

Closing the Achievement Gap for English Language Learners

Yvonne and David Freeman
The University of Texas at Brownsville

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Types of English learners

Newly arrived with adequate schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• recent arrivals (less than 5 years in U.S.)• adequate schooling in native country• soon catch up academically• may still score low on standardized tests given in English
Newly arrived with limited formal schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• recent arrivals (less than 5 years in U.S.)• interrupted or limited schooling in native country• limited native language literacy• below grade level in math• poor academic achievement
Long term English learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 or more years in the U.S.• below grade level in reading and writing• mismatch between student perception of achievement and actual grades• some get adequate grades but score low on tests• have had ESL or bilingual instruction, but no consistent program

Four Keys for School Success for Older English Learners

1. Engage students in challenging, theme-based curriculum to develop academic concepts
2. Draw on students' background - their experiences, cultures, and languages
3. Organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build students' academic English proficiency
4. Create confident students who value school and value themselves as learners

Reasons to Teach Language through Content

1. Students get both language and content
2. Language is kept in its natural context.
3. Students have reasons to use language for real purposes
4. Students learn the academic vocabulary of the content area

Connect Content Areas through Thematic Instruction

Themes should provide students with opportunities to investigate big questions

These question should be drawn from state standards

Why Organize around “Big Question” Themes?

Themes should provide students with opportunities to investigate big questions

1. Through themes, teachers can connect curriculum to students' lives and backgrounds and draw on their language strengths

2. Students know what the topic is even when instruction is in the second language.
3. Because the same topics are studied across content areas and languages, students build academic concepts and vocabulary more easily.
4. Because the curriculum makes sense, second language students are more fully engaged and experience more success.
5. Teachers can differentiate instruction to accommodate differences in language proficiency.

Conversational Language Cummins 1989

The ability to comprehend, speak, read, or write when there is rich context and the topic is not cognitively demanding

in casual conversation, in games, when there are visuals, realia and other nonlinguistic support, when students already know about the topic in their first language

Academic Language

The ability to comprehend, speak, read, or write when the context is reduced and the topic is cognitively demanding

reading textbooks, novels without photos or pictures, writing long compositions

understanding a long presentation without visuals, learning new concepts

Time to Develop

Conversational Language - Students need about two years in order to be able to understand, talk, read and write in context-rich, cognitively undemanding situations

Academic Language - Students need 4 to 9 years to use the new language in order to learn and to read, and write in the academic content areas that are context reduced and cognitively demanding

Cultural Relevance Rubric	
1. Are the characters in the story like you and your family?	Just like us Not at all like us 4 3 2 1
2. Have you ever lived in or visited places like those in the story?	Yes No 4 3 2 1
3. Could this story take place this year?	Yes No 4 3 2 1
4. How close do you think the main characters are to you in age?	Very close Not close at all 4 3 2 1
5. Does the story have main characters who are boys (for boy readers)? Girls (for girl readers)?	Yes No 4 3 2 1
6. Do the characters talk like you and your family?	Yes No 4 3 2 1
7. Have you ever had an experience like one described in this story?	Yes No 4 3 2 1
8. How often do you read stories like this one?	Often Never 4 3 2 1

Culturally Relevant Texts

When teachers use culturally relevant texts, ELL's are more engaged.
ELL's comprehend culturally relevant texts better because the students have more background knowledge about the situations and characters.
At least some of the texts ELL's read should be culturally relevant.

Culturally Relevant Books

- Ada, A. F. (2002). I Love Saturdays and Domingos. New York, Atheneum Books.
- Aliki (1998). Marianthe's Story: Painted Words/Marianthe's Story: Spoken Memories. New York, Greenwillow Books.
- Aliki (1998). Painted Words/Spoken Memories. New York, Greenwillow Books.
- Atkin, B. (1993). Voices from the Fields. New York, Little, Brown and Co.
- Bunting, E. (1998). Going Home. New York, HarperTrophy.
- Byrd, L. (2003). The Treasure on Gold Street: El tesoro en la calle oro. El Paso, TX, Cinco Puntos Press.
- Carlson, Lori, Ed. (1994). Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States. New York, Henry Holt and Co.
- Choi, Y. (2001). The Name Jar. New York, Knoff.
- Cohn, D. (2002). ¡Sí se puede! Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press
- Hayes, J. (2004). La llorona. The Weeping Woman. El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press
- Heide, F. and J. Gilliland (1990). The Day of Ahmed's Secret. New York, Scholastic.

- Jimenez, F. (2001). Breaking Through. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.
- Jiménez, F. (1997). The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child. Albuquerque, N.M., University of New Mexico Press.
- Kindersley, B. and A. Kindersley (1995). Children Just Like Me: Celebrations. London, Dorling Kindersley.
- Levine, E. (1989). I Hate English. New York: Scholastic.
- Pérez, A. I. (2000). My Very Own Room: Mi propio cuartito. San Francisco, Children's Book Press.
- Rempel, L. (2004). Hey, Hmong Girl, Watssup? Saint Paul, MINN, Hamline University Press.
- Rosa-Casanova, S. (1997). Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice. New York, Atheneum Books.
- Shihab-Nye, N. (1994). Sitt's Secrets. New York, Aladdin.
- Salinas, Bobbi (1998). *The Three Pigs: Los tres cerdos, Nacho, Tito, and Miguel*. Oakland, CA, Piñata Publications.
- Soto, G. (1997). Buried Onions. San Diego: Harcourt Brace.
- Tal, E. (2005). Double Crossing. El Paso, Cinco Puntos Press.
- Thuy, lé thi deim, (2003) The Ganster We Are Looking For. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Torres, L. (1998). Liliana's Grandmother. New York, Farr Straus Giroux.
- Tsang, N. (2003). Rice All Day. Barrington, IL, Rigby.
- Wing, N. Jalapeño Bagels. New York, Atheneum Books.

**Questions Submitted via Email During Yvonne and David Freeman's Webcast
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All answers provided by Yvonne and David Freeman (Y & D)

Q#1: We currently scatter our ELL students around the building regardless of level. Would we experience more student success if we clustered them into one or two classrooms?

Y & D: How well prepared are the teachers working with those students? Do they have ESL certification? While we do not want to isolate the ELLs, it is important that the teachers working with them have an understanding of sheltering, preview/view/review, first and second language acquisition... Perhaps use the teachers with this background and have the students somewhat clustered. **DO NOT LET THEM BECOME ISOLATED**, however, from the other students. In no way, should the classrooms where they are placed become a dumping ground for all struggling students.

Q#2: We agree that it is inappropriate to expect our learners to perform adequately on high stakes tests after one year. However, our students must take Massachusetts MCAS. What strategies would you suggest to best prepare them for that?

Y & D: Do the best you can to give them challenging academic content and scaffold the instruction. They need lots of comprehensible, engaging reading. The more comprehensible input they get, the more likely they will be to succeed. Do not teach them isolated facts. They will have nothing to connect those isolated facts to. I don't know what grade level you are talking about, but these suggestions I would give to all levels.

Q#3: Some of our students (large ELL population) are adopted by English first parents at ages 5-9 years. Are there any recommendations for their instruction?

Y & D: Those children are probably getting lots of support from home with English and literacy...being read to, hearing English in meaningful settings. However, it may be important to validate their roots in classroom studies... This should be done with sensitivity and in consultation with the parents.

Q#4: It seems that our elementary students may have great confidence by 4th or 5th grade, but then it erodes. What suggestions do you have to boost those long term ELLs prior to their entry into middle school?

Y & D: I would say they are not developing that academic language they need as they get to the upper grades. In the lower grades, they need more meaningful reading and writing that will help them build the academic language they need. Are they voracious readers? Any students who read a lot will ultimately succeed. I do not know the social situation...There are, of course, socio cultural issues too. Read our "Closing the Achievement Gap book or "Between Worlds."

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Q#5: Is there value in planning direct instruction through an activity such as hands-on centers? Do you recommend any resources that could give guidance on this?

Y & D: ELLs learn much better in group settings. I'm not sure what you mean by direct instruction. The more you can make the input comprehensible through visuals, realia, group work, etc, the better.

Q#6: Is it a common practice, for across the nation, for ESL students to be required to take the same standardized tests as non ESL students after one year? In VA it is required, so do you have any suggestions to help these students succeed?

Y & D: Yes, it is common practice and anti theoretical. It takes from 4-9 years to catch up with native English speakers. Do the best you can to give them challenging academic content and scaffold the instruction. They need lots of comprehensible, engaging reading. The more comprehensible input they get, the more likely they will be to succeed. Do not teach them isolated facts. They will have nothing to connect those isolated facts to. I don't know what grade level you are talking about, but these suggestions I would give to all levels.

Q#7: I teach Reading Recovery to the ELL students who are in first grade. Some of these students are at level I. Should I wait so that students have more English before taking them for intense reading and writing?

