



A Union of Professionals

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# AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS

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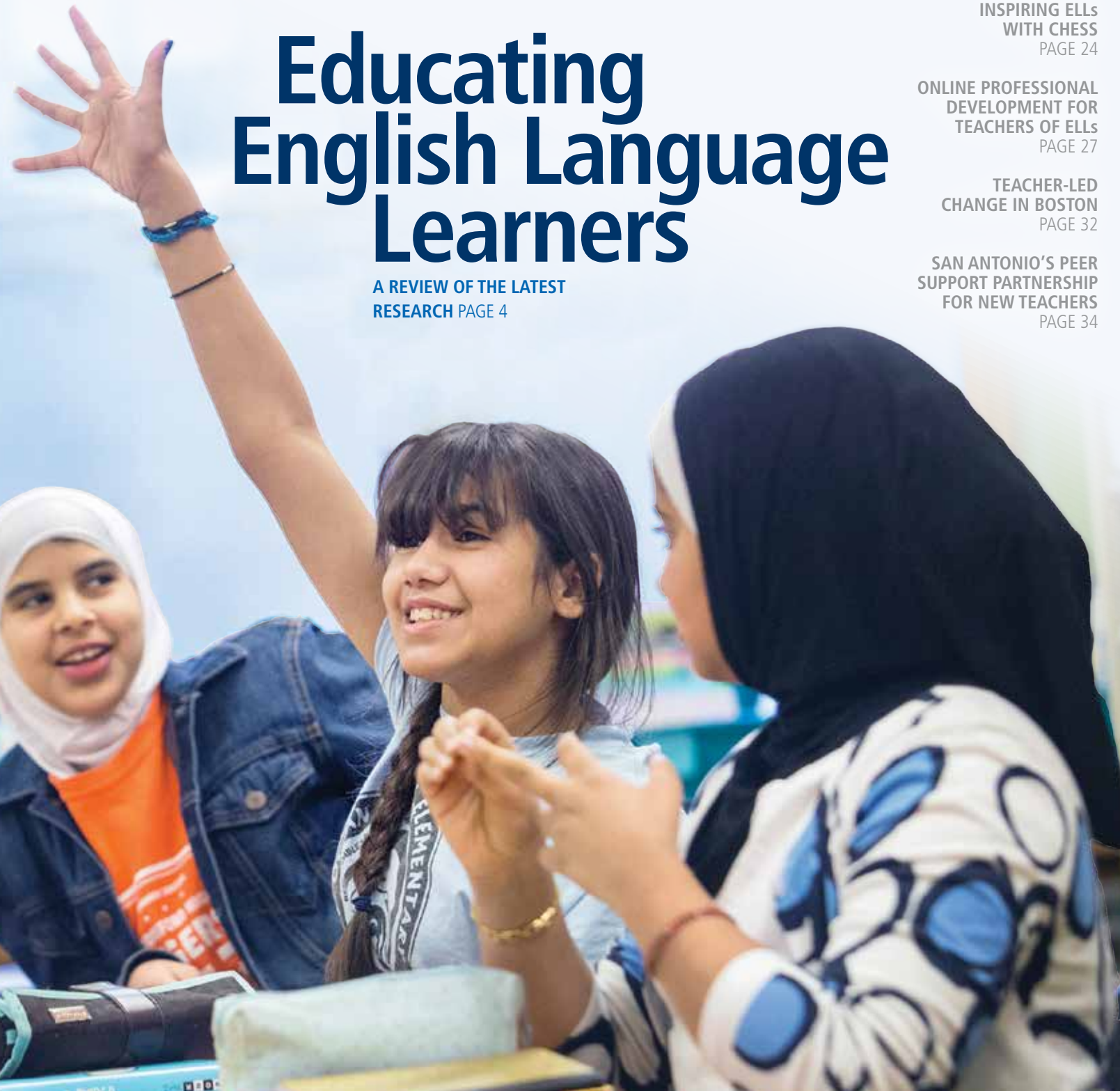
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# Election 2018

## Which side are you on?



**ELECTION DAY November 6**

The November elections are a moment of urgency and opportunity—a moment to reject the politics of division, and an opportunity to level the playing field, to create economic policies that help all, not just the wealthy. Winning elections at the local, state, and federal levels will enable an agenda that includes:

- Investment in public education instead of austerity and privatization,
- Strengthening unions and lifting up workers' voices,
- Making healthcare and college more affordable,
- Rebuilding the middle class, and
- Putting a check on the Trump-DeVos agenda.

The union movement, and AFT members in particular, can and must be the catalyst for change, for fairness, and for justice. **We need to be all-in, together.**

Please join the fight! Go to [go.aft.org/countmein2018](https://go.aft.org/countmein2018) and tell us how you can help in the 2018 elections!

## We Care. We Fight. We Show Up. We Vote.



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## Achieving Together What We Cannot Do Alone

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

Right-wing groups have been waging war against public sector unions for many years, and, over the summer, the conservative bare-majority on the U.S. Supreme Court—cheered on by President Trump—handed them a win in *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*. This case was about stripping unions of resources, with the ultimate aim of eradicating labor unions altogether. Why was this such a prized goal for the right wing? Because unions help level the imbalance between the rich and powerful and everyone else, and help working people get ahead.

Stamping out unions has long been the aim of many wealthy conservatives, because it's easier for them to win elections, maintain economic dominance, and disempower workers when individuals can't collectively improve their lives through the solidarity of a union.

*Janus'* supporters argued that the "fair share fees" nonmembers pay for union representation violate their First Amendment rights, even though workers have the right not to join a union or pay for any of the union's political work. Justice Elena Kagan dismissed the majority's opinion as "weaponizing the First Amendment," noting that the same argument was raised—and unanimously rejected—41 years ago in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, a precedent the Supreme Court has upheld six times. With this reversal, public employees who benefit from a collective bargaining agreement but choose not to join the union can opt to be "free riders" and not contribute anything for the benefits they receive, while the union must still represent them.

Right-wing groups are mobilizing and spending many millions of dollars to "defund and defang" unions by attempting to pick off our members, but they are sticking with the union. AFT locals throughout the country report that all or nearly all of their members have recommitted to their union. Workers are sticking with their unions because unions

are still the best vehicle working people have to make a difference in their lives and their workplaces. Unions negotiate everything from manageable class sizes to safety equipment for emergency personnel. Workers covered by a union contract earn 13.2 percent more on average than nonunion workers, and they are more likely to have health insurance, paid leave, and retirement benefits.

As the recent teacher walkouts showed, the states where union density is the lowest have sharply cut back spending and investment in public education. Teachers, firefighters, nurses, and other public employees nationwide are signing recommitments to their unions, because they know that unions make possible what is impossible for individuals to accomplish on their own.

Educators for Excellence recently released a survey of educators that shows that a vast majority of teachers believe teachers unions are essential. The survey found that 85 percent of all teachers regard unions as important, including 74 percent of nonunion teachers. And they value the union even if they disagree with positions the union takes.

The public gets it, too. Even in our hugely polarized country, polling shows that people support teachers unions and agree that teachers aren't paid enough. And voters in Missouri repealed a state law that would have weakened unions by an emphatic 2-1 ratio.

Linda Greenhouse, the Pulitzer Prize-winning, longtime Supreme Court reporter, observed that the court's "attack on public employee unions has little to do with the Constitution and a whole lot to do with politics." Indeed, the right wing of the Supreme Court is going well beyond its charge to interpret the Constitution. With the reliably conservative vote of Neil Gorsuch and the conservative leanings of Trump's latest nominee, Brett Kavanaugh,

the Supreme Court is transforming from an impartial protector of constitutional liberties and minority rights to a partisan champion of the powerful and the political right—which is exactly how a web of right-wing, dark-money groups planned it.

In the last term, the Supreme Court ruled to allow states to purge eligible voters from their rolls, uphold Trump's

**Unions have re-engaged with our members who, in turn, are sticking with their unions.**

immigration ban, and protect employers from class-action lawsuits by workers with grievances. Sounds more like a legislative agenda than a judicial docket of the highest court of the land. The increasingly activist, deeply partisan, and anti-worker Supreme Court should be at the forefront of workers' minds as they vote this November. The course of the country and the soul of our nation are in the balance.

*Janus* poses a challenge for public sector unions, one we have been preparing for. But it presents great opportunities as well, as unions have re-engaged with our members who, in turn, are sticking with their unions. I spoke with many educators as they headed back to school this fall. They expressed hopes and concerns that are both unique and universal—the elimination of a vital program, continued cuts in education spending, how to help struggling students, and their students' safety. They know that, no matter what we seek to accomplish, we can achieve together through the union what we cannot do alone.



## OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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**NEW ELECTION RESOURCES FROM SHARE MY LESSON**

Teaching students about the democratic process has never been more important. Voter turnout is on the rise in primary elections, and first-time women candidates have been defeating longtime incumbents across the political spectrum. In fact, more than 300 AFT members are running for office in the 2018 midterms. Visit Share My Lesson’s election collection at [www.sharemylesson.com/election-collection](http://www.sharemylesson.com/election-collection) for free K–12 lessons, activities, blogs, and webinars to educate students about local, state, and national elections and why they matter. Topics include fostering civil discourse, fighting fake news, participating in political debate, and learning about voting rights—hot-button issues sure to keep your students informed and engaged.

**A DECADE OF CUTS TO EDUCATION HAS HURT KIDS**

A recent report published by the AFT details the devastating impact on schools, classrooms, and students when states choose to pursue an austerity agenda in the false belief that tax cuts will pay for themselves. *A Decade of Neglect: Public Education Funding in the Aftermath of the Great Recession* outlines the effects of austerity measures taken in the last 10 years.

Among the findings: public education is underfunded in every single state in the United States. Read the full report at [www.aft.org/decade-neglect](http://www.aft.org/decade-neglect).

**\$19 billion:**  
the amount schools in 25 states have lost in spending.

**38 states:**  
where the average teacher salary in 2018 is lower than in 2009.

**41 states:**  
have shortchanged higher education by a total of \$15 billion.

**STICKING WITH THE UNION**

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled against working people in *Janus v. AFSCME*, but the AFT and its members are standing strong. Given the right wing’s attempts to further rig the economy in favor of corporations and the wealthy, unions remain the most effective vehicle for ensuring working people have the power to join together to make possible what is impossible for individuals acting alone. AFT members across the country are recommitting to their local unions. Their stories may be different, but their goal is the same: to show that the union fights for its members.

For example, in Massena, New York, the union has formed partnerships to boost a community facing severe economic struggles. In Douglas County, Colorado, the union helped to fend off a corporate takeover of the school board.

And in Genoa, Ohio, the union reclaimed the pay teachers had sacrificed to restore arts programming. These locals show that unions are not going away, that new members are signing up, and that the labor movement will continue to make a difference in the lives of working people.

**AFT HELPS MEMBERS CLIMB OUT OF DEBT**

With Americans carrying more than \$1.5 trillion in education debt, student debt far exceeds automobile and credit card debt in this country. In a recent survey of AFT members who are struggling financially, 80 percent said their education debt was either “challenging” or “a major burden.” The AFT’s student debt clinics already have helped more than 10,000 people better understand how to pay off their debt and find the best path to a debt-free life. Learn how to sponsor a student debt clinic at your local union: [www.aft.org/member-benefits/student-debt-clinics](http://www.aft.org/member-benefits/student-debt-clinics).

—THE AFT COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT



AFT President Randi Weingarten rallying in support of public education in Pittsburgh this summer.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL CAMPBELL

**IN MEMORIAM**

It is with great sorrow that we announce the passing of our friend Eugenia Kemble. “Genie” conceived of the AFT’s quarterly journal *American Educator* and was the founding executive director of the Albert Shanker Institute. She had a fierce sense of what was right—she fought tirelessly for righteousness, justice, public education, labor rights, and democracy in this country and abroad. We thank her for her leadership and dedication to the AFT and the members we serve; she will be missed.

—EDITORS



# Educating English Language Learners

A Review of the Latest Research



BY DIANE AUGUST

It's October in the Rio Grande Valley; the summer heat has receded and the school year is in full swing. Rolando Diaz teaches sixth-grade science at Del Valle Middle School. His class is a mix of English language learners (ELLs) with varying levels of English proficiency. He also has a few newcomer students, mostly from Mexico and Central America. Although all the students are Latino, they have varying degrees of Spanish proficiency.

*Diane August is a managing researcher and the director of the Center for English Language Learners at the American Institutes for Research. Previously, she was a senior research scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics and a senior program officer at the National Academy of Sciences. This article is drawn from chapters 7 and 8 of the report Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures, published in February 2017 by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, which is available online at [www.bit.ly/2nObDhP](http://www.bit.ly/2nObDhP).*

Today, Mr. Diaz is teaching a lesson on ecology. To prepare for it, he has added several scaffolds to the district-mandated science curriculum. He presents slides to guide the lesson, providing students with visual support for what they hear him say.

Students also have a workbook that corresponds to the slides. For each slide, students engage in an activity that helps them process information. In this case, it is “partner talk” requiring them to describe a variety of habitats in terms of food, shelter, and temperature. They also use a bilingual glossary with pictures and English and Spanish definitions for the lesson’s target vocabulary words. The glossary asks students to answer a question about each word and draw a picture or provide an example. For instance, for “ecosystem,” they describe one near their house.

Mr. Diaz begins the lesson by introducing the content and language objectives for the day. Next, he explains several general and domain-specific words using the slides.

He quickly gives each definition in English, asks a student to read the definition in Spanish, presents an example for each definition, and asks students to discuss each word’s meaning. A few

weeks ago, he taught a mini-lesson on recognizing English-Spanish cognates, so they discuss whether “habitat” and “ecosystem” are also cognates.

Students then form groups to explore the schoolyard habitat. In each group, students are assigned various roles—mapmaker, bug collector, vegetation inspector, soil sampler, or data collector—and they complete a corresponding chart. For example, the vegetation inspector measures and records the height of the tallest vegetation and works with the mapmaker to record the location.

At the end of the lesson, students listen and follow along as Mr. Diaz reads the section of the grade-level text that discusses features of the ecosystem in Yellowstone National Park. After each section of text, students answer questions orally about the text, illustrations, and other visual displays. Mr. Diaz provides sentence starters and sentence frames to scaffold responses for his students with lower levels of English proficiency.\* He intentionally pairs newcomers with bilingual peers so they can converse in Spanish before writing in English.

A longtime teacher, Mr. Diaz has effectively planned and carried out instruction on a specific science topic. He has ensured that students with varying degrees of English proficiency can access the academic content, strengthen their literacy skills, and engage with and learn from their peers.

I’ve worked with Mr. Diaz and many others like him to incorporate these best practices into their teaching. His teaching reflects the latest research on educating ELLs. In this article, I discuss this research, which includes seven principles from a recent consensus report released by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.<sup>1</sup> The report, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, examines what the research tells us about learning English from early childhood through high school, identifies effective practices for educators, and recommends steps policymakers can take to support high-quality educational outcomes for children and youth who are learning English.

These principles and practices build on findings from previous reviews on the same topic,<sup>2</sup> as well as U.S. Department of Education best-evidence syntheses.<sup>3</sup> While dual language programming for ELLs is effective for developing English proficiency and content-area knowledge in English—with the extra benefit of maintaining and developing students’ first language, validating their culture, and providing opportunities to enhance cross-cultural understanding<sup>4</sup>—this article focuses on instruction delivered in English, an important component of dual language programs. (For more on dual language programs and early childhood education, see the article on page 10.)

