

Effective Practices for Increasing the Achievement of English Learners

Jana Echevarría, California State University, Long Beach

Introduction

As schools focus on preparing students to be college and career ready, the achievement of English learners is a critical issue. It is widely acknowledged that English as a second language programs alone cannot adequately serve the large and growing numbers of English learners in U.S. schools (Brisk, 2010). These students also benefit from content area teachers using strategies and techniques that make subject matter understandable while at the same time developing students' English language proficiency. This dual approach (i.e., content teaching that incorporates language development, typically referred to as *sheltered instruction*) and how best to implement it have been the research focus of the Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE). Sheltered instruction is becoming a more common approach in schools as the number of English learners in U.S. schools increases.

Sheltered Instruction: Content and Language Teaching

Learning rigorous, standards-based subject matter can be challenging for many students, but it is particularly difficult for those students who are not yet proficient English speakers. Although these students learn in many of the same ways as English speakers, they benefit from adjustments made to instruction so that it is more understandable for them (August & Shanahan, 2010). Some of the features of instruction shown to be effective for enhancing learning for English learners include modeling, using multiple media to provide visual aids, providing repetition and additional practice, using students' background knowledge to make information meaning-

ful, highlighting and teaching key vocabulary, building on students' native language proficiency, and planning opportunities for students to interact with one another on text-based tasks.

Although many of these features involve the use of language, explicit attention to teaching *academic language* within content lessons is required for students to develop English proficiency. Academic language differs from conversational English in that it is more complex and it is not typically encountered in everyday settings. Effective teaching includes planned speaking practice in content classes so that students have both formal and informal practice using academic English (Guthrie & Ozgungor, 2002). Consistent opportunities for oral interaction around formal academic language can facilitate more specialized uses of the academic register of formal writing and speaking (Gibbons, 2003).

Effective Sheltered Instruction in School Settings

While there exists a body of research on content and language teaching, the growth of the English learner population has outpaced research. As Coleman and Goldenberg (2012) state, "Although formal research to evaluate the effects of various sheltered strategies is ongoing, educators must help lead the way. There is simply no time to wait until researchers address all of the important issues regarding sheltered instruction" (p. 48). In that vein, this brief highlights two schools' successful efforts to improve the achievement of their students using the SIOP Model, one of the approaches that CREATE research studies have confirmed as being effective for teaching English learners.

Developed as an approach for integrating language development with content teaching, the SIOP Model offers teachers a model of instruction for planning and implementing effective lessons. It has been validated as a model of instruction that improves the achievement of students whose teachers use it (Echevarría, Richards-Tutor, Chinn, & Ratleff, 2011; Echevarría, Short, & Powers, 2006; Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012). Its 8 components and 30 features provide a framework for lesson planning and for classroom observation. The eight components are Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice & Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review & Assessment (see Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2013, for a comprehensive discussion). Each of the components is supported by empirical studies, and the model itself has a growing research base (Short, Echevarría, & Richards-Tutor, 2011).

Pasadena Memorial High School, Pasadena, Texas

Pasadena Memorial High School, located in an urban area outside of Houston, has a total population of approximately 2,700 students, including a population of English learners whose number fluctuates between 160 and 180 students. Most of these students are Spanish speaking, but there are also students from Asian countries. Many of the school's English learners have been in the United States for 3 or more years, and typically about 30 students are recent immigrants (i.e., in the United States 3 years or less).

Prior to SIOP Model Implementation

Prior to the school's beginning SIOP implementation, the English as a Second Language (ESL) program was unfocused, mainly because there was only one ESL teacher who was responsible for meeting the needs of all English learners. English learners lagged behind their English-speaking peers in vocabulary and content knowledge, and their overall academic needs were not being met. The program lacked a plan for determining students' needs and how to address them.

In 2008-2009, the principal recognized that school-wide involvement in the education of the growing number of English learners was warranted. At that time, teachers had little knowledge of language development and how to deliver content effectively to students who were not native speakers of English. A commitment to professional development was made with the goal of improving state test scores, especially the scores of English learners.

