participate along with teachers and also receive their own sessions on how to make sure that the implementation of all this training is of high quality.

The ExC-ELL professional development begins with five days of workshops on how to teach vocabulary, reading, writing, and subject matter, followed by extensive coaching by the ExC-ELL trainers. The school's principals and the literacy coaches who work with the teachers shadow the trainers initially to practice conducting classroom observations and giving technical feedback to help teachers reflect and set goals. The observations by trainers, coaches, principals, other teachers, and central district administrators also help to validate data on teacher and student performance. Observers collect the data with the ExC-ELL observation protocol using a digital pen and paper that can be docked on a computer to generate reports on the students' use of vocabulary, reading, and writing skills; the effectiveness of cooperative learning; and classroom management. The protocol can generate reports for individual classrooms, for subject area clusters or learning communities, after each observation, or as benchmark assessments or end-of-year reports.

Researchers, school administrators, and policy makers have neglected for too long the relationship between professional development and student learning. Designing, measuring, and providing effective professional development is often a complex undertaking for schools and school districts. Yet, without knowing how and how well professional development is implemented in each classroom, they cannot determine its impact on student learning.⁷² Schools need to establish clear causal links between their particular teachers' needs, their teacher professional development offerings, and their student outcomes. Measures of student outcomes on standardized achievement scores alone will not give a clear picture of the complex ways in which professional development is linked with teacher effectiveness and student learning. Direct observation of teacher knowledge and skills, as well as the delivery of those skills in the classroom, makes those links clearer. Several recent studies have examined how observational protocols that measure various domains of teaching have affected student outcomes.⁷³ These observational protocols offer a vehicle for exploring the transfer of skills and knowledge from teacher preparation offerings into their active teaching repertoire, as well as how their teaching affects students, in order to evaluate teachers' effectiveness.⁷⁴

Parent and Family Support

Parent support for children's success in school is always important,⁷⁵ but it is especially so for the children of immigrants. English learners are likely to have to balance cultural, linguistic, and social differences between home and school, so open communication and positive relationships across the home-school divide are crucial.⁷⁶ Schools serving many English learners need to focus on aspects of children's development beyond those directly affected by classroom

teaching. SFA schools, for example, establish "Solutions Teams" to organize resources and energies to deal with these issues.⁷⁷

Parents need to feel that they play a meaningful role in school decisions that affect them and their children. Schools may, for example, establish a Building Advisory Team to review schoolwide discipline policies, suggest opportunities for parent and community involvement, review homework guidelines, and suggest ways to improve school climate. The team should ensure openness to participation by parents who do not speak English.

Schools should also create many opportunities for parents and other community members to volunteer in the school. Volunteer opportunities may include tutoring, homework help, or other academic assistance, as well as helping with sports, cultural programs, food service, and fundraising. Parents should feel that they are welcome at school and that their issues are important. Many SFA schools offer parents a "Second Cup of Coffee" to give them a chance to sit with a parent aide or other staff member to discuss ways to help their children at home, as well as parenting issues such as behavior management and finances. These programs should be offered in the parents' home language if at all possible. Other communications may be informal. School staffs may be encouraged to look for opportunities to speak with parents as they drop their children off in the morning, for example, or to share good news about individual children. Good news phone calls, texts, or e-mail can make a big difference in how parents feel about the school.

Children need to be in school on time every day. Effective programs for attendance collect information early in the day and act on it immediately, so that lateness and missing

days of school never come to be seen as normal. Providing awards for children who improve their attendance can also help build supportive relationships between home and school. Despite every effort at preventing absences and tardiness, problems will arise with individual children. School staffs should formulate generic intervention plans for predictable types of problems, such as truancy, and then modify them for individual circumstances if necessary.

In essence, SFA schools try to negotiate opportunities to provide health, mental health, and social services at the school or in close coordination with the school. For example, school staff should know how to help families with issues such as health problems, counseling, immigration problems, food, shelter, and adult literacy. Ideally these services can be provided at the school site, but if not, school staffs should still help make sure that families have easy access to services that affect children.