### 1. Provide Access to Grade-Level Course Content

For ELLs, exposure to grade-level course content provides crucial access to the language required for academic achievement and for becoming fully proficient in English.<sup>5</sup> This exposure helps



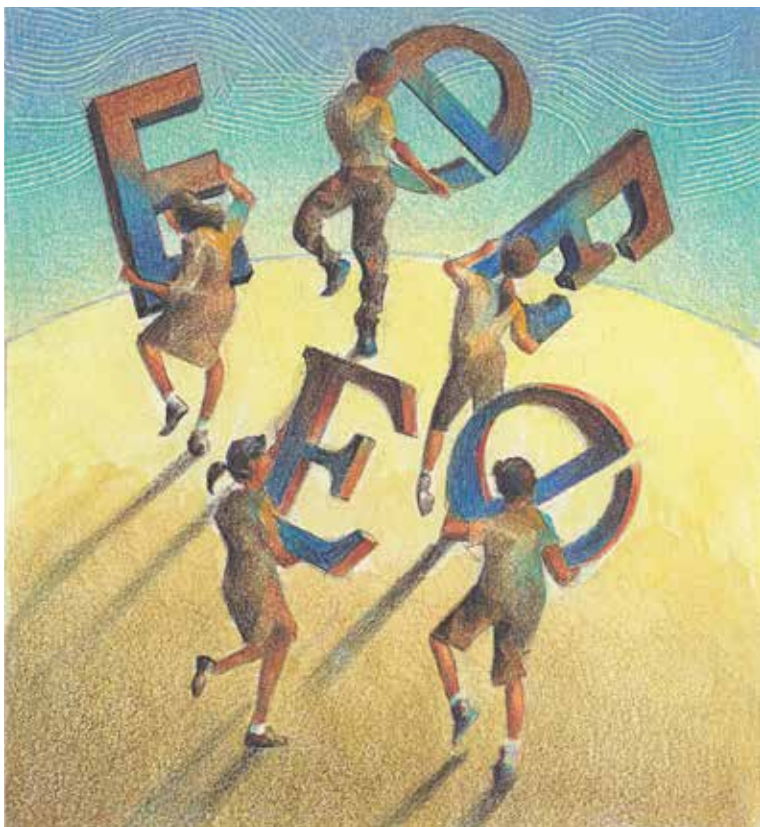
**Keep in mind that many skills and types of knowledge transfer from students’ first language to their second.**

students develop the concepts and skills needed to master grade-level coursework as they move up through the grades. Grade-level coursework, in turn, helps ensure students perceive the materials as worth working on, engaging, and meaningful.<sup>6</sup>

In the reviewed studies that focus on the elementary grade levels, a variety of authentic materials were used to support learning. For example, in an English language arts intervention, newspaper articles, diaries, and historical and fictional accounts were used to teach students about immigration across different time periods.<sup>7</sup> In an intervention for young children, the read-aloud books and videos focused on habitats.<sup>8</sup> A middle-grades science intervention used the same texts and experiments used with gifted and talented students.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that many skills and types of knowledge transfer from students’ first language to their second, and that ELLs may have already acquired core content in their first language.<sup>10</sup> For example, students who have learned math concepts and skills in their first language do not need to relearn the concepts and skills, but do need to learn the English academic language associated with them. ELLs whose first language shares cognates with English do not need to learn meanings for cognates whose meanings they know in their first language—only English labels for these cognates.

\*For more on scaffolding, see “One Sentence at a Time” in the Summer 2017 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/summer2017/hochman-wexler](http://www.aft.org/ae/summer2017/hochman-wexler).



## Approaches deemed effective for building vocabulary in English-proficient students have also been used in successful interventions for ELLs.

Because grade-level materials in English are challenging for ELLs, instruction using these materials must be coupled with methods that support ELLs. The following principles elaborate on this theme.

### 2. Build on Effective Practices Used with English-Proficient Students

Many of the practices that have proved effective for ELLs are adapted from practices that have proved effective for English-proficient students.\* For example, in the area of literacy interven-

\*A useful resource for finding reading and math programs deemed effective for all students is [www.evidenceforessa.org](http://www.evidenceforessa.org), a website created by the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University.

tions, it is helpful to teach ELLs the same skills as their English-proficient peers—the skills of hearing the individual English sounds or phonemes within words (i.e., phonemic awareness); using the letters and spelling patterns within words to decode the pronunciation (i.e., phonics); reading text aloud with appropriate speed, accuracy, and expression (i.e., oral reading fluency); using strategies to learn new words; thinking about what they are reading (i.e., reading comprehension); and writing with the organization, development, substance, and style appropriate to the task and audience.<sup>11</sup>

Effective practices for middle-grades students similarly build on practices that have been effective with English-proficient students. For example, in science, the 5-E approach—Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate—has been used to guide successful interventions for ELLs.<sup>12</sup> Approaches deemed effective for building vocabulary in English-proficient students have also been used in successful interventions for ELLs.<sup>13</sup> Examples include teaching vocabulary in the context of rich and varied language experiences, teaching individual words, teaching word-learning strategies, promoting word consciousness, and using words in writing.<sup>14</sup> In social studies, approaches include reading and writing about informational passages that provide multiple perspectives on historical events.<sup>15</sup>

That said, not *all* practices deemed effective for English-proficient learners are effective for ELLs. For example, one study<sup>16</sup> found that the use of literacy practices that included only higher-level questioning and discussion about the meaning of text had a strong relationship to improved reading comprehension for English-proficient students, but had little discernible benefit for ELLs. The study also found differences with respect to teacher-student interactions. “Telling”—defined as the teacher providing students with information, rather than engaging them in the creation of information through coaching, recitation, or other forms of interaction—had a statistically significant positive effect on ELLs’ reading comprehension, but a negative effect on the comprehension of English-proficient students. The researcher posits that in the first case, the literacy practices (e.g., higher-level questioning and discussion) may have been at too high a level for ELLs to benefit without the appropriate supports. In the case of “telling,” the researcher suggests that ELLs benefited because they were provided with more support for engaging with core content in English—a level of support that was not necessary for English-proficient students.

### 3. Provide Supports to Help ELLs Master Core Content and Skills

ELLs also benefit from visual and verbal supports.<sup>17</sup> For students in the elementary grades, visual supports include the strategic use of pictures, short videos, and graphic organizers to represent complex vocabulary and concepts.<sup>18</sup> Verbal supports include student glossaries; words glossed in context by the teacher; and whole-class, small-group, and partner discussions that focus in part on clarifying key ideas.<sup>19</sup> In the middle grades, visual supports



include graphic organizers such as diagrams, tables, and concept maps for science, and illustrations and multimedia for language arts. Verbal supports include bilingual glossaries, as well as sentence and paragraph frames. In several studies, students were taught strategies to support learning;<sup>20</sup> in one such study, students learned strategies to help them write.<sup>21</sup>

For ELLs who are newcomers, especially those in the upper grades, core content provided in their home language will support them in developing their knowledge and skills while they are acquiring proficiency in English.

#### 4. Develop ELLs' Academic Language

Academic language is defined as language used in school, in written communications, in public presentations, and in formal settings.<sup>22</sup> Academic proficiency is “knowing and being able to use general and academic vocabulary, specialized or complex grammatical structures, and multifarious language functions and discourse structures—all for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills, interacting about a topic, and imparting information to others.”<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that academic language differs across content areas. In science, for example, the challenges of mastering academic language apply to vocabulary (e.g., learning everyday words with science meanings, general academic vocabulary, and discipline-specific vocabulary); syntax (e.g., passive voice, compound and complex sentences, and the nominalization<sup>†</sup> of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives); and discourse (e.g., learning to attend to precise meanings in science text and talk). Students must also learn to master the nonlinguistic forms of language prevalent in content areas like science and math (e.g., diagrams, graphs, charts, maps, and equations).<sup>24</sup>

One series of experimental studies developed academic language in the context of teaching mainly science content.<sup>25</sup> The studies used the types of visual and verbal supports previously described to help students make sense of content, develop general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, engage in opportunities to talk in pairs and small groups, and practice writing to extend their learning. These studies are well reviewed in two U.S. Department of Education practice guides for educators.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to vocabulary instruction, recent research indicates embedded instruction is a promising technique for developing ELLs' vocabulary when that vocabulary is not conceptually complex.<sup>27</sup> In embedded instruction, students are given access to word meanings through on-the-spot child-friendly definitions of the target words (and, in some cases, examples and gestures). The research also indicates that instructional condition interacts with word type, with conceptually complex words much harder for students to acquire and thus needing more instructional support.<sup>28</sup> (For more on helping stu-

dents with their oral language development, see the article on page 18.)

#### 5. Encourage Peer-to-Peer Learning Opportunities

One of the key principles of instruction in a second language is enabling students to interact via speaking, listening, reading, and writing with peers in their second language.<sup>29</sup> Speaking is important to generate feedback, encourage syntactic processing, and challenge students to engage at higher proficiency levels. As a result, it is no surprise that in many of the studies cited thus far, peer-to-peer learning was an important component of the intervention. In fact, in some studies, it was the focus.

**A key principle of instruction in a second language is enabling students to interact via speaking, listening, reading, and writing with peers in their second language.**



For example, in one study implemented in the elementary grades, peer-to-peer learning was used to develop first-graders' literacy skills in a dual language program.<sup>30</sup> Using the Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) program, the peer-to-peer learning classrooms provided a structured routine in which the teacher modeled the language activities of the day; students practiced the activities in pairs for 15 minutes while the teacher supervised; and students then turned to story sharing, a partner reading activity that lasted for another 15 minutes. Teachers paired high-performing readers with low-performing readers and

<sup>†</sup>Nominalization refers to using a word that is not a noun (e.g., a verb, adjective, or adverb) as a noun or as the head of a noun phrase (e.g., using the adjective “rich” as a noun, as in “the rich”).

then taught the students to use the PALS procedures. During each segment of the session, the high-performing students performed the role of coach first, and the low-performing students followed. On average, PALS students demonstrated significantly greater growth than control students in phoneme segmentation, non-sense word fluency, and oral reading fluency.

## Historically, ELLs have been both overidentified and underidentified as having a disability.



In the middle grades, many of the interventions that had positive outcomes for ELLs also provided opportunities for collaborative peer learning.<sup>31</sup> An important feature of these studies is that peer talk, in pairs or small groups, focused on course content.

In planning for peer-to-peer interactions for adolescents, teachers need to consider students' growing awareness of their social status in peer groups in school and their community.<sup>32</sup> For ELLs, this includes how they are perceived by peers proficient in English.<sup>33</sup>

### 6. Capitalize on Students' Home Language, Knowledge, and Cultural Assets

Studies on cross-language transfer<sup>34</sup> indicate significant relationships between performance in ELLs' first and second languages in word reading, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading strategies. Findings from evaluation studies comparing bilin-

gual programs with mostly English-only programs indicate that, over time, ELLs instructed bilingually either perform on par with or outperform ELLs instructed only in English,<sup>35</sup> providing indirect evidence of positive transfer.

Experimental studies<sup>36</sup> conducted with elementary school children suggest that instructional routines that draw on students' home language, knowledge, and cultural assets support literacy development in English.\* Examples of the instructional routines include previewing and reviewing material in children's first language, storybook reading in students' first language,<sup>37</sup> providing opportunities for students to engage in conversational exchanges during instruction that permits some interpretation to take place in their first language,<sup>38</sup> providing first-language definitions for the targeted vocabulary,<sup>39</sup> providing instruction in word-learning strategies that help ELLs uncover the meanings of cognates when encountered in English texts,<sup>40</sup> and introducing key concepts by connecting them with children's prior knowledge or experiences at home and in their community.<sup>41</sup>

As was the case for studies conducted with children in grades K-5, middle-grades studies that showed positive effects capitalized on ELLs' assets. While none of the studies were implemented in bilingual settings, the interventions included bilingual glossaries, background materials in students' home languages, teacher explanations in students' home languages, partner work in students' home languages, and instruction to help ELLs take advantage of their home-language knowledge and skills.<sup>42</sup>

### 7. Screen for Language and Literacy Challenges, Monitor Progress, and Support ELLs Who Are Struggling

Historically, ELLs have been both overidentified and underidentified as having a disability.<sup>43</sup> Both cases—identifying students as having a disability when they do not in fact have one (i.e., overidentification) and failing to identify students for special education services that they need (i.e., underidentification)—are problematic. Measures used to assess ELLs for reading and language challenges must distinguish language development

from disability.

Most intervention research has focused on ELLs with reading difficulties. Findings from numerous studies cited in previous reviews of promising and effective instructional practices for ELLs<sup>44</sup> suggest that districts should establish procedures and provide training for schools to screen ELLs for reading challenges, consider collecting progress monitoring data more than three times a year for ELLs at risk, and use data from screening and progress monitoring assessments to make decisions about necessary instructional supports.

The studies also suggest the types of reading skills that should be assessed at different grade spans to determine whether ELLs

\*For more on ways English language learners bring cultural assets to schools, see "The Potential and Promise of Latino Students" in the Spring 2017 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2017/gandara](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2017/gandara).

are in need of additional instructional support. For kindergarten and first grade, skills include phonological awareness, familiarity with the alphabet and alphabetic principle, the ability to read single words, and knowledge of basic phonics rules. For children at the end of first grade and in the next few grades, skills include the ability to read connected texts accurately and fluently. For students in grades 2–5, oral reading fluency should also be assessed. However, these grade spans are predicated on ELLs beginning their schooling in kindergarten and must be adjusted for students entering U.S. schools in later grades and who may have already acquired these skills in their first language.

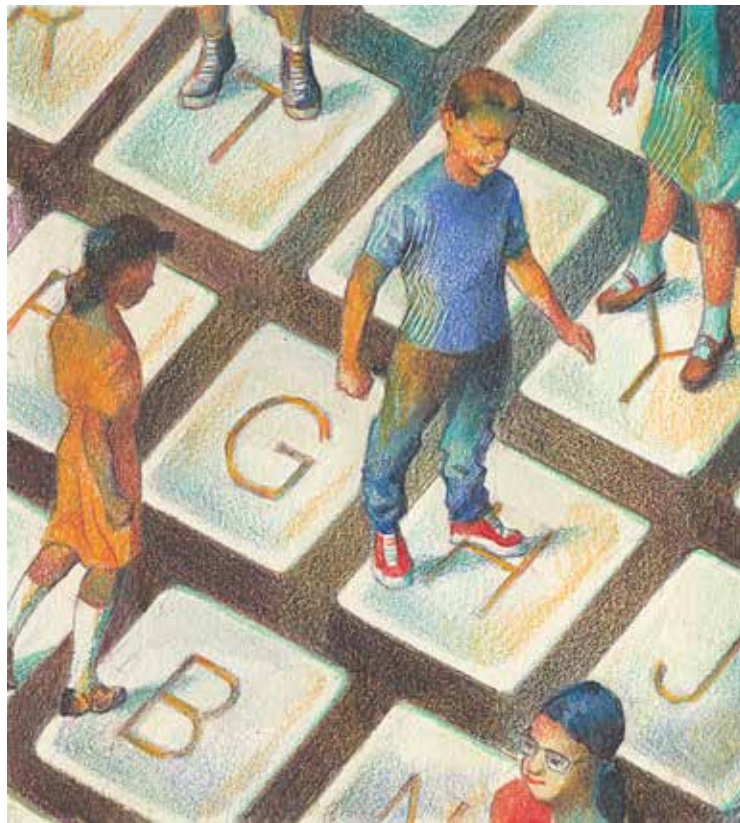
The studies provide two other recommendations: first, districts with performance benchmarks should use the same standards for ELLs and English-proficient students in the early grades, but should make adjustments in instruction when ELL progress is not sufficient; and second, teachers should be trained to use formative data to guide instruction.<sup>45</sup> With regard to formative data, one study suggests that students' writing samples should be used on an ongoing basis to determine areas for improvement.<sup>46</sup> Students' writing samples are excellent sources for formative assessment because they shed light on language challenges common to all children, as well as challenges and opportunities related to primary language influence on English.<sup>47</sup>

Almost all studies related to screening, monitoring, and intervening are studies of ELLs in elementary grades.<sup>48</sup> Recommendations based on these studies include implementing intensive small-group interventions for at least 30 minutes in small homogeneous groups, and providing training and ongoing support for teachers, interventionists, and other school personnel on how to deliver small-group instruction effectively, as well as how to implement effective teaching techniques that can be used outside small-group instruction (e.g., instructional pacing, error corrections, and modeling).<sup>49</sup> Another important recommendation is that additional supports should be provided to ELLs struggling in English literacy that address the other skills crucial for success in school, such as vocabulary, listening, reading comprehension, and writing.<sup>50</sup>

### Where Additional Research Would Help

While there are some studies on effective practices for ELLs in science, studies focused on math and social studies are still very limited, compared with studies of English-proficient students. More research is also needed on promising and effective teaching methods for developing ELLs' home language, knowledge, and skills, and equalizing the social status of students from different ethnic/language backgrounds with the social status of white and native English-speaking students in schools.

For bilingual programs in particular, research is needed on the features that influence the successful acquisition of language and content. These features should include student ratios of English speakers to partner-language speakers in two-way programs, the number of instructional hours allotted to each language, the pro-



**Students' writing samples shed light on language challenges as well as opportunities related to primary language influence on English.**

portion of school staff and leadership who are bilingual, and the use of target languages within and across content areas.<sup>51</sup> And since most of the intervention research focuses on ELLs in grades K–2, and on pre-reading and reading skills, additional research is needed to understand how to intervene with older ELLs struggling in reading and with ELLs at all grade levels struggling in math, science, and social studies.

