Before my colleague and I became involved in ELM [English Learners in the Mainstream Project], we had great difficulty getting a time slot for delivering professional development to our co-workers. Being a part of the ELM team gave us regular opportunities to select, create, and present relevant staff development as well as to make positive one-on-one connections with general education teachers. Through that process, we became regular go-to people for our school, a new identity that we fully embrace!

—ESL Coach

**WHY ACADEMIC LANGUAGE IS AN EQUITY ISSUE**

Academic language is a register, or series of registers, that needs to be explicitly taught and learned. Zwiers (2008) provides the following definition: “Academic language is the set of words, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher order thinking processes, and abstract concepts” (p. 20). We cannot cognitively process concepts that we do not have words for.

In light of the impact of language on cognitive processes, language also has significant societal implications—and not just for English learners (ELs). For these reasons, attending to academic language instruction may be the most important equity initiative that a school can take up. Halliday & Hasan (1989) explain,

Language is a political institution: those who are wise in its ways, capable of using it to shape and serve important personal and social goals, will be the ones who are “empowered” (to use a fashionable word): able, that is, not merely to participate effectively in the world, but able also to act upon it, in the sense that they can strive for significant social change. (p. x)
We are sized up by the language that we use in all social environments. Our language gives us access to relationships, employment, housing, and healthcare. If we think of language as a critical tool for survival and social mobility, it is hard to argue against a need for explicit language instruction.

“All teachers are language teachers” has become a cliché in the English language teaching field. For English as a second language (ESL) teachers, it is a stark reminder that our responsibility is more than direct service for ELs. For general education teachers, it can be read as a hopeful plea and call to action or a dismal reality check for those who have not considered that aspect of their role. Whether or not teachers identify as language teachers, they are language teachers by default, because language is the vehicle through which they deliver instruction. So, the question for all teachers is not, “Do you want to be a language teacher?” It is “What kind of language teacher do you want to be?”

**Who Academic Language Is For**

The following is a story from Michelle Benegas, coauthor of this book:

> It was November, the time had recently changed, and I noticed that it was dark outside as I put a frozen lasagna in the oven for dinner. I had no energy for anything more complicated. My kids sat transfixed in front of the TV, tired after a long day of school. It was 6 pm and I was exhausted and ready to go to bed. If you live in a cold climate, you can likely relate to this easing in to human hibernation that happens in late fall. As my husband was taking off his coat, the doorbell rang. I cocked my head. Apologetically, he said “It’s the insurance salesman. Sorry. I forgot to tell you that he was coming tonight.”

The salesman handed me multicolored folders and spread papers across our dining room table, making himself comfortable for a long stay. Would you like GAP insurance? A floater policy? If this 1914 house burned to the ground they would want to replace it with a sheetrock box, you don’t want a sheetrock box, do you ma’am? I struggled to stay engaged in the conversation. I understood a fraction of the words that he was using. I wanted to ask him to leave but I knew that I couldn’t because we needed insurance. It was in our best interest to get a comprehensive and economical plan. “Blah liability, blah act of god, slight increase in premium . . .” Lasagna smells wafted through the air. I wondered what my kids were watching on TV. As my frustration increased, my understanding of his words decreased. We ate cold lasagna at 8 pm and everyone went straight to bed. I haven’t talked to an insurance salesperson since.

This is an everyday example of an exchange between someone who holds information that is vital to another person when the information is not entirely comprehensible to that other person. We are all able to tell stories like these. In these situations, we are often humbled, embarrassed, and frustrated. If we are secure enough in what we do know, we may find humor in our language blunders. This is not the case for many of our students.

Let’s let go of the idea that academic language is for some, not all. Explicit academic language instruction is for all students, but it has a particularly critical implication for nonnative speakers of English, speakers of the many varieties of English, and struggling readers (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Edmonds et al., 2009; Nation & Snowling, 2004). If we have the expectation that our students talk and write like scientists, historians, and mathematicians, it is our responsibility to teach them to do so rather than assume that they will understand, or somehow infer from mere exposure, how to use those structures and content-specific words.
Four Types of English Learners

Because ESL services are linked to school funding and school funding is linked to policy, it is important that policymakers recognize that differing student backgrounds result in differing needs when it comes to language instruction. For this reason, it is important that we look carefully at four different types of ELs served in our schools.

**Highly Literate Newcomers:** Students who have received the same amount and quality of formal education as their peers, but need to learn English.

**Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education:** Sometimes referred to as “SLIFE,” students who immigrate at an older age who have interruptions in their education. These students are often, but not always, refugees. Students with limited or interrupted formal education meet at least three of the following five requirements:

1. Comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or who usually speaks a language other than English.
2. Enters school after Grade 6.
3. Has at least 2 fewer years of schooling than their peers.
4. Functions at least 2 years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics.
5. May be preliterate in their native language.

(Minnesota Department of Education & Midwest Comprehensive Center, 2016)

**Recently Arrived English Learners:** ELs who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for fewer than 12 months (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

**Long-Term English Learners:** Students who have been in the country for more than 6 years, but who are not progressing toward English proficiency and whose academic progress is hindered by limited English proficiency. Many long-term ELs (sometimes referred to as LTELs) are children of immigrants but are not immigrants themselves, and they are most often in the middle and secondary grades.

The preceding identifiers are intended for schools and teachers to consider how they are meeting the needs of each group that they serve. In conducting a school needs analysis and drafting an action plan (see Chapter 9), you must know the varied types of ELs that your school serves.

**Approaches to Language Teaching**

When you hear the term *grammar school*, what images do you conjure? If you are from the United States, you likely imagined a school from a bygone era, in which students trod to a one-room schoolhouse toting books tied with a string. We know that early U.S. schooling placed high value on grammar, but allocated time specifically for English grammar is seldom seen in our classrooms today. There have been many iterations of language teaching since the days of grammar school. One thing is for sure—we are still unable to agree on the best way to teach language. The following is a brief overview of six models of language instruction used in the United States.
Grammar-Translation Method: This method is rooted in Latin instructional approaches dating back to the 16th century. Central to this method are explicit grammar instruction, memorization of grammatical rules, and translations from one language to another. It remained a predominant approach to language instruction through the late 1800s and early 1900s. Despite having no theoretical basis, it is still used in classrooms today.

Audiolinguistic Method: At the onset of World War II, early proponents of this method noticed the defense advantages to having multilingual citizens. Rooted in behaviorism, the belief was that language could best be learned through memorization and repetition. Many people still remember tape players, headphones, and repeated speech drills in language labs. This method proved successful in training learners to memorize dialogues, but it fell short in preparing learners to interact in authentic situations.

The Natural Approach: In an effort to enhance the natural process of learning language, Krashen and Terrell (1983) developed the natural approach. This approach puts attention on communication, rather than grammar, with the intent of language acquisition, rather than language learning. They suggest that language be scaffolded and that students learn in a low-stress environment. However, critics of the approach say that while its attention to access is appropriate, it lacks focus when it comes to application, and it fails to address language structure (the grammatical systems in language). The natural approach remained popular throughout the 1980s and 1990s in the United States.

The Communicative Approach: This approach is based on the theory of communicative language teaching, which has an explicit focus on meaningful communication. Beginning in the 1980s and still popular in a variety of educational settings, the communicative approach promotes use of authentic texts and focuses on meaning rather than form. In a communicative classroom, the teacher is the facilitator of conversation and serves as a language model for students. Critics note that because the model prioritizes function (the purpose of the language that we use to communicate) over structure, critical gaps in formal language can persist.

Content-Based Instruction (CBI): Founded on communicative language theory principles, CBI is the predominant continuum of approaches in ESL instruction today. It allows for the focus on form found in the grammar-translation method as well as the focus on meaning found in the audiolinguistic method, the natural approach, and communicative language teaching. In CBI, teachers anticipate what language students will need in order to engage in and make sense of the already planned content (Brinton et al., 1989). In CBI, content drives language.

Functionalism: With many similarities to CBI, a functionalist approach is focused on the functions of language that are immediately needed, such as daily tasks and content-area lessons. With learners focused on function, rather than form, they can engage in authentic conversation with peers and stay on track with content learning.

Figure 1 shows how the pendulum has shifted from form-focused approaches to communication-focused approaches to where we are today—function-focused approaches to language instruction.

---

1 Krashen argues that language acquisition and language learning are discrete skills that cannot transfer from one environment to another. He considers language acquisition to happen unconsciously, as a result of exposure to language, and learning to happen purposefully, with a focus on form.
A functional approach to language instruction is based on the idea that language should be taught in context. In the field of ESL, this may mean that ESL teachers work alongside general education teachers to infuse explicit language instruction into the curriculum; however, coteaching and coplanning models do not exist everywhere. Regardless, teaching the language that the context requires is widely accepted as the most effective way to help students acquire academic language. Because ESL teachers cannot always be involved in the planning and delivery of content-area lessons, there is a need for all teachers to know how to teach language through content.

Though there is a general consensus about CBI and functionalism as the leading approaches to language instruction for ELs, there are a variety of program models used in schools. Known by many names, they are often referred to as “push-in” and “pull-out” models. These names refer to where a language learner is in relation to general education students. We would like to suggest that the ESL teacher has a critical role both when the learner is in and apart from the general education setting.

**COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM DESIGN: A DIRECT/INDIRECT SERVICE MODEL FOR SCHOOL–WIDE ENGLISH LEARNING**

ESL teachers are masters of their craft. It’s easy to see why ELs often feel so at home with the ESL teacher. ESL teachers understand the complexity of language and the role of culture in learning. We applaud these master educators for the gains that they are able to make with their students. However, the fraction of time that ELs spend with an ESL teacher is small compared to the time that they spend in a general education classroom. It is time for yet another evolution in the field of ESL, as much more can be done to tend to the forest if teachers can briefly step away from tending their own trees.

As the field of ESL has evolved over time, so has the role of the ESL teacher. It is no longer sufficient for an ESL teacher to serve only as a direct service provider to ELs. They are now asked to serve as coteachers, resource teachers, professional development (PD) facilitators, site-based experts, and teacher coaches. Our newcomers deserve a more comprehensive approach to learning language and content simultaneously. Students need to learn and use language in context.

The SWEL model for designing system-wide services for ELs considers that schools support ELs in three ways. Consider Figure 2.
For a school to adequately serve ELs, all of the elements shown in Figure 2 need to be integrated into the school day. It’s important for teachers and administrators to examine how they are attending to each of these three areas. It’s also critical to consider what teachers feel prepared to do and where students spend the majority of their time. Commonly, ESL teachers report feeling most prepared to offer direct service, somewhat prepared to offer differentiated service, and minimally prepared to provide indirect service. Unfortunately, the inverse is true when it comes to the amount of time that ELs spend in each setting. They often spend the smallest amount of their school day in direct service, second to differentiated service, with the majority of their time in a general education setting that could be supported through indirect service. It is critical that ESL teachers feel prepared to move beyond serving ELs through direct service models (e.g., pull-out and sheltered content) and differentiated service models (e.g., coteaching) toward an indirect service teacher leadership model that includes peer coaching, serving as a resource teacher, and delivery of targeted PD.

New to TESOL International Association’s *Standards for Initial TESOL Pre-K–12 Teacher Preparation Programs* (2019) is the requirement that ESL teachers be prepared to be school-based instructional leaders. Under this new standard, ESL teacher candidates in TESOL-accredited institutions will learn about adult learning theory and approaches to teacher PD. The field of English language teaching is moving from a direct service–only model to a direct/indirect service model. To be clear, a direct/indirect service model includes both providing direct instruction to ELs and providing support to colleagues so that ELs are appropriately supported in their academic language growth in the general education context. The model does not favor indirect over direct instruction, but rather recognizes that ESL teachers can do both with a reimagining of how an ESL teacher spends their day and by putting the right structures, such as scheduling time for peer coaching, in place. This book serves as a guide for preservice and in-service teachers who will assume the role and identity of the ESL teacher leader, or SWEL coach.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AND TEACHER SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND DISPOSITIONS**

Consider the following sports analogy as it relates to the way that PD is usually conducted in the field of education, where outside experts are hired with the intent of improving teacher practice.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Service</th>
<th>Differentiated Service</th>
<th>Direct Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit, targeted academic language instruction in all mainstream lessons.</td>
<td>Explicit, targeted academic language support in the mainstream classroom or while using mainstream content.</td>
<td>Explicit, targeted academic language support independent of mainstream content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Direct/indirect service model for school-wide English learning.
Imagine going to the finest basketball camp in the world and being explained the perfect technique for the jump shot. You will receive instruction from an expert coach on how to complete every element of the jump shot; however, you will not be in a gym. Not only will you be outside of a gym, but you will have no ball to practice with and there will not be a hoop in sight. The hope is that you take the techniques you learned in isolation, and then on your own time, incorporate them in to your regular practice. Tough sell! (Ferlazzo, 2018)

For many teachers, the basketball camp metaphor hits close to home. Beyond university-based teacher education, teacher PD often lacks the context and practicality needed for it to transform practice. Intensive one-size-fits-all workshops remain the most common platform for continuing education in the English language teaching field. Though cost-effective, many educators report that this model fails to move the needle in their practice (Baum & Krulwich, 2016; Ferlazzo, 2018). The SWEL approach responds to the shortcomings of the sit-and-get PD model not only by increasing the frequency of the intervention, but also by offering an opportunity for active learning, application of new strategies, and the constructive feedback needed to improve practice (Barshay, 2018). Through harnessing the capacity of teachers’ existing expertise, schools can experience transformative building-wide instructional growth without spending more money than is already being spent on outside consultants. The SWEL model is personalized, relevant, engaging, intentional, continual, and cost-effective. The conceptual frameworks that inform the SWEL model are 1) distributed leadership and 2) teacher skills, knowledge and dispositions. The following sections explain these frameworks.

**Distributed Leadership: Shared Responsibility for Professional Learning**

The first conceptual framework that underpins the SWEL model is distributed leadership. As described by Spillane (2005), distributed leadership focuses on an interactive leadership practice that involves not just leaders, but also followers and the context. In this model, leadership is the responsibility of many rather than a few, which is why it is sometimes referred to as shared or democratic leadership (Spillane, 2005). In such organizations, there are multiple leaders who may or may not have formal leadership titles and roles. The SWEL model is well supported by such a practice, although it can exist without a conscious embrace of distributed leadership, as many existing partners in this work have proven.

In many ways, leadership is and has always been an inherent part of teaching in a K–12 classroom. This is demonstrated by the fact that teachers are responsible for planning at both the macro and micro levels, keeping in mind the overall scope and sequence of a given unit of study while also considering where students are headed next. Teachers also need to pivot when those plans require readjustment, a skill that effective leaders rely on when things do not go as planned. Further, strong relationships play a critical role in the students’ and the school’s success, which means that teachers need to demonstrate leadership skills, such as team building and drawing on the individual strengths of students. As a result, it stands to reason that many teachers who run successful classrooms also have the potential to become strong administrative and instructional leaders.

In 2014, the Teach to Lead Initiative was announced by then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Teaching and Learning Conference (Duncan, 2014). Teach to Lead is a teacher leadership initiative undertaken in partnership by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Education Association, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It was designed
to advance efforts to develop more teachers into leaders, recognizing that there are ways to do this without requiring teachers to give up classroom teaching altogether. Duncan emphasized that providing opportunities for teacher leadership would give voice to the instructional experts who are too often left out of the conversation. The secretary of education was not alone in his efforts to cultivate teacher leaders; in 2014 the National Education Association partnered with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Center for Teaching Quality to create the Teacher Leadership Initiative (National Education Association, 2018) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals’ 2017 position statement called for increased opportunities for teacher leadership (2017).

It should go without saying that for a teacher to take on leadership responsibilities, structural changes to support that work are essential if the work is going to be effective. Clearly, teachers need to know what is expected of them as teacher leaders, which requires a job description and frequent interaction with school administrators. Teacher leaders also need time to do their work, which can mean some changes in scheduling procedures. Perhaps most important, teachers need agency to make decisions based on their professional expertise. All of these supports, among others, point to the rationale for intentionally implementing the practice of distributed leadership.

Distributed, or shared, leadership is a model that allocates responsibility for various organizational goals and duties based on the staff’s areas of expertise. In the past, school principals served as administrators—taking care of the budget, personnel, and scheduling, for example—as well as instructional mentors. They served as the building expert on instructional practices, often evaluating teacher effectiveness in the process. Today, there are far more administrative duties to cover, district initiatives to launch and monitor, and specialty areas in teaching for which principals have little to no training. A practice of distributed leadership is a means by which to share these responsibilities in a team made up of the principal, teachers, and others in the school community. In some schools, parents and students are also included in the leadership team.

Distributed leadership is uniquely supportive of the SWEL coaching model (see Figure 3). It asks that principals work closely with their EL teaching staff so that those teachers have the ability to share their knowledge about language learning with the entire school staff and that they have the structural supports to do so effectively while also teaching students. Depending on the school, this support can take a variety of forms.

Perhaps some SWEL coaches will have an extra prep hour during the school day, which is spent working on SWEL teacher leadership responsibilities. In other schools, it may be one day of the week when the SWEL coach does not work directly with students but instead serves as a peer coach, modeling instructional strategies, coplanning, and meeting with general education teachers to support their work with ELs. Regardless of the support method for the SWEL coaches in their teacher leadership work, it is
incredibly helpful when the driving leadership practice in the school is based on distributed leadership, which ensures that

- all voices are heard,
- asking probing questions in order to learn and improve is the norm,
- decision-making is a group process, and
- clear and focused goals drive the work (Burgess & Bates, 2009).

**Fostering Dispositions, Imparting Knowledge, and Developing Skills**

The second conceptual framework that underpins the SWEL model is that of teacher dispositions, knowledge, and skills (DKS). King and Newmann (2000) posit that “to be effective, professional development should address three dimensions of school capacity—educators’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions” (p. 578). The SWEL model focuses on these three areas for general education teacher learning and defines them as follows:

**Dispositions**: The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation defines teacher dispositions as “the habits of professional action and moral commitments that underlie an educator’s performance” (2019).

**Knowledge**: Teacher knowledge is defined as an understanding of the facts and concepts of the of the content area of instruction.

**Skills**: Teacher skills are defined as the ability to apply pedagogical knowledge in the classroom (e.g., connecting standards to learning targets, designing effective assessments, setting up a developmentally appropriate classroom).

All three components are equally essential for teacher preparedness to best serve ELs (see Figure 4). The DKS framework is evident in the PD plans in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, as well as the coaching foundations in Chapter 7.

Because opportunities for teacher learning can often be lopsided (overly focusing on dispositions but not attending to skills, for example), this book prepares SWEL coaches to design a school-wide implementation model that attends to all three areas of teacher learning.

**References**


