

# AccELerate!

The quarterly newsletter of the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition

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## Director's Welcome Jack Levy

Welcome to AccELerate! The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) hopes you will enjoy our inaugural issue. AccELerate is one of the many communication vehicles employed by NCELA to serve the field of ELL education. Published quarterly, it will feature articles and information on the following five NCELA content strands:

1. English language proficiency standards and assessments: Resources and services related to the systems of standards that

guide instruction for and assessment of English language development.

2. Inclusion in academic assessment systems: Resources and services related to alternate assessments and accommodation options for ELLs taking academic content assessments

3. Accountability: Resources and services related to systems for evaluating the effectiveness of programs that serve ELLs, including information on Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs)

4. Professional Development and

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Support for Curriculum and Instruction: Resources and services related to best practices for instruction of ELLs and the provision of professional development and technical assistance for state and local educators

5. Administration of Title III programs: Resources and services related to the interpretation and

implementation of Title III program requirements

Along with our website, web conferences, regional and national conferences, roundtable reports and resource guides, AccELLerate is a means for educators to share ELL ideas and strategies. Feel free to submit descriptions of innovative programs; tips for teachers, principals, program administrators

or university faculty; and announcements of new publications, other resources and upcoming meetings of regional or national interest. Welcome!

*Jack Levy is the Director of the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.*

## Teaching Academic Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension In Grades 6–12

Margarita Espino Calderón

### Who Are the Adolescent ELLs?

English Language Learners (ELLs) are a large portion of the 58% of Hispanics who do not graduate from high school. They are also from many other language backgrounds with similar experiences. About 80%–91% of ELLs in middle and high schools were born in the United States. They are second- or third-generation immigrants and have been in U. S. schools since kindergarten (Tienda, 2007; NAEP, 2005). These Long-Term English Language Learners (LT-ELLs) or ELLs in special education classes (SE-ELLs) have a fair command of oral English proficiency but may lack the academic discourse or reading comprehension skills to master subject matter.

The majority of the 9% to 20% newcomers or refugees entering U.S. schools at the middle and high school each year are likely to be Students with Interrupted Formal

Education (SIFE). The New York State Department of Education defines SIFE as “Students with Interrupted Formal Education in grades 4 through 12 who had 2 or more years of interrupted schooling in their country.” Other newcomers may have high literacy skills and subject matter knowledge. Their math, geography, literature, and science background usually surpasses that of their U.S. counterparts. Unfortunately, in spite of this wide range, ELLs and newcomers are usually placed in the same ESL or sheltered English classes in high schools. The reading skills of ELLs in special education and Students with Interrupted Formal Education in 6th through 12th grades range from

pre-literate to a 4th grade level in English, and even in their primary language. These ELLs are learning English at the same time they are studying core content through English. They must perform double the work of native speakers to keep up, and at the same time be accountable for AYP, according to the Carnegie Panel on Adolescent ELL Literacy (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2006). This panel and the National Literacy Panel (August et al., 2007) also found that without reading comprehension, students cannot learn math, science, social studies and literature. At the same time, schools must be accountable for their progress

### New from NCELA

NCELA has recently published several resources detailing the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students in the United States. According to the 2005-06 Consolidated State Performance Reports and the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data, approximately 5,074,572 LEP students attended PK-12 schools in the United States, an increase of 57.2% over the previous 10-year period and approximately 10.3% of the nation's total school enrollment. To see each state's individualized LEP growth maps and a number of FAQ's detailing these and other data, visit the NCELA Web site!

and engage in data-driven reform. When we interviewed students throughout the country, some shared that they had been placed in special education classes since their early grades. Many felt they had spent too much time in Spanish reading programs and never learned the basic reading skills in English. Others felt they were immersed in English without any support and neither learned to read in Spanish nor in English.

The diversity of adolescent English language learners requires different types of quality educational approaches and interventions. It's not only a matter of oral language proficiency, but also the levels and skills they have in reading, writing, and subject matter knowledge that should determine their placement. More important, their success requires thoughtful, coordinated, systemic change in all schools.

**Research Findings**

Recent research in middle and high schools in New York, Hawai'i and Alaska Villages is showing ways to accelerate the development of academic language, literacy, and content domain knowledge as an integrated comprehensive program approach (Calderón, 2007a, b). There are three important components: 1) an initial five-day institute and refresher workshops throughout the year as

