Across the nation, schools are in the midst of comprehensive reform efforts aimed at improving the achievement of all students. Language Learners in the English Classroom is designed as a tool to guide English teachers in designing purposeful and powerful lessons that accelerate the achievement of students who are learning English.

The authors describe the unique challenges for English language learners and provide practical, research-based strategies that will help your students meet those challenges. Focus chapters clearly define and illustrate how to integrate teaching of:
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Fluency
- Comprehension

into the grade-level content of middle and high school English classrooms. The book also examines the unique role that English teachers play in helping ELLs achieve academic success across the disciplines and incorporates NCTE’s position statement on teaching English language learners as well as the findings of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.

With authentic classroom examples, sample student work, and a handy discussion guide for study groups or individual reflection, this book is a must-have for any English teacher working with language learners.

About the Authors:
Doug, Carol, and Nancy collaborate in developing and implementing effective supports for English language learners in urban Southern California secondary schools. They host demonstration classrooms, develop videos in collaboration with teachers to promote reflection, and lead common assessment and consensus scoring sessions in partner schools. Doug is professor of English language development at San Diego State University, and Nancy is associate professor of literacy at the same institution. Carol has been a secondary classroom teacher and is a professional developer specializing in English language development for San Diego Unified School District.

Foreword by David Freeman
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Teaching and Learning in English: What Works

I was scared. I thought nobody spoken Spanish. I just could hear this weird sound. I would see the sign—it was like I wasn’t literate. It was like starting all over again, starting with the basics. I will start learning how to count, it will be like being in elementary school even though I was in high school.

Raquel Ramirez, college sophomore

Raquel is one of our success stories. Arriving in the United States at the age of fourteen, she completed high school in four years and is now beginning her sophomore year at the university with a double major in psychology and criminal justice. Her college grade point average is 3.68, and based on her test scores she was not required to take any college remedial courses. As she tells the story of her first day in high school, her words paint a clear picture of exactly what she wanted to express—the anxiety, fear, and frustration of coming to a new country and attending school using a new language. These words also highlight the variance of her ability to use English. On the one hand she easily uses high-level vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and idiomatic expressions. Still, she struggles with basic verb tenses and pronunciation. This unevenness in proficiency points to a need for standards that set high expectations supported through a model of instruction that addresses individual needs.

Beginning with the Standards

Given the diversity of our students, it can be tempting to be satisfied with even small amounts of improvement in skills and understanding. We are reluctant to point out all the errors a student makes in his or her writing. We’re happy when our students get the “big idea” from a piece of text, but we may not expect them to evaluate credibility and comprehensiveness of evidence or analyze the way in which the author establishes the tone of the text. We may be satisfied when students write a paper with a coherent thesis that maintains focus, without expecting them to improve that coherence through a clear organization of thoughts or precise word choice.
Teaching and Learning in English: What Works

The English language arts (ELA) content standards are just as important for our English language learners as they are for our native speakers. Using them in their entirety ensures that we hold the same high expectations for all our students, regardless of their language proficiency level. However, it does not mean that teaching should proceed without regard to language proficiency. The English Language Development (ELD) or English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards provide a road map to the ELA standards, describing performance indicators of progress at each level of proficiency. State ELD standards or TESOL’s ELP standards (see Chapter 1) can be used in conjunction with the ELA standards to guide planning, instruction, and assessment.

What Makes Learning in English Difficult for Adolescent English Language Learners?

Successful participation in any academic activity, whether oral or written, is a complex process that involves more than the match between the proficiency level of the learner and the difficulty level of the text. In other words, simply providing secondary school students with leveled books (e.g., beginners using texts written at a primary grade level) will not result in significant improvements in language learning. Rather, teachers must be sure to consider all of the influences on comprehension. Aida Walqui (2002, p. 2) identifies key elements that we interpret as three primary factors that impact a student’s ability to engage in the lesson:

- **The Learner**: language proficiency, knowledge of vocabulary, background experiences, prior knowledge about the topic, motivation and interest.
- **The Text**: complexity of ideas, features and structures, sentence complexity, density of ideas, text coherence (elaboration, explanation, expression of relationships between ideas, visual and textual supports). Note: the word *text* used here refers to both written and oral narrative and exposition.
- **The Context**: purpose for reading, writing or speaking, instructional activities and scaffolds.

The three elements described above pertain to all learners. Within this construct, however, we find that an English language learner often possesses an idiosyncratic knowledge and experience profile that can present unique challenges, especially when it comes to familiarity with the linguistic code, text structures, and rhetorical styles. We explore each of these challenges below.
Chapter 2

Lack of Familiarity with the Linguistic Code

Clearly, language is one of the greatest factors in being able to comprehend text and participate in academic tasks. The linguistic code comprises the phonology, the lexicon, the grammar, sociolinguistics, and discourse patterns and practices (Scarcella, 2003). While each of these aspects of the linguistic code may present difficulties for even native speakers of English, certain aspects are of particular concern in teaching English language learners.

