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*The Education of English Language Learners: Research to Practice.*  
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# Introduction

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## PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME

This volume integrates findings on the sociocultural, cognitive, and communicative-linguistic systems central to a child's development and education, thus providing the basis of practical implications for both assessment and instruction of school-age learners of English within and outside of the classroom. Our purpose is to provide educators up-to-date, evidence-based information about how to educate children who have varied language backgrounds and limited experience with English. In doing so, we aim to help redress the achievement gap for students often referred to as English language learners (ELLs).

## THE CHALLENGE

A crisis is brewing in U.S. schools. Rates of graduation from high school are poor, especially for minority students; the achievement gap between majority and minority students has not been closed; and the numbers of children of immigrant parents entering elementary and higher grades are

increasing, not just in New York and Los Angeles, but across the country (Wilkinson, Morrow, & Chou, 2008a). Such children often have English language skills that are insufficient for attaining educational goals. Consider that the proportion of ELLs in U.S. schools is rapidly increasing: From 1990 to 2005 the number of students classified as ELLs by the U.S. Department of Education more than doubled (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2004–2005), amounting to 10.5% of the total school enrollment in 2005. Not only do many of these children reside in non-English-speaking homes, but many of their families are also low-income, and poverty is a strong predictor of ELL difficulties (Westby & Hwa-Froelich, Chapter 9, this volume). Although high numbers of ELL students are enrolled in urban schools, many attend schools in smaller cities and rural communities as well. Hence, this is a national challenge.

Some children of immigrants are native English speakers, yet they come from homes where other languages are spoken, and even these native English speakers too often underachieve at school (Garcia, 2008). As an example, consider the largest group of non-English speakers at home: More than 31 million U.S. residents 5 years of age and older report that they speak Spanish at home, and more than half of these also report that they speak English very well (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). However, everyday, social, conversational proficiency does not predict academic school success (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008). Thus, although many Spanish-speaking ELLs entering school may indeed have such conversational skills, they may not have the necessary oral language underpinnings for entering into academic discourse and for ultimately achieving academic success in school.

Of particular concern is the education of ELLs in content areas such as science, mathematics, and social studies, each of which involves using language in unique ways to think and communicate orally and in writing (Schleppergrell, 2007). As the quotation above from a math teacher shows, content-area specialists often do not recognize that their responsibilities include instruction in language or literacy. Yet, teaching about the language of one's discipline would allow educators to mutually exploit the language and the content for increased understanding in the student. From the students' perspective, they cannot succeed in learning the content of the disciplines without understanding the relevant academic language (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008; Brisk, Chapter 7, and Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume). However, teachers receive little preparation in how to go about integrating language instruction into the disciplines. Not only

content specialists, but even primary school teachers who teach across content areas are unschooled in how to embed language teaching into other content areas. To be able to do so, all teachers of ELLs, not just teachers of English, need to understand better the strengths as well as the unique challenges of ELLs, whatever content is being taught.

Despite the No Child Left Behind (2000) initiative and large investments in support services such as special education, teaching English as a second language, language pathology, and reading instruction, American children trail children from other countries in math and science achievement (see Program for International Student Assessment, 2006; Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, 2006; Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, 2007). Thus, the challenge of educating successfully all American children persists—this, despite the fact that educational attainment in other countries such as Finland is growing. The deficiencies in American educational attainment are of concern for several reasons. One is that we must have an educated workforce to compete in a global economy. Another concern is that we have an ethical obligation to fulfill the promise of a better life that America offers to immigrants. We pride ourselves on that promise, and to fulfill it, we must offer adequate—even excellent—education to all children, not just monolingual, native English-speaking children of native English-speaking parents.

## OUR RESPONSE: EDUCATING EDUCATORS

Addressing the educational crisis successfully will depend, in large part, on enhancing communication between ELLs and their teachers. To do so, educators need to know who these students are and how to reach them, and prospective teachers need to have such information readily accessible to them. Accordingly, we asked our authors to clearly organize their chapters using these sections: focus points, chapter purpose, research review, best practices, summary, and implications. All but the first and last chapters follow this format.

We use the term *ELL* broadly throughout the volume to include more than those students who enter the education system not speaking any, or very limited, English. In addition, we include students whose experience with English may be limited in register and range. Indeed, some children, as noted above, may be native English speakers but are bilingual, speaking a different language in the home. Or, they may have

had little experience with what counts as academic English, a register appropriate to argumentation and scientific reasoning. Many authors in this volume show how all such children are different from monolingual native speakers in a variety of ways.