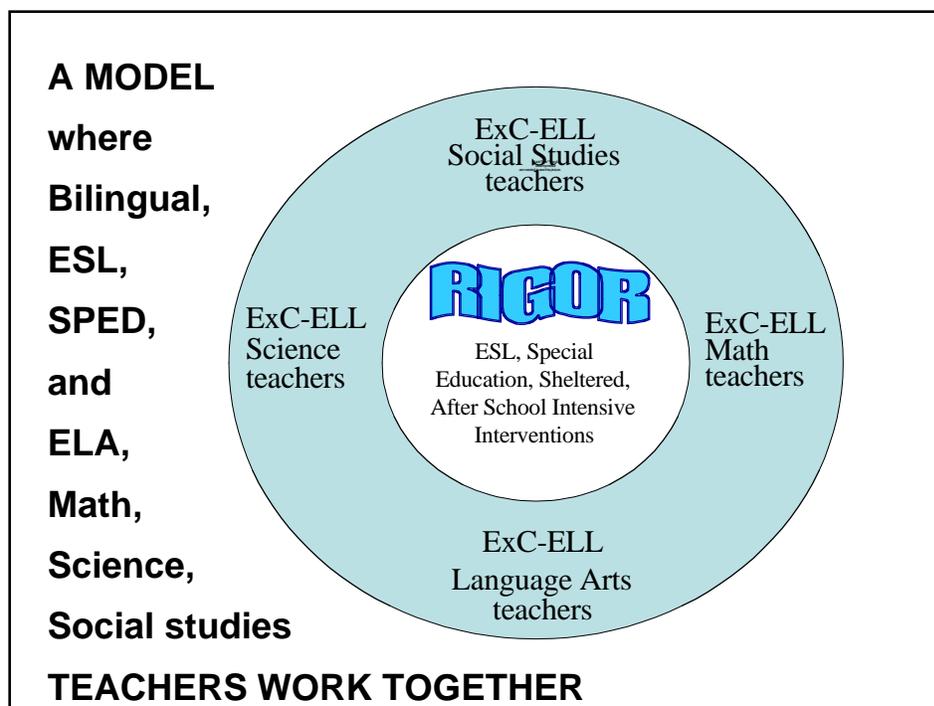
necessary; 2) a comprehensive set of instructional strategies for explicitly teaching the eight basic reading comprehension strategies, grammar, discourse strategies, writing mechanics for different content genres, and vocabulary before, during and after reading; 3) teacher reflection through systematic coaching by the trainers using an observation protocol that generates teacher and student progress on all components; and 4) a well-prepared in-house support system.

The components espouse these principles:

- Rigorous instruction accompanied by high expectations and beliefs that even the frailest ELLs can handle rigor.
- Accountability designed to measure student learning and quality instructional delivery.
- Support systems and learning communities for students,

teachers, coaches, and site-administrators.

Our longitudinal set of studies has shown that schools can address the diversity of ELLs by aligning the four components (Calderón, 2007a; 2007b; 2008; in press; Calderón & Wasden, in press). For example, teachers of SIFE and SE-ELL students are offered a professional development and curriculum program called RIGOR (Reading Instructional Goals for Older Readers). Leveled science and social studies books were developed that teach tier 1, 2, and 3 vocabulary, phonics, and basic reading comprehension skills, along with science and social studies topics aligned to standards. These lessons help SIFE get ready for their mainstream classes by learning the essential concepts at their English proficiency and literacy levels. This program was used



by ESL, bilingual, special education, and literacy teachers, as well as in after school and Saturday academies interventions.

Concomitantly, the middle and high schools' math, science, social studies, and language arts teachers go through an intensive institute on how to use ExC-ELL's (Expediting Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners). ExC-ELL's instructional strategies enhance vocabulary and teach comprehension strategies and writing mechanics for working with grade-level content texts. Both RIGOR and ExC-ELL teachers meet in Teachers' Learning Communities to plan, discuss student progress, solve problems, and share creative ways of teaching vocabulary, reading or writing across the content areas. They plan semantic awareness activities throughout the school, and share peer-coaching strategies.

### *Structural Systemic Changes*

The 5-day institutes are offered in English and in Spanish for schools that have dual language programs at the secondary level. If schools have literacy coaches or content coaches, they also participate in the professional development program, with additional

sessions on how to coach teachers. Principals and/or assistant principals also participate, particularly in the sessions on using the ExC-ELL Observation Protocol and how to use its technology. Schools must institute Teachers' Learning Communities (TLCs) to ensure continuous instructional improvement. Teachers are invited to present at workshops for other schools and at conferences on the successful strategies they are implementing in their classrooms. This leads to a Trainer of Trainers Institute to build capacity at the local level.

Students in the experimental groups have consistently outperformed control cohorts. Moreover, the schools made AYP and improved dramatically. The schools in New York received an "A" on their report card. At the Washington Heights Middle School MS 319, 75% of the students are making school year progress in literacy and 90 of the students in the lower quartile are making one-year progress. This includes ELLs who are first-time takers of literacy exams. MS 319 was recognized this year as the top middle school in the city, and the second place school from all middle and elementary schools in the city. Scores have increased by 12 points over last year, due to the progress of ELLs and other subgroups. The high school in Kaua'i has sustained its excellent status for two years after

these programs. ELLs in special education classes, as compared to control groups, have 6 to 9 months gains in reading above their counterparts.

