

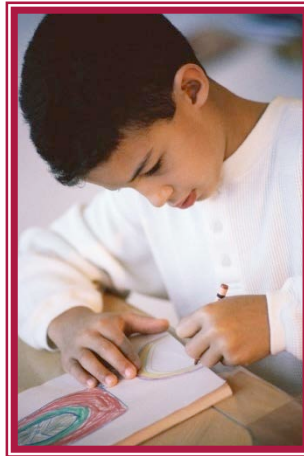
# *Teaching Academic Language to English Language Learners*

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*Mabel O. Rivera, PhD*  
*2008 SECC English Language Learners Institute*  
New Orleans, LA  
November 5, 2008

# *Demographics*



# *Frequent terms used in the literature*

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## ☐ **Language Minority Student (LM)**

- a child who hears and/or speaks a language other than English in the home

## ■ **Limited English Proficient (LEP)**

- ❖ Term used by federal government to identify LM students whose limited command of English prevents independent participation in instruction

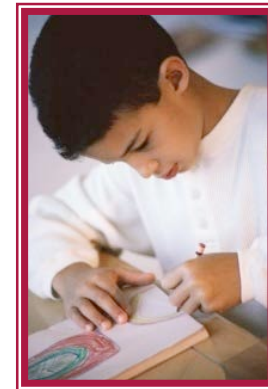
## ■ **English Language Learner (ELL)**

- ❖ an LM student designated locally (i.e., by the state) as limited English Proficient
- ❖ the English Language Learner term is often preferred over Limited English Proficient as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits

# *English Language Learners*

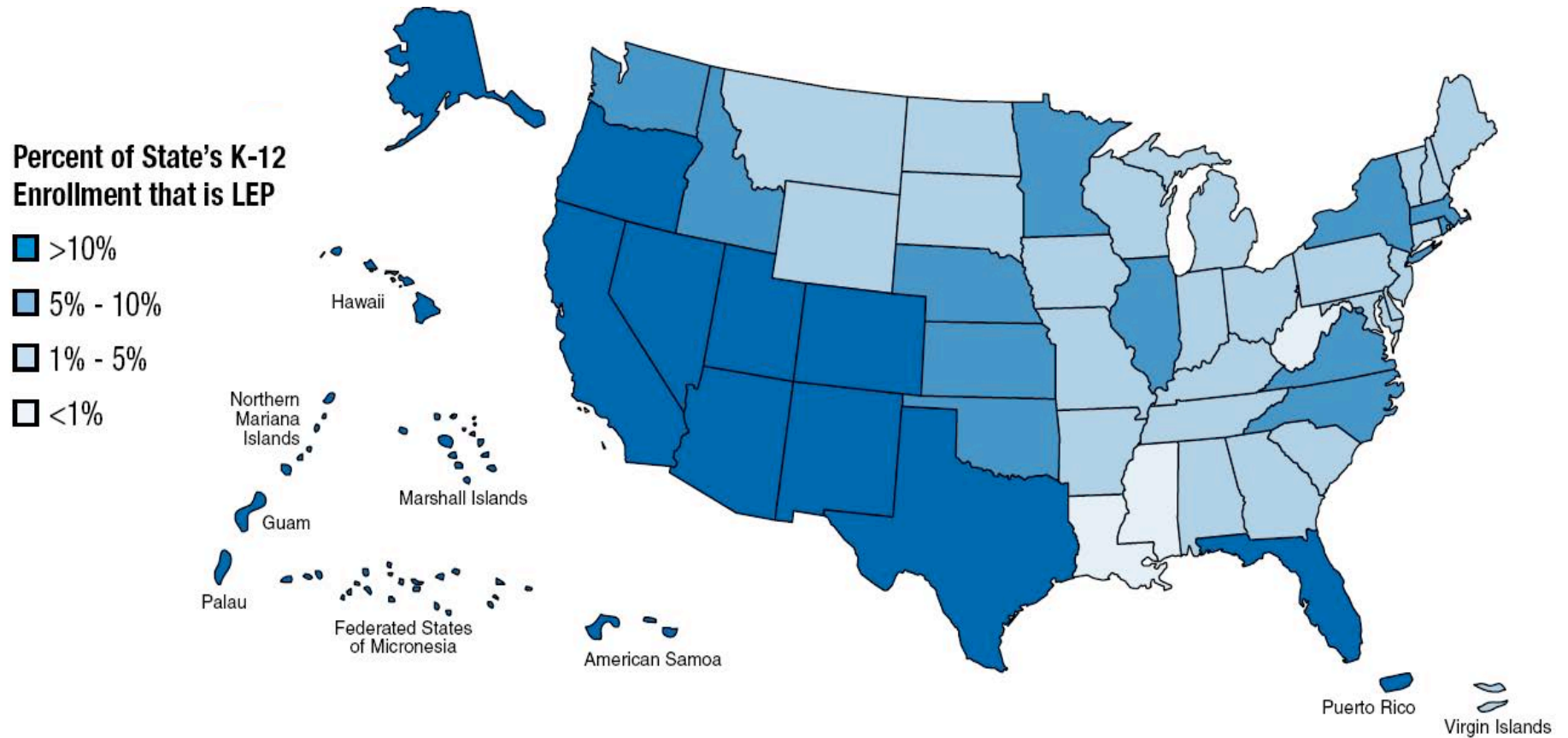
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- ❑ Language-minority (LM) students who have *limited proficiency* in English language use, which directly affects *learning* and *assessment*
- ❑ Group membership is expected to be *temporary*
- ❑ Heterogeneous group