Finally, the social and emotional factors that influence student dispositions toward learning and academic performance (e.g., student motivation and engagement) must also be studied. More effective instruction, positive teacher attitudes toward teaching ELLs and high expectations that they can succeed, and engaging

*(Continued on page 38)*

# Encouraging the Development and Achievement of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood

BY LINDA M. ESPINOSA

As the population of children from birth to age 5 growing up with one or more languages other than English in the home continues to grow, and as many of these children participate in early care and education (ECE) programs, teachers and support staff will need to be prepared to work with dual language learners (DLLs)\* and their families.<sup>1</sup> Most, if not all ECE educators, will need to understand the process of second language acquisition during these early years as well as the teaching competencies and effective practices that support the healthy development, learning, and achievement of DLLs.

- cognitive skills, such as executive functioning.
- Early exposure to a second language—before 3 years of age—is related to better language skills in the second language.
- The language development of DLLs often differs from that of monolingual children: DLLs may take longer to learn some aspects of language that differ between the two languages, and their level of English proficiency will reflect variations in the amount and quality of language input—but these differences are in most cases normal and not an indication of delay or disorder.
- The cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits of bilingualism<sup>1</sup> are tied to

- diverse words and sentence types. For most DLL families, this means they should continue to use their home language in everyday interactions, storytelling, songs, and book reading.
- There is wide variation in the language competency among DLLs that is due to multiple social and cultural factors, such as parents' immigration status and number of years in the United States, family socioeconomic status, and the amount of educational support for bilingualism.

These findings about second language acquisition during the early years, combined with research on high-quality ECE programs, have informed an emerging consensus on effective teaching of DLLs. An underlying principle is that they need both systematic exposure to English and ongoing support for home language maintenance and development.

## DLLs need both systematic exposure to English and ongoing support for home language maintenance and development.

### ECE Program Features

Recent research has identified certain ECE program features and instructional practices that promote school readiness and future success and help reduce the achievement gap between DLLs and their English-only peers at kindergarten entry. The National Academies' report emphasizes that ECE programs should intentionally use both languages—the child's home language and English—to promote high levels of proficiency in both, a characteristic that carries linguistic and cognitive advantages and is valuable in later school and life.

However, the practical implications of implementing a balanced approach to early bilingualism contain many challenges. While dual language program models that promote bilingualism and biliteracy are recommended, they are not always possible. Many programs serve multiple languages and employ few ECE teachers who are fluent in more than one language or are trained in cultural and linguistic diversity. In some cases, local policies and resources do not support a dual language approach. Consequently, in many programs, monolingual English-speaking ECE teachers must learn specific instructional practices and strategies that promote proficiency in both languages.

The findings of *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*,<sup>2</sup> published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, include the following conclusions about young children and early bilingualism:

- All young children, if given adequate exposure to two languages, can acquire full competence in both languages.
- Early bilingualism confers benefits such as improved academic outcomes in school, and it enhances certain

high levels of competence, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing in both languages.

- DLLs should be supported in maintaining their home language in preschool and the early school years while they are learning English in order to achieve full proficiency in both languages.
- Continued development of the home language during the preschool years is critical to positive language transfer and facilitates the acquisition of English.
- DLLs' language development is enhanced when adults provide frequent, responsive, and varied language interactions that include a rich array of

*Linda M. Espinosa is an emeritus professor of early childhood education at the University of Missouri–Columbia and a former member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on Fostering School Success for English Learners. This article is drawn from chapters 4 and 5 of the report Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures, published in February 2017 by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, which is available online at [www.bit.ly/2nObDhP](http://www.bit.ly/2nObDhP).*

\*For more on working with dual language learners, see "Dual Language Learners: Effective Instruction in Early Childhood" in the Summer 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/summer2013/goldenberg\\_hicks\\_lit](http://www.aft.org/ae/summer2013/goldenberg_hicks_lit).

<sup>†</sup>For more on the benefits of bilingualism, see "Bilingual Education" in the Fall 2015 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/goldenberg\\_wagner](http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2015/goldenberg_wagner).



CULTURA CREATIVE/LAMY STOCK PHOTO

comprehend lessons in English, develop advanced oral language skills, and progress in their English language development.

### Effective ECE Instructional Practices

Young DLLs need additional scaffolds and supports to comprehend the meaning of lessons because they are simultaneously learning English and academic

to volunteer in the classroom to extend DLLs' opportunities to see, hear, speak, read, and practice their home language.

- Create visual displays that represent the languages, cultures, and family practices of the children enrolled in the classroom.
- Allow for frequent individual and small-group language learning experiences for DLLs.
- Provide books and materials that authentically represent the cultures and languages of the children and families.

Based on the research summarized above and the language needs of DLLs, the state of California, with the largest number and proportion of DLLs under 8 years of age, 60 percent,<sup>3</sup> explicitly recommended two program approaches for DLLs in a recent report, *California Preschool Program Guidelines*:<sup>4</sup> (1) balanced English and home language development, or what is commonly referred to as a dual language model, and (2) English language development with home language support. The first approach is intended to promote full bilingualism and biliteracy, while the second provides guidance on how all ECE teachers can support all languages represented in their classrooms.

In dual language programs, careful attention must be paid to the amount of exposure and quality of instruction in each language. There is evidence that if programs do not have a systematic division of time allocated to each language and do not frequently monitor the allocation of time, they often tend to become English-dominant. Possible methods of balancing class time between the two languages include, but are not limited to, programs that alternate time spent in each language (daily or weekly) and programs that alternate instructional time between ECE teachers who speak the home language and those who speak only English.

The second program approach, English language development with home language support, recognizes the limitations of many ECE programs to implement dual language classrooms, resulting in interactions and instruction that are provided primarily in English. In this approach, ECE teachers must learn specific instructional strategies that will help DLLs

## While dual language program models that promote bilingualism and biliteracy are recommended, they are not always possible.

content. These additional supports can take the form of explicit bridging between the two languages using pictorial, visual, and/or multimedia cues to aid understanding; interactive and physical actions linked to meanings; direct instruction on important features of English, including vocabulary and phonics; using culturally familiar themes and materials; and working closely with families to promote the continued development of the home language. A variety of specific instructional strategies that have been linked to improved short- and long-term outcomes for DLLs are practical and within the range of what can be expected of all ECE teachers.

Based on a synthesis of research findings expanded upon in the National Academies' report, the following instructional strategies are ones that all teachers, even monolingual English-speaking teachers, can use to support the goals of home language maintenance and English language development:<sup>5</sup>

- Early in the school year, meet with parents to learn critical information about their child and family, especially about the child's early language experiences.
- Recruit parents, extended family members, or community representatives

Have students, parents, and other family and community members help you understand and read them.

- Have key vocabulary words introduced in the home language by parents or community volunteers.
- Systematically use cognates in the home language and English to explicitly make connections between the two languages.
- Use pictures, real-world objects, and concrete experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts.
- Use visual cues and physical gestures and signals linked to specific content vocabulary to imprint meaning.
- Routinely assess each child's language and conceptual knowledge and skills.

While these specific strategies are not exhaustive and have not been rigorously evaluated, they are based on research to support language skills in the home language while also promoting English language development. The preponderance of the evidence suggests these are ways that educators in preschool classrooms can integrate and extend DLLs' knowledge, and ultimately help them learn English while also learning age-appropriate content.

(Endnotes on page 39)

# Teaching English Language Learners

Tips from the Classroom



*With more than 35 years of combined experience teaching English language learners (ELLs), Larry Ferlazzo and Katie Hull Sypnieski understand how students learn. Together, they have written a series of books on the topic, and in this article they share their insights. Chief among them is that ELLs require particular instructional strategies to help them thrive. The following pages specifically focus on three areas: differentiating instruction, encouraging students' intrinsic motivation for academic achievement, and using an affirming form of correcting student errors. The authors explore each area with common scenarios faced by teachers and with research-based and classroom-tested strategies that teachers can apply in response to them. It's important to note that many of these strategies can also work with mainstream students. As the saying goes, good instruction for English language learners is good instruction for everyone.*

—EDITORS

BY LARRY FERLAZZO AND KATIE HULL SYPNIESKI

## Differentiating Instruction

*There are 20 students in a high school English language development class, ranging from newcomers who haven't had formal schooling for years to those who have had high-quality schooling*

*Larry Ferlazzo teaches English language learners and mainstream students at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, California. He writes an education blog at [www.larryferlazzo.edublogs.org](http://www.larryferlazzo.edublogs.org), a weekly teacher advice column for Education Week Teacher, and regular posts for the New York Times. Katie Hull Sypnieski teaches English language learners at Rosa Parks K-8 School in Sacramento. She and Ferlazzo are the authors of Navigating the Common Core with English Language Learners: Practical Strategies to Develop Higher-Order Thinking Skills; The ELL Teacher's Toolbox: Hundreds of Practical Ideas to Support Your Students; and The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-to-Use Strategies, Tools, and Activities for Teaching All Levels.*

their entire lives, including some English instruction.

There are 35 students in a physical sciences class, including 25 who are proficient in English, five long-term English language learners (who have been ELLs for six years or more), and five intermediate ELLs.

A teacher has 30 students in a mainstream U.S. history class. One day, an administrator brings a newcomer—with no to minimal English skills—and places him in the class.

These scenarios are quite common, especially in our public schools. What can teachers do? Here, we offer some research-based strategies we have used in our teaching careers when we have been (and continue to be!) in these types of situations.

### Rate of Speech and Wait Time

Speak slowly and clearly, and provide students with enough time to formulate their responses, whether in speaking or in writing. Remember, ELLs are thinking and producing in two or more languages. After asking a question, wait a few seconds before calling on someone to respond. This “wait time” provides all students with an opportunity to think and process, and especially gives ELLs a needed period to formulate a response. In a typical classroom, the average time between a teacher posing a question and a student giving an answer is one second. Many researchers have found that the quality and quantity of responses improve when that wait time is increased to between three and five seconds.<sup>1</sup> We will often preface a question by first saying, “I’d like you to take a few seconds to think about this question before I call on someone to answer it.”

### Nonlinguistic Cues

Using visuals, such as pictures and sketches, and nonverbal cues, such as gestures and intonation, helps make language and content more accessible to students. Graphic organizers, including word charts where students can draw visual definitions and write definitions in their home language, can help all students, and particularly ELLs, bring together what they are learning and/or make connections between new and prior knowledge. Teaching with visual representations of concepts can be hugely helpful to ELLs and to all students.<sup>2</sup>

### A Modified Version of Preview-View-Review

The “preview-view-review” strategy uses students’ native language to facilitate instruction. With this approach, the teacher introduces the lesson in a student’s home language, teaches the lesson in English, and then summarizes the lesson in the student’s home language. Since we only speak English and Spanish, and many of our students speak other languages, we modify this instructional strategy by accessing the multiple multilingual textbook summaries and videos freely available online. Even though we may not be using the exact textbook that provides the translated summary, we’ve typically been able to find something to approximate our lessons. We provide these resources to students a day or two prior to the lesson in English and ask them to read or watch them in their free time at home or in class.

### Texts Written for Different Levels

There are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of freely available articles on multiple subjects that are edited into easier or more

complex reading levels. Sometimes we use these for all-class reading, providing the more accessible versions to ELLs. At other times, we provide them to our ELLs prior to a lesson on the topic (perhaps when we are going to do a close reading of a more complex text) so that they can develop the needed prior knowledge.

### Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning, ranging from the old standby of “think-pair-share” to other small-group projects, creates good learning venues for ELLs because they are more likely to ask peers for assistance, and, in the best of possible worlds, there might be a bilingual student in the group or a paraprofessional in the classroom who

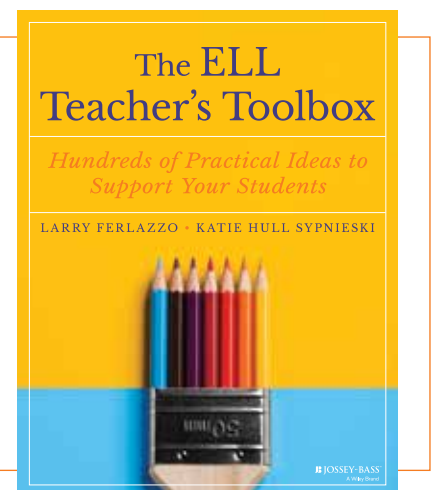
**Remember, ELLs are thinking and producing in two or more languages. After asking a question, wait a few seconds before calling on someone to respond.**

can help. As with all these differentiation strategies, the added benefit is that research shows the attributes of cooperative learning benefit all students.<sup>3</sup> In fact, a recent meta-analysis finds this strategy to be particularly effective for students in economically challenged environments.<sup>4</sup>

### Jigsaw

The “jigsaw” strategy can be implemented with a number of different variations. Most involve students becoming “experts” in a section of a text or an element of a broader topic. For example, a student reads about a specific time in a famous person’s life,

*The ELL Teacher’s Toolbox*, by Larry Ferlazzo and Katie Hull Sypnieski, is published by Jossey-Bass, which is offering *American Educator* readers a 30 percent discount off the purchase of the book through December 31, 2018. To order, visit [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com) and use sales code ELTT1.



which he or she then teaches to other students who have become experts in different portions of the text. All students take turns teaching their classmates. Not only is this a great differentiation strategy for ELLs (they can be assigned a more accessible section of the text and are provided a cooperative learning environment), but research suggests that it's an extremely effective, if not the most effective, instructional strategy for all students.<sup>5</sup>

### Sentence Starters and Writing Frames

As teachers, we often use sentence and question starters to provide important scaffolds for ELLs—to help with writing and classroom discussions. They can reduce student stress levels, allow students to focus on the key parts of a lesson, and help introduce academic vocabulary. We also use writing frames, which are templates that include sentence starters, connecting words and an overall structure that provides extensive scaffolding to a student responding to a question or prompt. One caveat

Four elements nurture the development of students' intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and relevance.



to note: starters and frames are most helpful to students with little to no English language skills, and relying on them too much may actually hinder learning.

### Encouraging Intrinsic Motivation for Academic Achievement

*Ahmed is 18 years old and has just arrived from Syria with his family after being out of school for two years. At his new school, he is frustrated by the English language and angered by another student calling him a terrorist. He spends as much time as he can*

*texting his friends when in class and pretty much just goes through the motions during lessons.*

*Juan fled El Salvador to escape gang violence. He's a 10th-grader but hasn't been in school since he was 7 years old. Juan is in a mainstream math class, and although several of his classmates speak Spanish, he generally puts his head down on his desk and sleeps because he's tired from his night job.*

*Leslie recently came from Mexico and has a new baby at home. Her aunt takes care of the child while she is in school, but she is hoping to return to her home country next year to be with her baby's father. Leslie is quickly learning conversational English, but she has next to no interest in learning to write or read it. Since she's planning to return to Mexico, she says, "Why bother?"*

All students, including ELLs, need our support in building intrinsic motivation for academic achievement. Many of our students show tremendous motivation in other aspects of their lives, whether it is to escape oppressive conditions in other countries, to work tirelessly at jobs to support their families, or to take care of children at home. In addition, many spend countless hours in extracurricular school activities, including athletics and various clubs. So, how can we encourage students to channel and apply a similar drive to academic endeavors?

Researchers have identified four elements that nurture the development of students' intrinsic motivation: (1) autonomy: students have a degree of control over what needs to happen and how it can be done; (2) competence: students feel they can be successful in doing it; (3) relatedness: the activity helps students feel more connected to others and cared about by people they respect; and (4) relevance: students find the work interesting and valuable to them, and useful for their present lives and/or hopes and dreams for the future.<sup>6</sup> Here are a few ways that we have tried to reinforce each of these four elements in our classes with ELLs and others.

### Autonomy and Competence

There are many free or low-cost engaging online sites, such as Duolingo ([www.duolingo.com](http://www.duolingo.com)) and LingoHut ([www.lingohut.com](http://www.lingohut.com)), where students can reinforce their English skills through interactive reading and writing exercises, learning games, and books that provide audio support for the text. Since the software is the only entity aware of any student mistakes, using these sites can reinforce feelings of competence for when students apply their learning in the "real world." These tools can be used on any device in school or at home.

### Relatedness

It's critical that teachers develop trusting relationships with all students,\* including ELLs. Learn their story—why their family came here, what their interests are, what goals they might have for their lives.† If you cannot speak their home language and/or can't find another staff person or student who can, Google Trans-

\*For more on building relationships, see "It's About Relationships" in the Winter 2015–2016 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/ashley](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2015-2016/ashley).

†For more on the importance of learning students' stories, see "Celebrating the Voices of Immigrant Students" in the Winter 2017–2018 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/winter2017-2018/zehr](http://www.aft.org/ae/winter2017-2018/zehr).



late can be a very helpful tool; using its audio translation mode will automatically provide verbal interpretation.