SIOP Training and Implementation

It was decided that all teachers in the school would learn the SIOP Model, and to that end, they received SIOP professional development. District trainings introduced teachers to the components of the SIOP Model over the course of 3 days.

In addition, a SIOP peer facilitator was hired to assist teachers in implementing the SIOP Model at the school. To deepen teachers' understanding of the SIOP Model and facilitate effective implementation, a campus SIOP team of 28 teachers was selected. Teachers recommended for the team were considered to be among the strongest in their respective content areas (English language arts, science, math, and social studies) and at their grade levels. These teachers had designated SIOP classes that included English learners.

In the first 2 years (2009-2010 and 2010-2011), the SIOP facilitator met with SIOP teachers every 3 weeks during their conference period and focused on one SIOP component every 12 weeks (two 6-week periods). In the first year of SIOP implementation, the components covered were Lesson Preparation (with a focus on writing content and language objectives), Building Background, Comprehensible Input, and Interaction. Components covered in the second year were Strategies, Practice & Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review & Assessment. During meetings, teachers received training in the features of the component, and activities for the targeted component were modeled so that the teachers could try them in their classrooms. Content area SIOP team teachers planned lessons collaboratively during their additional conference period. The SIOP facilitator would meet with newer teachers who required more support every 2 weeks.

In addition to conference period meetings, formal walk-through observations were conducted by the site coach, the assistant principal, and district instructional ESL specialists. Observers visited classes for 5 to 10 minutes at a time and used the SIOP protocol to see which components were visible. The focus was on observing the level of implementation of the targeted components. Walk-throughs were sometimes unannounced; at other times teachers requested an observation when they were doing something they wanted the coach to see. Usually, there was an informal discussion following the walk-through between the coach and teacher. Over 80 walk-throughs were conducted each year.

After the first year, SIOP components were selected for deeper study and implementation based on what was

observed during walk-throughs. For example, if there was little interaction observed in SIOP classrooms, the Interaction component would be the focus of the next meeting and subsequent observations.

SIOP Model Results

English learners’ results on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the required state standardized assessment system, are presented in Table 1. The percentage of English learners who passed the assessment in all content areas has increased steadily since the SIOP Model was introduced in 2008-2009.

In addition, the 2011-2012 language acquisition assessment scores revealed that students at Pasadena Memorial High School made significant progress in acquiring English. The school was the highest ranked high school in the district, with 65% of their limited-English-proficient population making progress. “I think this speaks to the commitment SIOP teachers have in helping students acquire the language,” says the school’s SIOP peer facilitator. “Overall, having teachers understand the language development process of the students has been very helpful. Teachers hold students to higher standards because the teachers see that the students can do way more than they thought they could.”

Table 1. TAKS Results: Percentage of English Learners Passing

Content area	2009	2010	2011
English language arts	43.43%	56.50%	76.60%
Science	30.76%	43.47%	53.00%
Math	29.29%	41.73%	62.00%
Social studies	64.81%	78.26%	86.25%

Other Factors of Success
Restructured ESL program

At the same time that SIOP implementation began, a course plan was developed for students in the ESL program. In year 1, English learners took a language acquisition class whose focus was to develop conversational English. They also took a course on reading in content areas and an English course for ESL students. In years 2 and 3, students took a writing course, a reading in the content area course, and an English course.

Monitoring of Academic Performance

Previously, the school’s one ESL teacher had not had time or resources to adequately monitor the academic progress of English learners. In 2009-2010, the SIOP peer facilitator and district ESL specialists began monitoring English learner progress by obtaining failure reports on English learners every 3 weeks. At each 6-week grading period, the SIOP peer facilitator assessed the failure reports and assigned a SIOP instructional aide to assist in the class with the most English learners in jeopardy of failing the course. The aide supported instruction and provided linguistic accommodations for students. The SIOP peer facilitator also assisted teachers by calling parents when teachers requested and keeping parents informed about their child’s academic achievement. When multiple requests were made about a particular student, the SIOP peer facilitator set up a parent-teacher conference with the student’s family.

