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THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Introduction

In classrooms across the United States, it is becoming apparent that a student’s language abilities are closely related to their successes in academics and in social communication. The language of English is ever-changing, making it one of the most difficult languages to learn. The reasons for these changes are driven by the needs of children acquiring a language (van Gelderen, 2006).

There is a seemingly urgent challenge in the United States K-12 schools in teaching language-minority students to read and write well in English. English literacy is the basis of all achievement in academic learning. This success will lead to numerous educational and economic opportunities beyond schooling. Language-minority students who cannot read and write proficiently in English cannot participate fully in schools, workplaces, or society. They face limited job opportunities and earning power. Inadequate reading and writing proficiency in English limits the nation’s potential for economic competitiveness, innovation, productivity growth, and quality of life (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Garcia (2005) found that the United States has long been a nation of incredible cultural and linguistic diversity. This trend of ethnic and racial population diversification continues most rapidly among its young and school-age children. Nationwide, White, non-Hispanic student enrollment has decreased since 1976 by 13%, or a total of 5 million students. As the overall total of the U.S. student population has decreased from 43 million to 41 million students (pre-k to grade 12) since 1976, the following demographic student indicators have become educationally significant:
A. Minority enrollment as a proportion of total enrollment in elementary and secondary education rose from 24% in 1976 to 40% in 2000.

B. As a proportion of total enrollment, Hispanics increased from 6.4% in 1976 to 12% in 1996. The number of Hispanic students increased from almost 3 million in 1976 to more than 4.5 million in 2000, an increase of 52%.

C. During this same period, Asian/Pacific Islander students increased from 535,000 to 1,158,000, an increase of 116%.

Unfortunately, these students, who form an emerging ethnic and racial majority, continue to be “at risk” in today’s social institutions.

Our nation’s public schools face many challenges in preparing students for productive and prosperous futures in the increasingly diverse and competitive global economy. One of the greatest challenges we face as policy makers, educators, parents and local communities is providing effective instructional programs for children who are learning English as a second language, called English language learners (ELLs) (Mora, 2008).

School districts throughout the state of California are grappling with the complexities of teaching these children to speak, read and write in English while also ensuring their progress in learning the academic content outlined in the state’s academic content and performance standards. One of the key factors in success for ELLs is a solid foundation in language and literacy in the early grades (Mora, 2008).

For ELLs to advance at a normal rate in becoming literate in English, they need instruction that is different in focus and intensity from the instruction provided for native English speakers. ELLs require much more oral language development with a focus on listening and
speaking. ELL students require instruction that provides ample opportunities for them to hear and discriminate the words and sounds of English, to increase their vocabulary and to practice their oral English skills (Ballantyne, McLaughlin & Sanderman, 2008).

ELLs require instruction and support in the early school years which is responsive to their particular needs. ELLs also require assessment tools that are appropriate and sensitive to their needs. Attaining accurate assessments of young children who are learning English is enormously complex, and assessment measures must be sensitive to both maturational processes as well as the trajectory of second language acquisition. In order to ensure that linguistic minority children are afforded the best possible start in life, policymakers and education decision makers need to inform themselves about the particular circumstances and requirements of this group of children. They furthermore need access to accurate data so that they can work to create optimal conditions which result in children who are ready to learn in school (Ballantyne, McLaughlin & Sanderman, 2008).

In a study by Cobb (2004), English language learners (ELLs) represent a growing subgroup population increasing the total enrollment of elementary and secondary students in the United States by nearly 12% in the past decade. In addition to being able to communicate in oral and written forms, one must be able to think critically, reason logically, and use technology (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008). Many English learning students are falling behind academically because they are struggling to acquire even the most basic skills in their second language. As a result, an achievement gap has been created that will only widen over time and become more and more difficult to close (Facella, Rampino & Shea, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that educators recognize and learn from existing expertise regarding second language learning in order to give ELLs the support necessary to reach full academic potential and to make gains in
closing the achievement gap (La Celle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994). This literature review explores the characteristics of an English language learner (ELL), the challenges for the ELL community, acquiring a second language, best practices for ELLs, classroom instruction for teachers of ELLs, recommended assessment practices and accommodations for an ELL.

Statement of the Problem

When students are presented with a conventional curriculum with no modifications, they tend to flounder, become overwhelmed, and mentally tune out or withdraw from active classroom participation (Carnine, Coyne & Kami’Enui, 2007).

Students need a foundation in oral language before learning to read. These skills are central to reading and writing in a second language. Students need phonemic awareness and basic sight words to learn to read and write. Learning a second language does not occur overnight even when conditions are ideal. Students need to interact with peers, family, and teachers who speak English at a higher level than they do as hypothesized by Vygotsky (Leathley, 2006).

Five states, California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois, are home to the majority of these students. Even within these high-concentration areas, many schools must adapt to rapid change (Beatty & Hakuta, 2000). Demographers forecast that if immigration and birth rates remain at current levels, the total Hispanic population will grow at least three times faster than the population as a whole for several decades. Moreover, ELLs are the most highly segregated group in America’s public schools – that is, most likely to attend schools with non-diverse populations – and their segregation is increasing. Nevertheless, the challenge of bringing native Spanish speakers, frequently from low-income families and with other sources of academic
disadvantage, to proficiency in English, while maintaining their academic progress in all subjects, is one that schools and districts around the country face (Beatty & Hakuta).

Rules and policies governing the inclusion of language-minority students are far from uniform from state to state, and across different kinds of testing programs. They also change frequently as states adjust to population changes, political shifts, and emerging evidence from both research and practice (Leathley, 2006).

Purpose of the Literature Review

English language learners (ELLs) are found in every program and every school district, and they place great demands on teachers, administrators, and educational policy makers. Although many of them are initially placed in language assistance programs, a significant number of these students are enrolled in mainstream classrooms with no or little language assistance (Abrams, Carrasquillo & Kucer, 2004). ELLs is a term used to identify children whose native language is not English and are learning English as a second language. The dramatic growth in the immigrant population and shift in demographic trends has created implications for early care and education programs in the United States. Children of immigrant families are the fastest growing segment of the nation’s child population. Most of these children do not use English as their home language, and often learn English as a second language in school and child care settings. The challenges ELLs face, such as delays in developing reading skills, may have lasting effects on their ability to learn in later years (Hall & Hewings, 2001).

The most crucial challenge for ELLs is the expectation of local, state, and national educational agencies that they score at grade level on state and national standardized tests, especially in the area of English language arts and mathematics (Abrams, Carrasquillo & Kucer,
ELLs are also expected to achieve a passing score in state content areas tests. Therefore, educators need to find ways of meeting the needs of this significant group of students in achieving the English language arts standards as well as the content learning standards of the different academic subjects. The immediate academic achievement and future (employment) success of these students depends significantly on how successfully they acquire spoken and written English proficiency and develop strategies to appropriately use all the dimensions of the language. These dimensions include the specialized vocabulary of the various content areas, the ability to interpret and use complex syntax and grammatical structures in oral and written modes, and the use of reading and writing in all aspects of school life (Portillo, 2003).