Another good idea is to provide a peer mentor to your newcomer—ideally, someone who speaks his or her home language. At our schools, peer mentors leave one of their classes for 15 minutes each week to chat with their mentee.

We already discussed the importance of cooperative learning in the differentiation section above. In addition to that specific strategy, we promote a cooperative classroom culture through an “everyone is a teacher” ethos. We first introduce research to our students that shows, among other things, the impact that classmates can have on each other’s learning (particularly on ELLs)<sup>7</sup> and the benefits of diversity.<sup>8</sup> Then, we explain to them that the content, whether the subject is English or another subject, is too complex to have just one teacher in the room, and that we must all be teachers. Students then make individual posters listing the ways they can act as teachers, such as by helping classmates who might not understand a lesson or by modeling good attendance. We put the posters on the classroom wall, and students engage in regular reflections on if and how they recently have been teachers.

### Relevance

We teach specific lessons highlighting the abundant research showing the cognitive and economic advantages of bilingualism. In addition, we learn about our students’ interests and life goals, and try to provide specifically related learning resources. For example, a student who wants to become a cosmetologist will likely be interested in learning some English technical terms of that industry; a Latino student who is interested in astronomy may be interested in reading articles about Latino astronauts.

We also use the world around us for teaching and learning opportunities. Over the years, our students have identified and taken action on issues directly affecting their families and communities. These actions have included organizing a neighborhood jobs fair with 20 job-training providers and 300 people in attendance, creating a neighborhood campaign to complete U.S. Census forms, and writing letters to public officials about government immigration policy.

### Using an Affirming Form of Error Correction

*Angela, an ELL at the intermediate level, receives her graded essay in history class marked with numerous grammar and spelling corrections. Her teacher has written several comments in the margins that she doesn’t understand. She feels defeated, crumples up the paper, and throws it in the trash.*

*Bin, a newcomer student from China, is confused about a homework assignment. He decides to take a risk, raises his hand, and asks his teacher a question in English. When he uses the wrong form of a word, the teacher instantly corrects him and does an impromptu grammar lesson for the entire class. Bin decides not to ask any more questions.*

*Ms. Jones is a new teacher. The ELL students at various proficiency levels in her English class make numerous errors when reading, writing, and speaking. She has received conflicting advice about how to address these errors, ranging from direct grammar instruction and overt correction to no grammar instruction or error correction at all. She feels overwhelmed and confused and wonders, “Isn’t there a middle ground?”*

Many teachers might agree that error correction, particularly how and when to do it, is a key challenge of working with ELLs. Adding to this challenge is the murky research on error correction. Some research suggests that correction (by prompts that point out the error to a student and require an immediate attempt to fix the mistake, or by recasts, when the teacher correctly rephrases what the student has said) can be a useful tool to assist language acquisition.<sup>9</sup> Other studies have found the opposite—that overt oral and written grammar correction can inhibit language learning and generate a negative reaction from students.<sup>10</sup>

This conflicting research, combined with our many years of experience and our common sense, points to the fact that there isn’t a one-size-fits-all answer to error correction. However, error correction, when done in an affirming way, can provide ELLs with an opportunity to acquire language and to build their confidence as learners.

**Error correction, when done in an affirming way, can provide ELLs with an opportunity to acquire language and to build their confidence as learners.**

### Mistakes as Opportunities

Helping students see that mistakes are opportunities to learn, not commentaries on their intelligence or a sign of failure, can lead to improved academic performance.<sup>11</sup>

One lesson we teach is designed to encourage this type of mindset. It involves asking students to think of a few recent mistakes they have made when speaking or writing in English and what they have learned from these mistakes. We also share mistakes we have made as teachers and what we have learned as a result. Ultimately, we create a class list of mistakes and learnings and reflect on all the things students have learned because of their willingness to take risks and make mistakes in their new language.

These types of lessons help create the conditions for students to be open to error correction and to see it as a positive part of their growth as learners.

### Individual Feedback

Providing students with individual feedback is another error correction tool we employ once we have built positive relationships with students and a classroom climate where learning mistakes are encouraged.

When offering feedback on student writing in class, we use a simple technique we have found successful. It involves pointing

to the written mistake as a prompt for students to self-correct. Most of the time, when we point to an error around a concept we have already taught (e.g., a word or punctuation issue), students are able to correct it on the spot.

When it comes to writing comments on student essays, we generally emphasize a few positive aspects of the essay and only point out one type of error. If we hand back a paper with written comments, we also make sure to have a brief private conversation with the student about the feedback. We have also found it helpful to have students focus on one or two grammatical elements (e.g., verb tense or capitalization) as they begin a writing task so they can pay particular attention when practicing those concepts.

In addition, we encourage students to practice writing at online sites that provide immediate feedback. This practice can reinforce language acquisition, and the only one who knows when students make a mistake is the computer.



**We want to be as encouraging as possible when our students take the risk to speak in English.**

We don't usually correct oral mistakes unless students ask for specific feedback or the mistake is affecting what the student is trying to communicate. We want to be as encouraging as possible when our students take the risk to speak in English.

### **Group Feedback through Concept Attainment and Games**

When we identify common mistakes that our students are making in writing or speaking, we often address them as part of a lesson for the entire class. Two methods we have found to be

affirming for students and successful are concept attainment and games. Both strategies create the conditions for students to identify errors and how to correct them.

Concept attainment is a form of inductive learning where the teacher identifies both “yes” and “no” examples (they can be taken from student work—with the names removed, of course) of the intended learning objective.<sup>12</sup>

After identifying a common error (e.g., subject-verb agreement), we develop a sheet that lists both correct and incorrect examples in two columns; the correct examples go under the yes column, and the incorrect examples go under the no column. We then place the sheet on an overhead screen. At first, everything is covered except for the yes and no titles, and we explain that we are going to give various examples and ask them to identify why certain ones are under yes and others are under no.

After the first yes and no examples are shown, we ask students to think about them and share their thoughts with a partner. If no one can identify the difference between the two columns, we keep uncovering one example at a time and continue the think-pair-share process until they figure it out. We then ask students to correct the no examples and to generate their own yes examples and share them with a partner or the class.

Games where students are charged with identifying and correcting common grammatical errors are an engaging and affirming method of error correction. One of our favorites is a simple game we call “correct a sentence.” We first type up a list of sentences containing common student mistakes. Students are divided into teams, and each team is given a copy of the sentences. Teams are then given an amount of time (anywhere from five to 15 minutes, depending on the length of the list) to correct all the sentences. The team that accurately corrects the greatest number of sentences is declared the winner. Points can also be given to groups for identifying errors even if they haven't properly corrected them.

**T**eaching English language learners presents some key challenges in the classroom. However, remembering the many assets that ELLs bring to the classroom—their resilience, their stories, and their multicultural experiences—can help teachers and students view these challenges not as problems, but as opportunities for growth. □

### **Endnotes**

1. See, for example, Mary Budd Rowe, “Wait-Time and Rewards as Instructional Variables: Their Influence on Language, Logic, and Fate Control” (paper, National Association for Research in Science Teaching, Chicago, IL, April 1972), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED061103>.
2. See Mark W. Haystead and Robert J. Marzano, *Meta-Analytic Synthesis of Studies Conducted at Marzano Research on Instructional Strategies* (Centennial, CO: Marzano Research, 2013).
3. Xin Zhang et al., “Improving Children’s Competence as Decision Makers: Contrasting Effects of Collaborative Interaction and Direct Instruction,” *American Educational Research Journal* 53 (2016): 194–223.
4. Jens Dietrichson et al., “Academic Interventions for Elementary and Middle School Students with Low Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Review of Educational Research* 87 (2017): 243–282.
5. John A. C. Hattie and Gregory M. Donoghue, “Learning Strategies: A Synthesis and Conceptual Model,” *npj Science of Learning* 1 (2016), doi:10.1038/npjscilearn.2016.13.
6. See Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25 (2000): 54–67.

*(Continued on page 39)*

# Supporting Language Development

Given that nearly one in four schoolchildren in the United States speaks a language other than English at home, significant numbers of educators across the country teach multilingual, diverse student populations in their classrooms.

On the one hand, the challenge is simultaneously teaching academic content and skills while helping English language learners (ELLs) acquire English and, in many cases, navigate a brand-new culture. On the other hand, the challenge is to establish high-quality second language learning programs for children whose first language is English, especially in the early grades.

Meeting the language needs of both categories of students is important in a globally competitive world. It's also an opportunity to celebrate and encourage the assets that multilingual speakers can bring to the classroom.

## Bolstering Language Learning

Share My Lesson offers educators a number of resources to support not only students who are learning English, but also native English speakers who are learning an additional language. What might happen if we focus on the incredible benefits gained from learning multiple languages for *all* students instead of separating “English Language Learning” from “Foreign Languages” such as Spanish, German, or Chinese?

If we open ourselves up to this notion, we could share and adapt more resources, saving us time in lesson planning. More importantly, we could even change the more traditional deficit-focused treatment of ELLs to a more asset-focused model of celebrating the benefits of speaking multiple languages.

Often, resources for teaching language acquisition can be adapted for other languages. Visit Share My Lesson's profile of the “Foreign Languages Team” for resources for teaching French, Spanish, German, and more, and adapt them for the target language you are teaching.

Check out the blog “8 Common Misconceptions of Language Learning” for

positive ways to foster more rapid growth of language acquisition for all students. Two additional Share My Lesson resources—“What Learning a Language Says about Me” and “Language and Learning with Yo Azama”—highlight the benefits of speaking multiple languages and can be shared directly with students, teachers, and parents.

## Creating a Positive School Culture

Without a school culture of kindness and respect for differences, students who are learning English can become easy targets of bullying or teasing. Visit Share My Lesson's free resources and webinars on bullying prevention, mental health, and healthy school climate in the “Social Emotional Learning and Health” collection.

Can your students imagine what it must be like to leave their home and enter a new land where the language and culture are vastly different from what they've always known? How much do your students know

about immigration to the United States? Do they have questions about immigration laws and policies? Check out the “Immigration Resources” collection for tools and lesson plans to discuss this urgent topic directly with students.

## Sharing Tools

What are *your* favorite tools for teaching English language learners or for teaching foreign languages to native English speakers? Upload them to Share My Lesson so that we can harness our collective power in supporting English and foreign language acquisition for all students. Visit the “Best of English Language Learners” collection for toolkits, strategies, and detailed lesson plans.

One of Share My Lesson's premiere partners is Colorín Colorado, co-produced by the AFT and PBS station WETA, which offers thousands of resources for educators and families of ELLs. Be sure to check out the reading tip sheets for parents, available in 13 languages, as well as the classroom videos highlighting effective instruction of ELLs, ranging from pre-K to high school.

And when new issues arise, such as asylum-seeking families being separated at the U.S. southern border, our partners are quick to provide resources to help students discuss and make sense of these events. See our new “#FamiliesBelongTogether” collection, with teaching guides from PBS NewsHour Extra and other partners, for ways to address this humanitarian crisis.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM



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## Recommended Resources

**Foreign Languages Team**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml1>

**8 Common Misconceptions of Language Learning**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml2>

**What Learning a Language Says about Me**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml3>

**Language and Learning with Yo Azama**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml4>

**Social Emotional Learning and Health**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml5>

**Immigration Resources**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml6>

**Best of English Language Learners**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml7>

**Colorín Colorado**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml8>

**#FamiliesBelongTogether**

<http://go.aft.org/AE318sml9>

# Meaningful Classroom Talk

Supporting English Learners' Oral Language Development



BY AÍDA WALQUI AND MARGARET HERITAGE

Consider this interaction between a teacher and his students, most of them English language learners, in a ninth-grade English language arts class:

Teacher: Who wrote *The Pearl*, Carmen?

Carmen: Steinbeck wrote *The Pearl*.

Teacher: Very good. And Rosa, who is the main character in this novella?

Rosa: I guess the main character is Kino, although his wife, Juana, is also important.

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Teacher: That's right. And why do we say *The Pearl* is a novella? Jim?

Now contrast it with the interaction other ninth-graders had in their English language arts/English language development class:

Teacher: As we begin to explore this short story, "The Necklace," written by a French author from the 19th century, Guy de Maupassant, I am inviting you to read the first four paragraphs with your partner using types of "Question-Answer Relationships."\* We have practiced this process several times, so unless we require some explanation—[students signal they do not]—then, please get started. As you engage in reading and discussing, I would like you to focus on the character Mathilde and think about what kind of person she is. We will then focus on the problem she faces.

\*Taffy Raphael's Question-Answer Relationships framework<sup>1</sup> is intended to call students' attention to the kinds of questions that may be asked about a text. In this class, students work in pairs, announcing first the type of question he or she will ask to increase the other student's awareness of the types of meaningful connections the question seeks.

Rodrigo (after reading the first paragraph of “The Necklace” aloud to his partner, Martha): OK, I am going to ask you a “think and search” question. Did Mathilde grow up in a rich family?

Martha: I am not sure. I think no, because the paragraph says she could not marry a “rich and distinguished man” and had to marry a little clerk. Is that an employee? [Rodrigo nods his assent.] I guess it is because she is not rich. But she was very pretty and charming, right?

So now I am going to read the second paragraph. [She proceeds to read aloud to Rodrigo, then pauses and thinks.] I am confused, so I guess I will ask you a think and search question. The text says “with women there is neither caste nor rank, for beauty, grace and charm take the place of family and birth.” Is the author saying that for women, money does not matter? Why did she marry a clerk then?

Rodrigo: Yeah, I agree. I don’t fully understand. You said she was pretty but not rich. Now the second paragraph says that’s in place of family and birth, so does that mean richness? Does it not matter if women are pretty? Does it matter or doesn’t it matter? [Both students decide to raise these questions later during the whole-class discussion. Then Rodrigo proceeds to read the third paragraph to Martha.]

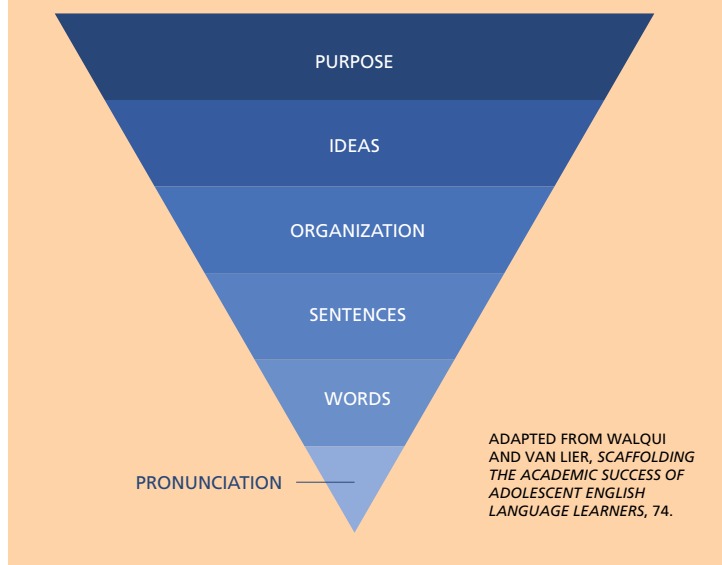
We have all observed classes resembling the first example, where the teacher already knows the answers to the questions being asked, as do most students. The exchange is just an exercise in reiterating the known using complete sentences. In contrast, students in the second example must actively consider the possibilities related to the text, by asking and responding to questions that reveal their understanding.

How do we ensure that *all* English language learners have opportunities to productively use oral language in academic settings? And how do we ensure that teachers leverage the power of classroom interactions to simultaneously foster language development, content knowledge, and analytical practices? In this article, we offer answers to these questions—and clarify common misconceptions—by presenting guidelines supported by both research and classroom practice.

### A Framework for Oral Language

If English language learners (ELLs) are going to productively engage in classroom discourse and express their thinking related to content learning goals, teachers must create a trusting classroom culture in which students feel that whatever level of language they can produce, their contributions will be valued by their teacher and peers and will never be subject to ridicule, sanctions, or negative comparisons.<sup>2</sup> Establishing classroom norms such as close listening to understand the ideas ELLs are conveying and showing respect to each other during their interactions (learning, of course, from the models their teachers provide) is essential for successful oral language use. Students need to know that interrupting their peers as they are formulat-

Figure 1:  
A Framework for Oral Production



**Teachers must create a trusting classroom culture in which students feel that whatever level of language they can produce, their contributions will be valued.**

ing ideas and finishing their sentences for them are not desirable classroom norms.

As teachers plan to engage students in oral interactions, the framework shown in Figure 1 above can help guide their support for their students’ work and language development. The framework comprises six interconnected levels.