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## Academic Language: Clarifying Terms

Robin Scarcella

One of the most important yet difficult challenges for English learners is developing academic language. As they enter grades 4–12, these learners face enormous difficulties in trying to learn grade-level content knowledge while at the same time they are still acquiring academic language. This is because academic language requires a greater mastery of a more extensive range of linguistic features than everyday, ordinary language. Although they, along with their monolingual English-speaking peers, lack subject-specific curriculum content language, unlike many of their English-speaking peers, English learners also lack knowledge of the features of foundational English. In addition to their linguistic gaps, they often lack the background knowledge that would help them acquire subject-specific curriculum language and the strategies and skills they need to learn it. What follows is an outline of (i) the types of language and (ii) cognitive knowledge, skills and strategies English learners require to do well in content classes in the upper grades (Grades 4-12):

### Types of Language

#### *Foundational Knowledge of English*

In order to acquire the subject-specific curriculum content language of the upper grades

(4-12), learners must have a strong foundation in the basics of the English language. They must know, for instance, how to read and write basic types of text, how to produce key types of sentences, how to use verb tense to describe events, and how to discuss a wide range of topics. They must have mastered basic vocabulary, consisting of an enormous number of commonly known and high frequency words. They must have deep knowledge of these words, knowing their meanings as well as their use in speech and writing. The foundational knowledge of English has often been under-emphasized in instruction. It certainly is not the equivalent of playground language or social, informal language and it cannot simply be “picked up” by watching television. In the upper grades, it is best delivered by specialists in intensive language programs—who deliberately and systematically provide students with direct, student-friendly instruction, expose students to targeted language features, give students guided practice in using the features, review the features, and assess students’ knowledge of these features, e.g., by providing instructional feedback and other formative assessments.

#### *School Navigational Language*

In addition, English learners must know *school navigational language*, the classroom management language that students need to understand and participate in instruction. Here are some examples: *I want you all to*

*line up at the door for recess. Raise your hand if you know the answer. Put your books away and take out a pencil. Time’s up!*

#### *Essential Academic Language*

In order to learn the subject-specific curriculum content language of the upper grades (4-12), it is helpful if learners have already developed essential academic language, consisting of the basic features of academic language that are used *across all content areas*. Academic words (such as *analyze* and *determine*), complex grammatical structures (such as relative clauses and conditionals), and discourse features characterizing cohesion (such as the use of related parts of speech *success*, *successful*, *succeed* and demonstrative pronouns *this* and *these*), for instance, characterize social studies texts, English texts, and science texts and have been identified as features of general academic language by corpus linguists such as Douglas Biber and Averil Coxhead. Note that children are taught many of the features of this general, academic language in the lower grades, and that English learners who have not learned these features through instruction are at a disadvantage when learning content-specific curriculum language in content classes.

Note that English learners do not need to learn subject-

specific content language prior to receiving content instruction. Their knowledge of the three types of language outlined above and cognitive knowledge, skills and strategies help them to learn this subject-specific content language along with their monolingual English-speaking peers.

### Types of Cognitive Knowledge, Skills and Strategies

#### *Background Knowledge*

English learners need background knowledge to participate in and benefit from content instruction. Language and content are interrelated. Most students learn curriculum-specific content language and curriculum-specific content knowledge in their content classes, and English learners and others certainly should not be taught this language and knowledge before taking content classes. The appropriate place for students to learn complex knowledge about mammals is in a science course, not in an ESL class. However, English learners will be disadvantaged in their science courses if they have not first learned a lot of basic conceptual knowledge concerning animals and their characteristics before they participate in science courses in which students are supposed to have already learned about the characteristics of animals. This more basic knowledge (and the associated language associated with this knowledge), which is generally taught in earlier grades, can

help English learners to figure out new content-specific language and communicate in their content classes.

#### *Metalinguistic Awareness*

In addition, English learners benefit from metalinguistic awareness, the ability to think about the language that they read (or hear) critically and edit their writing and revise their oral presentations. This ability could help figure out content-specific language and use it to access content lessons.

#### *Cognitive Strategies and Skills*

Also, some English learners may lack good study strategies and skills. They may not realize how important it is to arrive at class on time, with pens and pencils in hand, rested, and ready to pay attention and work hard. They may not have effective ways to learn, remember and recall new vocabulary or set learning goals and accomplish them.

In addition to the above, researchers concur that learning academic language requires concerted effort and hard work, sustained over time. Much of this work will not be fun, though it can be satisfying. Language learning, particularly *academic* language learning, is difficult and can be stressful. Why lie to students and tell them that academic language learning will be anxiety-free at all times? Why not prepare them for the difficulty—much as a football coach who tells students, *“The work is going to be hard and will take a lot of effort on your part. You are going to have to practice everyday and dedicate a lot of time to*

*achieve success. You may suffer, but you will be stronger. You have the capability. With diligence, you will succeed.”*

English learners do not have to be cushioned all the time. They are bright and can cope with the anxiety associated with hard work and effort. They will never be able to succeed in school if they are unable to handle the stress of academia or take difficult tests. The best way to motivate English learners may be to help them attain immediate success and then scaffold this success over time, emphasizing the students' role in working hard, building on their strengths and addressing their weaknesses.