Tutoring and Other Interventions for Struggling Readers

When children are struggling in reading, the most effective intervention is one-to-one tutoring by well-trained, certified teachers,⁷⁸ and the most effective tutors use structured phonetic programs.⁷⁹ Evaluations of the most widely used phonetic program, Reading Recovery, show that it is successful with English learners,⁸⁰ but other phonetic programs have had more positive effects on the reading of struggling students. Reading Rescue, for example, was found successful with Spanish-dominant urban first graders. Two other such programs are Early Steps and Targeted Reading Instruction.⁸¹

Well-trained, well-supervised paraprofessionals using structured, phonetic models

can also be effective tutors, as shown by programs called Sound Partners and Howard Street Tutoring.⁸² Well-structured volunteer programs, such as Book Buddies,⁸³ can be effective as well. Several effective tutoring programs—such as Corrective Reading; Read, Write, and Type; and SHIP—use structured, phonetic methods with small groups of two to six students.⁸⁴

Researchers have also provided strong evidence that effective whole-class programs can prevent struggling readers from falling behind. Proven forms of cooperative learning, such as Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition and its bilingual version (BCIRC), and PALS, discussed earlier, are particularly effective for students in the bottom quarter of their classes.⁸⁵ Cooperative learning can be as effective as one-to-one tutoring, but it should be seen as a way to reduce the numbers of children who will need tutoring, not as a substitute.

Monitoring Implementation and Outcomes

Educators seeking to improve instruction for English learners must pay close attention not only to the student outcomes a program achieves but also to how well each element of the program is implemented. In many comprehensive reform models, an on-site facilitator or coach helps implement the program and keep track of intermediate outcomes. In SFA, for example, a full-time facilitator helps all staff implement all aspects of the program, observes teachers and gives them feedback, and enables teachers of the same program component to share ideas and answer each others' questions. Facilitators work with the school staff to use online data tools to monitor continuously the reading progress of all students and to help use the data to identify students who may need tutoring, may have

problems at home, or may need to accelerate to higher-level instruction. No program is self-implementing; a model is only as good as the care with which it is implemented. Maintaining high-quality, adaptive, and effective innovations takes constant attention and

Cooperative learning can be as effective as one-to-one tutoring, but it should be seen as a way to reduce the numbers of children who will need tutoring, not as a substitute.

effort. Technology-based observation protocols and performance assessment tools help teachers, the professionals who coach them, and the administrators who oversee them continually gauge the learning progressions of teachers and students.

The Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy⁸⁶ also offers a comprehensive approach for re-engineering America's middle and high schools to prepare all students, including English learners, for college and careers. The approach has seven components. First, the school culture is organized for learning. Quality instruction is the central task that organizes everyone's work. Teachers feel personal responsibility, and the principals support their efforts. Second, student achievement data drives decisions about instruction, scheduling, and interventions. Staff receive supports to gather and analyze real-time data from formative assessments to inform instruction and to target remediation.

Third, time, energy, and materials are focused on areas deemed critical for raising student achievement. Fourth, instructional leadership is strong. Principals work in partnership with subject area specialists, literacy coaches, and other professional development experts to ensure implementation of critical programs. Fifth, all content teachers participate willingly in professional development because they recognize the need to improve their work and the importance of literacy skills to content-area learning. Sixth, targeted interventions are used for struggling readers and writers. Multitiered instruction helps students build the skills and strategies needed for successes. A logical progression of interventions is available, to which learners are assigned based on their needs. Finally, all content-area classes are permeated by a strong literacy focus. Teachers offer reading and writing instruction in all core classes (math, science, language arts, social studies).