First, teachers need to ensure that students clearly understand the *purpose* of the interaction they are being asked to undertake. For example, are they supposed to read a text and elaborate their thinking, highlighting what they understand and what they don’t? Are they engaged in describing a scene to somebody who has not seen it? Are they being asked to make a prediction after observing phenomena they will later investigate?

Second, teachers need to make sure students have *ideas* upon which they will elaborate. For example, have they noticed the most important aspects of the scene (the background, main character(s) presented, what they are doing, other relevant

details) on which they will center their description?

Third, teachers need to help students *organize* their thoughts and ensure their language follows specific patterns. For example, descriptions of a scene from a text cannot begin with sentences such as, “He kicks it, it breaks.” Students need to first indicate the setting of the scene, then introduce the characters, describe them, and explain what they are doing. This sequence is essential to help participants engaged in a conversation paint pictures in their minds. Organization is marked by phrases that can be provided to students as formulaic expressions (which we discuss later in this article) to use:<sup>3</sup> “The picture we have shows a...” “We can see a...” “Our scene takes place in a...” “Based on my observation...” “The two historical contexts are...”

Fourth, teachers need to consider the types of *sentences* students produce and judiciously highlight how they may be combined and expanded to produce more complex language. Increasing complexity can be accomplished with the use of connectors and conjunctions, such as “besides,” “furthermore,” “additionally,” “however,” etc.

**By some estimates, ELLs spend less than 2 percent of their school day in oral interaction. Teachers must find ways to engage them in productive talk.**

Fifth, teachers must pay attention to the *words* students use. Is one word repeated several times in an interaction? If so, teachers can take the opportunity to introduce a synonym. Do students incorrectly or imprecisely use a term? Teachers can take a moment to clarify usage and meaning.

Finally, when students are ready to present their work to others, teachers can focus on the *pronunciation* of carefully selected elements—only those that interrupt understanding.

Traditionally, many educators have been taught to focus on correcting student utterances by zeroing in on form and not on meaning. As a result, our framework may initially feel counterintuitive, but the more educators rely on it, the more it will assist them in supporting students’ language growth.

### Productive Talk

As a general pattern, we educators often talk too much, no doubt influenced by our “apprenticeship of observation” that began when we were students ourselves.<sup>4</sup> However, given the centrality of talk in learning, this pattern needs to change. By some estimates, ELLs spend less than 2 percent of their school day in oral interaction.<sup>5</sup> Teachers must find ways to provide students learning opportunities

that engage them in productive talk and then listen carefully to the language they use in order to support their continued growth.

By productive talk, we mean speech that has the following characteristics:

- *Has depth*: the specific idea being discussed is central to the theme of the lesson, is presented in interconnected ways, and engages students’ analytical thinking.
- *Is sustained*: one student’s statement is followed by another student’s response, which extends, refutes, or questions what was first said.
- *Is student controlled*: students control what they say, not the teacher. But teachers set up parameters for the interactions, sometimes framing questions that start the conversation. These questions are intended to communicate new related ideas, propose counter ideas or examples, and in general enhance the theme at work.<sup>6</sup>

Now consider these characteristics in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class, which comprises students with varied levels of English competence.<sup>7</sup> “Language” is the theme of the students’ exploration, and this was the third class on the topic. Table 1 on page 21 shows the deliberate moves of the teacher, Mr. DeFazio, during the lesson and the students’ interactions. The text in the table indicates the multiple instances of productive talk that he promotes with his directions and actions.

Let us look more closely at a specific interaction that occurred in the lesson after a student, Lavinia, reads the beginning of a letter she wrote about animal communication, and another student, Julio, reacts to one of her statements that animals do not have language.

Julio: Animal communication is not a language? It *is* a language—that’s what I think—because they are communicating with each other.

Lavinia: But they don’t speak.

Class: [Many students agree with Julio, saying “Yes, they do,” or nodding.]

Julio: You said a language can have words, sounds, gestures, and everything.

Class: [Many students are in agreement with Julio’s ideas once again.]

Lavinia: But they don’t have words. They don’t say “mama.”

Julio: They don’t need to. They have other characteristics. In animal language, some of the characteristics that you said are present—sound, pitch, gestures—so it is a language.

Mr. DeFazio: Julio is arguing very strongly that animal communication is language. Lavinia is saying that it’s not. What do you think would be a way to help them resolve that argument in their writing?

Class: [The discussion continues and a resolution emerges. Then Julio reads a section of his letter.]

Mr. DeFazio: A lot is going to depend on how you define language, OK? You can define it in such a way as to exclude what animals do; you can define it in a very broad way, as a system

of communication that includes everything. You are going to find linguists and zoologists who disagree, and if you are interested, I can give you some readings that were in the journal *Science* last year, people arguing back and forth.

Julio (reading his letter): First of all, I think that language is a way to inform others around you, your feelings, or just a simple thing that you want to let people know what is the deal. And it can be expressed by saying it, looking at a picture, or hearing it, you know what I'm saying? I don't know if you have heard about the kangaroo rat that stamps its feet to communicate with other rats. It's really funny 'cause we humans have more characteristics to communicate to each other, but we still have problems to understand other people. Characteristics like sound, grammar, pictures, and body language are some of them, while the rat only uses the foot. [Julio stamps the ground.]

Mr. DeFazio: Excellent! [The class applauds.] I never even heard about the kangaroo rat. Nice job, nice job. [Mr. DeFazio shakes Julio's hand.]

Applying the framework illustrated in Figure 1 to this interaction, we notice that students are clearly aware that the *purpose* of this exercise is to compare diverse positions on communication and to debate whether animals

have language or not, providing evidence for their positions. They have *ideas*, and they choose which ones to debate based on a diversity of opinions. Mr. DeFazio's opportunity to correct student work, suggest changes, ask for elaboration, and so forth comes in the letters he is asking his students to construct. This written product is intimately tied to oral production. Oral activity feeds into writing, and writing produces oral activity.



**Table 1: Teacher's Moves, and the Student Interactions They Promote**

Mr. DeFazio...	The students...
Introduces the theme of the lesson, "language in general (its definition, essential features, etc.)," and asks for questions to guide students' exploration. The lesson requires students to research and present what they are learning by writing letters addressed to somebody they know.	Individually jot down questions. Share their questions about language with each other.
Offers students a wide variety of materials on language, written in English, Spanish, and other languages, for diverse audiences, including professional journals. He asks them to peruse the materials to create conceptual maps in groups of four.	Individually take notes. Share their notes orally with peers in their groups of four and jointly discuss and produce their conceptual maps, deciding together what information to include.
Asks students to walk through the classroom to review each other's maps.	Ask spontaneous questions about the maps while walking through the room.
Asks students to start writing a letter to somebody they know, alone or in pairs, about language.	Write their letters. Students who choose to work in pairs work together to decide what they are going to write. While letters written in pairs are very similar, each student writes his or her own letter.
Meets with individual students or pairs to read the beginnings of their letters and ask students questions that will help them consider what to write next. While he reads students' letters, they read a letter he wrote about his experiences studying language.	Interact with Mr. DeFazio while he walks around the room asking questions about their letters: "This is good. You started with an experience. What else could you say to your cousin about the experience? Where are you going to go next?"
Asks for a few volunteers to begin writing their letters on chart paper. He then places the beginnings of the volunteers' letters in front of the class for a whole-class discussion.	Read their letters aloud and answer questions from other students.

In terms of productive talk, in Mr. DeFazio's class, students' analytic thinking is engaged, their interaction is *sustained*, and they *control* what they say. Mr. DeFazio has chosen a theme for the lesson that appeals to the students, and he has deliberately planned their active engagement throughout. As a result, the interaction engages students in *deep thinking* as they compare views on language.

Now that we have seen the characteristics of quality interactions for ELLs in practice, in the next section, we provide guidelines for promoting quality interactions during content lessons.

## Six Guidelines for Promoting Quality Interactions

1. **Design lessons that involve ELLs' participation in subject-specific and substantive oral practice to accomplish clearly defined lesson goals:** Planning a lesson always begins with establishing the destination: Where do teachers need to lead students? Teachers should ask: Are my goals closely related to content standards? What is the knowledge that will be constructed? Which analytic practice will be promoted? What is the language (beyond isolated words or sentences) that will need to be developed? Unless teachers themselves are clear about the goals of a lesson, they will not be able to plan the tasks and activities that support students' language and conceptual development.
2. **Construct tasks that appropriately scaffold student participation and growth:** Tasks need to be deliberately constructed to engage students in working beyond their current competence. Such tasks should promote worthwhile interactions for students to acquire new conceptual understandings and analytical skills and language. They should also have appropriate scaffolds, which entail teachers closely observing students to ascertain whether the support is working, whether it is still needed, or whether it needs to be modified or replaced.
3. **Make sure the task is designed to meet its purposes and the materials used are appropriate to support students working at the edge of their competence successfully:** Learning is most effective when tasks are designed to match students' current competencies and also challenge them to move forward, with support.
4. **Make sure that activities or tasks follow and precede others logically to build coherent lessons:** Leading students to increasingly more complex demands is essential if teachers want their lessons to flow smoothly and to incrementally build ELLs' understanding.
5. **Integrate reading and writing into oral development activities:** Oral interaction while reading texts not only allows ELLs to understand the text more deeply but also helps them develop awareness of what they understand as they read and what they can do to solve problems in reading.
6. **Be selective in addressing errors and intentional in providing feedback:** When ELLs use English to develop their understanding of content and their use of analytical practices, often their language will be neither accurate nor fully formed, although the intent of their communication will be apparent. Imagine, for a moment, the impact on ELLs' motivation and self-esteem if teacher responses to inaccuracies constituted a constant flow of error correction. Instead, consider formative feedback to students as invitations to understand how they are progressing in language development and to provide a resource for how they can advance. When feedback is given to students about language while they are learning discipline-specific content, the feedback should focus on language so that students can make sense of the academic content, rather than on correcting errors of language production. As such, feedback can increase the students' awareness and help them troubleshoot their own performance and eventually correct their own language.<sup>8</sup>

There is no hard and fast rule about how much feedback students should receive or how often it should be provided; this is a decision teachers will need to make for themselves, given their knowledge of their students, their language and content goals, and the students' current language use. However, because of the powerful impact that feedback can have on learning,<sup>9</sup> we advise teachers to make providing feedback a regular and routine part of their classroom practice.

## Common Misconceptions

Designing and facilitating meaningful classroom talk is essential for ELLs—indeed for all students—to develop more extended and sophisticated language use while simultaneously learning subject matter. Yet in too many U.S. classrooms, we find ELLs sitting silently, watching their teachers do all the work, and waiting for opportunities to fully engage cognitively and linguistically.

By way of concluding thoughts, we outline five pitfalls to avoid in thinking about language learning, and we provide suggestions for how teachers can engage students in sustained, high-quality classroom talk.

**Misconception 1: Sentence frames that provide students with a way of expressing their ideas about specific situations are helpful to them.**

A sentence frame is basically a fill-in-the-blank type of activity that invites only one correct answer. Sometimes it can be open and provide starters for students (also called sentence starters for this reason) to be filled in any way. However, these starters may not provide students with





phrases they can use time and time again in academic situations.<sup>10</sup> For example: “The main character in *The Pearl* is a modest and loving man, furthermore...” “His wife, Juana, loves Kino and Coyotito, their baby, and because of that...”

In addition to using sentence frames, we suggest teachers use *formulaic expressions*, which are phrases that help start or link ideas and can be used in many situations. Initially, students learn them as unanalyzed chunks, almost as if they were one word. Later on, as students learn more English, they begin to realize the formulaic expressions are formed by several words. Formulaic expressions are extremely useful in students’ development of English and in making their interaction with peers possible and more effective. Examples of formulaic expressions are: “I agree with you, and I can add that...” “May I suggest a couple of other ideas? One example I can offer...”

### **Misconception 2: Correct mistakes students make as they talk or they will “fossilize.”**

Historically, correctness has been regarded as paramount in second language learners’ use of English. More recently, however, researchers’ attention has shifted to the larger components of communication, as discussed before: purpose, ideas, organization, types of sentences, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Fossilization, a concept popular in the 1980s, refers to the inability of second language learners to learn the correct forms of language if they continually misuse them. Our perspective, consistent with that of multiple applied linguists, is that language keeps evolving as a result of continuous practice. It may fossilize if it is no longer used productively or receptively. However, in their schooling, students will be invited to engage in uses of language continuously, and thus, they will have ample opportunities to correct themselves or be corrected by others.

### **Misconception 3: Rather than correcting students’ ungrammatical oral language, it is better to provide them with recasts, which model correct English in response to students’ mistakes.**

It is common for teachers to believe that rather than correcting a student’s mistakes—and putting him or her on the spot—it is better to repeat what a student has said, this time changing the student’s utterance into grammatical English. They think that recasting saves a student’s face and that it is a less authoritarian approach.

Research, however, shows that these implicit corrections may not be productive.<sup>11</sup> Students do not take teachers’ recasts as corrections, but rather as reiterations of the idea and as acceptance of students’ comments as being right. When the time is appropriate to focus on selected language forms to study and correct, the correction and expansion activity needs to be made explicit.

### **Misconception 4: Sustained, focused interactions are possible starting in fourth or fifth grade, but lower elementary students are not mature enough to carry them out because they get too impatient with the task and with each other.**

Recently, during an open house at an elementary school in Portland, Oregon, one of us (Aída) had the opportunity to visit three classes. The first one was a kindergarten class. The teacher, Mr. Andanen, was preparing students to read and discuss *Julius, the Baby of the World*, a book by Kevin Henkes, an author the students were already familiar with because they had enjoyed reading three of his other books in class.

To introduce the book, Mr. Andanen set up nine stations around the room and invited students to walk through them. At each station, a picture illustrating a scene from the book was prominently displayed. Students were asked to rotate around the stations every three minutes. At each station, students needed to stop, look at the picture, and explain what they noticed. The teacher had asked students to use a “talking stick” so that the turns to speak were democratically divided within the group at each station. Peers had to listen attentively to the speaker and agree with, disagree with, or expand on what the student said. Formulaic expressions such as “In this picture, I notice...” and “I noticed that,

## **We advise teachers to make providing feedback a regular and routine part of their classroom practice.**

too, and I want to add...” were familiar to the group. At one station, Aída heard the following exchange:

Student 1: I notice a woman holding a big baby. Her mouth is open. I think she is crying.

Student 2: I also noticed she had her mouth open, but I don’t think she is crying. I think she is singing.

Student 3: I also noticed the woman with the big baby, and I want to add that he is very heavy. Perhaps that is why she is screaming.

The exchange shows that Mr. Andanen has created an environment that enables young children to notice and use language in purposeful ways. Although the students were only in kindergarten, they clearly articulated their ideas and listened to others. They showed they will soon be ready to start exploring the book more deeply so that they can eventually write an opinion piece based on evidence from the text about which Henkes book was their favorite.

### **Misconception 5: All students in a class need to master the same levels of oral development as a result of participating in lessons.**

Because not all students in a class will be at the same starting point, a robust activity provides multiple entry points for all students to engage as they learn. The important idea is that they should all be gaining—not that all of them will arrive at the same point, in exactly the same way, developing at exactly the same level. This would only be possible if what is learned is limited, and if the learning demands recall. This is not necessarily what we want in education. Rather, we

*(Continued on page 39)*

# Border-School Champions

## Chess and English Language Learners



Saul Ramirez, Henderson Middle School teacher and chess coach.

BY JOHN SEIDLITZ

**S**aul Ramirez, a middle school art teacher and chess coach, challenged the audience to consider the following as he opened his 2018 keynote address for the annual conference of the National Association for Bilingual Educators:

Think about chess for a minute. Imagine you walk into a chess club at a school. Who do you expect to see there? Be honest. White kids? Asian kids? At-risk Latino kids? Well, I have a question for you. For all of us actually. Why *not* at-risk Latino kids?

Ramirez himself had been an English language learner (ELL) and a former chess champion; he knew how chess could change students' lives. His own experiences inspired him to start the Henderson Middle School chess team. In 2015, his team of 12 ELLs

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from El Paso, Texas, most of whom had never previously heard of chess, went on to become national chess champions.