Pronunciation. A lack of familiarity with the sounds of English can lead to difficulty in making oneself understood in conversation due to pronunciation. Inaccurate pronunciation can also lead to inaccurate spelling. When students don’t hear the -ed ending of a word or are unable to differentiate between vowel sounds, it shows up in their writing. Raquel wrote “I was scare,” and we can clearly see by the verb tense that she intended to say “I was scared.” Errors such as this go beyond the expected difficulty that native speakers experience in learning tenses. Even among advanced English language learners such as Raquel, they may not perceive all the phonemes in words, thus forcing them to rely on their ability to recall rules when using these words in their writing. This can be further complicated by the many exceptions to English spelling patterns that stem from an abundance of words borrowed from many different languages.

Vocabulary. In primary school, students learn the “five-finger rule” for selecting independent reading materials: if they count more than five unfamiliar words on a single page, the book is too difficult, and they should select another. This is a good reminder to us about the link between understanding vocabulary and the content itself. Dutro and Moran (2003) discuss vocabulary in two distinct categories: mortar and bricks. The “mortar” of a piece of text—signal words, transition devices, negative markers, pronouns, and articles—are as important as the “bricks”—the technical vocabulary or the key words. They interact to express important relationships between ideas. After all, loving someone is different from being in love with someone. As English teachers, the temptation is to teach the word love, since that is the focus of those phrases. Yet a lack of understanding of the interaction of the brick word (love) with the mortar words (in, with) surrounding it leads to a loss of meaning. Therefore, a lack of familiarity with some of the most basic English vocabulary can seriously impede comprehension.

Even students with more advanced proficiency may get the gist of a conversation or of a reading but may miss the nuances because of
the amount of unfamiliar vocabulary. Nuances in vocabulary may be the key to recognizing the author’s purpose or bias, both of which are essential skills found in secondary school English language arts standards.

Idioms present another area of difficulty for English language learners. We use them unconsciously in our speech, sometimes as a way of explaining an idea we want students to understand, such as “a loose cannon” to describe a character’s unpredictable and embarrassing behavior. Native English speakers grow up hearing and using idioms and can interpret them as they come across them in texts, but a student who is unfamiliar with an idiomatic expression will not be able to understand it simply by deconstructing it. Words and expressions are a reflection of culture and values that may be different from a student’s own. The word *time*, for instance, is the most often used noun in the English language (Soanes & Stevenson, 2006). It is a critical concept in organizing a variety of literary and expository genres. We expect students to be able to organize events and ideas chronologically in a linear view of time. Not all cultures tell a story in this linear pattern; not all languages express the passage of time in the same manner. Vietnamese, for instance, uses auxiliaries rather than tense to signal past or future events, as in “work yesterday” (Bliss, 2001).

**Grammar.** Students must also have a good grasp of the grammatical structures found in academic text, structures not frequently used in everyday English. Clear writing and speaking depends on adept use of passive and active voice, conditional tense, dependent clauses, and gerundial phrases, among others. Without grammar, vocabulary becomes a string of unrelated words. Calling attention to and explicitly teaching these structures as they are found in the text will help English language learners make sense out of the string of words.

**Register.** Acceptable ways of communicating with different audiences are bound by culture and marked by word choice, tone, and even grammatical structures. Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds may not be familiar with the subtleties of language patterns that change depending on the audience, purpose, or topic. Reading an essay from a standard English learner can be like listening to a casual conversation between friends, full of tangential details, word choice that is not appropriate for school, and a personal tone that may be out of place in an academic piece. Both standard English learners and English language learners benefit from direct instruction in the registers used in writing, classroom discussions, and oral presentations.
Lack of Familiarity with Text Structures and Features

There are five common text patterns that we use to express logical connections: description, sequence, compare/contrast, cause and effect, and problem/solution. Each of these patterns has specific signal words that help the reader recognize the particular type of organization and thus the relationships between the important ideas. Text features such as headings, charts, and diagrams in the text support the connections between ideas. Students who are not familiar with the structures and features of text will have more difficulty linking ideas and constructing meaning as new information is presented. Students can use graphic organizers to make the structure of the text transparent and comprehensible. They can also use them as a scaffold to create their own compositions, jotting down the key events or concepts in the appropriate section of the graphic organizer, adding in applicable signal words, and then composing well-organized, cohesive text supported with evidence and details. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the types of text features commonly found in informational readings.

Table 2.1. Common Text Features

| Organization of Text                        | Table of contents |
|                                           | Index            |
|                                           | Glossary         |
|                                           | Page numbers     |
| Organization of Ideas                      | Synopses (beginning or end of reading) |
|                                           | Titles           |
|                                           | Headings         |
|                                           | Subheadings      |
|                                           | Conclusion       |
| Graphic Aids                               | Photographs      |
|                                           | Illustrations    |
|                                           | Diagrams         |
|                                           | Charts and tables|
|                                           | Maps             |
| Elaboration Emphasis                       | Captions         |
|                                           | Bold, italicized, or highlighted words|
|                                           | Footnotes        |
|                                           | Margin notes     |
| Extension of Understanding                 | Questions        |
Diverse Rhetorical Styles

You don’t want to depress your audience by giving everything away immediately. And you don’t want to bore them either, so you do what is considered interesting, which is to give plenty of details and a conversational tone to your written text. (Brazilian English language learner quoted in Fox, 1994, p. 22)