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## Issues in the classification system for English language learners

Jamal Abedi

Recent legislation—including the No Child Left Behind Act—mandates inclusion of all students into the national and state assessments, including English language learner (ELL) students. While this mandate brings highly needed attention to the education of ELL students, the academic needs of these students cannot be addressed unless these students are properly identified. Thus, the most important prerequisite to providing appropriate instruction and fair and valid assessment for ELL students is accurate identification. Inappropriate classification decisions may place students who are at a higher level of English proficiency into remedial or special education programs and may deprive less-proficient students of appropriate assessment and accelerated instruction. Furthermore, delay in the reclassification of students who have reached English proficiency may deny them the opportunity to achieve the higher level of content knowledge, while premature reclassification may cause ELL students to miss the opportunity to benefit from the needed specialized academic language instructional services and be placed at greater risk for educational failure.

Education and assessment communities have raised concerns over the validity of the current ELL classification system.

Lack of a strong theoretical foundation and issues regarding the quality of criteria used for such classification are among these concerns. For example, while the ELL classification system must be based on students' proficiency in academic English, the results of research do not show English proficiency as a major determinant in the ELL classification system. Many different factors may influence ELL classification decisions. The most common sources of criteria used across the nation in ELL classification include information derived from a Home Language Survey (HLS), and from English language proficiency and achievement test scores. Unfortunately, there are concerns over the validity of these sources of information. For example, the authenticity of the data from the HLS is questionable due to the language of the HLS, questions and concerns of parents regarding the quality of education their children will receive as a result, and citizenship issues. There are also concerns over the measurement quality of many of the English language proficiency (ELP) tests that were developed prior to the implementation of NCLB because they are based on different theories and cover different ELP content standards. While the newly developed ELP tests present a more valid picture of student's level of academic English proficiency, there are still issues on the content and

technical aspects of these assessments that need to be resolved.

There are also concerns over the appropriateness of standardized achievement test scores as valid criteria for ELL classification. Nuisance variables, such as the unnecessary linguistic complexity of test items, may be a source of measurement error affecting the reliability of these tests for ELL students. Linguistic complexity as a source of construct-irrelevant variance may also threaten the validity of these tests for ELL students.

There are also other contributing factors to inconsistent classification, some of which are unrelated to a student's level of English proficiency, such as ethnicity and schools' Title I status. The impact of such variables on ELL classification decisions may explain large discrepancies in ELL classification within and between states across the nation. This is a complex situation and a simple solution may not work. Adding more tests to the states already burdened by testing requirements may not be realistic. Conversely, current methods, using existing data for ELL classification, may not produce valid and reliable classification outcomes.

A model that utilizes multiple sources of data available in the

state assessment system may be considered. Given the limitations of the Home Language Survey (HLS) data for ELL identification, such data can be used primarily as a starting point. The HLS data can then be augmented by two other sources of data that are also part of the state assessment record, the English proficiency and standardized achievement test scores—after adjusting for linguistic and cultural sources of biases in these assessments.

To control for over-identification of ELL students based on HLS data, English language proficiency and standardized achievement test data on reading/language arts can be used, once again, after controlling for different sources of biases. A student who is identified as bilingual (based on the HLS data) and scores higher than the state-approved cutscore on the state ELP assessment can be removed from the list of potential ELL students. Students' standardized achievement test data (if available) may be used as the next precautionary step. Other relevant variables, such as

student's proficiency in L1 and number of years in the U.S., can also be used in the multiple-measure system. For example, academic achievement test scores would help to improve the quality of the ELL classification system when tests are more accessible for ELL students linguistically and culturally. More importantly, a valid classification system should be based on the theory of second language acquisition and should clearly identify the alignment of the level of academic language proficiency that is necessary for ELL students to function in academic environments where both instruction and assessment are offered only in English. Improving the validity of the classification system requires both valid criteria and people who are knowledgeable about assessment and classification systems for ELL students to implement the system. The best and the most comprehensive system of ELL classification may not produce desirable outcomes if the implementation phase is not done properly. Therefore, it is imperative for those who are involved in the classification of ELL students to

receive proper training and education about these students.

In sum, issues concerning the classification of ELL students need urgent attention. While existing classification system can be improved by using multiple sources of data from existing state assessment, the outcome of the current classification system must be applied with extreme caution. Meanwhile, serious efforts should be undertaken to improve the quality and validity of ELL classification system by introducing a more defensible model and incorporating more reliable and valid criteria for such classifications.

*Jamal Abedi is a professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis. For a more detailed discussion of ELL classification system see Abedi, J. (2008). Classification system for English language learners: Issues and recommendations. Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 27(3).*



### askNCELA's Inbox

In which we highlight the answers to commonly asked questions that appear in our email inbox.

#### Where can I get the latest numbers and percentages on English language learners?

NCELA's Web site presents a variety of numerical data regarding ELLs. The most recent figures, through 2006, can be found in *The Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Title III State Formula Grant Program: School Years 2004–06* ([http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/oela/Biennial\\_Report\\_0406.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/oela/Biennial_Report_0406.pdf)). The Biennial Report contains the latest publicly available data regarding the numbers of ELLs enrolled in the nations' public schools, the types of instructional programs implemented by states, and percentages of students meeting Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). The report also contains detailed profiles for each state, which include information on AMAOs, native language testing, and teacher capacity and professional development.