Henderson is a low-income school located in one of the poorest zip codes in the United States, right on the border with Mexico. If you stand on the roof of the school, you can see across the Rio Grande to Juárez, Mexico. About half of the kids who attend Henderson are English language learners. Many of them are from Juárez and have witnessed the violence that is an unfortunate part of life there. In the years when these students attended elementary school, two of every 10 drug-related murders in Mexico occurred in Juárez.<sup>1</sup>

I first heard about Ramirez's story in the spring of 2015 while I was at Henderson conducting staff development for teachers of ELLs. It was one of those days where nothing seemed to be going right; some of the teachers were having trouble finding substitutes, and the sound system wasn't working. I decided to try something different to get us into a positive mindset. I asked the teachers to share some success stories that they had witnessed while teaching. I expected to hear stories about kids rapidly gain-

ing English proficiency, maybe some improvement in test scores, but what I heard far exceeded my expectations.

One of the teachers shared the story of the Henderson chess champions. He described how in the fall of 2014, only 12 students signed up for Ramirez's fledgling team: 11 sixth-grade boys and one seventh-grade girl, most of whom were ELLs. He taught them the rules and began taking them to tournaments.

Gradually, the students began winning local competitions and beating teams from other schools. In the spring of 2015, Ramirez believed they were ready for the state championship tournament, which was being held in McAllen, Texas. With hopeful hearts, he and the team piled into a van and drove all the way to McAllen from El Paso. The 790-mile journey took the team two days to complete.

Walking in, the students could tell that they were different from the other teams. The Henderson team didn't have uniforms; the students didn't even have a practice room because they couldn't afford to rent one; they sat in the hallway to play practice games. They were an all-Hispanic team, with only 12 *very* inexperienced players. But they had worked hard, and Ramirez believed in them. Despite feeling intimidated, they won first place in their beginners division for the state of Texas. The Henderson Middle School Hornets were now state champions! They were given a hero's welcome when, trophies in hand, they returned to El Paso.

Ramirez had promised his team that if they won at state, he would take them to the national championship tournament in Louisville, Kentucky. Off they went—and won first place.

Hearing this story, I was stunned. How had I not heard about this great win? How was this news to me? I couldn't stop thinking about it, and immediately felt compelled to share this story. Here was a sport that low-income Latino kids were not typically known for playing and yet they won first place. Considering the climate of (often) negative energy and deficit thinking related to Latino youth, this story was beyond inspiring. It debunked the common perceptions and stereotypes of low-income ELLs and Mexican American youth. It forced me to reflect on my own attitude and thoughts regarding ELLs.

## A Renewed Focus on ELL Potential

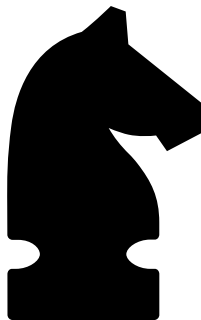
For 15 years, I had been encouraging teachers through my writing and workshops to focus on what English language learners are capable of and the linguistic and cultural assets they bring to our communities. Despite what I had been teaching, when I heard this story I was still surprised. The profound effect of hearing it made me realize the extent to which I still needed to alter my perceptions and expectations regarding ELLs. I wanted everyone to hear this story—teachers, students, parents, administrators. On the plane home that night, I knew I had a mission: sharing this story.

In the 27-plus hours of interviews I conducted with Ramirez and his team for my book *The Champions' Game*, I began discovering what this teacher does to make such a difference in the lives of his students.

He has a way of discovering their strengths and making them shine. He told me: "I strive to be radically available to my stu-

dents. I try to be fully present with all my strengths to help build up theirs. I bring who I am and, in a spirit of love, put all my talents, my stories, and every resource I have into serving them. I make a commitment every day to be as present to the students as I possibly can."

From the first time he meets his students, Ramirez works to connect with them on a personal level: "Even the hardest kid to reach has a story to tell that we can connect to." But to make that connection, Ramirez must *listen*. He has to listen not just with his ears, but with his heart. He has to look past labels and negative experiences.



From the first time he meets his students, Ramirez works to connect with them on a personal level.

One of his students, Edmundo Gomez, started with the chess team in sixth grade. (To protect his privacy, I have changed his name.) As Ramirez got to know Edmundo, he slowly learned his story. Edmundo's mom worked as a cleaner in a spa, as well as working a full shift at a restaurant. His dad lived in Juárez, and Edmundo would often cross the border to work with him. Edmundo had been in the United States most of his life, was taking remedial classes, and was also in trouble at school, but Ramirez had faith in him. Not just in his ability to play chess but also in his ability to acquire English and succeed in school.

After winning the national championship, Ramirez told the team members that they would need to maintain A or B averages throughout the next year to continue competing. Edmundo had never been an A or B student, but he loved the chess team. He told Ramirez he didn't



*The Champions' Game*, by Saul Ramirez and John Seidlitz, is published by Canter Press, which is offering *American Educator* readers a 20 percent discount off the purchase of the book through December 31, 2018. To order, visit [www.bit.ly/2LI9Va0](http://www.bit.ly/2LI9Va0) and use sales code ELLCHESS.

think he could meet the challenge. Ramirez responded with nothing but positive energy. He described to Edmundo what he saw in him. Ramirez told Edmundo that he knew he worked hard outside of school, was kind to his family, and had the intelligence and heart of a champion. Ramirez promised to help him. He put all the resources he had at Edmundo's fingertips, including tutoring, afterschool support, and reading materials.

That following spring, because of a series of poor decisions, Edmundo got arrested and put on probation. His probation officer talked to Ramirez, telling him that Edmundo would not be allowed to attend the state tournament in a few weeks. Ramirez requested that Edmundo be given special permission to go, saying that he would take personal responsibility for him—that he had faith in him. When the tournament came around, Edmundo was allowed to go, placed 16th in the state, and contributed to Henderson's victory.

Today, Edmundo is a 10th-grader. He is no longer in remedial classes, and he is no longer classified as an English language learner. Edmundo was able to raise his own expectations because

Ramirez helped him change the way he saw himself. If you were to talk to Edmundo, he would tell you: "Mr. Ramirez did not see me as a troublemaker. He saw me as a champion."

Ramirez's hard work has elevated teacher expectations of what is possible—whether their students are classified as ELL, gifted/talented, low income, or having special needs. Ongoing research confirms the tangible effects of teacher perceptions and expectations on student achievement,<sup>2</sup> either positive or negative. Following the first state chess victory, teachers' expectations began to shift at Henderson. Elizabeth Maldonado, the school's principal, reported: "There has been a positive change in the way our teachers see students' abilities. Their mindsets have shifted, and they now see that students from this area are able to accomplish great things academically."

The effect of the shift in teacher expectations is reflected in Henderson student responses to a recent El Paso Independent School District school climate survey. The results show increases in the percentage of students who stated that they "feel [their] teachers believe in [them]" and that they "can participate in after-school activities." There was also a substantial decrease in the percentage of students who stated that they "have been bullied at school."<sup>3</sup> So it is not just teacher expectations that are changing at Henderson, but also those of the students.

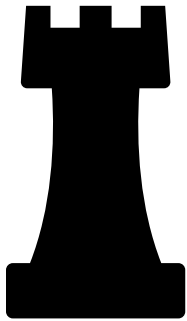
One example of changing student expectations is the increase in the number of girls on the chess team since the 2015 state and national wins. As educators, we are focusing more and more on ways to increase female participation in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, we are looking for ways to improve Latinas' beliefs about what they can accomplish in the context of the American school system.<sup>5</sup>

In the 2014–2015 school year, Ramirez had only one girl on the team; Lirio Gomez. When she placed 24th in the nation in her division, many of the girls at Henderson began to look at chess differently. Chess is a sport in which girls (especially Latinas) have been historically underrepresented. This past year, there were 12 girls on the Henderson chess team, making up 50 percent of the team and contributing to the team placing first at nationals in two divisions, proud examples of intelligent, successful Latinas for girls across the United States. The example of the Henderson Middle School chess team encourages all of us, as educators, to avoid allowing past expectations to determine future outcomes.

**T**his story has changed how I work with educators. I still emphasize the importance of increasing opportunities for English language acquisition and content mastery for ELLs; I always will. But I now increasingly emphasize the importance of helping English language learners (particularly those from low-income backgrounds) reach their full potential beyond academics.

I find myself asking: How can we listen better to students' stories? What do we need to do to see past labels and expectations to identify their strengths? How can we make ourselves truly present and available? How can we support

*(Continued on page 40)*



The example of the Henderson Middle School chess team encourages all of us to avoid allowing past expectations to determine future outcomes.



The Henderson Chess Team arrived home after winning yet another national championship.

# Understanding Their Language

Online Professional Development for Teachers of ELLs



BY SARA RUTHERFORD-QUACH, ANNIE CAMEY KUO,  
AND HSIAOLIN HSIEH

**W**hen Shaeley Santiago began teaching in Perry, Iowa, nearly 20 years ago, the state's school-age demographics were different than they are today. At the time, Iowa was nearly 93 percent white, with its student population of more than 600,000 only slightly more diverse. Shaeley was one of a handful of educators in her district certified to teach emergent bilinguals, sometimes referred to as dual language learners (DLLs) or, when designated as such, English language learners (ELLs). She taught middle school language learners of all proficiencies in the morning and then taught newly arrived immigrants in middle and high school during the afternoon.

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Shaeley enjoyed her job and treasured her students. But she often felt isolated from her colleagues. The students, particularly the newcomers in their self-contained program, were also segregated from the larger student community. Although the schooling of the district's middle and high school students was deemed the responsibility of the educator collective, the education of emergent bilinguals was often thought of as solely the concern of ELL educators. This was the norm not only in Perry or even just Iowa, but across the country.

Today, the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Iowa's school-age population has more than tripled. The biggest demographic shifts have occurred not only in metro areas but also in smaller manufacturing communities. For example, in 2000, ELLs made up slightly more than 1 percent of the preK-12 student population of the Denison Community School District, located a little more than one hour from Perry. Today, ELLs are nearly 60 percent of the Denison population. The percentage in Perry itself, where Shaeley began teaching, grew from 11.5 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Similar demographic shifts have occurred statewide and, indeed, nationwide.



Language learners and immigrants should not be conflated; these groups are related but distinct. While emergent bilinguals are often the *children* of immigrants, most are born in this country and are U.S. citizens.<sup>2</sup> Research shows their bicultural and bilingual experiences provide them with a unique global perspective and an increased cognitive flexibility.\* Thus, the inclusion of emergent bilinguals can diversify and deepen learning experiences for an entire school. Moreover, ensuring that ELLs have access to challenging academic content and the instructional supports they need is in the best interest of all who believe that an educated citizenry is vital to a functioning democracy.<sup>†</sup>

Amid all these changes, Shaeley's dedication to ELLs has remained steadfast. She now works in a larger district, the Ames Community School District, and is an instructional coach and teacher on special assignment. She is also an instructor at Drake University, teaching a course for both pre- and in-service teachers on meeting the needs of ELLs. These roles have given her a unique perspective. She can observe patterns in current classroom instruction and in teacher learning, not only in Ames, but across the state. And she can see how the role of language in content-area learning has been amplified with the advent of the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. Although Iowa's growing population of emergent bilinguals has brought with it enormous academic, linguistic, and civic potential that could enrich the state's school system, the potential of neither the standards nor the students can be realized without more effective learning opportunities for teachers.<sup>3</sup>

Here we arrive at the crux of the problem, which is bigger than Iowa and affects nearly every K-12 educational system in this country. There are now powerful standards and expectations that make visible the connections among language, analytical practices, and content-area knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Yet not all educators have access to adequate training opportunities, resources, or models to enable them to reconfigure the role of language in content-area

learning, appropriately change instructional practices, and ensure all students—but particularly English language learners—have access to rigorous content.<sup>5</sup>

## Understanding Language

Seven years ago, a group of scholars from across the country recognized this growing need to support educators who are tasked with ensuring that ELLs learn rich academic content knowledge and develop disciplinary language in English, a language many do not speak at home. Together, they formed Understanding Language (UL), a research and practice initiative housed at Stanford University. Chaired by emeritus professor Kenji Hakuta and Maria Santos, a seasoned district administrator, UL brought together leading experts in both language development and content-area learning.

One of our primary goals at Understanding Language has been to heighten educator awareness about the critical role that language plays in college- and career-ready standards. While UL's portfolio is quite diverse, the organization's work is unified by two core tenets:

1. Language is social practice or action;<sup>6</sup> and
2. Language develops through use, not statically or separately from content knowledge, but instead during carefully scaffolded interactive opportunities and processes of meaning-making.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the learning of language and the learning of content occur simultaneously, and this expectation should be made explicit. Throughout its seven-year tenure, UL has operationalized these tenets, creating foundational papers, curricular and instructional resources, and, more recently, online professional development courses and modules.

## High-Quality Professional Learning Opportunities to Serve ELLs

UL first began developing professional development opportunities for educators of English language learners two years after its formation, in 2013. The organization moved in this direction after it became clear that there was an urgent need to provide educators across the country with structured, comprehensive, and high-quality professional learning addressing how to integrate and organize language and content instruction to better serve ELLs. This need was reiterated time and time again, during conferences, in research studies, and in communications with states, districts, and schools. Since that time, UL has offered approximately 15 different online courses serving more than 50,000 participants. These courses span grade levels and content areas and focus on the core language and analytical practices that underlie college- and career-ready standards. This suite of courses is often referred to as Understanding Language Online or UL Online.

Shaeley was an early adopter among those 50,000 participants. She learned of UL Online through social media and signed up for the very first course we offered: Constructive Classroom Conversations (CCC). She found that the course was rigorous, illustrative, and connected to her classroom practice.<sup>8</sup>

She appreciated its focus on recording and transcribing student conversations as well as using formative assessment to gain a deeper understanding of them. She also applied the conversation skills framework the course offered, teaching students to

\*For more on the assets these students bring, see "The Potential and Promise of Latino Students" in the Spring 2017 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2017/gandara](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2017/gandara).

†For more on how civic engagement is critical to democracy, see "The Power of Active Citizenship" in the Summer 2018 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/graham\\_weingarten](http://www.aft.org/ae/summer2018/graham_weingarten).

co-construct knowledge, building on each other's turns and ideas in various ways.

After engaging in this first course, Shaeley enrolled in other UL courses, including two that addressed student argumentation (Supporting ELLs Under New Standards, and Learning as Evidence: Improving ELLs' Argumentation Skills through Formative Assessment Practices), as well as two others focused on literacy development using high-impact analytical language skills (Integrating English Language Development and Content Area Learning, and Seven Essential Practices for Developing Academic Oral Language and Literacy in Every Subject). Shaeley continues to draw from these experiences, and particularly from the argumentation courses, in both her K-12 work and her role as a teacher educator. For example, she shows the secondary teachers she coaches how to use UL's Argumentation Analysis Tool to formatively assess student arguments, which helps teachers gauge whether students are mastering one of the 10 essential English Language Proficiency Standards<sup>9</sup> that Iowa has adopted.

As classroom researchers and teacher educators, the course instructors for the first CCC course were aware of the pervasiveness of strategies such as “turn and talk” and “pair-share.” Across grade levels and content areas, K-12 teachers were constantly asking students to share their ideas with a partner or discuss issues, details, or solutions in pairs. Rarely, however, was the purpose and content of these exchanges reflected on or examined. More commonly, students were asked to turn and talk as a way to reinforce recall, bring their attention back to a topic, or even fill time during transitions.<sup>10</sup> One of our goals was to help classroom teachers make student-to-student conversations more productive. (For more on meaningful classroom talk, see the article on page 18.)

Together, the course development team worked with other experts in the field to develop the Conversation Analysis Tool, a rubric designed to help teachers and students focus on the key components of conversations that can make them meaningful, of high quality, and educationally valuable. And while the tool has changed slightly through the years, its focus and simplicity has remained. It guides students to take appropriate turns to construct a conversation and build on previous turns to expand upon an idea, which then enables them to focus on content or skills related to the learning objectives.<sup>11</sup>

Each of the three dimensions of the Conversation Analysis Tool has four descriptor levels (“no attempts,” “attempting interaction,” “inconsistent evidence,” and “strong evidence”) that aid the evaluator in best describing the language sample. These descriptors guide evaluators to treat language and learning as a continuum and avoid labeling learners with specific, static numeric scores.

We, the course development team, then built the curricular structure and course sequencing around this formative tool. Originally consisting of four distinct sessions, the first course included a variety of select readings and resources to introduce core content, such as the role of language in content-area learning and standards, the features of high-quality conversations, and the different kinds of conversation skills students could use and learn to build on each other's ideas. We even included videos of students in classrooms engaging in these activities—across grade levels and content areas—as models of what students were already doing and could do conversationally.