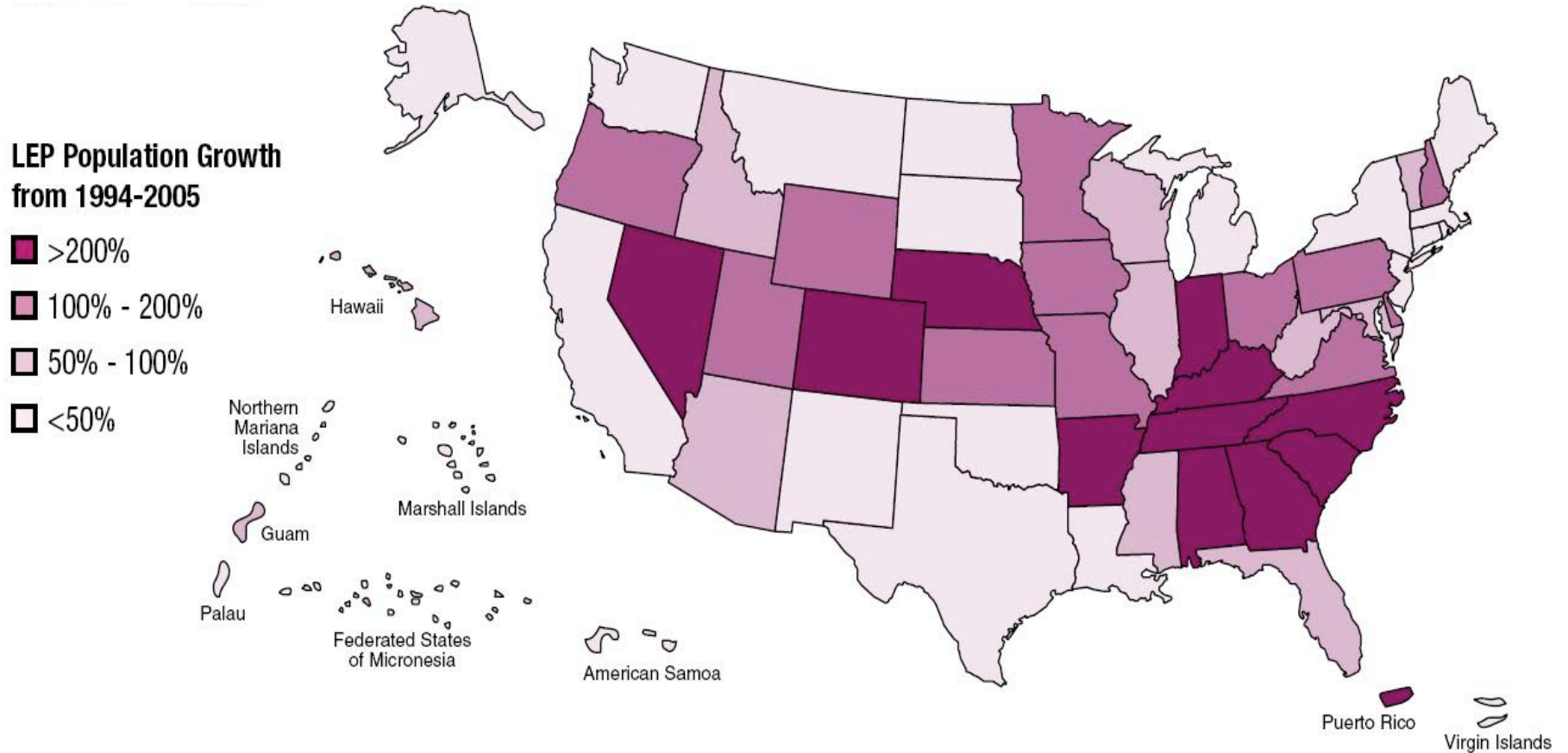


# Density of LEP Students



U.S. Department of Education, NCELA, 2006

# *Growth in LEP Students*



*U.S. Department of Education, NCELA, 2006*

# *Heterogeneous Group*

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## *Language*

- ❑ Over 460 different home languages are represented nationally
- ❑ Top five most common languages:
  - Spanish (79%)
  - Vietnamese (2%)
  - Hmong (1.6%)
  - Cantonese (1%)
  - Korean (1%)
  - Other 455 languages (15.4%)



# *Heterogeneous Group*

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## *Background*

- ❑ Within the ELL population the largest and fastest growing are:
  - Students who immigrated before Kindergarten
  - U.S. born children of immigrants (native born)
    - ❖ (K-8: 76%; 9-12=56%)

*By 2015, second generation children of immigrants are expected to be 30% of the school-aged population.*

# *Who are English Language Learners?*

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Factors that influence preparedness:

Variation in native languages

Level of native language/literacy skills

Level of English language/literacy skills

Degree of previous schooling

Familiarity with school routines

Content area knowledge

Specific subject area knowledge



# *Learning challenges*

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- ❑ ELLs face a unique set of learning challenges:
  - to develop the content-related knowledge and skills defined by state standards
    - ❖ while simultaneously *acquiring a second (or third) language*
    - ❖ for young children, this is a time when their *first language is not fully developed*
  - to demonstrate their learning on an assessment in English

