

Standards-Based Instruction

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The U.S. educational system has for the last decade focused on standards-based teaching and assessment. Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) every state was required to create a set of standards in the core content areas. Most of these standards were based on work done by the various professional educational organizations. In 1997, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) published *ESL Standards for PreK–12 Students*, which became the basis for many state ESL standards. The TESOL standards were updated to *PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards* in 2006. These new standards have been used to inform the national debate by organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers & National Governors Association and the World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium.

Common Core Standards and English Language Learners

The National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have published the Common Core State Standards Initiative (NGA & CCSSO, 2010a) online. These standards, frequently referred to as the Common Core, have been adopted by 44 states in an effort to develop a consistent target for educational outcomes across the United States. One point on which the Common Core differ from previous curricula is the strong emphasis on English language across the curriculum. In the past, many schools have relegated the teaching of language to the English language arts (ELA) or ESL courses. The Common Core clearly focus on the teaching of language in every school subject. The standards for ELA are not relegated to one genre or subject, but are titled *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*:

The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school . . . expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language [are] applicable to a range of subjects, including but not limited to ELA . . . teachers in other areas must have a role in this development as well. (NGA & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 4)

The Common Core address the needs of English language learners (ELLs) in the publication *Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners* (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d). Every teacher and administrator in the United States should read this three-page statement, whether they use the Common Core or a different set of standards. The statement notes:

[ELLs] require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge. . . . Effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction accordingly, and closely monitoring student progress. (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 1)

The paper clearly states that ELLs' reading needs differ from NES students in attempting to meet the Common Core. The goal of educating ELLs, according to this paper, is to make them college-ready through meeting the same rigorous content standards as NES students in the United States. In order to reach this goal, the paper calls for:

- Highly qualified teachers who are certified in ESL instruction
- A school environment rich in literacy
- Language instruction to build foundational skills in English
- Comprehensible input: course work written in English the ELLs can understand
- Pair and group work that allows ELLs to use oral English to communicate
- Ongoing assessment
- Models of academic English
- Opportunities to code-switch between the ELLs' first language and English to accomplish complex tasks
- Language support to help students understand the English in story problems before being asked to solve them
- Opportunities for students to use English to discuss complex concepts (academic discourse)

Recognizing that “the development of native like proficiency in English takes many years and will not be achieved by all ELLs especially if they start schooling in the US in the later grades” (NGA & CCSSO, 2010d, p. 1), the authors

nevertheless encourage schools to strive toward the Common Core through appropriate support by teachers who are highly qualified in ESL. Students can meet the standard in math whatever their home language, even though their accent, grammar, and vocabulary may never reach “native-speaker” proficiency. Therefore, the goal is not to have all ELLs speak English like NES students, but to provide them with at least the minimum language ability to engage academically at grade level in the core subject areas.

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation and ELLs

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) recently merged with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The new agency works with numerous other professional organizations to assess teacher preparation programs. Where ELLs are involved, CAEP coordinated with TESOL International Association to develop the guidelines in the *TESOL P–12 ESL Professional Teaching Standards* (TESOL, 2010). These 13 standards are divided into 5 domains: Language, Culture, Instruction, Assessment, and Professionalism (Appendix A). Compared with the most recent National Council of Teachers of English *Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 7–12* (NCTE, 2012), which have 23 elements for 7 standards divided into 5 domains.

Where the TESOL standards (2010) focus on language (including linguistics, grammar, and vocabulary), the NCTE standards (2012a) focus on literacy (literature and composition). Content knowledge in TESOL includes the ability to “use the major theories and research related to the structure and acquisition of language to help English language learners (ELLs) develop language and literacy” (p. 26), whereas NCTE focuses on reading “a range of different texts—across genres, periods, forms, authors, cultures, and various forms of media” and on “composing texts (i.e., oral, written, and visual)” (p. 1). For NCTE the structure of language is part of one element (element 5), namely, that good English teaching “incorporates knowledge of language—structure, history, and conventions” (p. 1), whereas for TESOL, knowledge of language is central. In Domain 1: Standard 1.a “Candidates demonstrate understanding of language as a system, including phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics and semantics, and support ELLs as they acquire English language and literacy in order to achieve in the content areas” (p. 27).

Another difference in the focus of the TESOL standards (for teachers of ELLs) and the NCTE standards (for teachers of NES students) is the weight of the focus on culture. For ELLs, TESOL requires that highly qualified teachers “know, understand, and use the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct learning environments that support ESOL students’ cultural identities, language and literacy development, and content-area achievement” (p. 38). NCTE, on the other hand,

includes ELLs within societal diversity, as teachers are required to plan and teach lessons that are “accessible to all students, including English language learners, students with special needs, students from diverse language and learning backgrounds, those designated as high achieving, and those at risk of failure” (p. 1).

Take Away ELLs form part of the audience for ELA teaching. CAEP distinguishes between highly qualified ELA teachers and highly qualified teachers of ELLs. Teaching English to those who already know the language is a different skill and requires different methods than teaching students for whom English is an additional (perhaps second, third, or fourth) language. To be considered “highly qualified” to work with ELLs, a teacher must be trained in the specialized field of TESOL.

Sheltered English Instruction

One of the most popular programs for teaching ELLs in the United States is the sheltered English instruction (SEI) model.¹ In SEI, ELLs are placed in content classrooms together, so that the teacher (e.g., in math or science) can work together with an ESL teacher to create lesson plans that meet the school’s standards in the content area while providing the ELLs with scaffolded support to learn English. In other words, ELLs study the same content as NES students, while their English study stems from the academic content. SEI allows content and ESL teachers to collaborate, applying their knowledge together so that ELLs learn English without falling behind in the other content areas.

The Center for Applied Linguistics provides materials and training in SEI, including materials for perhaps the most widely used SEI model, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). SIOP is a programmatic system of improving ELL learning outcomes. In typical SIOP models, the content teacher collaborates with the TESOL teacher in eight key areas: preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. Teacher pairs work to improve each of these areas of teaching in order. To monitor progress, teachers are observed using the checklist protocol (Appendix B). While the SIOP model is comprehensive in nature, dealing with all four skills and every content area, it highlights many key aspects of differentiation between NES students’ and ELLs’ reading. The most important underlying theme is that for ELLs, reading instruction must be integrated across the curriculum, not delegated solely to the ELA classroom.

¹This should not be confused with the Arizona Structured English Immersion (SEI) program of isolated English instruction that prevents ELLs from learning content material until after they have reached a target English test score.

The Center for Applied Linguistics text *What's Different About Teaching Reading to Students Learning English? Study Guide* (Kaufman, 2007) and related professional workshops are highly recommended for TESOL professionals who would like more in-depth information that is beyond the scope of this book.

Take Away Decades of research have produced clear indications that reading instruction is vital to ELL success in schools. The most promising methods for ELL success in school do not teach reading apart, but integrate the teaching of reading across the curriculum, through the school year, and throughout grades P–12.