The discourse component of the linguistic code is inextricably entwined with culture. English language learners come from diverse cultural backgrounds with diverse perspectives on logic and organization of thought. In English we expect a linear development of thought. Inductive reasoning provides details that lead to a conclusion, while texts utilizing deductive reasoning begin with a thesis and then provide details to support it. Other cultures develop ideas quite differently. Determining relevance or irrelevance of details, deciding how to organize an essay or formulate an argument is not universal but rather is culturally defined (Leki, 1992). This has significant implications for constructing paragraphs, determining importance, and establishing coherence. Imagine what an essay written by the Brazilian student quoted above might look like. This conversational tone might be an appropriate way to deliver a message in Brazil, but it would be unacceptable in an expository essay comparing and contrasting McCarthyism with Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*.

A primary focus in the English class is teaching students how to construct first a paragraph and then an essay. English language arts standards address a variety of narrative and expository genres in writing. And most students, native speakers included, need a great deal of direct instruction and practice in writing (Frey & Fisher, 2006). For English language learners, there is an added dimension in that the rhetorical styles in their culture may differ widely from those expected in their classrooms. These differences have implications for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Academic writing in English is generally organized around an overt statement of a thesis, supported by reasons, examples, and details. See Table 2.2 to see how a persuasive argument can be presented differently in different cultures. Although these are generalizations about the organization of ideas in other cultures, a native English-speaking reader (teacher) might find a student’s essay inadequate and make comments such as “missed the point,” “talked around the point,” “failed to connect the thesis and the evidence,” or “failed to present validity of the argument,” when, in fact, the student is presenting the argument in a culturally different rhetorical style.
Anna Söter (1988) analyzed narrative writing by eleventh-grade native speakers of Arabic, Vietnamese, and English in Australia. They were asked to write a bedtime story for a young child. All the stories contained the major elements that we consider important—setting, action, character. The differences lay in the emphasis on each of these. The stories of the native English speakers portrayed a strong sense of action and plot. The stories from the Vietnamese speakers included a greater proportion of dialogue, describing the relationships between characters and feelings. And the setting received more attention in the stories of the Arabic students.

Other studies have shown differences in the perception of the purpose of a narrative. Indrasuta (1988) found that American students felt the purpose of a narrative was to entertain and inform, and therefore their goal was to capture the interest of the reader. In contrast, Thai students saw the purpose as teaching morals and thought their stories had to be true stories. We can easily see that these cultural beliefs might create writing that does not meet the teacher’s expectations. It also can mean that students focus on different aspects of text as they read, per-

Table 2.2. Diverse Rhetorical Styles and Expectations of Academic English in Persuasive Essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Elements of Rhetorical Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>- Rely on rhythm and repetition to persuade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Vernacular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>- Consider it rude to tell reader what to do or believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Make points in favor of, or against, without direct statement of intent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>- Provide points related to the argument, repeat using some previously stated points and introduce new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Repeat several times, each time adding or eliminating ideas, expecting reader to infer the main point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakota</td>
<td>- Tell related stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- May not mention the thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>- Use passive voice and passive reflective verbs (“The book lost itself to me”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Cautious description</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

haps missing key elements the teacher wants them to notice and understand.

Courtney Cazden (1988) described a project in which white adults and African American adults were asked to listen to recordings of stories written by white first graders and by African American first graders. Based solely on these stories, they were asked to predict the children’s future success in school. The white adults found one of the stories of the African American children to be incoherent and predicted that the child “might have trouble reading,” commenting on language problems that would affect achievement. The African American adults noticed the nonlinear quality of the story but found it “well-formed, easy to understand” (p. 18). They pronounced the child to be bright and verbal and predicted that she would be successful in school.

Lack of Requisite Background Knowledge

English language learners also come to school with a wide variety of background experiences and levels of knowledge about any given topic. One high school English teacher asked her students to read a short story that made reference to Grand Central Station. Although many students may not be familiar with this particular train station, two of her students who had recently arrived from the Marshall Islands did not know what a train station was. In too many classrooms, background knowledge is assumed and therefore not activated and developed. As Marzano (2004) noted, building background knowledge is one of the most important things teachers can do to improve reading. In fact, there is evidence that students who have significant background knowledge on a specific topic can even comprehend texts that are poorly written or very complex.

Background knowledge is bound by culture, by experience, and by prior learning. Students who have not attended elementary school in the United States will likely have had far less exposure to events we often assume our students know about, such as the westward movement or industrialization. They may have gaps in their knowledge about pivotal time periods that have had a profound influence on literature, such as the Renaissance. Students who come from war-torn countries where dictatorships limit personal freedom may be unfamiliar with concepts of democracy and freedom of speech. These values are imbued in our classroom practices as well as our content, and students may need direct instruction to build background knowledge before engaging in the unit of study.
Effective Practice: Review of Research

Numerous agencies and organizations have examined current practice in developing language and literacy in English language learners. They have visited schools, convened panels of experts, analyzed existing research, and compiled lengthy reports of their findings. While each report brings a different perspective, the consistency of their findings is at once striking and telling. In sum, they paint a picture of effective practice that is standards-based and assessment-driven, immerses students in language, recognizes the diversity of proficiency and background, considers the primary language, teaches metacognitive strategies side by side with reading and writing skills, and integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking with content learning. We present the highlights from several of these important documents below.