Tiffany Park Elementary, Renton, Washington

Located outside of Seattle, Washington, in the urban community of Renton, Tiffany Park Elementary identifies 27% of its student population as English learners. The English learner population includes speakers of Ukrainian, Russian, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, and 15 other languages.

Prior to SIOP Model Implementation

Tiffany Park’s English learners had consistently underperformed in reading and mathematics on the state’s assessment, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, with only 26% of English learners at the school meeting standards. The number of low-income students who met standards was also low, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. State Reading Assessment Results by Grade Level: Percentage of Students Meeting Standards (2006-2007)

Grade	All students	Low-income students	Limited-English-proficient students
Grade 3	60.3%	44.7%	26.3%
Grade 4	71%	63.9%	27.3%
Grade 5	73.4%	58.8%	30.0%

Prior to the school's adopting the SIOP Model, Tiffany Park's ESL program was a pull-out program in which all eligible students were pulled out of their general education classrooms to work on language acquisition skills with either an ESL-endorsed teacher or a paraeducator. There was little connection between the instructional program in the ESL classroom and the general education classroom. Classroom teachers reported frustration with the ESL pull-out schedule and its impact on their ability to consistently provide core content instruction to English learners.

In 2005-2006, the new principal of Tiffany Park, a former English learner herself, determined that a new approach was needed to support greater academic achievement for English learners and low income students.

SIOP Training and Implementation

During the 2007-2008 school year, teachers at Tiffany Park participated in a 3-day SIOP Model training. All instructional staff participated, except for first-year teachers. In subsequent years, any staff members who had not been trained (i.e., the previous year's first-year teachers and teachers new to the building) also participated in a 3-day training.

The principal considered the first year of implementation a practice year in which teachers would try out components of the SIOP Model. However, she required teachers to have content and language objectives posted in their classrooms for all mathematics lessons. Most teachers also began using content and language objectives in all subject areas. After the initial training, the school's instructional coach and ESL teacher participated in a 2-day SIOP training focused specifically on coaching and implementation. They subsequently began working with those grade-level teams who wanted to increase their skill and implementation of the model.

In each consecutive year, the principal increased expectations for SIOP implementation, for example, by requiring the posting of content and language objectives in reading, mathematics, and science. She also provided the opportunity for staff to continue to deepen their knowledge of the SIOP Model through periodic component enrichment sessions in which the entire staff focused on one component (e.g., Review & Assessment or Lesson Preparation) during 90-minute staff development sessions.

The SIOP Model was included in Tiffany Park's school improvement plan as an instructional approach for improving the reading and mathematics achievement of all students, and also as an equity and access strategy for low-income students and English learners. Because Tiffany Park had a fairly high transition or ESL exit rate (nearly 25% of English learners in 2010-2011 were transitioned to English proficient status), those mainstream students who were former English learners continued to benefit from the kinds of instructional supports provided by SIOP teaching. Thus, the results for all students at Tiffany Park Elementary are reported along with students identified as low income and English learners.

SIOP Model Results

Washington State assessment results for Tiffany Park Elementary showed an overall increase in scores in 2010-2011 on reading, writing, mathematics, and science assessments (Table 3). Noteworthy improvements included fifth-grade increases of nearly 24 percentage points in science and nearly 26 percentage points in math.

In 2010-2011, Tiffany Park's average scores for English learners surpassed the overall average scores for the state on both the reading and mathematics assessments. Only 27% of Washington state's English learners

Table 3. State Reading Assessment Results by Grade Level: Percentage of Students Meeting Standards in 2010-2011 and Their Increase Since 2006-2007

Grade	All students	Increase from 2006-2007	Low-income students	Increase from 2006-2007	Limited-English-proficient students	Increase from 2006-2007
Grade 3	74.7%	+14.4	61.7%	+17	40%	+13.7
Grade 4	75%	+4	67.3%	+3.4	66.7%	+39.4
Grade 5	80%	+6.6	72.1%	+13.3	40%	+10

met standards on the reading assessment, but 47% of Tiffany Park's English learners met reading standards. In mathematics, only 24% of Washington state's English learners met standards compared with 38% of Tiffany Park's English learners.