[askNCELA@gwu.edu](mailto:askNCELA@gwu.edu) is NCELA's email helpline. We are happy to answer questions and to provide technical assistance information upon request.

## Learning a Second Language While You Are Still Working on the First

Keira Gebbie Ballantyne

For many of us, when we think of schoolchildren who are learning English as their second language, our minds automatically conjure up images of immigrant children. In fact, the majority of children who are classified as English language learners were born in the United States (Batalova, 2006).

Between 1996 and 2006, the number of ELLs grew by almost 60%. As this number rises, so too does the number of children who enter kindergarten and first grade speaking languages other than English. Accurate and recent counts of children in this population under the age of five are difficult to come by, but recent estimates find that one in three children entering Head Start or Early Head Start programs are not native English speakers.<sup>1</sup>

A critical characteristic which sets these young learners apart from children in the later grades is that very young children are still in the process of acquiring their first language. In typical monolingual development, many of the intricacies of the first language—including the full complexity of grammar and

comprehension—are not acquired until the first years of elementary school (Crutchley, 2007). Young second language learners are in fact *dual language learners*, engaged in the task of learning their second language while still working on gaining full mastery of their first.

### Simultaneous vs. Sequential Language Learning

There is a great deal of diversity among the population of dual language learners, or DLLs. At one end of the spectrum, children may come from households where two (or more) languages are commonly spoken at home, and where there has been wide exposure to the both home language and to English from

birth. These children can be thought of as *simultaneous bilingual*/language learners, acquiring two languages in parallel from the beginning. At the other end, children may have had very little experience with English speakers in the early years, and may only begin learning their second language in earnest when they begin kindergarten. These children are *sequential*/language learners (Tabors & Snow, 1997).

As every ESL teacher knows, there are many intermediate steps between not knowing a language at all, and gaining full competency over that language. Simultaneous language learners and sequential language learners represent two ends of a scale, but there are many families which exist

#### First language acquisition in the elementary school years

Research shows that first language acquisition continues into the elementary school years. Children entering elementary school may not yet have acquired the complex grammatical structures of their first language. In one experiment, children aged 6- to 11-years-old were shown pictures which illustrated cause-and-effect. In the pictures, the cause was something that did not happen (e.g. a boy did not walk fast enough), which led to an unwelcome effect (he missed his bus). Younger children were less likely to produce the grammatically complex conditional sentences used by adults to describe the pictures.

More likely  
at 6 years  
old

He missed the bus.

If he walked faster, he wouldn't miss the bus.

More likely  
at 11 years  
old

If he had walked faster, he wouldn't have missed the bus.

(Based on Crutchley, 2004)

<sup>1</sup> Figures from the 2006–07 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) data collection. We are grateful to Sharon Yandian for providing us with this data.

somewhere between fully bilingual and fully monolingual. Families may favor one language over the other for use with certain family members, or they may restrict the use of one language for certain contexts, like in the workplace. The contexts and ways in which language is used in the households will shape the competencies that children have in the languages which are available to them.

### Linguistic Barriers and Low-Income Communities Mean Extra Hurdles

Although DLLs are a diverse population, a sizable proportion of children from this demographic are also from low-income communities. In general, on a variety of measures of difficulties associated with poverty, dual language learners are more likely than learners in the general population to live in poor communities. This means that they are less likely to have access to high quality preschools, more likely to encounter adverse health that leads to learning difficulties. It also means that their parents may not have access to accurate and useful information to advocate for their children.

In the preschool years, dual language learners are less likely than monolingual English speakers to attend a center-based preschool or

prekindergarten program (Iruka & Carver, 2006). The research indicates that this may be due to lack of opportunity rather than to family choice. In a recent survey of Hispanic families, 97% of families indicated that they would use free and voluntary preschool programs if they were available (Pérez & Zarate, 2006).

The benefits of preschool for DLLs are well documented. Recent research has found that attendance in a high quality prekindergarten program decreases later achievement gaps, and furthermore that attendance in a high quality prekindergarten program has a greater effect on decreasing the achievement gap for Hispanic students than for any other ethnic group (Iruka & Carver, 2006).

Children who live in poor communities are less likely to have access to the full spectrum of healthcare options, and poor health in early childhood can lead to difficulties in school. Nutritional deficiencies and environmental lead poisoning can result in later cognitive difficulties, and hearing difficulties can result in later difficulties with language and literacy (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

Reading at home to children provides a boost to early literacy, yet the parents of dual language learners are less likely than other parents to read to their children at home (O'Donnell, 2008). The research to date does not provide a clear picture of why this is so, but anecdotal evidence suggests

that one reason parents do not read to their children is because they believe reading in the home language might impede learning English.

### What Schools Can Do To Help

#### *Encourage literacy in the home*

Preliteracy skills include early skills such as understanding that books contain words and stories, and that printed letters on a page represent language. Once these skills have been learned using books in one language, they can be applied to books in another language. Children who come to school with experience in reading in the home—in any language—are less likely to develop later reading difficulties. Effective schools reach out to parents and reassure them that home language literacy is beneficial and is never a disadvantage for their children.