# *ELL Performance Outcomes*

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- ❑ Some states have begun to look at the performance of ELLs on state tests after they have gained proficiency in English
  
- ❑ Although some reclassified ELLs do well, many students who have lost the formal LEP designation continue to struggle with:
  - academic text
  - content-area knowledge
  - oral language skills

*Issue: The current model of LEP designation does not provide support to ELLs who are dismissed.*

# *Instruction*



# *Effective Instruction*

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□ ELLs benefit from explicit instruction in the four linguistic modalities:

- reading
- writing
- listening
- speaking

... across the curriculum and regardless of student proficiency level.

(Genesee et al., 2006; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

# *Steps for Explicit Instruction*

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- Say and write the word
- Provide definitions (with familiar terms)
- Discuss what is known about the word
- Provide examples (and non-examples)
- Engage in extended discussions/activities with the word
- Create sentences with the word

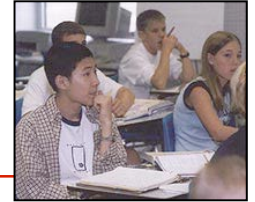
## *When planning for instruction...*

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- Consider the following questions:
  - How long has the student been receiving formal instruction in English?
  - What are the student's specific areas of difficulty or weakness?
  - Does the student have difficulties in most academic areas?
  - Has the student ever received supplemental or targeted instruction in the area of difficulty?
  - How different is the student's native language alphabet from English?
  - Does the student display specific strengths related to achievement in the area(s) of difficulty?