Importance of the Literature Review

Language acquisition is a very complex process that may not always follow a straight path. A student may appear to be communicating with increasingly regularity, but then will become silent and shy. While an observer might see an apparent decrease in the student’s language skills, an informed teacher may understand that this is part of the natural course of learning a new language – the learner is simply more aware of the language he or she doesn’t understand, and therefore is more shy about participating in conversation (Hall & Hewings, 2001).

If current demographic trends continue, more teachers will face culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms. These teachers need to understand the process of second language acquisition and how to alter their instructional styles to meet their students’ needs. Teachers should be encouraged to keep their standards high and develop methods that will promote the achievement of all their students, as they become competent, literate adults (Portillo, 2003).
Scope of the Literature Review

This literature review will focus on journal articles and statistical data that have been published between 1982 and 2008. The information reviewed will focus on the English language learner community and how to better instruction and assessment to fit their learning needs.
Introduction

First, this review of literature will describe the English language learner and the challenges they face as a community in the United States educational system. Second, it will delve into the importance of acknowledging the stages of second language acquisition and how educators can improve their classroom practices with this knowledge. Third, it will examine best practices used in the classroom to assist English learners with academic English proficiency. Last, this literature review will discuss assessment practices and accommodations for the English language learner.

The English Language Learner

The English language learner (ELL) student is characterized by actual participation in a non-English speaking social environment; he or she must have acquired the normal communicative abilities of that social environment; and is exposed to an English environment, most likely for the first time, during the formal schooling (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2004). ELLs are students whose first language at home is not English. They are supported in language development, particularly in listening and reading comprehension, and language production – speaking and writing (Copeland-Miles, 2005). These students may have either newly arrived in the United States or were born in the U.S. or have been living in the U.S. for many years in households where family members and caretakers speak a language other than English. Although English may be these students’ dominant language, they may not have developed the oral and written language skills or the vocabulary needed to function successfully at grade level in English academic settings (Swize, 2005).

Like all children, ELLs vary in their nutrition and care histories, family structure and stability, household composition, parental education and socioeconomic status, neighborhood
and community resources, exposure to literacy, life experiences, knowledge, cultural norms, abilities and dispositions (Hadaway et al., 2004). ELLs bring with them varied cultural experiences that have shaped their notions of appropriate adult-child interaction. For example, children from some cultures may ask questions of adults and display knowledge by volunteering answers, whereas children from other cultures may have learned to show respect for adults by listening quietly. Some children may demonstrate the desire for closeness with the teacher through physical proximity and hugs, while others may expect to have a more formal or distant relationship with their teacher (Copeland-Miles, 2005). Some ELLs seem independent and mature beyond their years, having developed high levels of social and linguistic competence through helping their families, caring for younger children, and interpreting for their parents (Swize, 2005). In addition, ELLs differ from each other in their previous literacy experiences. Some may be familiar with literature genres, informational text, and the analytic activities prevalent in U.S. classrooms. Others may be more familiar with religious texts or functional uses of literacy such as recordkeeping and letter writing (Copeland-Miles, 2005).

ELLs are a growing population in the nation’s schools. However, many ELLs are never identified as such and receive no supportive services. Others receive only minimal help. Some ELLs have been exited from special programs that failed to help them attain proficiency in academic English across the content areas or grade-level English literacy skills (Hadaway et al., 2004). Clearly, the quality of education available to today’s school-age ELLs will greatly impact our society and their lives in the years to come.

Challenges

_Lau v. Nichols_
In 1974, Lau v. Nichols occurred when a group of Chinese parents in San Francisco sued because their children were struggling in an English classroom. Legislators determined that it was against the children’s civil rights to learn entirely in English, and from then on, language learners were entitled to assistance in their home language (Harold, 2006). Lau v. Nichols resulted in three specific guidelines that need to be met by all school districts:

1. All ELL students need to be identified and assessed throughout their educational program,
2. A program of specific instruction, based on sound educational research, needs to be provided for these students, implemented effectively, and evaluated after a trial period.
3. Parents whose first language is not English must have all documents which are sent home translated into their native language.

One of the major complaints of advocates for ELLs has been that these guidelines are not specific enough, especially the fact that there is a lack of a mandate for the specific instructional approach that schools and districts must follow (Day, 2002).

*English Language Learners in Content-Area Classes*

*English-Language Arts*

English language learners face challenges in reading since literature is culture bound and authors typically expect to share common background information. However, ELLs are not always aware of these common ideas (Haynes, 2007). Garcia (2003) also found that ELLs may come from cultures where they are not encouraged to brainstorm ideas, think creatively, or express opinions. They may also be unfamiliar with drawing conclusions and analyzing characters. Also, story themes that are not common in a student’s culture may prove to be difficult to comprehend. In 2004, Fay and Whaley discovered specific challenges that ELLs face
when reading new material. They found that English learners have trouble comprehending a text that contains a large number of unknown words. They cannot glean meaning from context when they have too many words to decipher. ELLs may come from a language background where the sound/symbol correspondence is very different from that of English, making it hard to recognize correlations between letters and sounds. Lastly, ELLs will often memorize the rules for decoding written English and read fluently; however, they do not comprehend the meaning of the text.

In regards to writing, this language skill is one of the most difficult for English learners to master. ELLs may restrict the content of their writing to known words and phrases. Their limited vocabulary makes them reluctant to use inventive spelling (Harold, 2006). Some ELLs are hesitant to share their work during peer editing. When they do, they prefer to work with same-language peers who may not provide appropriate feedback (Haynes, 2007). When reading their writing aloud, English learners do not have a sense of what sounds right. Also, they may have little experience with creative writing in their native language since many cultures do not encourage opinions to be expressed (Lester, 2008). Haynes (2007) established that English learners tend to develop their ideas in their native language and then try to translate them into English. This is called translated writing and when this happens, students’ writing is full of inaccurate verb tenses and unintelligible sentences. The writing structure becomes chaotic and the grammar that is used makes the writing difficult to understand. In 2004, Fay and Whaley tested that in order to avoid translated writing; teachers must use a variety of strategies that will help promote students’ thinking in English. These strategies include:

1. Teaching nonfiction reading and writing first. Through nonfiction reading, ELLs can easily access facts and language chunks that they can use in their writing first.
2. More time should be spent helping students in the prewriting stage. Generate oral sentences and make a chart of facts about a nonfiction topic. These tools will help ELLs learn to speak the words they are going to write and strengthen the link between oral and written language.

3. Helping students by brainstorming vocabulary and themes with them in small groups. ELLs will have an easier time developing a subject orally in a teacher-directed small group than choosing topics on their own.

4. Using graphic organizers to help students gather facts.

5. Do not expect ELLs to edit their own work because they usually will not find their mistakes. Pick out one skill for them to edit and pair them with a classmate. When you limit the text to be edited, ELLs will learn how to spot errors.