#### *Understand the background of DLLs and the resources they bring to the classroom*

When schools understand why parents might avoid reading in the home, they are better prepared to begin conversations with families. The more that teachers understand the family and community backgrounds of their students, the more likely that they will be able to build on the strengths and background knowledge that children bring to the classroom. Effective schools work collaboratively to help teachers, principals, and other staff come to a deeper understanding of children's backgrounds.

*Encourage social interaction*

Children who do not speak the dominant language of the classroom can quickly become isolated. In the preschool and kindergarten years, these children can miss out on opportunities to learn critical early social skills. Teachers can encourage social interactions between DLLs and other children by creating structured activities that require communication (Strong 1983, 1984). Learning a few words and acknowledging home languages in the classroom can also have a powerful effect. Research has found that students in classrooms where teachers use greater amounts of their home language are less likely to be victims of bullying (Chang et al., 2007).

Keira Gebbie Ballantyne is a Senior Research Associate at the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. This article is based on NCELA's upcoming report *Dual Language Learners in the Early Years: Getting Ready to Succeed in School*. The report will be announced on the NCELA List upon release.

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## Assessing the English Language Proficiency of ELLs in K–2: Validity and Reliability Challenges and Considerations

Edynn Sato

Research suggests that language proficiency is a predictor of school success, and early language skills at kindergarten influence students' later school performance (Farran, Aydogan, Kang, Lipsey, 2001; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005). Students who lag behind in performance in the early school years appear to continue to lag unless there is significant improvement in their language capabilities (RAND, 2007; Rock, 2007).

Valid assessments of students' English language skills can provide information to help guide decisions related to appropriate language instruction and services that support ELLs' English language development and monitor their progress toward proficiency (Kopriva, 2008). Assessing students in the K–2 grade range, however, is challenging. The following provides an overview of a framework for considering three of the key challenges related to assessing ELLs in the K–2 grade range and systematically addressing these challenges in

order to ensure a valid and reliable measurement of what these students know and can do (for more details, see Sato, Lagunoff, & Rabinowitz, forthcoming).

The three challenges are familiarity, maturation, and English language proficiency and language literacy. K–2 ELLs generally are not familiar with the testing context (e.g., the procedures or conditions for taking a test, some socio-cultural related references in test items). There may also be maturational issues (e.g., dexterity with writing

implements, ability to stay task-focused, differential rates of development of the four language modalities—listening, speaking, reading, writing) that impact the degree to which they can participate in the testing situation without assistance. Such challenges are further complicated by students’ level of English language proficiency (ELP) and general literacy skills, which impact students’ understanding of assessments administered in English. These challenges have implications for the validity and reliability of the assessments administered to these students.

In order to minimize the effect of familiarity on student’s performance, aspects of the assessment’s setting and the contexts of the assessment’s tasks should be familiar to the student. Considerations pertinent to addressing familiarity issues include:

Setting:

- Students’ level of familiarity with the testing location and set up (e.g., building, classroom, desk/table).
- Students’ level of familiarity with the trained test administrator (e.g., teacher, aide).

Context:

- Students’ level of familiarity with the scenarios or situations in which the assessment tasks are embedded (e.g., school-related, community-related).

- Students’ level of familiarity with words and phrases in the assessment tasks that are not central to the assessed content (e.g., false cognates, gerunds, technical vocabulary, idiomatic expressions).
- Students’ level of familiarity with the task type/format (it is recommended that students be provided the opportunity to practice understanding and responding to item types included in the assessment). (For more details, see Sato et al., forthcoming.)

Maturation and ELP interact and impact student performance. The table below presents a matrix for considering how to address this interaction when assessing K–2 ELLs. More specifically, the matrix is intended to help determine the testing conditions most appropriate for the valid and reliable assessment of K–2 ELLs (Sato et al., forthcoming).

- Students with *limited* ELP have limited oral English skills (especially in listening comprehension) and have limited skills in pre-literacy or literacy (phonemics [sound-letter association], reading and writing of letters of the alphabet, words, phrases, and sentences in English or possibly another alphabetic language from which English

literacy skills readily transfer).

- Students with *moderate* ELP can read and write at least letters and words in English but may have difficulty following oral test directions.
- Students with *adequate* ELP can read and write at least letters and words in English and can understand and follow oral test directions.
- Students with *limited* maturity may have difficulty accurately recording their responses on an answer sheet without assistance.
- Students with *adequate* maturity can accurately record their responses on an answer sheet with minimal assistance.

The interaction between a student’s level of maturity and ELP has implications for the testing conditions most appropriate for that student (e.g., group vs. individual test administration; self-response vs. teacher transcription of student response) and consequently the reliability and validity of the student’s assessment results.