Also, for the purpose of this volume, we have taken a broad view of what constitutes evidence because our authors drew from not only scientifically designed, controlled studies but also from well-documented observations, case studies, expert reports, and clinical experiences. What struck us as we reviewed the chapters was that the sum total of the material submitted by our contributors coalesced into a coherent view, incorporating a wealth of various methods and consequent research findings. This richness encouraged us in the presentation of our resulting position (see also van Kleeck & Norlander, 2008).

In this first chapter we offer what we have learned from our authors and from many years of teaching about language and communication. Most importantly, we argue for a solid foundation in language and communication for quality education across the curriculum, and we emphasize that all educators need to understand language and language learning, as well as how both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) impact learning in the classroom and more generally. Specifically, we offer an evidence-based view of child learners not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by their teachers, but as constructors of understandings who need the guidance of their teachers. The teachers, in turn, need to know how the students can best learn, given their past and present experiences, both cultural and linguistic. And teachers need the support of administrators and families to sustain their efforts.

Our introductory chapter is organized into four main sections as follows: In the next section we describe the important cross-cutting themes emerging from the other chapters, along with several chapter references for each point. In many cases, we could not cite all relevant chapters for each point, but we have tried to give some guidance to our readers, with apologies to our authors for any omissions. We relate these themes in the next two sections, first, to students and the abilities they bring to the educational process and, second, to our view of educators and the need to empower them to be better-prepared partners in that process. General comments in this latter section are followed by two important subsections: one on the emerging best practices, especially relevant for classroom teachers as facilitators of learning in ELLs, and one for administrators as supporters of the teaching and learning process. Our final section introduces the three-part organization of the book.

## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

### ***L2 Learning Benefits from L1 Learning***

ELLs arrive at school with a variety of language skills (or as Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume, says, “communicative repertoires”); some may have had some schooling or can read in their first language, some cannot. Many of our authors provide evidence showing that L1 can be a beneficial steppingstone for L2. That is, learning in L1 encourages learning in L2, *even when the languages are not formally related*. Although it is clear that the more advanced a child is in L1, the more likely it is that those skills will facilitate L2, it is also clear that language learning from a variety of sources and experiences goes on beyond the preschool years (see Hoff & Shatz, 2007; Westby & Hwa-Froelich, Chapter 9, this volume). It is wise, then, to encourage continued learning in L1 when introducing the child to L2. There are several ways in which L2 can benefit from L1: (1) mastery of L1 (e.g., reading in L1) can give children pride in accomplishment and a love of learning that positively affects their interest in other subjects; (2) encouraging L1 learning signals to children that their languages and cultures are respected; (3) explicit comparisons between L1 and L2 characteristics can help children see how L1 and L2 are alike or different; and (4) bilingualism offers some unique cognitive advantages to the speaker (see Conboy, Chapter 1; Kohnert & Pham, Chapter 2; Reyes & Ervin-Tripp, Chapter 3; Bialystok & Peets, Chapter 6; Brisk, Chapter 7; Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume; see also Silliman & Wilkin-son, 2009).

Below we expand on some specific ways, especially relevant for education, in which L1 and L2 are related.

### ***Phonological Awareness Is Important in All Languages***

Much evidence shows that phonological awareness, the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of one’s language, is an important skill for a beginning reader of English. The conventional wisdom has been that such awareness is important for alphabetic languages like English but not for nonalphabetic languages. However, this apparently is not so: Phonological knowledge is relevant to reading in *all* languages, but the way it manifests is different, depending on several factors. Hence, how phonological knowledge in L1 will mitigate L2 differs by language pairs (see Newman, Chapter 5, this volume, especially Appendix 5.1).

### ***Translation “Equivalents” for Words May Not Index Conceptual Equivalents***

Contrary to the belief that early bilingual vocabulary building is done by finding equivalents in one language for words in the other, there seem to be few translation equivalents in early bilingual lexicons (Bedore, Peña, & Boerger, Chapter 4, and August, Dressler, Goldenberg, & Saunders, Chapter 12, this volume). One reason for this may be that children are conservative learners: They cannot be certain that words in one language will map to precisely the same conceptual space that they do in another language (see, e.g., Bowerman & Choi, 2001, on differences in spatial concepts encoded by Korean and English). However, recent research shows that for bilingual toddlers, like adult bilinguals, the larger the proportion of one’s vocabulary devoted to translation equivalents the more lexical access is facilitated (Poulin-Dubois, Bialystok, Blaye, Coutya, & Yott, 2009). Hence, encouraging discussion of translation equivalents and possible similarities and differences in conceptual underpinnings should facilitate both conceptual and lexical understanding.

### ***The Foundation of Literacy Is Oral Language***

Many of our authors stress the importance of oral language as a foundation for literacy (Conboy, Chapter 1; Kohnert & Pham, Chapter 2; August et al., Chapter 12, this volume). Noted as well is that conversational oral language proficiency is insufficient as a basis for academic success. Even native English speakers with everyday conversational competence need experience with oral academic language skills to achieve acceptable literacy skills. Thus, stopping ELLs’ access to English language teaching once conversational competence is achieved is premature. Moreover, if students have had some opportunity to develop academic language in L1, they are likely to be able to transfer that knowledge to L2. (See Westby & Hwa-Froelich, Chapter 9, this volume).

### ***Opportunities to Use L2 Need to Be Meaningful***

We have noted above that L1 can serve as a base for L2, but for such relational experiences to be useful, they must be meaningful. Allowing L1 to serve as a base from which to launch L2 experiences can help ELLs see value in their own background and how it relates and compares to the language and culture of English-speaking students (Reyes & Ervin-Tripp, Chapter 3; Brisk, Chapter 7; Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume).

Importantly, isolating ELLs from English-speaking peers in the name of efficient education does nothing to facilitate the growth of their L2 use or the kind of understanding that is so crucial for assimilation into the larger culture.

### ***English Language Development Needs to Be Explicit***

Meaningful experiences with L1 and L2 are not enough, however. Explicit instruction in English language development (ELD) that supplements meaningful experiences is necessary for success with ELLs. Indeed, the integration of ELD with carefully planned, meaningful experiences is likely to produce the best results (Reese & Goldenberg, Chapter 11, and August et al., Chapter 12, this volume). That is, ELD is not mutually exclusive with using language in meaningful contexts.

### ***Bilinguals Are Different from Monolinguals***

Bilinguals are not just like monolinguals except that they know (or are learning) more than one language. Recent research has informed us that bilinguals differ in many ways from monolinguals. Because brain development is sensitive to environmental input, learning two languages has an impact on the young language-learning brain (Conboy, Chapter 1, this volume); ways of learning are affected by previous experiences with language (i.e., L1) (Newman, Chapter 5, and Brisk, Chapter 7, this volume); and cognitive and social skills differ from monolinguals. As Bialystok and Peets (Chapter 6, this volume) point out, differences from monolinguals can be positive or negative for standard educational practices, but all provide opportunities to exploit those differences for bilinguals' learning. For example, when code switching is seen as a sociocognitive skill instead of a deficit, it can be utilized by the teacher to help engage the bilingual speaker (Reyes & Ervin-Tripp, Chapter 3, this volume).

Low L2 proficiency does not necessarily indicate language disorder. Just as code switching need not be seen as a deficit, so many of the characteristics of low L2 proficiency do not necessarily indicate language disorder. Diagnosing language impairment in ELLs is notoriously difficult. Language impairment tests for monolinguals may not be appropriate for ELLs because of the many differences in brain development and in language typologies (Conboy, Chapter 1; Westby & Hwa-Froelich, Chapter 9; Bailey, Chapter 10, this volume). Assessments focusing on interaction allow the bilingual or ELL to demonstrate responsiveness and learning

skills, not just static knowledge. Finding the appropriate services for ELLs without subjecting them to a diagnosis of language impairment may be the best path, given the current state of development in appropriate tests for language impairment in such children.

### ***Families Are Important to the Educational Process***

Among the best predictors of poor academic outcomes are low income and low language proficiency. Obviously, educators alone cannot counteract this important fact. However, they can enlist the help of their students' families and engage them in the task of educating their children. As several of our authors report, most parents, whether immigrants and/or low-income, are interested in seeing their children succeed in school. Families need encouragement and understandable information about how to help their children (see Brisk, Chapter 7; Reese & Goldenberg, Chapter 11, this volume). From learning about their students' languages and cultures to finding translators to help with family communication, teachers and administrators alike need to facilitate interaction with ELL families.

### ***Mutual Respect Guides Learning***

In a recent film made by an education professor (Martinez, 2009), both teachers and administrators spoke about the importance of relationships between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers, and administrators with teachers and students. Underlying those comments was the belief that quality education can be attained only with mutual respect among all parties. Offering the students meaningful experiences, reaching out to families, allowing creativity among teachers, supporting the needs of students and teachers—all these require mutual respect. All the authors in this volume assume the need for that respect; without it, students cannot construct an educated view of the world for themselves, teachers cannot guide them in that enterprise, and administrators cannot offer the necessary support.

## **THE WHOLE CHILD AS LEARNER**

Psychologists tend to consider children analytically. That is, they study aspects of children's language development, their cognitive development, or their social development. Educators too may lose sight of the whole

child: Beyond primary schools, when content-area specialization is the model, all too often children are seen only as science learners, or math students, or test takers. However, just as analytic study is the province of researchers and not the domain of the developing child, so too are the content-area specializations the province of practitioners and not the domain of the student. That is, the whole child draws on his or her skills as needed or appropriate, regardless of the boundaries set by the specialists.

The case for bootstrapping, or helping one's own efforts in an area by using whatever skills one has in other areas, is strong. Even prelinguistic children use whatever skills they have to acquire more competence as members of a family and then a community. For example, Shatz (1994, 2007b) offers many examples of how toddlers use cognitive and social skills to bootstrap their language development, with language then becoming a powerful device for acquiring more advanced cognitive and social skills. A related behavior can be seen with older children as well, when, for example, they group together words that they have experienced in common discourse contexts, creating abstract lexical categories for color, time, and number, even before they know what the individual words mean (Shatz, Tare, Nguyen, & Young, 2010). The message from such research is that children are creative users of their knowledge: They will utilize their skills, whatever they are, to operate in their social worlds, be they home, the playground, or school. Perhaps no one understood this better than Vygotsky (1978), who argued that children needed to be met at their "zone of proximal development" if they were to be guided successfully by adults. That is, adults need to gauge what skills children currently possess in order to guide them in measured steps toward higher goals.

Two implications follow from this perspective. The first is that language skill affects every realm of social and cognitive life. It is the medium in which culture is carried and education is attained. Without adequate language skills, individuals are hampered in their ability to achieve their full potential as persons (Shatz, 1994.) The second is that children are not blank slates ready to be inscribed with a dominant culture's standard practices. Because from infancy they have been constructing their own reality based on their experiences, new realities and experiences must be explicitly compared to and integrated with the old if children are to make sense of them and make them their own. (See Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume, on utilizing ELLs' communicative repertoires.)

Related to these implications is the notion that children are prepared to learn language. This notion does not require one to believe that

children are born with grammars in their heads. Rather, in this view, all human infants have brains that are designed to attend to language and to analyze and organize what they hear into a coherent, hierarchically structured system. Increasingly, regardless of their theoretical biases, researchers in language development both discover the remarkable capacities of infants to handle linguistic phenomena (Saffran & Thiesen, 2007) and recognize their abstract abilities (Lieven, 2009). Like any system, language has parts (like the phonological system) that have their own integrity but that influence, and are influenced by, other parts of the system, and that function in concert with the other parts to produce fluent performance.

The infant brain may be prepared to learn language, but that learning organization incorporates flexibility, and the brain develops as a function not only of maturation but of experience (Gathercole & Hoff, 2007; Conboy, Chapter 1, and Kohnert & Pham, Chapter 2, this volume). We do not yet fully understand all the ways in which the environment affects brain development (and language development), but researchers have begun to document disparities in learning as early as 9 months of age (Halle et al., 2009). However rich or poor the environment, language learning takes place in a social context (Shatz, 2007a). This is true for L2 as well as L1. The more educators can learn about the processes of language development, the better prepared they will be to deal with the disparate language backgrounds of ELLs (see Hoff & Shatz, 2007, for discussions on the development of different parts of language as well as bilingualism and literacy).

Students' language skills impact not only their test-taking abilities but every discipline they study. No matter how young, children come to school with a world of experience in home and community that frames their attitudes about learning and how they use language to learn. By the time they enter school, they are a social member of a language community. School represents a wider community with possibly different standards from home for behavior and for language use. It is a tenet of American education that all children come to school with brains adequate to learning, to constructing knowledge, and to expressing themselves. Less well recognized is that children's prior experiences have formed a framework into which the schools' standards and goals must be integrated. The time-honored role of teachers is to mediate students' creation of links between their earlier experience and the new school context (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

This perspective is even more compelling when we address the education of ELLs, who, regardless of their age, come to school with a dif-

ferent set of capacities and experiences from monolinguals. Educators need to appreciate those differences and to find ways to work within and beyond the constraints imposed by them. To help facilitate what may sometimes seem like a daunting task, we highlight below many of the best practices proposed in the chapters that follow.

### **THE TEACHER AS GUIDE FOR LEARNING AND THE ADMINISTRATOR AS FACILITATOR**

U.S. legislation, No Child Left Behind (2000), requires that each classroom has a “highly qualified teacher.” A major source of the persistent education gaps between ELLs and their counterparts is the disparity between what teachers know and what they need to know about ELLs and other at-risk students (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008). This gap needs to be bridged to improve the academic preparation and professional development of all school-based practitioners. The existing knowledge base of many practitioners appears disconnected from what is necessary for promoting and maximizing successful educational outcomes for individual students, and even more so for ELLs (Silliman, Wilkinson, & Brea-Spahn, 2004.) The concern is that ELLs often enter school without the background experiences and literacy skills, including proficiency in academic language (Wilkinson & Silliman, 2008), that form the foundation for future literacy development. ELLs require “teachers who are capable of accelerating the learning of students who experience the greatest difficulty acquiring literacy” (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006, p. 11). The quality of classroom instruction is, by far, the most significant element in formal education. To improve ELL learning, we must provide innovative ways to educate preservice teachers about the unique strengths and challenges of ELL students, as well as provide meaningful and comprehensive continuing professional development for teachers and other educational practitioners who encounter ELLs in school. Only those teachers who are prepared for cultural and linguistic diversity and who have developed a deep understanding of how to teach diverse students to acquire academic literacy will be prepared to make a difference in the lives of ELL students.

We argue that teachers of ELLs must, therefore, have explicit knowledge of contrastive linguistics in order to develop sensitivity to individual differences (Valdes, Bunch, Snow, & Lee, 2005; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Oller and Jarmulowicz (2007) accentuate how similarities in the linguistic features of two languages facilitate L2 learning. Of equal

importance are the ways in which distinctive differences may interfere with L2 learning. The value of this knowledge is that teachers are then capable of recognizing cross-language comparisons that allow them to (1) discover the linguistic strengths of individual children for the support of language transfer strategies, and (2) discern sites of potential linguistic interference, which will vary for each ELL in his or her classroom.

The research literature on teachers' pedagogical knowledge about ELLs emphasizes the relevance of oral language experiences for L2 learning (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2008). The need for both regular and special education teachers to be explicitly schooled in cross-linguistic differences (and similarities) in the phonological, morphological, and syntactic systems of first languages versus English (e.g., Gersten et al., 2007) is paramount. These cross-linguistic contrasts may affect, in many ways, the ability of ELLs to decode and spell in English, thereby interfering with the achievement of academic language proficiency. Knowledge of language contrasts is not a natural consequence of being literate: A monolingual English-speaking teacher may not be able to access the explicit phonemic awareness necessary for the effective teaching of beginning reading (Silliman, Bahr, Beasman, & Wilkinson, 2000). Even a bilingual teacher who has the requisite cultural knowledge about Spanish-speaking communities and speaks Spanish and English "fluently" may not have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge of critical linguistic contrasts between the two languages. Additionally, all teachers of ELLs, and not just English as a second language (ESL) teachers, need to develop metalinguistic awareness about the social differences between the everyday language use of students from different backgrounds and the demands of language in the classroom (Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume.)

We are mindful of the real research-to-practice divide. Many practitioners believe that research findings lack utility relative to the experiences that constitute the exigencies of their classroom life. Educational practitioners want feasible and defined procedures that can be applied to their specific situations in order to meet the particular needs of their students. They do not want radically different methods. Often, teachers find that the actual mastery of new practices for instructional innovations takes much longer to incorporate into everyday use than did the original research-based intervention used by the researchers. One consequence is that teachers may either abandon the innovation or fail to maintain a high level of fidelity to the implementation because the magnitude of effort does not justify their time. The likelihood of sustaining new practices is significantly decreased when on-site mentoring by researchers, including the ongoing support afforded by professional networking, and

administrative leadership are absent (Foorman & Nixon, 2006; Silliman et al., 2004).

Best practices, then, must be seen in the context of effective classrooms, one where all students learn and progress to meet the standards set. Such classrooms are informed by sociocultural theory. Student learning is dependent upon what a teacher knows, how students come to understand that knowledge, and the context in which the learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). Classrooms that are well organized are collaborative, with teachers guiding instruction and student participation. This context takes into consideration the relationship between teachers and students, the community of the classrooms, and the larger community of the school and how all these “parts” are organized and managed throughout every school day (Wilkinson, Morrow, & Chou, 2008b).

### ***Emerging Best Practices for Teachers***

- *Recognize that ELLs are different from monolinguals.*

Investigations of early brain development confirm that children who are developing two languages are different from those developing only one very early on (Conboy, Chapter 1, this volume). Since children’s brains are developing throughout the school years, there is every reason to think that developmental differences occur as children are exposed to a second language. Some of these differences will facilitate learning, others will not (Bialystok & Peets, Chapter 6, this volume), but all will require a knowledgeable teacher to exploit them in the furtherance of ELLs’ education.

- *Recognize or learn differences between English and children’s L1, and exploit these for the children.*

Languages can be sorted into types according to their sound, grammar, and vocabulary characteristics. How close a child’s L1 is to English (according to the characteristics of both) impacts how easily children can transfer their knowledge across languages. But, even when L1 is quite different from L2, teachers can help children to discover how the languages differ and to learn what they need to know about English. (See, e.g., Newman, Chapter 5, this volume.) To learn more about language similarities and differences, educators should avail themselves of courses in linguistic typology. For assistance with particular languages, teachers can seek help in the school community from bilingual speakers, such as other teachers or family members.

- *Encourage ELLs to use L1 and its learning strategies in learning L2, as appropriate.*

Several authors report that strong L1 skills predict better learning of L2. Thus, encouraging the continued development of L1 is likely to have positive effects on the acquisition of L2 (Kohnert & Pham, Chapter 2, this volume). Especially in the early stages of L2 vocabulary learning, ELLs are aware of the links between the two languages (Bedore et al., Chapter 4, this volume). Despite the finding cited above that they do not have many translation equivalents, early sequential bilinguals who continue to learn L1 link their lexicons and underlying semantic representations. Although there is little influence from this linkage to ELLs' production of vocabulary, nonetheless instruction in a student's primary language (L1) makes a positive contribution to literacy achievement in the student's second language when compared to students receiving instruction only in L2 (Reese & Goldenberg, Chapter 11, this volume). Therefore, the research points to cross-language transfer from L1 to L2 not necessarily just of vocabulary skills but also of skills such as phonological awareness and decoding and comprehension strategies. Again, teachers can use their creativity to bring L1 into the classroom in engaging and supportive ways that can guide such transfer of skills (Reyes & Ervin-Tripp, Chapter 3; Brisk, Chapter 7; Rymes, Chapter 8, this volume).

- *Create interactive activities that engage ELLs with more proficient speakers.*

Few productive interactions happen without creative forethought on the teacher's part. August and colleagues (Chapter 12, this volume) report that interactive activities effectively mixing ELLs and more English-proficient ELLs (or native English speakers) typically require the teacher to carefully structure the tasks. If classroom interactive activities are to benefit ELL language-learning efforts, careful consideration must be given to (1) the design of the tasks in which students engage, (2) training of the more proficient English speakers who interact with ELLs, and (3) the language proficiency of the ELLs themselves.

- *Designate ELLs to serve as "teachers" of their language and culture to other students, drawing upon ELLs' "funds of knowledge."*

Building upon the knowledge and experience that ELLs bring from home is a way to bridge the gaps between home and school—gaps that so often interfere with ELLs' successful learning and achieving in mainstream schools. The *funds-of-knowledge* term refers to the knowledge,

skills, experiences, and competencies that exist in children's homes and communities, and that teachers can draw upon to develop classroom learning activities that help ELLs achieve academic learning goals. *Funds of knowledge* may include, for example, knowledge of ranching and farming, construction, herbal and folk medicine, and appliance repair, and are typically discovered by teachers through home visits. Reese and Goldenberg (Chapter 11, this volume) argue that aspects of the diverse knowledge bases can sometimes be incorporated effectively into classroom lessons. Teachers who have tried this methods report positive changes in ELLs' attitudes and increased communication and rapport with parents—which are critical to fostering ELLs' success in school (Kohnert & Pham, Chapter 2, and Brisk, Chapter 7, this volume).

- *Recognize that code switching indexes skills and use it to help the child see uses of L1 and L2.*

Understanding when and why ELLs code-switch is important to figuring out how best to facilitate their L2 learning. Sometimes what is best to do is counterintuitive. ELLs may make errors early in L2 learning that suggest that they are developing representations of the L1 sound system as they learn new L2 vocabulary. Bedore and colleagues (Chapter 4, this volume) give the following examples: A first grader called a rhinoceros a “rinocornio,” and another called a boat a “bark” (noting that the Spanish word for *boat* is *barco*). Sometimes it may be difficult for ELLs to call up the correct phonological representation of a word. In cases of language loss (i.e., lack of access to low-frequency words or grammatical structures), Bedore and colleagues report that it may be facilitative to long-term vocabulary growth to continue to use L1 in speaking with an ELL, even if it is temporarily frustrating. The tendency to cease using L1 with ELLs may undermine their efforts in continuing to build vocabulary systematically. Reyes and Ervin-Tripp (Chapter 3, this volume) note that code switching does not necessarily indicate a deficit. Rather, it can be a sociolinguistic skill that is sanctioned in the family and community and can be used for a variety of communicative purposes. The teacher's task, then, is to recognize when it may be appropriate to use it versus when it may indicate only partial learning of English.

- *Use relevant opportunities to teach language even when teaching another content area.*

All teachers, not just ESL instructors or speech therapists, need to engage ELLs in learning the language relevant to their discipline. As an

example, Brisk (Chapter 7, this volume) recounts how a second-grade history teacher taught characteristics of English (capitalization and past tense) relevant to her history topic as part of her history lesson. And an experimental program for engaging kindergartners in science activities includes relevant vocabulary exercises (Gelman, Brenneman, Macdonald, & Román, 2009). But embedding appropriate language within content instruction requires careful thought about the language aspects that can be most seamlessly interwoven with the content material.

- *Relate ELD classes to instructional goals and classroom work; proficiency in academic language is critical for school success.*

ELD instruction is an important component of education for ELLs that should incorporate meaningful content relating to other classroom learning activities that extend the content focus (August et al., Chapter 12, this volume). The use of instructional objectives is often considered a centerpiece of effective instruction, with the objectives working as starting points to keep the lesson and activities focused and aimed toward student learning. Both content-area and ESL teachers can work together in a teamwork approach to forge links between ESL lessons and content lessons. Students' mastery of academic language—the language of the text, the test, and teacher talk—is essential, and teachers in all content areas must explicitly teach elements such as grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structure of the disciplines (see Brisk, Chapter 7; Westby & Hwa-Froelich, Chapter 9; Bailey, Chapter 10, this volume).

- *Continual language assessment is essential for ELL education.*

Formative assessment of ELLs' language development should be conducted repeatedly by every teacher who teaches ELL students reading, mathematics, science, or U.S. history. Without continual up-to-date information on a student's language needs and abilities, teachers will not be able to teach either language or content material effectively.

- *Tailor lessons and interventions to students' levels of proficiency.*

Although there are similarities between the kinds of teaching that best support first- and second-language learners in literacy learning, there are significant differences (August et al., Chapter 12, this volume). Consequently, when designing lessons and other interventions, educators must keep in mind the roles of background knowledge and experience. Lessons should be tailored to the level of students' L2 proficiency—which

may involve individualizing the task for different levels within the same classroom and lesson.

- *Maintain interventions beyond the “conversational” stage.*

All too often, students receiving special language services are redesignated as not in need of services once they gain only conversational proficiency in English. However, success in school is related to proficiency in *academic* language. Moreover, greater academic language development in L1 forms the basis for higher levels of development in L2 (Reese & Gold-berg, Chapter 11, this volume). The bottom line: ELLs who receive special services will benefit from instruction in academic language before being redesignated as capable in English.

Our discussion of best practices for teachers highlights the importance of creative teamwork among all educational practitioners. Although we have focused primarily on the opportunities for classroom teachers of ELLs, the work of all educational practitioners—teachers of content areas, speech–language pathologists, school psychologists, school counselors, school librarians—is crucial for the success of all students and ELLs in particular. Recognizing the financial and political pressures under which administrators function, next we offer several suggestions for how they might support the best practices outlined above.

### ***Suggested Best Practices for Educational Administrators***

School leaders play a key role in ensuring that teachers are both inspired and supported in their efforts to provide optimal instruction for ELLs. Importantly, leaders should nurture school communities that identify ELLs’ learning as a priority.

- *Encourage teamwork and cross-disciplinary collaboration among staff.*

Interaction, cooperation, and assistance among specialists and classroom teachers are essential for the school success of all students (see Bailey, Chapter 10, this volume). Principals need to have the teaching and learning of ELLs as a priority within the school community: They need to nurture the school community with specific actions, such as scheduling time and opportunities for regular classroom teachers to collaborate with ESL teachers in comparing teaching strategies, in reviewing the progress of ELLs in their classes, and in identifying key resources that can be applied to the education of ELLs. Moreover, in their roles as instructional

leaders, principals must identify instructional techniques to use when working with ELLs, such as scaffolded instruction, targeted vocabulary development, connections to student experiences, student-to-student interaction, and the use of supplementary culturally relevant materials. In short, principals need to support instruction that builds language lessons into content areas and integrates L1 and L2 in meaningful ways in the classroom.

- *Encourage home–school relationships.*

It is essential to support ways that bridge the gap between language and literacy practices both inside and outside of school (e.g., in the home). Providing support for home visits and training teachers how to speak with parents respectfully and without using jargon are just two suggestions for encouraging more home–school communication. Utilizing community resources for translation and communication assistance for teachers and parents is another way to support ELL education efforts.

- *Arrange for or support instruction in language typologies for teachers.*

Kohnert and Pham (Chapter 2, this volume) urge administrative support for the study of language development as part of teachers' required continued professional development. In addition to basic courses, an important topic for workshops that could be extremely helpful to teachers would be courses on language typologies relevant to the student population. Providing for or encouraging attendance at such workshops or classes would be an important step in preparing teachers to understand more about the language difficulties faced by ELLs. One possible source of such instruction might be language education and linguistics faculty in local colleges who would be willing to offer such preparation for teachers.

- *Support and respect creative efforts of teachers to work with ELLs and their families.*

Finally, we note the main lesson emerging from all the research reports, examples, and implications in the chapters that follow: There is no substitute for creative, thoughtful, well-educated teachers dedicated to educating all their students to the best of their abilities. Effective teacher education must recognize the varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students of today and tomorrow and must prepare the educators of the future accordingly. In this volume we have collected many suggestions for working with ELLs that teachers and/or researchers have found promising or successful. We are sure, however, that creative and resourceful educators can and do add to them.

Such efforts, especially in the context of collaborative team activities, deserve our support.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The remainder of this book is divided into three parts. Part I, Early Language Experience and School Readiness, introduces the kind of children about whom we write. Conboy, in Chapter 1, explains how the brain develops in response to experience as well as maturation, particularly with regard to potential influences of early exposure to more than one language. Kohnert and Pham (Chapter 2) discuss a model of first- and second-language acquisition that is sensitive to a variety of factors, both internal and external. The final chapter in this section, by Reyes and Ervin-Tripp, presents the linguistic behavioral characteristics of bilinguals, revealing their unique social-linguistic experiences. Together, these chapters provide a multifaceted profile of ELLs for educators.

The next section, Language and Literacy Principles and Practices in School, concentrates on ELLs' school learning, particularly on learning to speak and write English. The first two chapters are particularly useful in seeing how a first language might relate to learning a second. The Bedore, Peña, and Boerger chapter focuses on vocabulary acquisition and the relations between L1 and L2. Newman (Chapter 5) addresses L1 and L2 differences and similarities with regard to phonology and its role in reading. The next two chapters consider how the status of ELL affects learning. In their chapter, Bialystok and Peets discuss the pluses and minuses of being bilingual for the cognitive task of learning to read. And Brisk (Chapter 7) offers many suggestions for using the status of ELL to engage the student in learning.

The final section, Assessment and Interaction: Working with Children and Families, includes chapters that stress the active role educators can play in working with ELLs. The first, by Rymes, encourages teachers to discover the communicative competencies of ELLs and to utilize these in the learning process. The next two chapters, one by Westby and Hwa-Froelich and one by Bailey, are concerned with the important issue of how to assess whether ELL children are normal learners or language disordered, and how this determination impacts instruction. Reese and Goldenberg (Chapter 11) provide support for the view, espoused in earlier chapters, that family involvement in the learning process is crucial for ELL success. The authors of the last chapter, August, Dressler, Goldenberg, and Saunders, draw on decades of research to support what we know: To accommodate their unique present-day status, ELLs need explicit and meaningful training in the use of language for academic purposes.

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