# *Literacy instruction and intervention*



## ❑ Principles to consider when planning literacy instruction for ELLs

 Developmental stages and use of effective practices

 Degree of L1 and L2 transferability

 Need for differentiated instruction

## *Principles to consider when planning instruction*

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**Research-based practices** for teaching literacy skills to native English speakers also benefit young and adolescent ELLs

- Components of effective reading instruction
- Developmentally, cognitive abilities are not more or less typical (unless affected by disability)

## *Principles to consider when planning instruction (cont.)*

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### Transferability between L1 and English

- ELLs **draw** on a host of linguistic, metacognitive, and experiential resources **from their L1** according to their proficiency level
  - Reading skills
    - well developed reading skills transfer from L1 to L2
      - Ex: inference from text, monitoring comprehension
  - Concept knowledge
    - well developed schemas only need a transfer of label from L1 to L2

# *Degree of transferability*

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## □ Depends upon:

- The proficiency of native language skills
- The degree of overlap in the oral and written characteristics of the native and second language
- Type of language (alphabetic, logographic, etc.)
- Similar orthographies
- Overlap in sound-symbol correspondence

# *What is an Alphabetic Language?*

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- A language that uses symbols to represent sounds in speech and print.
  - Examples: English, Spanish, Greek, Russian
  - Alphabetic languages differ in how they present a single sound in print.
- Orthography (defines the set of symbols used and the rules about how to write these symbols)
  - *Transparent*
    - ❖ Languages that allow a few or just one association between symbols and sounds
  - *Opaque*
    - ❖ Languages that allow:
      - many ways to represent the same sound and a given symbol; or
      - combination of symbols to represent sounds

# *Alphabetic Languages*

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- ❑ English is considered to have an *opaque* orthography due to its many combinations of symbols to a particular sound.
  - Ex: *English*:
    - ❖ “f” and “ph” in *fantasy* and *pharmacy*; “ee”, “ei” and “ea” in *need*, *receive*, and *read*
    - ❖ “u” for *umbrella* or *Utah*
- ❑ Whereas Spanish is considered to have a *transparent* orthography because of generally a 1:1 correspondence between letters and sounds.

## *Principles to consider when planning instruction (cont.)*

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Curricular design and delivery for adolescent ELLs must follow the principles of **differentiated instruction**

- ❑ Decisions about how instruction is delivered must be guided by the student's needs
  - ❑ Individual differences have a significant relationship with literacy development
- ❑ Accommodations, modifications, and interventions should be provided as necessary depending on the student's response to instruction
  - ❑ Ex. If L1 is non-Roman alphabetic language; limited vocabulary in L1

# *Academic Language:* *The key to academic success*

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- *Academic language* refers to the vocabulary and semantics used in textbooks
  - fundamental to academic success in all domains
  - a primary source of ELLs' difficulties with academic content across grades
  - often still a challenge *after* students achieve proficiency on state language proficiency tests
  - influences ELLs performance on large-scale assessments

*Proficient use of—and control over—academic language is  
the key to content-area learning*



# *Conversational vs. Academic English*

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- ❑ Good conversational English skills may be accompanied by limited academic language skills in ELLs
  - Language of print is different than conversational language
  - For example:
    - ❖ In studies of ELLs (including those no longer designated as LEP), mean vocabulary scores below the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile are not uncommon
      - This means that students who are considered as no longer needing support instruction in English still lack use of skills that enable them to understand and manipulate content vocabulary.

# *Components of academic language*

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- Vocabulary knowledge
  - **Breadth** – knowing the meanings of many words, including multiple words for the same, or related, concepts
  - **Depth** – knowing multiple meanings, both common and uncommon, for a given word
- Understanding of complex sentence structures and syntax
- Written vocabulary (distinct from oral vocabulary)
- Understanding the structure of argument, academic discourse, and expository texts

## *Why do students fail to acquire academic language?*

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- ❑ Absence of exposure to appropriate books and to people who use academic language
- ❑ Absence of opportunities to learn and use academic language
- ❑ Absence of systematic, explicit instruction including sufficient and supportive feedback

*(Scarcella, 2003)*

# *What does it mean to know a word?*

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## Five Levels of Word Knowledge:

- No knowledge
- General sense
- Narrow-context bound knowledge
- Enough knowledge to understand but not enough to recall and use appropriately
- Rich, decontextualized knowledge of a word's meaning, its relationship to other words, metaphorical use

*Students should leave high school with a rich understanding of about **50,000 words**.*

# *Vocabulary instruction for ELLs*

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Instruction should address learning:

- labels for words
- multiple meanings of words
- word parts
- how words relate to one another
- about words in multiple contexts
- strategies that allow for independent word learning

# *Cohesion Markers*

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- ❑ Reading with understanding requires the ability to construct relationships between clauses and sentences.
- ❑ Difficult to infer meaning of cohesion markers from context
  - e.g., *because, although, however*
- ❑ Especially difficult for children in the upper elementary grades, second language learners, and readers with limited background knowledge about the text

(Lesaux, 2008)

## *Text Cohesion Task*

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Last week I had to go to the hospital \_\_\_\_\_ I stepped on a piece of broken glass.