Importantly, the course assignments required participants to listen closely to and formatively assess their own students' conversations. This process allowed them to focus on students' language and then build on areas of growth to inform, change, and refine instructional practice. The pedagogical approach for Constructive Classroom Conversations included the following steps:

1. Ask participants to elicit, collect, and transcribe conversation samples of their own K-12 students as they learn content;
2. Have participants analyze these conversation samples using the Conversation Analysis Tool;
3. Allow participants to examine student conversations other course participants have submitted and provide peer feedback;
4. Base classroom lessons on participants' emerging understanding of their students' conversations and skills; and
5. Repeat this cycle of data collection, analysis, peer reviews, and instructional implementation, building on insights.<sup>12</sup>

**The learning of language and the learning of content occur simultaneously, and this expectation should be made explicit.**

### Focus and Evolution of Online Offerings

The first CCC course was open to anyone and everyone interested in the topic, but participants needed access to a K-12 classroom to get the most out of the assignments we asked them to undertake. A majority of participants from this course were classroom teachers of different grade levels and subject areas. Coaches and administrators also participated to support the professional development effort in their schools and districts. While we now charge an enrollment fee, the first conversations course, along with other pilot courses that were available between 2013 and 2018, was fully funded by grants and thus free for educators. An updated version of the conversations course is currently open for enrollment. To learn more, educators can visit Understanding Language's course information page at <http://ell.stanford.edu/courses>.

To receive proof of course completion, participants were required to successfully complete pre- and post-course surveys, all the session assignments, and peer reviews. Mini assessments in the surveys provided a way to observe learning growth, and the session assignments created opportunities for participants to transfer and apply knowledge and practices from the course to their classrooms. Peer reviews further extended the commu-



nity of learners beyond physical boundaries. Participants then could use this completion evidence, which usually came in the form of a digital certificate, to receive professional development hours or continuing education units from their school districts.

The demand for the initial CCC course encouraged us to continue the effort and create other courses, such as Supporting Student Argumentation, Integrating Language Development and Content Learning in Math, and Using Complex Texts to Develop Language. While each of these courses was unique in its content, they all employed a similar structure and model as the conversations course, emphasizing listening to and analyzing students' language through formative assessment cycles and adjusting instruction accordingly.

**In the new standards, *all* teachers are positioned as teachers of language and literacy.**

The nature of these types of massive open online courses allows and invites participants to enroll with different purposes and goals. Some participants, for example, sign up to access the resources, which they use and adapt within their schools. Others are teacher educators who disseminate the information to their own student teachers.

### **Accentuating Formative Assessment and Inquiry in UL's Online Course Model**

At first glance, the UL courses might look similar to other online courses or professional development offerings. Like most online courses, they are structured into several "sessions" (or learning "modules," as teachers often refer to them). Each session consists of a number of instructional videos aligned to learning objectives, practice-oriented readings, and individual or team assignments.

When you look closely, however, it becomes clear that there are substantial differences to our approach. First, course content focuses on practices that are central to college and career readiness, such as argumentation and reasoning, and addresses the role of language within these practices. Second, all the courses use a strategic and specific inquiry process to formatively assess ELLs' language use. These two features were originally designed by the UL Online course development team as core features of the first course. But the UL courses differ in a third important way as well: they promote and support a particular type of

blended learning model, a feature that emerged as participants began experimenting and discovered that both online and in-person support were indispensable in making the most of their course experience. We discuss this blended model in some detail later in the article.

### **Course Content Prioritizes Curricular Connections**

One of our central goals has been to make visible the connections among language, analytical thinking (e.g., analyzing texts, composing arguments, using evidence), and content-area learning, particularly in the context of the new standards.<sup>13</sup> This integrated and cross-curricular focus has driven the development and implementation of all our professional development courses and materials. While college- and career-ready standards do not fundamentally alter the nature of any particular discipline, they do highlight the role of language in content-area learning. Language has always played a significant role in content learning, but this role often has been obscured.

Moreover, content teachers often did not see themselves as language instructors. That responsibility fell on English language development or possibly English language arts teachers.<sup>14</sup> In the new standards, however, language takes a more prominent role across content areas, and *all* teachers are positioned as teachers of language and literacy.

Student expectations and assessments also have become more "language intensive." Students are required to make sense of complex texts, solve problems, engage in argumentation, and participate in constructive and cooperative peer conversations as well as provide explanations for their thinking and reasoning across content areas. Students thus are expected to communicate their disciplinary learning on a daily basis through these language practices. And if analytically challenging and language-rich academic experiences are to become integral to students' daily classroom experiences, then teachers must provide them.

To that end, most of the assignments in UL courses require educators to listen carefully to students' language use, collect and analyze student language in oral and written forms, and apply insights from this process to strengthen instruction.<sup>15</sup> In the CCC course, for example, participants plan a discussion-worthy activity, teach a lesson embedding the activity, elicit student learning evidence during the activity—by recording and transcribing a portion of a student-to-student conversation—and then analyze the transcription using a rubric to improve teaching and learning.

### **Pedagogical Approach That Focuses on Inquiry**

Another feature that distinguishes UL courses is their strategic and reflective approach, which is in line with research asserting that teachers of language learners benefit from multidimensional learning opportunities. In other words, professional development should aim for deeper, reflective learning—going beyond simple sets of instructional activities or strategies.<sup>16</sup>

In the conversations course, for example, instead of jumping right into a skill or skills that a teacher participant would like to develop or improve (e.g., facilitating constructive conversations, crafting educative prompts, helping students support their ideas with evidence), an initial assignment asks participants to observe the conversations their students currently are having in their classrooms. With the status quo in mind, the participants then



learn about constructive conversations and skills to foster these conversations, help students to build on each other's turns and ideas (e.g., creating ideas, clarifying, supporting), and learn how to create discussion-worthy prompts.<sup>17</sup>

An essential feature of UL courses is the incorporation of formative assessment to gauge where students are in their learning by gathering and assessing evidence and planning next steps.<sup>18</sup> This instructional approach is further intertwined with course learning objectives. For example, the learning goals for CCC include: (1) listen purposefully in order to assess student-to-student conversations, (2) craft effective prompts and create conversational opportunities within a lesson, (3) model and build activities for cultivating constructive classroom conversations, and (4) provide productive feedback to students and make instructional changes to strengthen conversations.

Finally, using language analysis tools, such as the Conversation Analysis Tool or the Argumentation Analysis Tool, to formatively assess teaching and learning is central. These tools are designed to shift educators' attention toward helping students use language to engage in and communicate learning rather than simply focus on vocabulary or grammar.

### Leveraging Blended Learning Opportunities

UL Online offerings explicitly emphasize building educator communities through blended learning or hybrid learning, which incorporates both online and face-to-face components. This recommended feature was not originally part of the UL course design and, indeed, is not required of course participants. Instead, it grew from the experiences and input of course participants.

For instance, during our first CCC offering, several district-level English language development coaches from Seattle Public Schools participated in the course and decided to incorporate it into their district's professional development plan. They then augmented the online offering with on-site, in-person professional development support and incentives (e.g., hourly payment, professional development clock hours). Since 2014, Seattle has run seven iterations of its own hybrid learning model using the CCC course. More than 200 Seattle teachers have completed this professional development opportunity.

While Seattle has been our oldest collaborator in the hybrid model journey, it certainly has not been the only district experimenting with combining UL Online courses and localized, face-to-face support. In 2014, the Los Angeles Unified School District also began experimenting with its own blended learning model. The district created fellowships to encourage and support teachers to take on this learning opportunity. UL collected and compiled successful stories from these early adopters and shared best practices as supplementary materials in the course. Since 2016, there have been more and more course participants receiving local support from their schools or districts, as well as organizing professional learning communities at their local sites.

We have found that course participants who are part of a blended learning cohort are much more likely to complete all course requirements and receive a statement of completion. Research examining the 2014 and 2015 iterations of the Constructive Classroom Conversations course, for example, demonstrated that 79 percent of participants with face-to-face or hybrid supports completed all course requirements, while only 2 percent of



participants without these supports did.<sup>19</sup> This is notable because completion rates sometimes can serve as a rough measurement for learning, particularly with respect to targeted objectives. The type and amount of district or school support also affect completion rates. In a study conducted on a different UL course on supporting student argumentation, we found that completion rates correlated with support configurations; overall, the more comprehensive supports participants received, the more likely they were to complete the course.<sup>20</sup>

### Impact of the Courses

Educators who have completed these courses consider them to be valuable. For example, when surveyed about overall experience with the courses, 95 percent of course completers responded positively. And 91 percent reported being satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied with what they learned from the courses, asserting that they felt more knowledgeable about the content.

Perhaps most importantly, educator participants who have taken and completed UL courses, particularly the foundational CCC course, have been very likely to demonstrate growth with respect to targeted learning outcomes, as measured by pre- and post-assessment measures. In other words, course participants are learning how to support students' language and content learning.<sup>21</sup>

Participants are also applying that knowledge to their classrooms. They report the courses have: (1) shifted their thinking about the role and use of language during content-area learning, (2) led them to integrate more discourse work throughout disciplinary lessons, (3) prompted them to incorporate formative assessment with a language lens into their instructional practice and involve students in this process, and (4) shifted their attention away from the structural components of language to how students are using language to communicate learning.<sup>22</sup>

It is our hope that those seeking to build sustainable professional development models will learn from this approach. For educators always on the lookout for quality professional development to support ELLs' access to challenging standards and rigorous content, UL hybrid course models are extremely useful and practical. They offer a vision for systematic change—not only in reference to con-

*(Continued on page 40)*

# When Educators Lead the Way

## Teacher-Driven Change at One Boston School

BY ANNELISE EATON, JENNIFER POULOS, ALISON B. STEVENS, AND JANET ANDERSON

It's an early spring morning at the Mildred Avenue K-8 School, and only the sound of soft chatter can be heard in Danielle Neville's eighth-grade English class. Students, who have just finished reading John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, are editing persuasive essays about the novel's central themes of oppression, community, and fate. A student in the front row passes his tablet to his neighbor, asking for feedback on the evidence he has chosen to support his essay's main argument.

In Ms. Neville's class, and in classrooms across the school, students think critically, analyze problems, ask questions, collaborate with peers, and make real-world connections across texts, math problems, and science experiments. Located in the Mattapan section of Boston—a neighborhood rich in diverse cultures but with persistently high rates of poverty—the Mildred continuously strives for academic excellence for its students.

The scholarly learning environment that characterizes the Mildred today seemed impossible five years ago, when the school was among the lowest performing in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. Between 2004 and 2013, the average

tenure for a principal at the school was just 18 months, with five new principals arriving during those nine years. With each leadership change, teachers faced shifting expectations and priorities. Though teachers were deeply unsatisfied with the education provided to Mildred students, they had little input into organizational and instructional solutions to problems at the school.



This photo and the two on the following page show students and teachers from the Mildred Avenue K-8 School.

Faced with pressure from district leadership to improve student achievement at the school, Mildred principals during this era often adopted a directive leadership style, effectively serving as school managers, and providing little opportunity for teacher voice or leadership.\* Staff culture suffered and instruction lacked coherence across classrooms. School-level performance data showed that students were not mastering grade-level content. According to teachers, low levels of student engagement impacted an already tenuous school climate. Math proficiency, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, the state's standards-based assessment program, plummeted to the 1st percentile in Massachusetts.

Given the school's poor performance, many school staff believed the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would identify Mildred as a Level 4 "turnaround school" in 2013, a designation made by the department's commissioner to prompt intensive intervention at chronically underperforming schools, for which the Mildred met the criteria. This classification would bring a blend of additional resources to the school

but also lead to heightened accountability for school performance. When the state announced the newest turnaround schools in 2013, school and district leaders were surprised that the Mildred was not identified. With this decision made, Mildred staff faced the notion that there would be no influx of additional external resources to help the school turn around its performance. This decision catalyzed both Boston Public Schools (BPS) leadership and a team of committed Mildred teachers to drive the kind of school improvement that staff recognized was needed to ensure high expectations for learning for all students.

In the absence of state-led turnaround, teachers and district leaders employed a rarely used Boston Teachers Union (BTU) contract provision wherein teachers can form an intervention team with the support of district and union leadership.<sup>1</sup> Utilizing this joint labor-management model, the Mildred's teacher-led intervention team would share responsibilities for schoolwide change with district leadership. For Mildred educators, the formation of the intervention team acted as a vehicle for transformative action, with the district providing agency to a teacher-led team to drive the school's change effort. Schoolwide improvements to teacher professional culture, school climate, classroom instruction, and—over time—student achievement resulted in the Mildred being selected by EdVestors as the 2017 School on the Move Prize winner, which comes with a \$100,000 award.

### A Foundation of Trust

At the Mildred, many teachers knew that the lack of consistent academic expectations across classrooms exacerbated challenges in raising student performance. Teachers were frustrated by the school's stagnant performance and challenging climate; they described these as symptoms of lackluster instructional leadership characterized by a series of attempted reforms

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\*For more on teachers' roles in school decision making and school performance, see "Leadership Matters" in the Spring 2018 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/spring2018/ingersoll\\_sirinides\\_dougherty](http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2018/ingersoll_sirinides_dougherty).

that principals had implemented with limited teacher input.

Drew Echelson, the BPS network superintendent responsible for overseeing teaching and learning at the Mildred and 15 other BPS schools, was interested in a new approach. He garnered support from the superintendent and BTU president to pursue a teacher-led intervention. With BPS and BTU approval, Echelson pitched the idea to



Mildred staff. Echelson had high expectations for teachers at the Mildred to manage a schoolwide change process. He spent several hours each week meeting and building relationships with Mildred teachers in the 2012–2013 school year, conducting walk-throughs and providing feedback to the principal and teacher leaders. He recognized that though many highly skilled educators were among the faculty at the Mildred, the absence of shared academic expectations for students and structures to ensure instructional alignment across classrooms diluted their impact.

The intervention team model would activate existing teacher talent and integrate expertise from a select group of BPS teachers from other schools to devise a turnaround plan for the school. Mildred teachers recognized that Echelson was offering them a chance to have a say in improving their school; this approach would be different from reforms they had tried in the past. Acting as both a representative of the district and the interim principal, Echelson invited Sherry Pedone, the Mildred's BTU representative, to select three teachers to serve on the intervention team. Pedone identified teachers with leadership potential and openness to change who were also well-respected for their instructional acumen. Echelson was jointly chosen by the BTU and the BPS superintendent to chair the committee.

### A Teacher-Led Plan for Action

Near unanimous votes by intervention team members led the Mildred to put together an intervention plan that requested autonomy to make decisions on school policies like structure, curriculum, staffing, budget, and professional development. With significant

prior planning already invested, both BTU and BPS leaders agreed to the intervention team's plan. Perhaps most importantly, BPS leadership acted upon all intervention team recommendations, granting the Mildred's educators significant decision-making power at a time when many district leaders may have tightened the reins on a severely underperforming school.

Though the full plan would not go into effect until the start of the 2014–2015 school year, the superintendent's willingness to grant decision-making authority to the Mildred's educators allowed staff to immediately act upon several short-term recommendations. During the 2013–2014 school year, teachers adopted high-leverage instructional strategies, including routinely using performance data from regularly occurring interim assessments to influence classroom instruction. This led to early gains in student performance. Initial successes proved critical to student and staff culture at the Mildred, creating a sense of momentum toward school improvement.

The intervention team's teaching and learning plan included bold changes to raise expectations for student learning. Schoolwide work included revisiting external/nonprofit partnerships to ensure their work aligned with the school's new instructional vision. When conducting walk-throughs across Mildred classrooms, the intervention team saw a wide variance in instructional quality and committed to deep work on classroom instruction, requiring all teachers to examine the impact of their instruction and continually refine their practice based on student data.

With the approval of the superintendent, teachers on the intervention team recommended that Echelson evaluate every member of the Mildred's staff, with only those receiving a performance rating of proficient or higher remaining at the school. The team was confident that evaluations would reveal that most of the Mildred's staff possessed the deep content knowledge, intellectual curiosity, and capacity for growth required for success in the turnaround effort. When evaluations concluded in spring 2014, about one-

quarter of the teachers received ratings below proficient based on a rigorous evaluation aligned to the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework.<sup>2</sup> Retaining the Mildred's effective educators would be crucial to the school's success.

With a highly effective teacher corps in place for the start of the 2014–2015 school year, hiring a principal who would collaborate with teachers through a time of rapid change emerged as a top priority. Mildred teachers on the intervention team selected a group of their colleagues for the principal hiring committee.

After interviewing several candidates, the team met Andrew Rollins, a former middle school social studies teacher who had been serving as director of operations at a different BPS K–8 school. Mildred teachers were confident that Rollins' instructional expertise and collaborative leadership style made him the best fit for the position. He was far and away the teachers' choice, and administrators—school and district alike—supported this decision.