- *Students 1 and 2* typically include ELL students in kindergarten and those students in the first and second grades with little or no literacy experience in English or another alphabetic language from which English literacy skills readily transfer. Their

MATURITY	LEVEL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY		
	Limited	Moderate	Adequate
Limited	Student 1	Student 3	Student 5
Adequate	Student 2	Student 4	Student 6

English language proficiency is so limited that they require assistance during an assessment's administration (e.g., prompting, clarification) and with the recording of their responses.

- *Students 3 and 4* typically include ELL students in the first and second grades who have some literacy experience in English or another alphabetic language from which English literacy skills readily transfer. However, these students may require additional assistance during an assessment's administration (e.g., oral prompting or clarification because of difficulty following oral test directions) and with the recording of their responses (e.g., because of difficulty/lack of familiarity with using a pencil). For these students, teachers should determine on an individual basis whether individual or group assessment best meets the student's needs, and also whether the student is capable of recording his or her own responses or needs to rely on teacher transcription. It is difficult to determine without additional information whether *adequate maturity* is enough for a student to access the assessment, or whether *moderate ELP* is enough for a student to access the assessment.

Qualitative (teacher judgment) data can inform the determination of appropriate testing conditions for *Students 3 and 4*.

- *Students 5 and 6* typically include ELL students in the first and second grades who have acquired basic literacy skills in English in or out of school or who are literate in a language other than English that has an alphabetic writing system from which these students can transfer some of their first-language literacy skills (e.g., writing a word based on how it sounds). Additionally, these students have adequate English language skills to be expected to participate in an assessment's administration and accurately record their responses on an answer sheet (e.g., they are able to request assistance when needed).

While group administration of assessments is less of a burden on resources (staff, cost, etc.), individual administration of assessments is preferable to help ensure the accuracy (reliability, validity) of the measurement of students' performance, and essential for those students who have difficulty accessing the assessment. With appropriate training, test administrators can provide assistance to students having difficulty understanding and responding to a test item or task. Individual administration also provides more allowance for students to demonstrate their English language skills (e.g., verbal responses, using illustrations). Parameters for appropriately

increasing students' access to the assessment via individual administration should be clearly articulated in relevant training materials and training sessions.<sup>1</sup>

The framework described above begins to identify and address specific challenges associated with assessing these young learners. However, more research is needed to better understand the characteristics of this student population and how they impact valid assessment practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Such parameters will include: guidelines and examples of allowed repetition/prompting for individual and group-administered assessments; guidelines for determining frustration level and protocol for ending a testing session.

## English Language Learners with Interrupted Schooling: Do Self-Efficacy Beliefs in Native Language Proficiency and Acculturation Matter?

Rebecca K. Fox, Anastasia Kitsantas & George Flowers

For those newcomer students who arrive in school with a strong academic background in their first language, the challenges of acquiring English language proficiency and academic achievement are tremendous. For adolescents with interrupted schooling (AIS), who arrive at school without a strong or continuous education in their home countries, the task is even more challenging. It is becoming increasingly important for schools to understand these students more deeply and identify effective strategies to help older English learners succeed academically (Morse, 2005), particularly since this group of students is at the highest risk of becoming school dropouts (Walsh, 1999).

Many AIS have come from war torn countries where education was limited. Even if schooling were easily available in their home country, a growing number of students report that they were often not able to continuously attend school because of financial reasons or family duties. Upon arrival in the U.S., some families may not have a permanent residence, or face problems finding employment. Many factors compromise the ability of many immigrant adolescents to receive quality, ongoing schooling.

Achievement in U.S schools for students who have experienced interrupted schooling can be more difficult than for students who arrive in U.S. schools with grade level academic content knowledge proficiency in their first language (Collier, 1995; Garcia, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). Academic English in both the written and oral domains can take up to 7–10 years for some students. Time is a critical factor for AIS because when they arrive in the U.S., they are already well into their teenage years, making it a challenge to remain in school long enough to acquire the degree of academic-level written and oral English necessary for high school graduation or college entry.

Academic success in high school requires strong literacy skills to support cognitive development, oral and written language proficiency, and content knowledge. While a fair amount is known about the relationship between second language (L2) literacy and literacy in one's first language (L1) (Cummins, 1981), there is little research on the relationship between interrupted schooling and subsequent second language success and retention.

### Role of Self Efficacy and Acculturation

Our recent research focused on the influence of interrupted schooling on second-language learning among a sample of 29 high risk Hispanic students, aged 15–19 years, in a large metropolitan high school. Our research examined the effects of *self-efficacy* and of *acculturation* on English proficiency.

*Self-efficacy* refers to beliefs about one's capability to learn or perform effectively under given conditions (Bandura, 1997). In general, the data suggested that competency in one's home language is associated with proficiency in the second language.

We found significant correlations between students' beliefs that they were effective speakers and readers in their home language and their performance on tests of oral proficiency and writing in English. We also found that students who believed they were effective learners of vocabulary in their first language performed well on tests of English oral proficiency.

*Acculturation* is the change in values and behavior associated with extended contact among diverse cultural groups (Birman &

Trickett, 2001; Kim, Brenner, Liang, & Asay, 2003; Schumann, 1986). Interaction with native speakers of the target language provides the L2 learner with the means and a motivation for developing oral communicative skills in the second language. Oral fluency supports subsequent L2 literacy development. This may be especially important for older second language learners with interrupted schooling, compensating in part for the weak or missing L1 literacy foundation. Equally important, L2 oracy provides the second language learner an entrance to the discourse communities of school. Students who scored high on measures of acculturation also tended to score high on the self-efficacy speaking, reading and vocabulary subscales. Overall, our results suggest that proficiency in a second language increases with the frequency and intensity of interaction with members of the host culture.

### What High Schools Can Do to Support Adolescents with Interrupted Schooling

*Understand the backgrounds of AIS and acknowledge the resources they bring to the school and the classroom.* The unique perspectives that students bring from other countries can enrich classroom discussions and encourage a dialogic approach to learning. Students should be encouraged to share

classroom topics with their parents and seek their opinions. By inviting these additional perspectives, teachers have the opportunity to acknowledge and build on other cultures and the background knowledge they bring to the learning of all students.

#### *Provide opportunities for ELLs to access academic content in their L1 to support L2 acquisition.*

Whenever possible, encourage ELLs to support their in-class discussions with additional research in their L1 (e.g. online journals, newspapers, newscasts, and discussions). Teachers should encourage students to build on L1 knowledge to support their cognitive and language development in both L1 and L2 while they continue to acquire academic skills in written and oral English.

#### *Encourage literacy activities in the home.*

Literacy skills include the ability to read and understand topics and issues, as well as express opinions from multiple perspectives. Reading, discussing, and formulating ideas in the home language will support the development of oracy and literacy skills necessary for academic achievement. Assignments that encourage interviewing, family history and opinions of members of the language community serve to further legitimize the essential home-school connection.

#### *Encourage students to join school clubs, sports, and organizations.*

High school students need to be invited to after school activities, many of which are often

unknown to immigrant families. These activities provide informal time for interaction in English in a natural setting while sharing some of a student's culture with American peers.

#### *Provide opportunities for both parents and students to understand new school systems.*

Schools should have easily accessible parent/family support so that students and families understand how U.S. schools work. Ongoing information that is provided both orally and in written form in both English and multiple languages will help to bridge the information flow to and from families (Constantino, 2003).

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## Tapestry for Teachers of English Language Learners: Version 2

[www.tesol.org/ELLTapestry](http://www.tesol.org/ELLTapestry)

Cheryl M. Chevalier

The Tapestry is an extensive on-line resource center for educators and administrators working with English language learners in preK–12 classrooms. It presents the research findings on teaching ELLs and on second language acquisition that provides a foundation for research-based

teaching and evaluation of student learning.

Designed to answer critical questions about teaching children who are learning English as a second language, this Tapestry, like Medieval Tapestries, is made of Sets each with its own patterns of threads framed as questions.

These patterns are woven together to make a Tapestry using the 21st century web capabilities as a loom. Teachers can use the patterns to create their own Tapestry that reflects the needs of the students in their unique classroom.

For example, a Question on Story Mapping includes documents giving both examples of maps and journal citations, and it also links to Questions within Tapestry Sets on using stories to develop vocabulary, the role of first language and oral proficiency, fluency and automaticity, and culturally aligned-curriculum.

A Question on Sheltered Instruction (SIOP) provides teaching strategies, research citations, and a link to the SIOP website.

This resource center includes teaching materials and strategies, instructional curriculum models, methods for adapting instruction, and links to curricula grounded in

*Foundations of Emerging Literacy* presents the research findings on:

- teaching phonological awareness
- the alphabetic principle and the advantages of bilingualism, and
- teaching fluency and automaticity.

*Vocabulary Development* presents the research findings on:

- vocabulary development in academic reading,
- the role of oral language proficiency
- first language proficiency in second language acquisition, and
- the explicit teaching of vocabulary.

*Story Comprehension* presents the research findings on:

- culturally aware, explicit and active comprehension instruction
- vocabulary acquisition with storybook reading, and
- a model of a story map used with English language learners

*Academic Reading* presents the research findings on:

- years of education required for achieving proficiency in academic tests and learning
- comprehension of language in mathematics problems
- comprehension of expository, or academic, texts
- the instructional strategy Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), and
- the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)

research and directly applicable in the classroom.

The Tapestry Sets are Foundations of Emerging Literacy, Vocabulary Development, Story Comprehension, and Academic Reading. Each Set includes a Bibliography of research and research-based teaching practice. To ensure classroom applicability, teachers critically reviewed the Tapestry throughout its development to ensure that it would be directly applicable

and relevant to the classroom.

Research on Individual Differences and Educational Background, Diversity of Language and Socio-Economic Backgrounds, Strategies for Modifying Teaching, and teachers' need for the support of Professional Development are included.

An extensive Library of web resources on Government Resources, Funding and Grants, Curriculum and Assessment, Program and Professional Development, Children with

Learning Disabilities and Special Needs, Family and Community Involvement, Bilingualism and Heritage Languages, Legislation and Policy, and Research is practical for the classroom.

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