- A. while
- B. but
- C. because
- D. therefore

(Lesaux, 2008)

# *Cohesion Markers*

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- Different types of relationships between sentences and clauses
  - Tim loves to play with blocks. Also, he likes painting.
  - Lisa was quite happy even though her favorite toy was lost and couldn't be found.

(Lesaux, 2008)



# *Multiple meanings of words*

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## *light*

*Please turn on the light.*

*The box is very light.*

*She has a light touch.*

*The mood was light.*

*She is very light on her feet.*

*Light a fire for warmth.*

*The shirt is light blue.*



Studies of change have traditionally focused on time related differences in mean performance levels across groups. Changes in mean performance, however, often tell us little about individual change. Instead, examination of mean performance over time assumes that individuals are changing at the mean rate of the group.

Consider an example where half of the subjects are growing in a positive and half in a negative direction, with considerable inter-subject variability in growth rates. In this situation, the mean growth rate, and growth in means, might be equal to 0. However, a growth rate of 0 may not describe the true growth rate of even one subject in the data set. This example illustrates that mean growth rates potentially convey very little information about growth in the absence of information concerning individual growth, and inter-individual differences in growth. In fact, in most applied situations, it is more reasonable to expect significant variability in growth patterns and growth rates than it is to expect all subjects to grow at the same rate and in the same way.

One of the country's finest rock climbers is many things: courageous, strong, driven, dutiful, and blind. By the time Erik Weihenmayer was 12 years old, the eyesight that had been deserting him was nearly gone. This didn't slow Erik down. "I'd built a plywood ramp in our driveway to jump my bike over," he remembers. "I'd fly ten feet through the air and bounce when I landed. It was great." One day, he couldn't see well enough to navigate the ramp and fell off its side. "I got all cut up on these rocks in our driveway." But his vaulting days were not over. The next day he found the ramp painted a fluorescent orange. His father, Ed, had done the painting—yet another encouragement for his son to persevere.

For Ed, it wasn't easy seeing his son scrape his shins on life's obstacles. Once, Ed watched as Erik ran that bike into a parked car. The boy got up, dusted himself off and pedaled home. Ed never mentioned the incident.

Only by observing could Ed figure out ways to help. He encouraged Erik to try out for his Connecticut high school's wrestling team, and Erik became a champion. After Erik lost his sight completely, Ed enrolled the boy in the outdoors program at the Carroll Center for the Blind in Massachusetts, and soon Erik was climbing New Hampshire's rock faces. He had found a calling.

Erik became an intrepid adventurer and a superb rock climber. He hiked all over the world, often with his father in attendance. On June 27, 1995, Erik conquered Alaska's 20,320-foot Mount McKinley.

# *Which words should we teach?*

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- Tier framework (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)
  - **Tier 1** – basic words (*bed, up, boy, run*)
  - **Tier 2** – high frequency for mature language users (*fertilization, compost, logistics*)
  - **Tier 3** – low frequency or apply to specific domains (*isotope, peninsula, legislate*)

# *Word selection process*

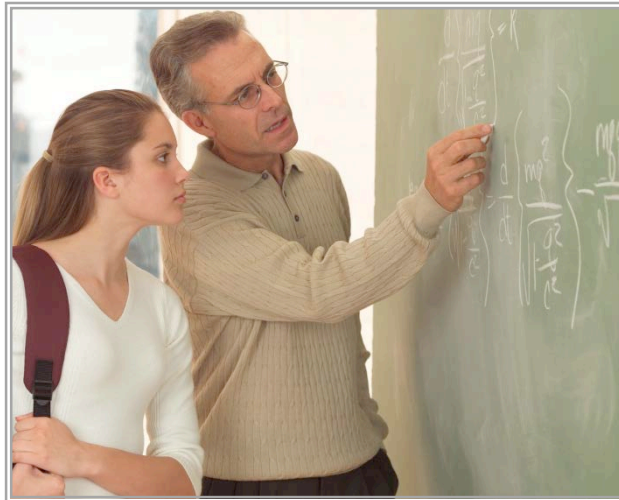
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## Recommended sequence

- List all the words that have meanings that are likely to be unfamiliar to your students
- Select words that can be categorized as Tier 2 words
- Select Tier 2 words that are most necessary for comprehension
- Are there other words needed for comprehension?