### Instructional Transformation

With Rollins' arrival in fall 2014, staff began to unite around a focus on academic rigor. A collaborative working relationship between Rollins and the teachers also proved critical. Rollins spent time getting to know each teacher and elevated the role of teacher leaders across grade levels and content areas. As teachers demonstrated expertise in specific areas, Rollins asked them to share strategies with their colleagues, creating a sense of collective ownership schoolwide.

In addition, several of the intervention team's instructional recommendations provided opportunities for teacher leadership. The intervention plan proposed 60 hours of professional development, significantly more than the district-wide allocation of 24 hours.<sup>3</sup> Teachers on the school's instructional leadership team partnered with Rollins to determine the content and schedule of professional development sessions and to share their expertise.

The intervention plan added 30 minutes of instructional time to the school day and included an extra dose of small-group English language arts and math instruc-

*(Continued on page 40)*



# Coaching Them Through It

How San Antonio Supports First-Year Teachers



Veronica Goldbach, right, a consulting teacher in San Antonio's Peer Support Partnership, talking with Kristen Watt, a first-year teacher she mentors.

BY JENNIFER DUBIN

Two months into her job teaching kindergarten at an elementary school in San Antonio, Texas, the new teacher was frustrated. Having to handle disruptive student behavior and plan lessons for those who struggled to pay attention was overwhelming. As a first-year teacher, she had neither the confidence nor the know-how to manage her classroom. By April, she was a different—and much better—teacher, even winning her school's Rising Star award for most promising new teacher. Who helped her make the turnaround? Veronica Goldbach, a 15-year elementary school veteran assigned as her mentor.

When the teacher grew most discouraged, Goldbach gave her the moral support to carry on. She decided to work on her

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instructional skills and to be receptive to constructive feedback and support.

Goldbach can tell other stories about such transformations. That's because she works as a consulting teacher (CT) in the Peer Support Partnership, an intensive one-year mentorship program in which 11 veteran teachers work with approximately 150 of the 300 to 400 new teachers hired each year by the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). A joint effort of the school district and the local union, the San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel, the program was created three years ago to improve teacher recruitment and retention.

It is modeled on Peer Assistance and Review (PAR)\* programs in other places, such as Toledo, Ohio; Montgomery County, Maryland; and Albuquerque, New Mexico, where successful teachers leave the classroom for a few years to work full time as one-on-one mentors with new teachers as well as with veterans who need support. Just as doctors and lawyers set the standards

\*For more on Peer Assistance and Review, see "Taking the Lead" in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/ae/fall2008/goldstein](http://www.aft.org/ae/fall2008/goldstein).

for their professions, PAR enables teachers to guide and guard the teaching profession. That's because several PAR programs also allow expert teachers to evaluate colleagues and ultimately recommend the removal of those who, after receiving targeted supports, fail to improve.

Because the Peer Support Partnership in San Antonio is still relatively new, district and union officials designed it to be strictly supportive and not evaluative. The program pairs consulting teachers, who must have at least six years of experience, with first-year teachers in some of the district's highest-needs schools. Each consulting teacher works full time mentoring 12 to 15 brand-new teachers each year. After three years, consulting teachers return to the classroom; they also have the option to remain consulting teachers for an additional fourth year.

wanted to make a difference in children's lives. She enjoyed her years of teaching at a variety of grade levels: second, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. But when the district announced it was looking to hire its first cohort of CTs for the Peer Support Partnership, she was intrigued and decided to apply. "Hearing that this job was a partnership between the human resources office and our union just kind of made me feel a little more comfortable with it," she says. "That I wasn't going to be out to get teachers. That I was really going to be supporting them."

A former SAISD Teacher of the Year, Goldbach was exactly the kind of coach the program needed. "One of the most critical things was to identify teachers who have mastered their craft," says Toni Thompson, the school district's associate superintendent for human resources. District officials chose CTs who had strong

## The Peer Support Partnership pairs consulting teachers with first-year teachers in some of the district's highest-needs schools.

That a school district in Texas, a non-collective-bargaining state, has successfully created a PAR program speaks to the power of the labor-management partnership around this effort. It's a "really good example of something that we co-created," says Shelley Potter, the longtime president of the San Antonio Alliance. Although not officially part of any contract, the Peer Support Partnership is included in a handbook for school board policy and administrative procedures. Veteran teachers and school administrators see the program as a way to collaborate in improving the education experience for their students. The school district benefits because the program is a way to recruit and retain teachers who could earn more in neighboring districts. And for veteran teachers, the program is a creative way to strengthen their own teaching.

"I'm becoming an expert in what's expected of teachers in different grade levels," says Goldbach, who works with teachers in kindergarten through sixth grade. Even with all her experience, she readily admits that her own first year of teaching was tough. Although she had a mentor, she rarely saw her; that teacher was busy with her own classroom. Thankfully her mother, a retired teacher, helped her, as did her mother's colleagues. "I had that strong support system," she says, "but I know a lot of people don't."

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Goldbach never intended to leave the classroom. A graduate of SAISD with a master's degree in education from Trinity University in San Antonio, she had always planned to teach because she



instructional backgrounds and also possessed what Thompson calls "the three Cs": communication, collaboration, and coaching skills. As mentors, CTs would have to know how to take what they observed and break it down so that new teachers could understand how and what to improve.

This past spring, Goldbach worked with 13 teachers at five different schools. Usually, she visited two schools each day and checked in with her teachers twice each week. Sometimes her morning began as early as 7 a.m., when teachers asked to meet with her before school. And sometimes her workday ended at 7 p.m., if teachers wanted to meet with her after school. Mostly, she meets with teachers during their 45-minute lesson-planning time. "It just depends on what the teachers need," she says.

Often, she helps them in the classroom. She may offer coaching strategies while the new teacher leads a lesson. Or, if a teacher is trying to improve student engagement, Goldbach will help her monitor that by standing near students who may be disengaged. She can then give the teacher "a signal, like, you're losing these kids," she says.

Because she taught fourth grade for many years, Goldbach has deep knowledge about curriculum and teaching strategies for that

specific grade level; she can easily help her new teachers who teach fourth grade. “But if I am not the expert, I find the expert to come and help them,” she says. For instance, when her kindergarten teachers needed help with classroom management strategies and how to teach phonics, Goldbach worked with their principal to schedule a time for them to observe a veteran kindergarten teacher during her literacy block at another school.

Given all the miles they put on their cars, CTs receive \$100 each month to help defray their travel expenses. Besides earning the same salary as they did as classroom teachers, the job comes with a \$5,000 yearly stipend.

Once a month, the CTs meet with their own coach, a trainer from the Education Service Center, Region 20, in San Antonio, which is a state-run facility that provides professional develop-

who didn’t have their own classroom.” Other districts she considered applying to in the state offered new teachers mentors who also had their own classrooms. In San Antonio, Nathan especially liked the fact that she would be paired with a CT whose sole job was to mentor her and other novice teachers.

Nathan, now a fifth-grade teacher at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, says that working with Rosa Barrera, her CT, last year was extremely rewarding. Barrera showed Nathan, then a third-grade teacher, how to add rigor and depth to her lessons. “I was fine planning something very baseline, but she kind of helped me kick up the challenging parts of it.”

Barrera also showed Nathan how to make her lessons cross-curricular. For instance, when she taught a unit focusing on biographies of Rosa Parks and Ruby Bridges in reading, Barrera



**Consulting teachers meet monthly to discuss mentoring challenges and to bounce instructional ideas off each other.**

ment. There they spend half the day discussing coaching issues as well as the book they are all assigned to read, *Get Better Faster: A 90-Day Plan for Coaching New Teachers*, by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo.

CTs also meet monthly with each other to discuss mentoring challenges and to bounce instructional ideas off each other. And they meet regularly with the principals at the schools where they’re supporting new teachers. It’s “nonevaluative,” Goldbach says. “We just check in and see what the principal is seeing in the classroom. It kind of helps us to see if we’re seeing the same things” and “what we need to work on.”

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As part of their job, CTs also travel to nearby job fairs to promote SAISD and to highlight its Peer Support Partnership. In April 2017, at a job fair at the University of Texas at Austin, Goldbach met Eugenia Nathan and convinced her to apply to the school district. For Nathan, a University of Missouri–Columbia graduate who grew up in Dallas and wanted to move back to Texas, the program was a unique selling point. “I was really confident with my teacher prep,” she says. “But I knew I’d need some support and someone

helped her extend the topic to social studies as well. “The students see those passages during their reading, and they recognize the same person,” Nathan says. “They’re building background knowledge.”

Another time, Barrera came into her classroom when she was teaching a lesson on spelling. Afterward, she suggested Nathan try dictation with her students. “She gave me a whole packet of resources, and she actually modeled for me how I would teach it to them,” Nathan says. “That was really helpful.”

Her students formed their own relationships with Barrera. Nathan says they were eager to see her when she came in, often waving hello and even hugging her. “The way I introduced her in the beginning of the year is I told them ‘I’m new to Franklin,’” she says. “They were very used to the idea that a lot of people come in to observe me because it was my first year.” Barrera’s job, Nathan explained to her students, was to help her so she could best help them.

Asked if she wished Barrera could spend another year coaching her, Nathan gives a sensible answer that would make her CT proud. “I would love another year, but I know that in the classroom, we’re big on the gradual release of responsibility—which is I do it, then we do it as a class, then eventually you do it on your own—for those independent skills,” Nathan says. “The nice thing about the program is that we have the professional relationship now, where she has shared so many resources and so much of her experience, that I feel very comfortable just shooting her a text and saying, ‘Hey, I’m having this issue. What can I do?’” □

**AFTER THE EDUCATION WARS: HOW SMART SCHOOLS UPEND THE BUSINESS OF REFORM**

In recent years, positive disruption and cutting-edge innovation have been among the buzzwords associated with education reform. Meaningful school improvement, however, doesn't have a thing to do with them. In her book *After the Education Wars: How Smart Schools Upend the Business of Reform* (The New Press), Andrea Gabor shows how business reforms have hurt public education, impeded teaching and learning, and alienated students and families. Just as important, she highlights schools that have pushed back against privatization and the relentless focus on accountability by "creating a climate of trust and respect" among educators and local communities.

A longtime business reporter, Gabor first introduces readers to W. Edwards Deming, the management consultant whose ideas around continuous improvement helped Toyota and Ford rise to prominence in the auto industry. Deming's belief that employees—not senior management or consultants—are best positioned to solve a company's problems was never embraced by the majority of American businesses. Instead, they favored the ideas of Frederick Winslow Taylor, who prioritized scientific efficiency over labor-management collaboration. As a result, the business reforms of Taylor eventually influenced the business of school reform.

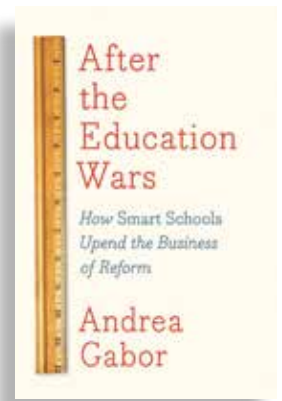
The schools Gabor profiles are succeeding because of Deming's ideas, whether or not the educators in these schools have heard of him. For example, she shows how a coalition of public high schools, the New York Performance Standards Consortium, has for more than two decades meaningfully assessed student learning through performance-based assessments, such as essays, research papers, and science experiments.

Among the reasons consortium schools are high performing is that classroom teachers—those closest to students (à la Deming)—not only engage students in their learning but also measure more accurately than a standardized test ever could their knowledge and skills over time.

Next, she focuses on Brockton High School in Massachusetts, a formerly struggling public school. Because of the partnership between administrators and faculty members, the school implemented a comprehensive focus on literacy. Gradually, Brockton improved, and the school banded together with community members to fend off a charter school proposal that would have drained funds from the school.

Gabor also tells the story of Leander, Texas, about 30 miles outside of Austin. Once struggling, the district is now high performing thanks to administrators and teachers intentionally following Deming's philosophy of systematic improvement.

Her final example debunks the New Orleans miracle. Although corporate reformers consider the charter schools that replaced many of the city's public schools a resounding success, Gabor writes that New Orleans is actually "a cautionary tale of skewed incentives and rushed reforms that have often hurt the city's most vulnerable children." It's an analysis that starkly contrasts with the stories of real school improvement that make this book worth the read.

**DEMORALIZED: WHY TEACHERS LEAVE THE PROFESSION THEY LOVE AND HOW THEY CAN STAY**

It's no secret that teachers face myriad challenges outside the classroom. From misguided reforms such as value-added measures, to a lack of support from administrators, to notoriously low pay, educators leave teaching when they become frustrated and unhappy with their work. Often, they are said to have simply burned out.

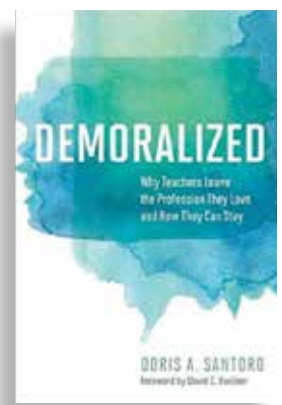
But such an explanation may not always be accurate, says Doris A. Santoro, an associate professor of education at Bowdoin College. In her book *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay* (Harvard Education Press), Santoro contends that some teachers call it quits because of demoralization. This type of dissatisfaction, she writes, "occurs when pedagogical policies and school practices (such as high-stakes testing, mandated curriculum, and merit pay for teachers) threaten the ideals and values, the moral center, teachers bring to their work—things that cannot be remedied by resilience."

To determine what can be done to help teachers overcome demoralization, Santoro interviewed 23 public school teachers with five to 35 years of experience who had moral concerns but were still teaching. She found that many concerns related to teachers' fears that certain policies and practices would harm students or violate the trust they had worked so hard to establish. She also learned that educators' moral concerns often related to

upholding the integrity of the profession—for instance, a teacher taking a stand against the role of standardized testing because it violates her conception of good teaching.

Given that our nation's teacher shortage could surpass 100,000 teachers this year, Santoro writes that research must focus on the process of remoralization, of helping educators recharge their moral centers and regain a sense of satisfaction in their work. To that end, she offers 16 specific strategies for sticking with the profession. These include identifying allies within a teacher's school or district, pursuing National Board Certification, and joining civic groups to ensure teacher voices are part of policymaking discussions.

Santoro also highlights the power of teacher unions to resist demoralization by suggesting that educators seek union leadership opportunities. Although the labor movement has been weakened in some states, such as Wisconsin, she writes that "unions can continue to establish themselves as a moral force." After all, unions not only elevate the individual voices of teachers, "but also serve as the voice for the profession and public schools."



## Research on Teaching ELLs

(Continued from page 9)

school climates can foster ELLs' motivation to learn and commitment to their educational success in the elementary school years and beyond.<sup>52</sup>

**E**xperienced teachers knowledgeable about supporting ELLs, such as Mr. Diaz, already incorporate many of these principles in their instruction. But more needs to be done to make sure this research gets into the hands of all classroom teachers, and to ensure additional research is conducted that can strengthen teaching and learning. □

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## Oral Language

(Continued from page 23)

want to produce individuals who are thoughtful, engaged, and conscious of their own development.

**E**nglish language learners bring valuable assets and immense potential to school. The role of educators is to realize that potential in deep and accelerated ways. Each classroom teacher must ensure the path to that development is paved with meaningful interactions to help students develop language skills, gain conceptual understanding, and learn academic content. Our students deserve no less. □

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## Chess and ELLs

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our students with our own strengths and resources? And most of all, have we done everything we can to show our students that they have what it takes to be champions? □

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## When Educators Lead the Way

(Continued from page 33)

tion for all students. In addition, the plan also ensured that students had access to science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) activities and enrichment. Opportunities for ongoing collaboration enhanced teachers' ability to use this extra time to strengthen students' foundational skills to meet rigorous, grade-level standards.

**I**n 2016, the Mildred Avenue K–8 School became the first school in Massachusetts' history to rise from the 1st percentile of academic achievement to Level 1 status, Massachusetts' top school performance designation. Across the commonwealth, where several turnaround schools have struggled to sustain progress through leadership turnover and other school changes, the Mildred is

an example of ongoing improvement. With a strong cadre of teacher leaders in place and a professional culture where staff share effective practices across classrooms, teachers constantly explore new ways to meet the needs of their students. Beyond their impact on classroom instruction, these factors have also led to high levels of teacher retention at the Mildred, strengthening the school's ability to continue its strong academic performance and positive school climate. □

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tent delivery, but also in terms of the content itself. Ultimately, each course component is grounded in the following educational realities: language is a core component of every discipline; content-area learning and language development happen simultaneously and should be treated as such; we are all language teachers; and, perhaps most important, to truly support students in their development, you have to first listen to their language. □

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