In recognition of the school's achievement on state tests, Tiffany Park Elementary received the Washington State Overall Excellence Award in 2011, placing it in the top 5% of all elementary schools statewide.

Other Factors of Success

The factors described below, coupled with fidelity to the SIOP Model, contributed to Tiffany Park's success.

Delayed-Start Fridays

In 2007-2008, Renton School District implemented delayed-start Fridays, providing teachers with the opportunity to work in professional learning communities weekly. Once a month during this time, Tiffany Park's principal held professional development sessions such as SIOP component enrichment, which provided teachers with additional support in SIOP implementation.

Classroom Walk-Throughs

From 2008 to 2010, Tiffany Park was part of a state-wide improvement initiative that included an instructional framework, extensive professional development, and classroom walk-throughs. Each building at Tiffany Park had walk-through goals, which resulted in opening the doors of classrooms in a way that had not been done previously. The "open-door policy" created by the walk-throughs provided access to instruction, which helped ensure that high-quality SIOP teaching was being implemented in classrooms.

Ongoing SIOP Support

In 2011-2012, the district began providing a stipend to two SIOP lead teachers at Tiffany Park for providing additional SIOP support to their colleagues. The lead teachers participated in a 1-day SIOP training on peer coaching, and they met together each quarter to plan and discuss ways to support teachers. The lead teachers also set up demonstration classrooms, observed other teachers and provided constructive feedback, provided mini-reviews of specific SIOP features for teachers at staff meetings, participated in lesson design study with grade-level teams, and helped sustain the staff's SIOP teaching efforts.

Modified ESL Program

The ESL director modified the ESL program so that it was more purposeful and of time-limited duration. The content of pull-out group lessons was focused on a

specific skill, such as writing a good paragraph. Students in an ESL group were pulled out for 4 to 6 weeks rather than the entire school year. Also, students were no longer pulled from their classrooms during the times that core content was being taught.

Conclusion

The integration of content and language teaching is critical for English learners to develop the academic skills necessary to be successful in meeting high standards. However, teaching must be adapted for these students to access grade-level content material and to develop the specific academic language required in school settings. The SIOP Model is most successfully implemented by teachers who have the support of their administration and other teachers in the building. This support is achieved when the model is adopted as a school-wide initiative. Based on the experience of the two schools featured here, ongoing professional development and fidelity to the research-validated SIOP Model of instruction had a positive impact on student achievement.

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CREATE, the Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners, is conducting a program of research designed to address the critical challenge of improving educational outcomes for English language learners in the middle grades by

- Enhancing the empirical research base for readers in Grades 4–8
- Using both narrative and expository text to develop and test effective interventions that promote content knowledge and language and literacy development
- Investigating the features of instruction and text modifications that facilitate learning for English learners (e.g., traditional instruction vs. ESL-enhanced instruction, teacher-guided instruction vs. group work, traditional text vs. modified text)
- Designing, testing, and delivering professional development that ensures that teachers implement effective classroom practices to help English learners achieve high standards

For more information, visit the CREATE Web site
www.cal.org/create

The Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE) conducts a program of research designed to address specific challenges in the education of English language learners in Grades 4–8. CREATE is a partnership of researchers from six institutions:

- Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics, University of Houston
- Harvard University
- California State University, Long Beach
- University of California-Berkeley
- Center for Applied Linguistics
- Vaughn Gross Center, University of Texas at Austin

This brief was produced by CREATE with funding from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), Institute of Education Sciences, under Contract No. ED-R305A05056. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED. This document is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission.