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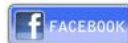
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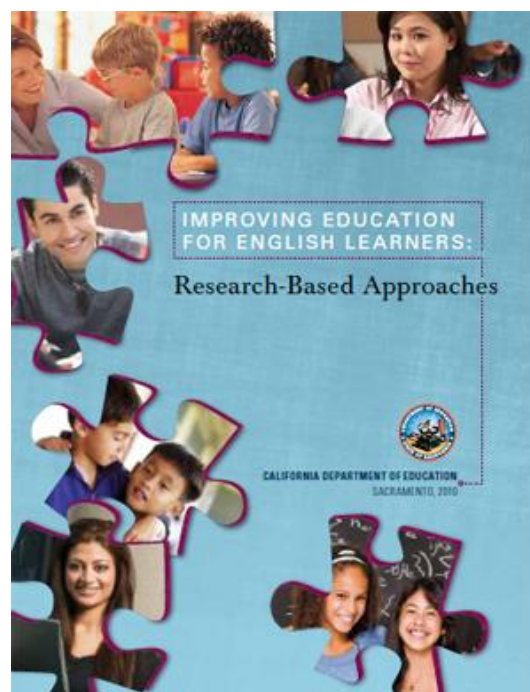
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When *Improving Schooling for Language-Minority Children: A Research Agenda* (August & Hakuta, 1997) was published thirteen years ago, educators and teacher educators were faced with a challenge. This major work was primarily directed to researchers and policy makers, and was intended to guide the extension of existing theories and methodologies regarding the instruction of English Learners (EL). It provided a thorough review of the state of



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research and research infrastructure in the mid-1990s, and, at the same time, acknowledged that there were important gaps in that knowledge. Overall, the volume attempted to help build research capacity that could eventually improve schooling for millions of EL students. The major challenge was for non-researchers to make sense of this material and to apply it to their work with students.

We now have a similarly-titled volume, *Improving Education for English Learners: Research-Based Approaches* (California State Department of Education, 2010). This book, however, is specifically directed to classroom teachers, resource teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and providers of professional development (CDE, 2010, p. 2). As noted in the introduction, the overall goals of the book are: to assist school districts in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs for English learners over the coming years. It is also intended to assist educators in addressing the instructional needs of English learners and to support the implementation of the English language development (ELD) standards as well as the subject-matter standards and frameworks. (p. 15)

Through this new book, the California Department of Education has made available the work of major authors in the field of second language instruction. It is a practice-oriented volume that attempts to bring readers up-to-date on the research and on a wide range major instructional categories of English learner education. Those areas include: research on instructed English Language Development for K-12 students; ELD implementation for students in grades K-5; ELD implementation for students in grades 6-12; research on literacy instruction for EL students; sheltered content instruction; and, alternative educational programs for EL students with an emphasis on bilingual approaches (instruction in the native language and second language).

In this review, we briefly describe the genesis and contents of the book, citing its overall strengths and making a general, cautionary statement. We follow with succinct reviews of each of the book's six chapters in order to assist educators in selecting chapters for use with their students or colleagues.

Overview

This volume contributes in several ways to the field of English Learner education. First, it fills a major gap in the professional literature by summarizing what is known about how to teach and develop second language proficiency in K-12 students. Until now, there have been few works that cover the research in instructed second language development. In the past, educators have often relied more on approaches based on theory, on recommendations that come principally from the teaching of foreign languages to adults, or on conventional wisdom (Goldenberg and Coleman, 2010). In addition, the book begins to address a persistent gap in the field: research on teaching English to EL students at the early stages of English language proficiency. To date there have been numerous publications on how to shelter content instruction for students with intermediate English language proficiency, but far fewer regarding research on how to promote optimal development of the L2 (second language). The scarcity of research-based ELD methodology has been a major weakness in the knowledge base, especially because the distinguishing characteristic of all EL students is that they need to develop L2 proficiency.

Third, the volume contains excellent, up-to-date bibliographies organized by the major chapter topics. The reference sections will be of particular use for faculty who want to select additional, original source material for their students to read. Graduate students, in particular, will benefit greatly by reading some of the original sources. While the book could be assigned for reading for teacher candidates, the depth of some chapters— e.g., Goldenberg & Saunders—may provide more detail than they can weigh and analyze during an intensive credential program, especially one that provides only minimal course work that focuses on specific needs of EL students. With guidance, however, the book would provide a solid foundation for teacher candidates in programs that have sufficient coursework to prepare for English Learner or bilingual certifications.

Overall, we have one major caution regarding the book. In the introduction, renowned scholar Kenji Hakuta writes that the research cited throughout the volume is balanced

in terms of sources and not limited to randomized, controlled studies. Specifically, Hakuta makes the point that the book includes "...various forms of systematic data gathering" (p. xiv). In actuality, the preponderance of the research cited is largely experimental or quasi-experimental, as noted by several of the authors themselves. Consequently, the book does not present a comprehensive view of the complexities of second language acquisition and instruction. As has been stated frequently by many scholars in the ELD field, attempting to control for variables in experimental studies—e.g., learner variables such as birth place, years in the U.S., age of onset of English learning, SES status, formal education in the first language, race and ethnicity, cultural background, among many others that impact second language acquisition—is extremely difficult. When those learner characteristics are not taken into account, then one must interpret findings regarding acquisition patterns and effective ELD strategies with caution. It is important to explicitly recognize that qualitative research that includes rather than ignores the natural complexity of second language learning and teaching is also needed to guide efforts to develop EL students' language acquisition.

Genesis of the Book

Current and former California Department of Education staff guided the development of the book. Collectively, staff represented many decades' experience working with English learners in schools. After many months of brainstorming and outlining the areas to be included in the book, the development team selected the contributing authors. Before agreeing to participate, authors of each chapter were asked to collaborate with a co-author, and to commit to responding with research evidence to questions and concerns culled from contacts with current teachers and administrators of EL students. To further guarantee that the final product would be accessible to practitioners, the authors were invited to review and comment on each other's work, and to participate in several seminars. These activities made it possible for the authors to build on the common knowledge base and to make useful cross-references to other chapters. In this way, the development of the volume served as an important professional development opportunity for CDE staff and for the authors themselves.

While the book was developed in California with a sensibility for the 1.5 million English learners in that state, it is likely to find resonance throughout the U.S., and abroad. The topics of second language development and mastery of academic content by students who are not native speakers of the national language are issues of concern throughout the world as populations migrate due to social, economic, and political forces.

Chapter Commentaries

In Chapter 1, “Research to Guide English Language Development Instruction,” William Saunders and Claude Goldenberg provide an extensive review of experimental and quasi-experimental studies of research on effective ELD instruction. They begin with a very clear distinction between ELD and sheltered content instruction, emphasizing that the central purpose of ELD instruction-- the learning of English--, in contrast to the primary concern of sheltered instruction-- the learning of content. The authors then move to their review of the research, often drawing upon the results of other syntheses or meta-analyses, as well as recent individual studies. Notably, Saunders and Goldenberg are careful to report when the research was undertaken with elementary-age students, with older students, or with university/adults.

Readers of this carefully done review will appreciate the authors’ construction of three categories of findings: (1) ELD instructional guidelines based on strong supporting evidence, (2) guidelines based on emerging hypotheses, and (3) guidelines based on research with non-English Learners but that may be applicable. The authors also note that one limitation of their review is related to their focus on experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Those studies tended to focus on acquisition of discrete language forms, for example, *wh*-questions, and on not on broader aspects of communicative competence that are essential to becoming native-like in the target language.