6. Show ELLs models of good writing at their language level.

Mathematics

Mathematics in a U.S. classroom may present some difficulties for ELLs, even when they have good computation skills. The language in current mathematics textbooks can be overwhelming for students. If ELLs have low reading comprehension skills, they will struggle in their mathematics class. Mathematics teachers may also have challenges with ELLs who use different processes to arrive at answers (Stoops Verplaatse, 1998). According to Haynes (2007), in many countries, mental math, or a mathematical calculation that uses only the human brain, is the norm. Students may not show their work in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, or they may show work in a different way than is typically taught in U.S. schools. In this regard, it is important for teachers to remember that mathematical concepts are not necessarily universal; some mathematical concepts may not even exist in certain cultures.
Mathematic teachers should be able understand that ELLs bring other mathematics systems and their prior mathematical knowledge to their classrooms. Specific challenges that ELLs will face in mathematics include:

1. Forming numbers.
2. Using the U.S. measurement system.
3. Using mathematic manipulatives. Some ELLs may not value math instruction using manipulatives because they see these lessons as “playing.”
4. Understanding time on a 12-hour clock. Many cultures use a 24-hour clock.
5. Understanding temperatures on a Fahrenheit thermometer
6. Using vocabulary words and concepts for money such as nickel, dime, and quarter.

**Social Studies**

Social studies and U.S. history classes are one of the leading academic challenges for ELLs because these students usually have a very limited knowledge of U.S. history, geography, and current events. They do not have the background knowledge needed to understand the new concepts that are taught (Stoops Verplaetse, 1998). ELLs will memorize information for a test, but because it has no relevance for them, the information is quickly forgotten. ELLs have a difficult time when they need to access this knowledge during exams or standardized tests. Even ELLs who have already exited English as a Second language (ESL) programs struggle with retaining historical facts that were not really relevant to them in the first place (Haynes, 2007). Stoops Verplaetse (1998) identified the difficulties that ELLs experience with history and social studies which include:

1. Using higher-level thinking skills for reading and writing.
3. Reading text that contains complex sentences, passive voice, and multiple pronouns
4. Understanding lecture-style presentations and taking notes.
5. Comprehending large blocks of text during class.
6. Deciphering what is important in the text.
7. Accessing background knowledge. ELLs are seldom asked to contribute an alternative view that reflects conditions in other countries.
8. Understanding nationalistic or culturally focused maps.
9. Recognizing the proper names of countries, cities, and oceans that are not the same as students have learned in their native country.
10. Understanding the passive voice in English texts. Sentence structure that includes dependent and independent clauses makes reading social studies texts very difficult for ELLs.

Science

ELLs are often unfamiliar with how science is taught in the United States. Our hands-on approach may be different from what they are used to in their native countries. Making predictions and drawing conclusions independently may also be difficult for ELLs (Haynes, 2007). Science vocabulary can be difficult for ELLs because it is filled with cognates and words with Latin prefixes and suffixes. This vocabulary can become even more challenging because words that students may already know in English, such as work or building; have another meaning in science (Stoops Verplaetse, 1998). Unfortunately for ELLs, materials tend to be covered quickly in science classes and science textbooks often have many concepts on one page. ELLs may find science classes difficult because in many cultures, science education is based on rote learning, which is memorization by repetition (Haynes). Additional challenges that ELLs
face in science include following multistep directions, understanding visuals, using science labs or equipment, applying the scientific method, reading science textbooks, and drawing conclusion and making hypotheses during the discovery process in science lessons (Haynes). Moreover, ELLs are generally able to participate in science class much sooner than they can in other content-area classes when science is taught using a hands-on inquiry method (Stoops Verplaetse, 1998).

**Teacher Readiness**

School districts across the nation are battling to meet the needs of their large populations of ELLs (Facella et al., 2005). As the number of linguistically and culturally diverse students entering American schools increases, more and more teachers are faced with the challenge of educating children with limited English skills. Many of these teachers, however, have had little or no training in second language development and need guidelines to help them understand the process ELLs undergo as they learn and acquire a second language. Teachers also need to be aware of how to assist their students in maintaining their home language (Portillo, 2003).

**Student Data**

Beatty and Hakuta (2000) found that educators do not have sufficient effective tools for classifying students at various levels of English proficiency. Without these it can be very difficult to identify the point at which students are ready to participate in a particular activity or test. Educators need to know not only which students lack proficiency in English and who may need academic support, but also which students need to be accommodated in or even excluded from testing. They also need ways of monitoring these students’ progress after they are identified as English language learners (Marzano, 2003). In addition, teachers and administrators
need ways of making sure that these students’ language skills are improving throughout the time they are classified as ELLs so they can ensure that the students are receiving the support they need (Beatty & Hakuta, 2000).

Marzano (2003) discovered that a separate but related need is for data about the progress of these students as a group. Schools and districts need to be held accountable for how well they are helping these students progress, not just because it is a good idea, but also because doing so is required by law. To monitor their own progress and the effective of their programs, these jurisdictions need more information than tests to identify students as ELLs or reclassify them as mainstream students can provide (Lester, 2008).

*California’s Battle*

In California alone, more than 1.5 million English learners attend public and private schools. As the number of English learners increases, educators will need to seek solutions and embrace changes necessary to ensure quality education for all students (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008). Nearly 1 in 4 identified ELLs is not enrolled in a federal or state supported program designed for ELLs. They have instead been placed in monolingual programs and courses designed for monolingual English-speaking students. By the time an ELL has acquired sufficient English to compete with his or her monolingual English-speaking peers, he or she has not taken the same number of high-level courses and consequently scores lower on tests (La Celle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994).

*Instructional Issues*

Schools and districts are also faced with the challenge of having to provide ELLs with opportunities to maximize their learning. In 2004, Cobb found that there were too many
differing characteristics of students within the ELL subgroup. Although ELLs must increase their proficiency in English, they differ in language, cultural background, and family history. ELLs also come from families of differing socioeconomic status and differing educational orientations (La Celle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994). This variance within the ELL subgroup results in many instructional issues. Cobb (2004) stated that there is a constant variance in this subgroup since students continuously transition out of ELL programs as they achieve English language (EL) proficiency. Thus, this subgroup is continually made up of low-performing students.

*Standardized Testing & State Standards*

For English language learners, problems with accountability through standardized testing are mainly with the language in which the test is written, their student mobility, and the validity of the test. A huge drawback is that now ELLs are assessed by a high-stakes exam taken in a language in which they are not proficient. In addition, instructional emphasis is so heavily placed on content standards, other needs of language learners such as oral proficiency and social awareness are ignored (Harold, 2006).

There is a basic need for teachers to use state standards in order to ignite student cognition and therefore influence student performance. In 2002, a study was conducted at a public elementary school in central California where the population was predominantly low-income Hispanic families: 90% of students were Hispanic, 78% received free- or reduced-lunch, 68% were limited English proficient, and 38% were from migrant families. This correlational study examined the relationship between teachers’ use of standards and student achievement across a broader range of learning measures. The specific hypothesis was that higher implementation of the standards during language arts instruction would predict greater
achievement gains on end-of-year standardized tests of comprehension, language, reading, spelling, and vocabulary. The participants were 15 teachers (2 men, 12 women) and 266 students (137 boys, 129 girls). Teachers’ years of experiences ranged from 1 to 26. Of the students, 82 were in the third grade (31%), 101 were in fourth grade (38%), and 83 were in fifth grade (31%). Data were gathered through live observations over the course of one semester by a pair of trained observers. Two 45-minute observations of language arts instruction were made of each teacher. Observations were separated by approximately seven weeks. The study resulted in finding that the high use of the standards by teachers reliably predicted student achievement gains on SAT-9 tests of comprehension, reading, spelling, and vocabulary. In addition, teachers’ use of the standards reliably predicted gains in English language achievement when English was the language of instruction (Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, & Tharp).

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

Academic English, or cognitive academic language proficiency, is the language of the classroom. English learners must master academic English to understand textbooks, write papers and reports, solve mathematical word problems, and take tests. Without a mastery of academic English, students cannot develop the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed to understand and express the new and abstract concepts taught in the classroom. However, academic language takes at least five to seven years to develop, and it can take even longer for a student who was not literate in his or her primary language when he or she began in a U.S. school (Flynn & Hill, 2006).
Second Language Acquisition

Copeland-Miles (2005) believes that oral language is one of the most important and significant attributes of human existence. Vygotsky and Bakhtin view language socialization as a process which results in the acquisition of linguistic and social knowledge and skills through language practices and through interaction with more expert or more knowledgeable other in order to become competent members of a social group (Day, 2002).

For ELLs in U.S. schools, developing proficiency in oral English is essential for academic and future professional and personal success. Developing proficiency in oral English involves acquiring vocabulary, gaining control over grammar, and developing an understanding of the subtle semantics of English (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, & Saunders, 2006). At the same time, acquiring proficiency in English involves learning how to use the language to interact successfully with other speakers of the language. Oral interactions can vary considerably from exchanging greeting to initiating and sustaining conversations to negotiating collaborative tasks to giving and/or receiving directions to telling or listening to stories delivering or comprehending lectures. Many programs recommend daily oral English language instruction until students achieve at least a minimum level of proficiency in English (Garcia, 2003).

Research is powerful in supporting the theory that first language acquisition is similar to second language acquisition (Leathley, 2006). According to Collum and Rivera (2006), second language acquisition research has shown that in the early stages of second language acquisition, language learners require more cognitive resources to process the second language than those already more proficient in that language. This is because when learning a second language, learners attend closely to the forms of the second language; that is, to extract meaning from an
utterance or text, their attention is directed toward linguistic structures, lexical items, and phonological features. In essence, ELLs tend to process language unit by unit, piece by piece, focusing closely on each discrete element of language. By contrast, native or proficient second language speakers have largely automatized language processing and give only peripheral attention to language forms. That being said, students need some oral language skills before learning to read and write in a formal way to experience success in their new language (Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007). The literacy process begins with speaking. Students acquire oral language skills by asking questions of their teachers and asking questions of their peers when in small groups. A classroom where students are able to take risks and develop English oral skills is important for them to become successful readers (Bialystok, 1991).

Also, social interaction in learning is necessary and important for ELLs. Learning to speak requires speaking with others with higher skills (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Language learning can be viewed as a socioculturally situated social practice that engages learners’ social identities (Day, 2002).

As an educator, it is important to understand where each one of your ELLs is in second language acquisition. Knowing and understanding the stages and its characteristics are critical for effective differentiating instruction for these students (Cawthon, 2005). By knowing the stages of language acquisition and the stage-appropriate questions, educators can engage students at the correct level of discourse. In addition, when appropriate questions are asked, content knowledge can be assessed alongside language proficiency (Flynn & Hill, 2006).

Knowing the level of language acquisition also allows one to work within the student’s “zone of proximal development” – that area between what the student is capable of at the
moment and the point you want the student to reach next (Hall & Hewings, 2001). Cawthon (2005) believes that second language learning must be meaningful, comprehensible, interesting, and something to which the learner can relate. The level of difficulty must be slightly about the learner’s current level of competence, and presented in a classroom setting that ensures low anxiety for the student. Furthermore, a child’s language-cognitive abilities need to be sufficiently well developed to cope with the curricular process of the classroom.

Second Language Instruction

Creating a Thriving Learning Environment

Effective, highly skilled teachers will create a positive learning environment that lowers newcomers’ anxiety level and allows them to more rapidly integrate into the classroom. These classroom teachers have an excellent understanding of their ELLs’ needs (Haynes, 2007). A safe environment is necessary. Learning a language and becoming literate cannot happen by fear and intimidation. Students must have the opportunity to take risks, ask questions, and have the chance to use their English-speaking skills where they are respected and appreciated for learning English as a second language (Chamot, 1999). A safe environment is a positive climate for learning a language through support, encouragement, and acceptance. Safe environments foster the development of the whole child. Providing safe environments for learning demands mutual encouragement where trust is established in order to engage in learning with uncertain outcomes. A safe environment where there is mutual respect and trust is vital for children to expand academically and grow. The ability for children to be innovative, to increase their critical thinking skills, and to imagine the impossible is important for the future of our country (Leathley, 2006).
When students feel safe to take risks in the classroom, in speaking as an example, they are reinforced in positive manner that what they say is worthwhile. Research shows that students in a classroom studying vocabulary and working on challenging assignments learn more if they are able to speak more often (Claire & Haynes, 1994). Student achievement is related to students’ connectedness to the classroom learning environment. An important element of that connectedness is the relationships that students have with each other. Psychological safety is a hallmark of each of these classrooms. The students feel comfortable and supported. They realize that the biggest infraction they can commit is to work against the unity and cohesiveness of the group (Thornhill, 2006). If teachers can make classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, educators can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn. A sensitive teacher who takes learners’ individual personalities and learning styles into account, he or she can create a learning environment in which virtually all learners can be successful in learning a second language (Candlin & Mercer, 2001).

**Differentiating Instruction for English language learners**

Differentiating instruction may require accommodating mainstream materials for ELLs. An effective teacher’s goal for ELLs is to help them gain the same knowledge as their native English-speaking peers. Repurposing materials is necessary, especially for social studies classes (Haynes, 2007). Scaffolding is essentially a way to nudge a student toward a higher level of performance. With language development, this can be done by modeling correct grammar or pronunciation, asking challenging questions, or providing direct instruction (Flynn & Hill, 2006).
Fay & Whaley (2004) noted that there are three student characteristics that teachers can use to differentiate instruction:

1. The *readiness* of the student tells what knowledge and skill level is appropriate for the student.
2. *Student interest* is important as this is a great motivator and helps students build connections.
3. Finally, it is important to know the student’s *learning profile* or learning style. One can discover if the student learns best with auditory, visual, or tactile input. This includes finding out which of the multiple intelligences such as music or interpersonal skills is the strength of the student.

*Direct Instruction*

Brown (2000) believes that direct instruction emphasizes the explicit and direct instruction of specific reading and writing skills or strategies. Direct approaches to instruction are based on the twin assumptions that reading and writing consist of interrelated but discrete subskills and that these skills are best taught explicitly. For example, students are taught new vocabulary items explicitly or given practice discriminating among sounds and matching sounds to letters. Another characteristic of direct instruction is its orientation to evaluation. The effectiveness of direct instruction is assessed directly and with respect to discrete skills, for example, by testing students’ vocabulary knowledge or their spelling skills explicitly. Direct instruction is thought to be particularly appropriate and desirable for minority language students on the grounds that they are at risk for reading and writing development and thus, they require
explicit and focused instruction in the requisite skills that comprise reading and writing (Cook, 2001).

*Interactive Instruction*

Cook (2001) found that interactive instruction emphasizes learning that is mediated through interaction with other learners or more competent readers and writers (e.g., the teacher). The goals of interactive approaches include specific literacy skills and strategies, and they also include literacy-related outcomes including, for example, engagement in reading and writing and interest in literacy. In interactive learning environments, learners engage in literacy activities with one or more other learners or with more mature readers and writers (like teachers, parents, or older students). In this way, students learn from others, initially by observation and subsequently by internalizing more mature literate behaviors exhibited by others. In contrast to learning in direct instruction, learning in interactive instructional environments is indirect or mediated by such social interaction. Interactive approaches are favored by some on the grounds that teachers and parents who are competent readers and writers can provide learners with individualized guided instruction that corresponds to their zone of proximal development, in line with Vygotsky’s theory of development and learning (Brown, 2000). Cook also learned that interactive learning environments are especially relevant to ELLs because of the diverse sociocultural backgrounds of these students. More specifically, interactive approaches support individualized teaching and learning in line with the heterogeneous learning needs and styles of ELLs. Interactive learning environments are also thought to reinforce participant structures that some ELLs are used to in their homes but which differ from mainstream American culture. These participant structures emphasize group versus individualized participation, collaborative versus competitive demonstrations of competence, and learning by observing versus learning by
Brown discovered that interactive learning environments entail multiple participants engaged in collaborative work and, consequently, extended opportunities to learn through observation. Learning from models is also thought to be advantageous for students from minority-language backgrounds who have not had extensive extracurricular experiences with adult models of literacy; the same could be said of majority-language students from low-literacy backgrounds. Interactive strategies recognize and promote the acquisition of this culture in addition to the specific language and cognitive skills that comprise reading and writing as cognitive activities.

Interactive learning environments that provide carefully planned direct instruction of target language skills, as needed, are likely to be most effective. Moreover, language skills that are linked to literacy and academic domains should be the target of such instruction (Flood, Jensen, Lapp & Squire, 2005).

**Process Approaches**

Process-based instruction emphasizes engagement in authentic use of written language for communication or self-expression. Process-based approaches deemphasize teaching the component skills and strategies of reading and writing in favor of learning through induction (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary & Saunders, 2006). Process approaches emphasize student engagement in authentic literacy activities with significant communicative goals. Typically, students are given extended opportunities to engage in free reading or writing and in reading and writing activities in which communication is emphasized, such as dialogue journals or free writing, for example, are usually individual activities, whereas shared literature can entail group activity (Haynes, 2007). Children’s literature is a common vehicle for implementing process
approaches since literature exposes learners to authentic written text, is engaging, and allows learners to relate to written language via their own experiences, if materials are well chosen. Literature-based literacy programs provide a number of advantages to ELLs: they (1) offer exposure to a variety of children’s books, (2) contribute to a rich literary environment, (3) motivate responsive reading, (4) encourage voluntary reading, (5) expand the learners’ reading interests, (6) help learners grow in language, reading, writing, and thinking, and (7) help learners discover their own connections with literature (Christian et al., 2006). In addition, Flood et al. (2005) saw that process approaches are distinguished by the view that language is holistic – reading, writing, speaking, and listening co-occur under authentic conditions and they, therefore, should be taught and learned together.

*Encouraging Flexible Grouping for Students*

Teachers should arrange the physical layout of the classroom to be conducive for small-group and paired learning. Desks should be arranged in groups of four or five so that ELLs feel that they are an integral part of the classroom community. These types of groupings give ELLs real reasons to communicate with their peers in an academic setting (Haynes, 2007). Native English-speaking peers can modify their speech and adapt their oral communication to help ELLs better understand content. Small-group and paired learning provides ELLs with many opportunities for sustained dialogues with their native English-speaking peers. Students will have multiple opportunities to negotiate meaning in groups (Hadaway & Young, 2006). Teachers can also use flexible grouping to encourage choral and duet reading. ELLs can use choral reading to develop fluency and expression. This kind of reading helps ELLs develop confidence in their ability to speak and read English. Choral reading is well suited for short plays, poetry, rhymes,
and dialogues. Choral reading gives ELLs the opportunity to try out language. This practice also helps students improve their sight vocabulary and develop oral language skills. ELLs are more willing to participate because they are not in the spotlight (Haynes).

Duet reading also helps ELLs increase their reading skills. This kind of reading pairs a skilled reader with a weaker reader, such as an ELL, to boost the weaker reader’s confidence and increase his or her fluency. Skilled readers can be the classroom teacher, a parent volunteer, a cross-grade buddy, or an instructional aide. The skilled reader follows the words with his finger to reinforce the text that is being heard (Flood, Jensen, Lapp & Squire, 2005).

Using Diversity as a Resource

Exemplary teachers view diversity in their classrooms as a positive rather than a negative influence. They understand that families with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds have unique experiences to share with classmates. They are confident that this knowledge will enrich the native English-speaking students in their class and help them learn to respect diverse cultures. These teachers make students from diverse backgrounds feel that their cultures are important, and the students are proud when they home cultures and languages are studied in the classroom. This study of the native culture is a real self-esteem builder for ELLs (Haynes, 2007).

There should be a high value in children’s home languages and cultures. Hopefully, classrooms and schools will become a place where ELLs can both learn effectively and concurrently negotiate identities of power and possibility in a climate of respect, care and trust for one another (Barrett, 1982).

Students bring to their classrooms their own personal sense of self, shaped by their families and their culture. Teachers need to understand what is important to students and to
create the conditions in their classrooms that afford them personal integrity and dignity. The individual with the most power to develop conditions for learning in the classroom is the teacher (Thornhill, 2006).

*Developing Alternative Assessments for English language learners*

Because many ELLs simply memorize material for a test and don’t understand what they have learned, teachers need to develop alternative assessments specifically for ELLs. These assessments should provide teachers with a realistic picture of what individual ELLs can do without focusing unduly on what they cannot do (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary & Saunders, 2006). School districts can begin by adopting a consistent grading and assessment policy for ELLs. Many schools use a pass/fail system for first-year ELLs. Other ways to create alternative assessments include increasing the amount of time given for test taking, allowing students to finish a test with an ESL teacher after school, adjusting test time for students’ English language proficiency level, giving instructions in students’ native language, and allowing students to use bilingual dictionaries and electronic translators (Haynes, 2007).

Cooperative learning is used to emphasize the efforts of class members toward the collective goal of success for each individual student. Classroom responsibilities are shared among class members. Yet the students will truly value the freedom to express their individual ideas and opinions. Strategies that clarify students’ values and explore individual concerns and ideas with all the students of the class will build an understanding of classroom ethics (Chamot, 1999).
Combining Language Objectives & Content Objectives

Flynn and Hill (2006) researched that setting objectives in the classroom helps focus the direction for learning and establish the path for teaching. For ELLs, setting the objectives is especially important. When ELLs are aware of the intended outcomes, they now know what to focus on and what to screen out as they process new information. The educational environment also becomes a friendlier place for ELLs when they have a clearly stated target for learning. When you set objectives correctly, students work toward clearly defined goals and are able to explain what they are learning and why they are learning it.

It is critical to set both content objectives and language objectives for ELLs. Just as language learning cannot occur if we only focus on subject matter, content knowledge cannot grow if we only focus on learning the English language (Flynn & Hill, 2006). Furthermore, Candlin and Mercer (2001) found that there are four reasons for combining language objectives with content objectives:

1. Language forms and vocabulary will develop as students study areas of interest. Correct grammatical form and necessary vocabulary are best learned in the context of content areas (e.g., modeling the past tense when talking about history).

2. Motivation plays a role in learning complex language structures. Low motivation can hinder language acquisition because, as with low self-esteem and anxiety, it blocks language stimulation from reaching the brain (known as an “affective filter”). High motivation, on the other hand, results in an increased ability to learn and use a new language.

3. Teachers can activate and build on students’ prior knowledge in the content area. By
accessing and activating such knowledge, you can prepare students to learn about analogous events in U.S. history.

4. **Language structure and form should be learned in authentic contexts rather than through contrived drills in language workbooks.** While English-dominant students can write their ideas, ELLs can verbalize their thoughts using sentence starters.

Second language instruction is undoubtedly one of the critical focal points in the education of all children – native English speakers as well as ELLs. Literacy is both an end in itself and a means to other ends since, without formal education, most children would not learn to read and write and, without reading and writing skills, children would be not able to learn and function effectively in school and beyond. Clearly, there are challenges in teaching reading and writing to ELLs that exceed those that educators face when teaching native English speakers (Carder, 2007).

### Best Practices

In a descriptive study by Facella, Rampino, and Shea (2005), teachers in two communities with large ELL populations were asked what effective teaching strategies worked with ELL students. The study proposed two open-ended questions for teachers about teaching practices: 1) What strategies do you find to be effective in promoting language acquisition with ELL students? And 2) Why do you feel these strategies work? Ten teachers from a public school in Chelsea, Massachusetts and ten teachers from a public school in Brookline, Massachusetts were chosen and interviewed. These teachers taught in grades ranging from pre-Kindergarten to second grade. From the interview a list was compiled of the different strategies used in each classroom. Then, a survey was prepared showing the different strategies. The teachers chose which ones worked by choosing their ten best strategies. The study reported that teaching strategies may differ because of student population. However, the main goal is to help students
make a connection between content and language, which strategies help provide. Strategies give students the tools needed to acquire language to interact and communicate with others around them. Finally, teachers must continually research on their own to find out what works best for their students.

Recognition and Validation of Students’ Experiences

In order for ELLs to create meaning from lessons, teachers must draw on students’ backgrounds and their experiences, cultures, and languages to create confident students who value school and value themselves as learners. This process is based on developing a network of support to reinforce effective practices within the school, the family, and the community. In doing so, the use of students’ knowledge and skills to connect the curriculum to their own lives and experiences in their schools, homes, and communities will result in a better understanding of what is being taught (Cobb, 2004).

Use of Technology

Besides having the ability to read, write, and speak in English, ELLs must also be able to understand the importance of technology. Technology should be used as a way to enhance learning. With access to computers and the internet, all students can gain instruction at their own pace. For ELLs to survive in today’s competitive and information-rich cultures, they must be able to use technology effectively. Research studies exist that demonstrate that students who learn in multimedia or hypertext environments show greater gains in areas of language development than students who learn in more traditional environments (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008). As technology becomes the normal and expected means of communication and education, important changes occur in expectations about the abilities students have to acquire to be successful language users. Moreover, the bond between technology and language use in the
modern world should prompt all educators to reflect on the ways in which technology is changing the profession of English language teaching (Chapelle, 2003).

In 2007, O’Hara and Pritchard used a stratified random sample of twenty participants in the sixth and seventh grades at a middle school in Northern California. 26% of the population is Latino and 32% receive free- or reduced-lunch. In the sample, they investigated the impact of authoring hypermedia projects on the academic vocabulary development of sixth and seventh English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The specific research questions addressed were: 1) What impact does the authoring of hypermedia have on students’ academic English vocabulary and underlying concept of development? And 2) Are there differences in vocabulary or concept development between those students who participated in the hypermedia authoring project and the students in the corresponding control groups? The study was broken up into three phases: a) the concept of hyperlinking, b) instruction on the unit and target vocabulary, and c) creating the hyperlinked report. Within each grade level, there was a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group was allowed hands-on exploration consisting of a Web-based scavenger hunt and other technological resources. The control group was only allowed their textbook and other books as classroom resources. For the final project, the treatment group was to create a hyperlinked report using the target vocabulary. The control group created a poster presentation. The results of the study found that engagement in the process of hypermedia authoring promoted vocabulary development as students connected new words to their prior knowledge and chose their own words and images to represent the underlying concepts. O’Hara and Pritchard (2007) found that hypermedia can improve students’ understanding of target vocabulary and attitudes toward vocabulary instruction. Furthermore, the study also validated the participants’ capacities to learn.
Higher-level Questioning

Consequently, ELLs need instruction that is designed to teach complex thinking and challenge students to develop cognitive complexity (Cobb, 2004). This higher-level thinking will allow ELLs to achieve an academic goal as long as there are clear standards and systematic feedback on performance. Retention of the cognitive and affective content will result, as long as these questions are based on students’ views, judgments, rationales, experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs (Doherty et al., 2003).

Thematic Units

Instruction should also challenge students’ ability to develop academic concepts. Thematic units can help students analyze their school, home, community, and the world in an academically engaging and challenging way (Doherty et al., 2003). Thematic instruction creates a framework in which students can use both oral and written language for learning content. These units will give students more chances to connect to the information being taught. Also, they allow for repetition, hands-on learning experiences, gestures, and multisensory approach, because of the way the thematic unit content and vocabulary is introduced (Facella et al., 2005). Through thematic units, students are given opportunities to practice their skills and use new language often, which leads to mastery of the content. Theme-based units also help the students’ comfort level within the classroom environment (Cobb, 2004).

Structured Overviews

Structured overviews provide another way for students to connect to instruction. In this practice, students are first provided with a “big picture” of what will be learned. A handout is given to students to outline major ideas. It shows the relationship of one idea to another and
helps build and activate background knowledge for students (Cobb, 2004). In structured overviews, teachers must verbally present the information and explicitly show the relationships of the concepts that will be taught. These concepts are the ideas that are represented by the key vocabulary in the lesson. Teacher modeling in the structured overview increases students’ understanding of verbal and conceptual explanations, thus increasing the potential for learning (Doherty et al., 2003).

**Collaboration**

Collaboration is the learning through joint productive activity in which teacher-student and/or student-student work together on a common product or goal and have opportunities to converse about their work (Doherty et al., 2003). This collaborative effort provides teachers and students with the chance to work together on instructional activities and gain insight from each other. The teacher’s role in collaborative learning is to design challenging learning activities that generate associations between the new information and students’ prior knowledge from the school, home, and community. The teacher must also use standards to promote, guide, and sustain students’ cognitive elaborations (Doherty et al., 2003). There is a powerful role of the teacher in teacher-child relationships, where power is seen as ‘a network of relations constantly in tension and ever-present in activity’ rather than as something which is possessed. The teacher should give students a place in the interactions and hold it for him or her; in turn, giving the students a voice that can speak from a desirable and powerful identity. The students will now gain social capital in the classroom (Flynn & Hill, 2006).

Research indicates that the academic success of many socioeconomically
disadvantaged and culturally diverse students is closely linked to the relationship to their teacher. Children of color value the social aspects of an environment to a greater extent than do ‘mainstream children,’ and tend to put an emphasis on feelings, acceptance, and emotional closeness. The interpersonal connection between the student and the teacher is critical to the success of many culturally diverse students (Thornhill, 2006). Furthermore, many culturally diverse students connect with teachers who display emotions in their teaching role. In fact, many culturally diverse students interpret a teacher’s dispassionate affect as disinterest or a lack of caring. Teachers who overtly express caring toward their individual students are more likely to engender their respect and desire for affiliation (Cary, 2000).

Educators have found that cooperative learning groups foster language acquisition in ways that whole-class instruction cannot. Cooperative learning groups create and demand speech because each member must carry out his or her role if the group as a whole is to succeed. Group members must also “negotiate meaning” as they speak, meaning that they must adjust their language so that it is comprehensible to other members. In doing this, students ensure that all members are able to understand what others have said. Since students are in small groups, it is easy to check for understanding and adjust the level of speech appropriately, which is difficult to do in a whole-class session (Flynn & Hill, 2006). Thornhill (2006) also saw additional advantages of cooperative learning:

1. They allow for the repetition of key words and phrases. Repetition allows ELLs to move the content they hear from short-term comprehension to long-term acquisition.
2. They require functional, context-relevant speech. Speech that is personally relevant and related to “real-life” situations is more likely to add to an ELL’s fluency.
3. They are “feedback-rich.” Not only are there far more opportunities for feedback and corrections in a small group setting, but the feedback and correction occur in the context of actual conversation, rather than in a formal instructional situation. An ELL is less likely to feel self-conscious about being corrected in a small group setting.

4. They can greatly reduce student anxiety. Because small groups are supportive and interdependent, ELLs feel more comfortable speaking.

From meaningful participation in learning, students gain content knowledge and proficiency in academic uses of English. Students will also benefit from their educational experiences and succeed in reaching the educational goals they set. Cobb (2004) found that after reorganizing classrooms into peer-oriented small-group activity settings, students displayed significant improvement in reading achievement, industriousness, on-task behavior, and peer-directed cooperative behavior toward school-related goals.

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a kinesthetic approach to second language teaching. This approach suggests that whole body movement leads to a high degree of motivation and a rapid increase in learning. Students demonstrate an understanding of the target language through following commands for movement. Later, the student develops the ability to use the language conversationally. This approach rests on the premise that listening precedes speaking, movement can show understanding, and speaking should not be forced (Harold, 2006).

Visual Aids

The reasons for visual aids in the classroom for ELLs are obvious. They can be used at all levels of language learning, from beginners to advanced, and they can bring into the classroom
those objects which would otherwise be forever outside it. Depending on the image, visual aids can be used to bring vocabulary to life, or to act as input into information-transfer activities (for example, one learner might have access to visual information and then have to describe it verbally to another learner) (Corbett, 2003).

Recommended Assessment Practices

Assessment is undoubtedly one of the most critical aspects of education for ELLs. It is implicated in virtually every aspect of their education – from screening or admission, to identification of special and individual needs that figure in instructional planning, to promotion or retention. Standardized or norm-referenced tests are only valid for students on whom the test has been normed, and use of such tests with other types of students can lead to egregiously faulty results and decisions. Standardized tests that have been developed for mainstream English-speaking students may contain cultural biases that can result in underestimations of the competence of students from different cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary & Saunders, 2006). To be effective, education must be based on an accurate assessment of students’ knowledge and skills; otherwise, students will be provided instruction that is too advanced or not advanced enough, redundant, or simply irrelevant. Despite its singular importance, research on assessment of ELLs is dramatically lacking (Stevens, Butler, Castellon-Wellington, 2000).

Assessment plays a central role in the education of all students. Tests are intended to measure students’ performance in order to identify those who need assistance and to provide feedback on the effectiveness of instructional methods and materials. Tests are also used with increasing frequency to make high-stakes decisions, such as whether a student will move on to
the next grade or receive a diploma, which teachers will receive bonuses, and whether schools will be rewarded or penalized. One of the tenets of the standards-based reform movement is that all children, including ELLs, are expected to attain high standards. In particular, Title I of the Improving America’s Schools Act (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) mandates that assessments that determine the yearly performance of each school must provide for the inclusion of limited English proficient (i.e., ELL) students. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) establishes annual achievement objectives for ELLs and enforces accountability requirements. The rationale for including ELLs in high-stakes tests is to hold them to the same high standards as their peers and to ensure that their needs are not overlooked (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary & Saunders, 2006).

Accurate and effective assessment of struggling ELLs is essential to ensure that information provided is used in providing instructional interventions to these students. ELLs rely too much on the use of letter sounds, under-utilize context, and have difficulty monitoring meaning. In consequence, they do not understand what they have read and have difficulties in writing meaningful text (Abrams, Carrasquillo & Kucer, 2004). Assessment measures are a part of instruction, and teachers often use this information to make instructional decisions based on the reflected strengths and needs of their students. By using a variety of assessment tools and activities, teachers will be able to individualize instruction to meet the academic demands of their students (Castellon-Wellington, 2000). Because of the English language demands and the many academic challenges that ELLs encounter, the use of ‘high stakes assessment’ alone may not provide a complete picture of what these students really know and the progress they have made. Current tools for assessment range from informal teacher-made measures (observations, checklists, rubrics) to formal measures (standardized, criterion referenced). State and school
districts promote ‘high stakes tests,’ while teachers often use a variety of other assessment tools to monitor literacy development and to understand the day-to-day performance of their students. This combination of different measures of assessment works for the benefit of everyone, but is especially helpful in providing an adequate picture of the strengths and needs of ELLs (Collum & Rivera, 2006).

Information about the students’ academic achievement in content areas should be collected in ways that allow students to show their knowledge, skills, and abilities, through the medium of the language or languages in which the material was taught (La Celle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994). Concerning ELLs, La Celle-Peterson and Rivera (1994) also found that assessments should attempt to assess all that students are learning by allowing students to show what they know in a variety of appropriate modes. For example, creating a report and presenting the information to their peers is a way of informally assessing a student’s content knowledge and understanding of the instruction (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008). By tracking students’ progress from year to year, rather than producing only relative scores at one point in time, educators will bring the expertise of other educators who know the needs and learning characteristics of particular groups of students. With this knowledge, educators can assess their students’ knowledge as well as create a point of reference for understanding ELLs (Facella et al., 2005).

Accommodations

Accommodations are the primary tool used by states to comply with the federally mandated inclusion of ELLs in state assessment. They can help ELLs gain access to the content of a test by enabling these students to overcome linguistic and sociocultural barriers. They are intended to minimize the cognitive resources ELLs need to process the language of the test and maximize the cognitive resources available for accessing the content of the test. Accommodation offers promise as a tool for appropriately including ELLs in state assessments. However, a state
assessment administered to ELLs with accommodations must maintain its original purpose, assess the original construct, and yield scores that are comparable to those of other students taking the test without accommodation (Collum & Rivera, 2006).

**Linguistic Simplification**

As a test accommodation, *linguistic simplification* refers to the process of decreasing the linguistic complexity of test items or directions or both to make the meaning more accessible to the test taker without changing the meaning conveyed by the text. Simplified, plain English, or plain language text incorporates vocabulary that avoids ambiguity, colloquialisms, or synonyms and uses uncomplicated linguistic structure. The goal of linguistic simplification is to ensure understanding of the test items and, in some cases, directions without compromising the construct being tested. Properly applied, linguistic simplification does not compromise the validity and comparability of test scores by “dumbing down” the test, but affords ELLs and non-ELLs equal access to the content-based complexities of test items (Portillo, 2003). The process of linguistic simplification is intended to reduce the semantic and syntactic complexity of the English used in the text of a test including directions, items, and response options. Second language researchers have identified a number of syntactical features as difficult for both ELLs and native English speakers to process: passive voice constructions, long noun phrases, long question phrases, comparative structures, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses. In addition, low-frequency, long, or morphologically complex words and long sentences are especially difficult for ELLs to process. Simplification makes the language more accessible to ELLs, therefore allowing them to more easily access the core messages of a test item. Linguistic simplification of test language can facilitate ELLs’ comprehension and reduce the linguistic load placed on them during an assessment (Collum & Rivera, 2006).
**Dictionaries or Glossaries**

Collum and Rivera (2006) researched that bilingual dictionaries and native language glossaries are provided to ELLs to help them understand the meaning of words that might be less familiar due to their limited English language proficiency. Glossaries and bilingual dictionaries are designed to help students comprehend the language of English-language test items and not to provide explanations or clues regarding the construct of being tested. A dictionary provides a general definition of the word, whereas a glossary provides an explanation of a word customized for a particular context and audience. The dictionaries used in accommodations for ELLs are designed specifically for ELLs and define words in simplified English, giving examples of usage and may provide synonyms. The glossaries used in accommodations for ELLs also use simplified language and can also be provided in the student’s native language. The format of these glossaries appear as specialized lists of key words in English with definitions or explanations customized to fit the perceived needs of the test taker (Portillo, 2003).

**Native Language**

Accommodations in the native language are wide-ranging and might include written translation of test directions or items, or both, bilingual or dual-language versions of the test, oral repetition of test directions or items, or both in the native language via audiotape, or sight translation (Butler & Stevens, 1997).

**Extra Time**

The use of extra time on an assessment is based on the premise that if language poses a problem for ELLs, students under normal testing conditions may not be able to carefully consider all of the items on the test. Although extra time can be provided as a single
accommodation, it is more commonly provided in conjunction with other accommodations. For example, students might be permitted to use both a customized dictionary and to receive extra time. The only type of test for which the provision of extra time violates the construct measure is speeded assessment, or testing that assesses students’ rates of item completion as part of the construct being measured (Butler & Stevens, 1997).

Educators have devised a variety of test accommodations – means by which the disadvantages students who are not proficient in English face in testing can be at least partially compensated for. Accommodations have become more frequently used as educators have focused on the need for information about how ELLs are faring. A successful accommodation is a way of improving the accuracy of the information collected by the test and an important way of addressing the tension between the goals of inclusion and accuracy (Beatty & Hakuta, 2000).

Summary

For English language learners to advance at a normal rate in becoming literate in English, they need instruction that is different in focus and intensity from the instruction provided for native English speakers. ELLs require much more oral language development with a focus on listening and speaking. ELL students require instruction that provides ample opportunities for them to hear and discriminate the words and sounds of English, to increase their vocabulary and to practice their oral English skills (Mora, 2008). There is a reality that indicates all school districts in all regions of the nation are confronting the challenge of educating ELLs. Providing students with a quality education is a national issue to which critical resources and attention are devoted (Garcia, 2005). With regards to educational policy, the U.S. shows great inconsistency within the governing agency that determines the policy. Sometimes it is the responsibility of the
federal government, and other times it is up to the states to determine the best program (Harold, 2006).

Oral language must come first for ELL students. Once they have developed oral language skills in English, they can begin to learn about writing and reading in English. The acquisition of oral language must precede written language. However, the student should not be expected to begin reading or writing until a foundation of oral language has been developed (Hall & Hewings, 2001). Cummins addresses the importance of integrating language development with the student’s study of other content areas such as science or social studies. He encourages the use of cooperative learning to increase optimal language learning conditions. As students work together, the language learner has the opportunity to hear language and use language with peers. He stresses the importance of acknowledging and building on the student’s culture, experiences, and language. If a child’s background and experiences are not recognized and used as a platform for learning new content, they often do not succeed in school (Cawthon, 2005).

Brain research has emerged as the new theory with second language acquisition. The short-term conscious memory of the brain holds information for eighteen seconds. Through rehearsing information, it can be transitioned into long-term memory. When young children repeat songs and phrases, it is a way for them to rehearse and remember language. In order to engage the long-term declarative memory, one uses semantic memory. This includes phonological rules, syntax, semantics, spelling patterns, and word meanings. To encourage learning through the semantic memory, the teacher will have the student practice word flash cards, apply grammar rules, or sequence words in order for the days of the week (Lyons, 2003).
Lastly, Carder (2007) found that successful ESL programs in the United States aim (1) teach second language through academic content, (2) consciously teaching learning strategies needed to develop thinking skills, solve problems, and apply new knowledge, (3) activating and connecting students’ prior knowledge to the new knowledge developed in class, (4) respecting and valuing students’ home language and culture and using students’ first language at appropriate times for academic work in small groups, (5) using cooperative learning, (6) facilitating an interactive, discovery learning classroom context, (7) encouraging intense and meaningful cognitive and academic development in order to make up for any time lost in academics while acquiring English, (8) assisting students with access to and proper use of technology, and (9) using multiple measures across time for ongoing classroom assessment.
Position of the Author

It is clear that the teaching of English language learner is directly related to the way in which they learn and process new information. Research has shown that the ELL population faces many challenges in education that are directly related to their ability to acquire a second language. These challenges may include equity in education, variances within the subgroup, and the truthful use of state standards. On the other hand, there are a plethora of teaching strategies that can be used in order to assist ELLs with learning the content. The only way to support an ELL’s second language acquisition is to choose strategies that are developmentally appropriate to the student’s language acquisition level. The ultimate goal of instruction is to foster complex thinking by all students and language and literacy development in the language of instruction. With the use of these strategies, students can show a significant gain on standardized comprehension tests. Therefore, assessments must be appropriate for the learners being assessed and should be designed with the whole learning experience in mind.

As a fairly new educator in the English language development field, reviewing this literature has been very informative. I can use these reviews as a means of better understanding my students and their language ability levels. I also feel supported in my views on the education of English language learners because I had voiced my opinion on some of these issues with my department. However, at the time, I did not have the research to support my views on the subject. There were some limitations in some of the studies that were referenced. In one of the correlational studies, it had only used observations for its data collection. I became confused because in the hypothesis it stated that the students had made gains on the SAT-9. This test was never mentioned in the methodology, but was used in the compilation of results. In the
descriptive study, only interviews and surveys were used to collect data meaning that the Halo Effect could have interfered with these results.

Furthermore, when assessing English language learners, the question of validity arises. Norm-referenced tests approved by the No Child Left Behind Act were developed for native English speakers. There is a risk of underestimating achievement if the test taker is not proficient in the language of the test. Therefore, proficiency in the language of testing is a moderator variable that should be taken into account when assessing academic knowledge.
Reference List