Best Practices in Academic Literacy for Immigrant Secondary School Students

Spaulding, Carolino, and Amen (2004) identified specific practices that teachers should implement to address the needs of English language learners, including:

1. Recognize the different linguistic and academic needs of students in various ELL subpopulations.
2. Use the native language to support English language development.
3. Implement language development standards and assessments that are directly linked to academic standards and assessments.
4. Create literacy-rich secondary school environments.
5. Use instructional approaches that unify language and content learning.
6. Instruct students in language learning strategies. (p. 25)

Developing Literacy in English Language Learners

The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006) conducted an in-depth review of the research on developing literacy in English language learners. Their findings identify successful practices at the same time as they reveal some significant gaps in our knowledge about this topic. We have summarized their findings below.

1. Instruction in the key components of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. English language learners improve their literacy when these key compo-
nents are taught simultaneously. Consideration for language proficiency level and features of the primary language (e.g., the sounds that differ between home and school language or false cognates between the two languages) helps teachers modify approaches used with native English speakers.

2. Instruction in these key components is not sufficient to develop proficiency in reading and writing. Oral proficiency in English is critical as well. English language learners generally attain parity with native English speakers in word-level skills such as decoding, word recognition, spelling. Their text-level skills (reading comprehension and writing) lag significantly behind their native-speaking peers. The research suggests that this disparity stems from a lack of proficiency in oral language. Oral proficiency of vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, syntactic skills, and metalinguistic skills is strongly correlated to proficiency in reading and writing.

3. Oral proficiency and literacy in the first language can be used to facilitate literacy development in English. Students who are literate in their first language will generally develop English proficiency more rapidly and more easily than those who are not. They can transfer their knowledge and skills from their primary language as they develop language and literacy in an additional language. Older students are able to rely on metalinguistic skills to assist them in learning another language (Zadina, 2005). For example, recognizing cognates (words that have similar spellings and meanings in two languages) can help students develop vocabulary easily.

4. Individual differences contribute significantly to English literacy development. Developing literacy is a dynamic process influenced by many factors including proficiency in the first language and in English, the student’s age, cognitive abilities, prior knowledge, and experiences, and the similarities and differences between the primary language and English.

5. Home language experiences can have a positive impact on literacy achievement. Not surprisingly, students perform better when they are learning in their stronger language. Finding ways to bridge the gap between home and school patterns of interaction can increase engagement and motivation. Text that is culturally meaningful can facilitate comprehension.

In addition to the conclusions this panel was able to make, they also identified two areas in which the profession still needs information:

1. An understanding of how sociocultural contexts impact literacy development. Existing studies do little to define the impact on literacy development of sociocultural variables such as immigration status, discourse patterns, family influences, district, state, and federal policies, and language status. Some research
suggests correlations but do not define them through empirical evidence.

2. Ways to assess student progress for instructional planning. Formal and informal assessments are fundamental to making placement decisions and planning instruction. For the most part, current methods of assessment are inadequate for these purposes, and studies that examine these methods are flawed in their approach. It does appear that when teachers are asked to respond to specific criteria as opposed to expressing a spontaneous opinion, they provide information that is helpful in planning.

NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2006) has detailed effective practices for teaching English language learners. They focus on three areas within the English classroom: teaching language, teaching reading, and teaching writing. We present each of these areas in Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, respectively. Taken together, these components of the NCTE position statement clearly illustrate the needs of English language learners and ways in which students can best learn. Importantly, NCTE also recognizes that language and content reinforce one another. Simply focusing on language development with adolescent English language learners will not result in the achievement gains we expect. “The best way to help students learn both English and the knowledge of school subjects is to teach language through content. This should

- Recognize that second language acquisition is a gradual developmental process and is built on students knowledge and skill in their native language.
- Provide authentic opportunities to use language in a nonthreatening environment.
- Teach key vocabulary connected with the topic of the lesson.
- Teach academic oral language in the context of various content areas.
- Teach text- and sentence-level grammar in context to help students understand the structure and style of the English language.
- Teach the specific features of language students need to communicate in social as well as academic contexts.

Figure 2.1. Teaching language. Source: Adapted from Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs), by National Council of Teachers of English, 2006 (Urbana, IL: Author).
Provide reading materials that are culturally relevant.

- Connect the readings with the students’ background knowledge and experiences.
- Encourage students to discuss the readings, including the cultural dimensions of the text.
- Have students read a more accessible text on the topic before reading the assigned text.
- Ask families to read with students a version in the heritage language.
- Replace discrete skill exercises and drills with many opportunities to read.
- Provide opportunities for silent reading in either the students’ first language or in English.
- Read aloud frequently to allow students to become familiar with and appreciate the sounds and structures of written language.
- Read aloud while students have access to the text to facilitate connecting oral and written modalities.
- Activate students’ background knowledge of the text before introducing the text.
- Teach language features such as text structure, vocabulary, and text- and sentence-level grammar to facilitate comprehension of the text.
- Recognize that first and second language growth increases with abundant reading and writing.
- Relate the topic to the cultural experiences of the students.
- “Front load” comprehension via a walk through the text or a preview of the main ideas, and other strategies that prepare students for the topic of the text.
- Do prereading activities that elicit discussion of the topic.
- Teach key vocabulary essential for the topic.
- Recognize that experiences in writing can be used to clarify understanding of reading.

**Figure 2.2.** Teaching literacy: reading. *Source: Adapted from Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs), by National Council of Teachers of English, 2006 (Urbana, IL: Author).*

Not replace reading and writing instruction in English, nor study of literature and grammar” (NCTE, 2006, pp. 6–7).

Using content to teach language provides a natural context for developing language and literacy, even as it builds vocabulary and background knowledge for learning in the content area. This is especially important given the limited amount of time students have to attain grade-level standards across the curriculum. It provides an authentic
Chapter 2

Figure 2.3. Teaching literacy: writing. Source: Adapted from Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs), by National Council of Teachers of English, 2006 (Urbana, IL: Author).

- Provide a nurturing environment for writing.
- Assign cooperative, collaborative writing activities that promote discussion.
- Encourage contributions from all students and promote peer interaction to support learning.
- Replace drills and single-response exercises with time for writing practice.
- Provide frequent meaningful opportunities for students to generate their own texts.
- Design writing assignments for a variety of audiences, purposes, and genres, and scaffold the writing instruction.
- Provide models of well-organized papers for the class. Use sample papers to model specific aspects of the paper that make it well written.
- Comment on strengths in order to indicate areas where the student is meeting expectations.
- Make comments explicit and clear (both in written response and in oral responses). Begin feedback with global comments (content and ideas, organization, thesis) and then move on to more local concerns (or mechanical errors) when student writers are more confident with the content of their draft.
- Give more than one suggestion for change—so that students still maintain control of their writing.
- Teach students how to cite references. Teach the values that are implicit in the rules of plagiarism and textual borrowing, noting that not all cultures ascribe to the same rules and guidelines.

Teach strategies for avoiding plagiarism.

Reading Next: Key Elements of Effective Reading Instruction

A panel of experts invited by the Carnegie Foundation identified fifteen critical components for improving adolescent literacy. Each was derived from a strong research base of instructional and infrastructural practices found to be effective in middle and high schools (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). Teaching reading to adolescent struggling readers is a different proposition from teaching reading in elementary school. For most, it is not an issue of being able to read words accurately, but rather one of comprehension. And with the wide diversity of students’ background and skill, that inability to comprehend what they read stems
from a wide variety of reasons. Some may lack the fluency required to comprehend, while others may not know comprehension strategies such as predicting, summarizing, or inferring. We often find that English language learners have not had enough practice with enough different kinds of text to be able to use these strategies independently and apply them in different subject areas. They may not have an adequate vocabulary or relevant background knowledge to make meaning from the text.

In Tables 2.3 and 2.4 we have listed these findings along with specific implications for teaching English language learners.

Writing Next: Key Elements of Effective Writing Instruction

In their synthesis of research on writing, Graham and Perin (2007) identified eleven elements effective for helping adolescents learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. Writing well is difficult for many students, not just English language learners. It is perhaps the most difficult of the four domains of language because it requires students to integrate skills from oral language and reading in order to compose a well-organized, fluent expression of their ideas. Constructing a complete and cohesive essay requires that students have extensive background knowledge and a deep understanding of their topic. They must understand the unique characteristics of each genre and what is required to achieve the desired goal. They must be able to use a high-level academic lexicon as well as more common vocabulary such as transition words, pronouns, and prepositions.

In Table 2.5 we have listed the eleven elements, a brief explanation of each, and particular considerations for English language learners.

Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions for Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy

In the newest report on the subject of English language learners, at least at the time of this writing, Short and Fitzsimmons (2007, p. 14) identified six major challenges in improving adolescent ELL literacy:

1. Lack of common criteria for identifying and tracking their academic performance.
2. Lack of appropriate assessments.
3. Inadequate educator capacity for improving literacy of language learners.
4. Lack of appropriate and flexible program options.
5. Inadequate use of research-based instructional practices.
6. Lack of a strong and coherent research agenda about adolescent English language learners’ literacy instruction.
Table 2.3. Key Elements of Effective Reading Instruction, Focusing on English Language Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practice</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Focus on ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct, explicit comprehension instruction</td>
<td>Teach the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read</td>
<td>Model, model, model! Use content as a vehicle to teach language—students do not learn language in a vacuum. Incorporate language teaching throughout the day, throughout the content areas to accelerate learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective instructional principles embedded in content</td>
<td>Use content-area texts in language arts classes and teach content-area-specific reading and writing skills in content classes</td>
<td>Model, model, model! Use content as a vehicle to teach language—students do not learn language in a vacuum. Incorporate language teaching throughout the day, throughout the content areas to accelerate learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation and self-directed learning</td>
<td>Build motivation to read and learn and provide students with the instruction and supports needed for independent learning tasks they will face after graduation</td>
<td>Teach students to take responsibility for learning and re-engage as active, not passive, learners. Provide choice in text selection. Provide varied levels of texts on a common topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text-based collaborative learning</td>
<td>Encourage students to interact with one another around a variety of texts</td>
<td>Group students heterogeneously to provide language models and scaffolds for learning when students are working with one another on collaborative tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic tutoring</td>
<td>Provide students with intense individualized reading, writing, and content instruction as needed</td>
<td>Group students homogeneously to address like needs and develop language proficiency when the teacher or tutor is present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse texts</td>
<td>Use texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics</td>
<td>Ensure access for ELLs through differentiated texts that address the same topic. Incorporate texts from a variety of cultural perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive writing instruction</td>
<td>Connect to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform in high school and beyond</td>
<td>Assign tasks that require high-level critical thinking skills and teach the language and strategies needed to analyze, synthesize, justify, persuade, etc. Scaffold writing instruction through talk, visuals, graphic organizers, writing frames, and gradual release of responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Use as a tool for and a topic of literacy instruction</td>
<td>Use technology to scaffold understanding through visuals and access to a variety of sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing formative assessment</td>
<td>Learn how they are progressing under current instructional practices</td>
<td>Assess all four domains of language—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Provide focused, selective feedback that differentiates between language and content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4. Key Elements of an Infrastructure That Supports Effective Reading Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practice</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Focus on ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extended time for literacy</td>
<td>Two to four hours of instruction and practice in language arts and content-area classes</td>
<td>Provide additional instructional time for ELLs to close the gap—learn language and content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Both long term and ongoing</td>
<td>Include focus on language and the language acquisition process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing summative assessment</td>
<td>Assess students and programs, to provide data that are reported for accountabil-ity and research purposes</td>
<td>Assess in relation to both ELA and ELD/ELP standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary teacher teams</td>
<td>Meet regularly to discuss students and align instruction</td>
<td>Organize instruction thematically to provide redundancy of language, vocabulary, and ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Provide guidance from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students</td>
<td>Use data to plan purposeful placement and instruction of ELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Understand how ELL needs differ from native speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program</td>
<td>Coordinate between disciplines and departments, out-of-school organizations, and the local community</td>
<td>Teach reading across the content to contextualize skills and concepts, provide redundancy of language and ideas, connect to prior learning and experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can imagine, these are formidable challenges. Thankfully, the authors of this report also proposed a number of potential solutions. Their solutions have been incorporated into the very fabric of this book. In fact, we were motivated to write this book following the site visit Shannon Fitzsimmons conducted at Hoover High School. The solutions found in *Double the Work* have been the focus of our work there. These recommendations suggest that we as English educators should do the following:

- **Integrate all four language skills from the start.** In far too many classrooms, English language learners are not provided instruction in reading and writing until they have developed basic oral proficiency. In other classrooms, oral language is not developed and used in conjunction with reading and writing.

- **Teach the components and processes of reading and writing.** Some English language learners may need to learn the sounds of English or the vocabulary terms for a specific topic. As teachers,
### Table 2.5. Key Elements of Effective Writing Instruction, Focusing on English Language Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Practice</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Focus on ELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing strategies</td>
<td>Teach students strategies to plan, revise, and edit their compositions</td>
<td>• Teach the organization of various genres—organization of writing can vary from culture to culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Teach the vocabulary and language structures that make the thesis and evidence clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarization</td>
<td>Explicitly and systematically teach students to summarize texts</td>
<td>• Use graphic organizers to help ELLs chunk text for summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative writing</td>
<td>Use instructional arrangements in which students work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities for students to practice oral language—listening and speaking—to hear and rehearse models of language they can transfer to writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific product goals</td>
<td>Assign students specific, reachable goals for the writing they will complete</td>
<td>• Break down goals as needed to make writing less overwhelming for students who are learning language at the same time as writing strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word processing</td>
<td>Use computers as instructional supports for writing assignments</td>
<td>• Teach students to use spell-check and online thesaurus dictionaries (including primary language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide prescreened websites for research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence combining</td>
<td>Teach students to construct increasingly complex, sophisticated sentences</td>
<td>• Use this as a way to teach grammar in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prewriting</td>
<td>Engage students in activities designed to help them generate and organize their ideas for compositions</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities that encourage students to practice oral language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry activities</td>
<td>Engage students in analyzing data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task</td>
<td>• Assure that ELLs are engaged in tasks that require high-level critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process writing approach</td>
<td>Integrate a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop that focuses on extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences and purposes, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing</td>
<td>• Provide daily opportunities to practice writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Link assignments to personal experience to activate background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of models</td>
<td>Provide students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing</td>
<td>• Provide numerous models before expecting students to produce independently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing for content learning</td>
<td>Use writing as a tool for learning content material</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities to talk with peers before asking students to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Build background knowledge before asking students to write</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we must provide instruction in these components. However, focusing solely on the components will not result in proficient and skilled readers and writers. Adolescent English language learners also need to engage in the processes of reading and writing, as well as learning the language required to summarize, synthesize, discuss, draft, respond, revise, and evaluate.

- **Teach reading comprehension strategies.** Adolescents need instruction, modeling, and coaching in the use of comprehension strategies. Their age alone is not an indicator that they have mastered the skills necessary to understand and think critically about texts. When the language or the content of a text is unfamiliar, it becomes even more important to use these strategies to facilitate understanding.

- **Focus on vocabulary development.** Many students will develop a conversational vocabulary as they engage with peers, TV, and society. However, without instruction they cannot develop an academic vocabulary. English language learners need multiple exposures and opportunities to use new vocabulary. Context clues alone are often insufficient to assist ELLs in making meaning because they do not understand enough of the surrounding text.

- **Build and activate background knowledge.** A number of researchers, policy analysts, and teachers have come to the same conclusion: background knowledge is a significant predictor of reading comprehension and future learning. As such, a focus on background knowledge is essential in every lesson we teach.

- **Teach language through content and themes.** Focusing on language in the absence of content not only is more difficult but is also less motivating for students. Adolescents want to know why they’re learning what they’re asked to learn; they ask about relevance all of the time. They also enjoy discussing big ideas and engaging in inquiry, which naturally requires language. Combining language and content ensures that students develop their linguistic competence and content knowledge while being connected to the world around them. Organizing instruction around important themes provides the redundancy that is critical to learning language. As ideas are presented from a variety of perspectives, students have multiple opportunities to hear and use the same language.

There is an amazing amount of consistency across these reports. First, they all clearly demonstrate that teachers matter and that what they do can either facilitate or hinder the progress of English language learners. Second, they point to specific instructional interventions, procedures, strategies, and systems that teachers can use to ensure students’ success. Third, they each suggest that literacy is complex and that literacy development requires purposeful instruction. They also note that
focusing on isolated skills will not work. And finally, they point to the knowledge that effective teachers have and need to have if they are to be successful.

Before we turn our attention to the language focus areas that adolescent English language learners need—grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—let’s focus on the instructional routines and procedures necessary to accelerate language and literacy learning.

A Model for Organizing Instruction for English Language Learners

“That’s the reason they’re called lessons,” the Gryphon remarked: “because they lessen from day to day.” (Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865)

Carroll raises an interesting point: our instruction should decrease over time. This idea was further developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) through the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction. The model suggests that the teacher moves from assuming “all the responsibility for performing a task . . . to a situation in which the students assume all of the responsibility” (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 211). Stated another way, “The Gradual Release model emphasizes instruction that mentors students into becoming capable thinkers and learners when handling the tasks with which they have not yet developed expertise” (Buehl, 2005, para. 15).

In her book Other People’s Children, Delpit (1996) describes the support learners get from other people and from books:

Think about the difference between learning to play chess from your grandfather or learning from a book. The best part about learning from a grandfather is that there is presumably a relationship to build the learning on and, because he is there with you, he can adjust the instruction according to what he sees that you need. The problem with depending on a grandfather is that you might not have one when you need one. (p. 96)

Without using the term, Delpit describes one of the essential features of the gradual release of responsibility model—that the teacher can adjust instruction. This is a critical feature and one that we cannot forget if we are going to see appreciable changes in the literacy performance of our English language learners.

A visual of our implementation of the gradual release of responsibility model can be found in Figure 2.4. We have identified four broad categories of instruction (Frey & Fisher, 2006). Over time, and with pur-
poseful instruction and support in each of these categories, information, strategies, skills, content, and language transfer from the teacher or knowledgeable other to the student.

**Focus Lessons.** In this phase of instruction, the teacher models thinking or information for the whole class. The teacher does not ask students to provide answers, but the teacher may have a conversation with the class. This is the “I do it” phase in which the teacher does almost all of the work. In general, the focus lessons should clearly establish the purpose for the day, week, or theme. We know that English language learners learn more and faster when they understand the purpose of the lesson (Hill & Flynn, 2006). The focus lesson is often a shared reading and think-aloud in which the teacher models his or her thinking about a piece of text. In doing so, the teacher does the following:

- builds students’ vocabulary
- models vocabulary learning through context clues or word parts
- develops students’ understanding of fluent reading
- models fluent reading, punctuation, and intonation
- uses standard grammar
- focuses the students’ attention on examples of targeted language structures

![Figure 2.4. Gradual release of responsibility model.](image-url)
shares examples of comprehension strategy use
models comprehension skills

While the focus lesson is a critical component of instruction, it cannot last too long. In general, adolescents will continue to learn in this format for about fifteen minutes. Any longer than that and students will likely lose interest, become confused, forget the point or purpose, and disengage.

**Guided Instruction.** Over many years of work in literacy, we have come to believe that students will never learn to read or write well if they spend period after period in whole class groups. We know that the “real teaching” that we do in the English classroom occurs during guided instruction. This is the time in which “we do it,” meaning that teachers and students work together and responsibility is shared. While this can occur as a whole class activity, it is most often realized as needs-based groups of students who meet with the teacher for specific instruction designed to address areas of weakness or future growth. These groups can focus on grammar, mechanics, idea development, comprehension, or any other number of areas in which students need purposeful and explicit instruction. English language learners, in particular, benefit from small group instruction as it is far less intimidating to speak out in front of just a few other students. In a large group, ELLs often tend to sit passively, neither practicing language nor engaging in learning. Guided instruction groups typically last between fifteen and twenty minutes, and teachers can meet with one or two groups per day, depending on the length of the class.

Guided instruction targeted to areas of student need allow teachers to be much more exacting in their instruction. As Fullan, Hill, and Crévola (2006) note, we do not need more prescriptive teaching, but rather more precision in our teaching. This precision will come when we understand the language and literacy development of our students and plan for needs-based interventions.

**Collaborative Learning.** The most common question we get about guided instruction is “What will the other students do while I meet with four, five, or six students in a small group?” Unfortunately, in too many classrooms this question is left unanswered, and the teacher either leaves students to work independently or abandons guided instruction altogether. Our answer to this question is collaborative learning activities in which students work together in purposeful ways to consolidate their learning. These collaborative learning activities must be directly linked to the purpose of the lesson—the focus—and provide
students with opportunities to discuss and engage. It is the time of the lesson in which the teacher says, “You do it together.”

There are a number of ways that students can collaborate with one another, including peer response groups, partner reading, book clubs, literature circles, reciprocal teaching, editing conferences, and the like. The goal is that students work side by side and engage with one another, in the absence of the teacher who provides prompts, questions, and clues. Just like the small group guided instruction, this collaborative work provides an environment in which students who are learning English are more comfortable taking the risks that are so vital to learning language. They have significantly increased opportunities to practice language and clarify understanding as they listen to and talk with their peers.

**Independent Reading and Writing.** The goal of our collective work is skilled readers and writers who complete tasks independently. To that end, students need opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned on their own. Students need to read independently and widely, they need to write for themselves and others, and they need to think about the content they are studying. In some classrooms, students enter and are asked to work independently day after day. It’s still far too common for students to enter a classroom and see written on the board, “Read pages 284–301 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter.” These classrooms do not work for English language learners (and probably most other students). Without the scaffolding provided through a gradual release of responsibility, English language learners will continue to perform poorly in school, drop out before completing high school, and fail to reach their potential.

Although independent work is a critical step in the learning process, English language learners may need to spend more time in the first three phases of instruction—“I do it,” “We do it,” and “You do it together”—before they can access and construct grade-level text on their own for extended periods of time. With instruction linked to student performance data and purposeful lessons, students acquire knowledge and language at amazing speeds. As we noted in those many reports we reviewed, it really is the teacher who makes the difference.

**Conclusion**

Over the past several decades, teachers and researchers have learned a great deal about effective instruction for English language learners. We are no longer in an era of guessing what works. There is not an unlim-
Chapter 2

ited range of effective approaches to teaching English language learners. For students to become proficient with the language, to think critically about the content, we must provide instruction in the language and ample opportunities to practice the language. As Dutro and Moran (2003) noted, students must learn English, not just learn in English. There are simply too many students who have become protracted at the intermediate levels of language proficiency, failing to progress any further. Each of the four focus chapters in this book highlights specific strategies to move students beyond this threshold level of proficiency to be able to read, write, listen, and speak grade-level academic English:

- **vocabulary knowledge** to use precise and academic terminology
- **grammar skills** to communicate ideas in standard academic English
- **fluency development** to articulate their thoughts easily in a powerful and effectual manner, and to read and write fluently in order to understand
- **comprehension strategies** to make meaning from grade-level texts across genres and content areas

Focusing on vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension as we will do in the chapters that follow will ensure that we provide students with the skills and knowledge they need in order to use the English language to negotiate their world.
Across the nation, schools are in the midst of comprehensive reform efforts aimed at improving the achievement of all students. Language Learners in the English Classroom is designed as a tool to guide English teachers in designing purposeful and powerful lessons that accelerate the achievement of students who are learning English. The authors describe the unique challenges for English language learners and provide practical, research-based strategies that will help your students meet those challenges. Focus chapters clearly define and illustrate how to integrate teaching of • Vocabulary • Grammar • Fluency • Comprehension into the grade-level content of middle and high school English classrooms. The book also examines the unique role that English teachers play in helping ELLs achieve academic success across the disciplines and incorporates NCTE’s position statement on teaching English language learners as well as the findings of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.

With authentic classroom examples, sample student work, and a handy discussion guide for study groups or individual reflection, this book is a must-have for any English teacher working with language learners.

About the Authors:
Doug, Carol, and Nancy collaborate in developing and implementing effective supports for English language learners in urban Southern California secondary schools. They host demonstration classrooms, develop videos in collaboration with teachers to promote reflection, and lead common assessment and consensus scoring sessions in partner schools. Doug is professor of English language development at San Diego State University, and Nancy is associate professor of literacy at the same institution. Carol has been a secondary classroom teacher and is a professional developer specializing in English language development for San Diego Unified School District.

Foreword by David Freeman

Language Learners in the English Classroom
by Douglas Fisher, Carol Rothenberg, and Nancy Frey

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096
800-369-6283 or 217-328-3870
www.ncte.org


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