We personally found the academic forthrightness of these authors refreshing at a time when many textbook companies still claim that their materials are “scientifically-based.” Investigations into those claims usually reveal serious weaknesses in terms of

generalizations to California's public school population, e.g., the studies exclude EL students who, in turn, account for one out of every 4 California students. The Saunders & Goldenberg chapter, in contrast, is an example of careful scholarship seeking links between research and practice. Practitioners and graduate students who have the opportunity to read and discuss this chapter will emerge with: an up-to-date view of the experimental and quasi-experimental research on K-12 ELD instruction; a beginning foundation of evidence-based ELD strategies; and a strong sense of how much more work is needed in this area.

Marguerite Ann Snow and Anne Katz collaborated on Chapter 2 of the volume, "English Language Development: Foundations and Implementation in Kindergarten Through Grade Five." Once again, this chapter has much to offer readers, even those professionals with long careers in the field of second language instruction. For example, the authors provide updated citations on classic areas of second language acquisition research such as L2 accent in older learners, and Merrill Swain's construct of comprehensible output. The bibliography is, again, an exceptionally rich resource for teacher educators and graduate instructors. Because the authors know this field so well, they are able to use research findings to substantiate the case that effective ELD instruction is not simply "good teaching," an oft-heard refrain in both schools and teacher education programs that has not led to change in the under achievement of EL students.

This chapter may have suffered somewhat from being asked to cover too many topics related to K-5 ELD. Just some of those topics include: language proficiency levels of California's state-wide language proficiency test; L2 acquisition processes; standards-based instruction; academic English; ELD instructional strategies application to reading and writing; effective schooling; professional development; and sociocultural considerations in family and community support. The authors employed a series of lists to address several of the topics but the result is that readers may be left without a strong sense of the literature in certain areas. The section on sociocultural factors in L2 learning and teaching is particularly lacking, as it is throughout the entire volume itself, not solely in this

chapter. Knowing that some topics receive brief treatment, however, the careful instructor can still use this chapter to the benefit of students and practitioners, focusing on its strong section on second language acquisition, and using other components as a starting point for deeper study.

In Chapter 3, “English Language Development: Issues and Implementation at Grades 6 through Twelve,” Susana Dutro and Kate Kinsella go a long way towards providing intermediate and secondary educators with specific guidelines for ELD instruction, yet another area in the field that has suffered from scant instructional research. From providing a general blueprint for instruction for adolescent EL students, to describing specific instructional strategies for increasing students’ English language proficiency, this is a resource-rich chapter for classroom practitioners. As one example of the resources, the authors provide several lists of *language functions* (speech acts to accomplish communication tasks in school settings) and *language frames* (sentence prompts, varying in their degree of guidance, to scaffold EL students’ classroom communications). The authors take their readers beyond an introduction to language functions and frames, to a very useful list of language functions associated with certain sentence frames, across beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. For example, with the language function of *contrasting* (expressing how things are different), the beginner might be guided to use the phrase “__er than”; the intermediate student, “in contrast”; and the advanced student, “whereas” or “as opposed to.” As they describe these specifics of instruction, authors Dutro and Kinsella include along the way some important criticisms of traditional approaches used with adolescent EL students such as placing them in scripted reading interventions where they have little to no opportunities for oral language interaction.

Two cautions that we raise regarding the Dutro and Kinsella chapter actually apply to a few other chapters in the volume as well. The authors repeatedly make the case for instruction that focuses on developing EL students’ accurate use of discrete components of language such as grammar and vocabulary. This approach is often-referred to as form-based instruction. It is usually contrasted with instruction that emphasizes students expressing a range of

ideas without requiring accurate usage when they first begin to produce English. The latter is referred to sometimes as meaning-based instruction, or communicative language teaching. Taken to an extreme, form-based instruction and its frequent corollary, deductive instruction, could lead teachers back to language teaching approaches arising from behaviorism and widely used in the 60s and early 70s. These approaches, such as the Audiolingual Method, were often focused on correct usage of language forms disassociated from real communicative intent. Behaviorist approaches have a record of failure in motivating adolescent students to learn foreign or second languages. Of course, communicative-based approaches to language teaching could have a different but equally unsatisfactory record of success, i.e., students' persistent incorrect usage. Our point here is that instructors using this chapter should help readers find the authors' own comments about the importance of providing meaningful instruction, such as when Dutro and Kinsella recommend that ELD topics be based on either student interest, e.g., cyber-bullying, or their current academic studies. Those comments are present in the chapter, but less frequent than the admonition to focus on language forms and functions.

A second caution regarding this chapter relates to what readers could interpret as an assumption that oral language always precedes written language in L2 acquisition. Dutro and Kinsella do not assert that it does, and instead write that oral language "... merits high priority" (p. 193). But again, instructors guiding teachers or students through the processing of this chapter need to make sure that there is not a return to thinking that EL students must first develop listening and speaking skills in the L2 before they are introduced to L2 reading and writing. Qualitative studies of second language acquisition since the 1980's, such as those from highly respected researchers such as Sarah Hudelson, have repeatedly shown that EL students profit from early introduction to reading and writing in the second language, and quickly integrate literacy into their second language repertoire, whether or not it is explicitly taught. These same researchers have also raised the question of which way the arrow points in terms of the established relationship between EL students' oral language development and literacy: Does L2 oral language proficiency always lead to increased L2 literacy, or could

L2 literacy likewise enhance students' oral language use? Again, qualitative studies in L2 development have shown that the latter holds true—another example of the complexity of the both the research and field of instructed ELD.

For Chapter 4, it is difficult to imagine two more expert authors in reporting the experimental and quasi-experimental research on EL literacy instruction than Diane August and Tim Shanahan. August and Shanahan were the editors of an important book stemming from the work of the national literacy panel on minority-language children and youth (August & Shanahan, 2006). Their chapter in this volume is entitled “Effective English Literacy Instruction for English Learners.”

August and Shanahan directly deal with some important complexities of literacy instruction for EL students. For example, they note that reading research shows that EL students struggle with text comprehension, not with word-level skills. The authors also discuss the complex relationship between oral language and reading, that is, that oral English development is not strongly related to phonological skills or spelling, but it is to reading comprehension. As in the book's previous chapters, the authors in this chapter pay attention to the construct of academic English. They make an important point that classrooms require language along the entire conversational-academic language continuum-- not just the formal, academic end--, and that teachers should keep in mind the full range of discourse forms and functions required to be communicatively competent in the L2.

In addressing broad aspects of EL literacy instruction, August and Shanahan cite research that holds that instruction for EL students should be “comprehensive and multidimensional” (p. 227); in other words, EL student profit from enriched instruction rather than reductive approaches. They also mention research on needed adaptations in reading instruction for EL students, for example, modifying phonics instruction to include small-groups and additional instructional time.

We do have a concern with the authors' selection of studies to review in this chapter. Despite their initial statement regarding EL students' difficulty with text

comprehension (p. 212), the authors proceed to highlight studies that show gains on word-level skills, not reading comprehension. Once again, instructors and teacher study groups need to keep in mind that these studies only give us part of the picture of effective literacy instruction for EL students.

Additionally, the authors repeatedly state how the same reading skills and instructional strategies that apply to native speakers of English apply to EL students as well. For example, on page 220, there is a sequence of 8 sentences, and 5 of them express this idea. The top of page 222 returns to this message. The strong version of this message can stand in contrast to the stance of other EL scholars and practitioners, many of them authors in this same volume, who argue that EL students have some unique language and literacy needs, and that “good instruction” (for native English speakers) is not and has not been sufficient to reverse the pattern of EL under achievement. Later in the chapter, the authors bring up the notion of instructional adaptations for EL students (p. 222), but it is given much less attention. It is these kinds of complexities within the book, however, that will make for active thinking and discussion about effective EL instruction, and we hope that instructors will highlight them for their colleagues and students.

For Chapter 5, “Programs and Practices for Effective Content Instruction,” the developers of this book once again selected top scholars in the field, Jana Echevarría and Debra Short. Echevarría and Short are two of the principal creators of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), and an impressive range of professional development materials for teachers working with students at the intermediate levels of English proficiency. Given that various authors in the volume cite the relatively rapid progress of EL students from beginning to intermediate levels of proficiency, but the challenge of moving EL students from intermediate to advanced proficiency, it was important to include this chapter on instruction directed at students at the intermediate stage of English development.

Like the other authors in the volume, Echevarría and Short provide a good discussion of academic language for EL students, a construct that all teachers and administrators who work with EL students are striving to operationalize

and support. After an overview of the SIOP model, the authors review a range of studies that have examined the effectiveness of sheltered content instruction. They also provide some sample lessons. We were surprised, however, to find these lessons challenging to understand, perhaps because of the length constraints of the chapter. We direct readers to the excellent series of materials produced by the SIOP team, e.g., *Making Content Accessible for Elementary English Learners* (Echevarría, Vogt & Short 2010) for clear and extended guidance on sheltering content for EL students in grades K-12.

Given the challenge in interpreting the EL research cited in the beginning chapters, with all the caveats discussed within the volume and in this review, the final chapter in the volume constitutes a welcome, straightforward read. Kathryn Lindholm-Leary and Fred Genessee, again, premier scholars in the area of EL education, co-wrote “Alternative Education Programs for English Learners.” They thoroughly review the research on the effectiveness of bilingual education/dual language programs, that is, programs that include instruction in students’ primary languages in addition to English. The convergence of findings in this area is perhaps further highlighted by the contrasting gaps in the instructed ELD research reviewed in the earlier chapters. While scholars in the field of EL education will not be surprised by this convergence, educators new to the field may be, especially given the vocal opposition in the U.S. to most forms of dual language education in the public schools.

Beyond this chapter’s review of research on the effectiveness of dual language education, instructors using this book for pre- or in-service education may want to point out the authors’ note that dual language programs have explicit objectives related to cultural diversity. Except for a brief mention in the book’s early chapters, and one longer discussion by Echevarría and Short (Chapter 5), cultural diversity is given very short shrift in the book. Of course, no one book on ELD instruction can be expected to cover all important aspects of the field; we simply encourage here that this point be discussed explicitly so that readers know to look elsewhere for extended discussions of the impact of sociocultural factors on English acquisition and instruction.

One final point that is very important in the Lindholm-Leary and Genessee chapter is their discussion of accelerated learning for EL students. If EL students, who are often several years behind on academic performance tests, are to catch up to their grade-level peers over the course of their schooling, then their instruction needs to be powerful enough so that they gain more than one year's growth for each year of schooling. Though the authors in the book's final chapter show how dual language education can be an approach to keep EL students learning academic content while they are acquiring high levels of English proficiency, the challenge for all of us is to take up the mantle of accelerated teaching and learning for all EL students, regardless of their placement in either dual language or all English programs.

Conclusion

Rarely has so much research on ELD instruction been synthesized in a format that is accessible to those who will actually put into practice the instruction of EL students. This volume has done just that. Additionally, the book offers educators the opportunity to read and discuss the thinking from renowned experts in the field of instruction for EL students. Though we have pointed out some cautions about the book's content in this review, we enthusiastically recommend it for educators in pre-service, in-service, and graduate programs.

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About the Reviewers

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Norm Gold is a consultant specializing in systems development for education, with an emphasis on language, learning, and equity. He has over 30 years experience in the field of English learner (EL) schooling, 21 of those with the California Department of Education. His background includes graduate studies in language, linguistics, curriculum and evaluation; extensive on-site monitoring and coaching for schools and school districts; and several years of work and study outside the U.S. Dr. Gold has published in the U.S., and abroad, and is a frequent presenter at state and national conferences.

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