To complement high-quality instruction by ESL teachers and all content teachers, schoolwide teams supported by knowledgeable administrators meet regularly to align curriculum, plan cross-content projects, address student concerns, and monitor English learner progress. Finally, counselors who understand and are able to respond to the challenges facing English learners are available to students.⁸⁷

An Elementary School Case. Project English Language and Literacy Acquisition (ELLA), a five-year randomized trial study funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, restructured a transitional bilingual education program in which students were moving toward instruction in English alone.⁸⁸ The experimental component of the program resembled a dual-language, or developmental, program, in which two languages are developed all

through K–12. The two languages, Spanish and English, were separated in instruction, expectations were high during instruction in both languages, and the interventions included targeted and deliberate higher-order questions.

Within that structure, the home-school connection was clear. Family activities were aligned with the school curriculum and were sent home in two languages. The teachers and paraprofessionals received monthly professional development and created a professional portfolio to enable them to reflect on their practice and improve their teaching skills.⁸⁹

The leadership in the district directed and supported the restructuring. It used the program evaluation to compare the enhanced bilingual program model with the district's other bilingual programs by using classroom observations of the teachers in both with a specified observation tool.⁹⁰

A Middle and High School Case. ExC-ELL was a five-year effort funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to design and test a professional development model for core content teachers who have English learners in their classrooms. The aim was to integrate the teaching of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills into all math, science, social science, and language arts classes. The foundation of instruction was cooperative learning for language and literacy development, performance assessments, and the use of an online observation protocol to capture teacher and student learning progressions.

The professional development consisted of three phases. An initial fifty-hour training session was followed by yearlong coaching by experts, administrators, and peers, and

then by the creation of learning communities. In that third phase all content, ESL, and sheltered instruction teachers (those who specialize in teaching core content to English learners), as well as their coaches and administrators, worked together to re-engineer the way they addressed the diversity of English learners, struggling readers, and general education students. The instructional focus described above for literacy and the eight basic principles for creating an effective context for teaching reading to adolescents were the targets of the study and school restructuring. After two years, the reading scores of English learners improved 45 percent, meaning that the majority of long-term English learners, students with interrupted formal education, special education students, and newcomers attained or exceeded grade level in reading. In turn, the experimental schools advanced from low-performing to high-performing in two years.⁹¹

Concluding Remarks

Experts on teacher education, language-minority children, and general reading and writing instruction agree that effective teaching is critical to student learning. Concomitantly, other research shows that certain school structures facilitate effective teaching.⁹² In short, effective instruction is nested in effective school structures.

As larger numbers of English learners and struggling readers reach America's middle and high schools, more and more of the nation's teachers are discovering that they need to learn how to teach these students effectively. Elementary teachers recognize that they must provide more challenging and meaningful instruction to prepare their students for secondary schools. Mainstream content teachers in middle and high schools, having seen the many English learners spilling out of ESL or

sheltered classrooms and into theirs, want to do what is right for all students. What these teachers need today from the nation's schools are the structures and support that will enable them to move in these directions. Without better support for teachers, we cannot expect better student outcomes.

As states begin debating adoption of core standards, we can be certain that accountability to all students, including English learners, will increase. These standards will surely affect the curriculum, the way students are assessed, and how teacher and administrator accountability is measured and documented. Language development progressions, reading comprehension, and writing targets will be developed along with the accountability measures for the core subjects. English learners will no longer be assessed only for oral language; they will be tested for each discipline.

Although reforms and interventions are needed in every grade, there are compelling reasons to begin in the early grades. It is easier to build a strong foundation with quality programs in preschool to the third

grade, when children's needs are much more manageable and teachers are imparting new skills rather than remediating gaps. Teachers' knowledge about how children acquire languages, their grasp of when and how to maximize the use of the primary language spoken in the home, and their modeling of academic discourse in the first and second languages can have important effects on how children learn language and content.⁹³

The comprehensive studies that we have reviewed show that successful schools work simultaneously on student formative assessments, school structures, professional development, teacher support, and effective instruction for English learners. The implications for school districts, state departments of education, and the U.S. Department of Education are that forthcoming regulations need to focus on whole-school interventions for English learners. Schools need time to stop and to retool all educators through comprehensive professional development—an ambitious undertaking that will require appropriate funding.

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