Y & D: It is difficult to know if they have reading problems at Level 1. However, intensive reading support can only help students with both English and literacy. I would say be sure the students are getting lots of meaningful reading, poems, chants, big books, and see how their English and their reading comes along.

Q#8: I teach at the elementary level. We currently conduct pull-out ESOL classes for grades 1-5. What is the best way to work with each grade level teacher on content and also differentiate instruction for all levels of English?

Y & D: Pull out ESOL is the least effective program unless the teachers and the ESOL specialist work closely together and teach the language through the content themes the teachers are using in the regular classroom. Otherwise, there is no connection when the students pulled out go back into the classroom. The pull out program should be one that teaches English through content.

Q#9: Given the reliance on standardized testing, what do you suggest we do so that ELL learners' abilities are not underestimated?

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Y & D: Because of language issues, we do not know what they know when we test them. They often do poorly because they cannot read or write answers to questions. Do the best you can to give them challenging academic content and scaffold the instruction. (cont. on page 3)

(cont. from page 2) They need lots of comprehensible, engaging reading. The more comprehensible input they get, the more likely they will be to succeed. Do not teach them isolated facts. They will have nothing to connect those isolated facts to. I don't know what grade level you are talking about, but these suggestions I would give to all levels.

Q#10: What would you consider your best messages for Reading Recovery teachers to use with our children?

Y & D: Read any of our books. You want to let students know they can learn, they are smart, and that learning a second language takes time.

Q#11: When are the Rigby texts from the Freemans' going to be available?

Y & D: Which Rigby texts? OWE (On Our Way to English) is a theme-based ESL program K-5 and available now. We just wrote a professional development program (STEEL) and it is also available. Our textbooks are sold through Heinemann.

Q#12: How does teaching differ for students who are life long English learners versus newly arrived with limited schooling?

Y & D: Newly arrived do speak English and may understand the socio cultural setting. Newcomers with limited formal do not understand how schools work and are behind in content. The Long term learners need lots of meaningful reading and writing, but so do the newcomers, but at a different level. Please see our "Closing the Achievement Gap" book (Heinemann).

Q#13: What is a second grade teacher to do in order to prepare a newcomer for a state standardized test in one year?

Y & D: Do the best you can to give them challenging academic content and scaffold the instruction. They need lots of comprehensible, engaging reading. The more comprehensible input they get, the more likely they will be to succeed. Do not teach them isolated facts. They will have nothing to connect those isolated facts to. I don't know what grade level you are talking about, but these suggestions I would give to all levels.

Q#14: What language level do you recommend for Reading Recovery services or do you advise to look at 2008 Reading Recovery Council of North America

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each language domain L-S-R-W level in order to determine what ELLs will most benefit from Reading Recovery? (cont. on page 4)

(cont. from page 3)

Y & D: It is difficult to know if they have reading problems at Level 1. However, intensive reading support can only help students with both English and literacy. I would say be sure the students are getting lots of meaningful reading, poems, chants, big books, and see how their English and their reading comes along.

Q#15: Is there a plan to present the "Time to Develop" research to the NCLB folks so children can be evaluated according to growth rather than a "one size fits all" goal?

Y & D: Yes people are trying to get the information to NCLB folks. No one seems to listen.

Q#16: Our district has placed a large number of our ELL children in Direct Instruction programs. How do you suggest we can convince the district to return to thematic-based units? It seems as if the DI is hurting rather than helping...backed by research.

Y & D: Yes, thematic instruction is the only approach that will make the input comprehensible. Teaching distinct parts of language is meaningless to ELLS and ineffective.

Q#17: How would you suggest to transfer these strategies to out-of-classroom teachers, such as Reading Recovery teachers? Do you have any specific recommendations for teachers working with ELL students in a first grade reading intervention program?

Y & D: Make the reading instruction as comprehensible as possible. Read books with pictures. Do not isolate language. Intensive reading support can only help students with both English and literacy. I would say be sure the students are getting lots of meaningful reading, poems, chants, big books, and see how their English and their reading comes along.

Q#18: Are there any initiatives to change the NCLB requirements for ESL students? Y & D:

Y & D: Some hope for change, but don't hold your breath.

Q#19: Where can you get limited English, culturally relevant texts? Who are some publishers or resources to order from? Especially for really young students (pre-K & 6 yr. olds) and then secondary students

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(middle and high school).

Y & D: All our recent book have lists of culturally relevant books. See Heinemann and Scholastic (English Language Learners: The Essential Guide.) The handout we provided also has several books listed. If you e-mail me at Yvonne.freeman@utb.edu, I have several lists I can attach.