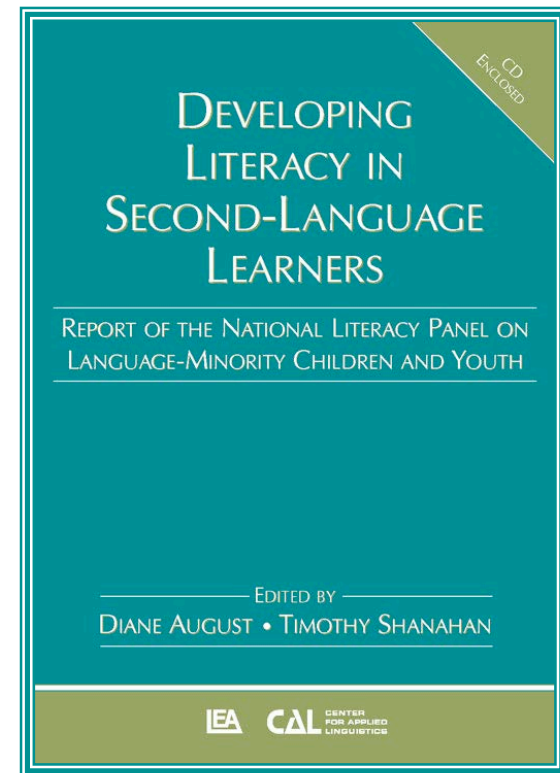
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# *Research*



## *Recent syntheses*

- ❑ August, D.L., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in a second language: Report of the National Literacy Panel.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



*Focus: Development of literacy in language-minority students*

# *Research on Instruction and Intervention for ELLs*

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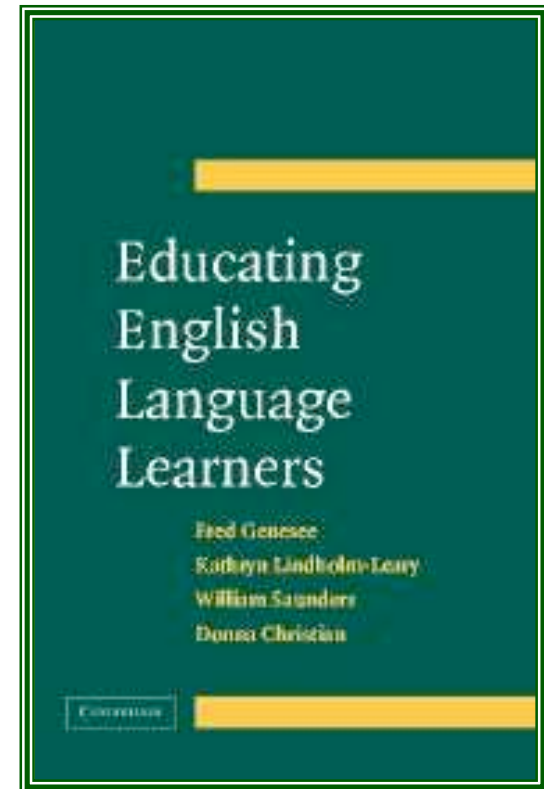
- ❑ Small body of literature compared to research with monolinguals  
over 400 (NRP) vs. 18 (NLP)
- ❑ Gaps in our knowledge base for instruction on ELLs



## *Recent syntheses*

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- ❑ Genessee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W. M., & Christian, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.



*Focus: oral language, literacy, and academic development in ELLs*

## *Recent syntheses (cont.)*

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- ❑ Short, D. J., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the Work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

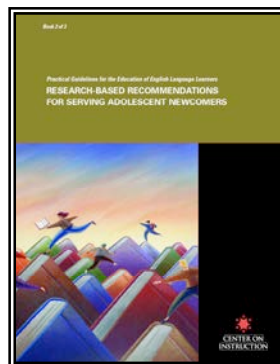


*Focus: language and literacy in adolescent ELLs*

# *Practical Guidelines for the Education of English Language Learners*

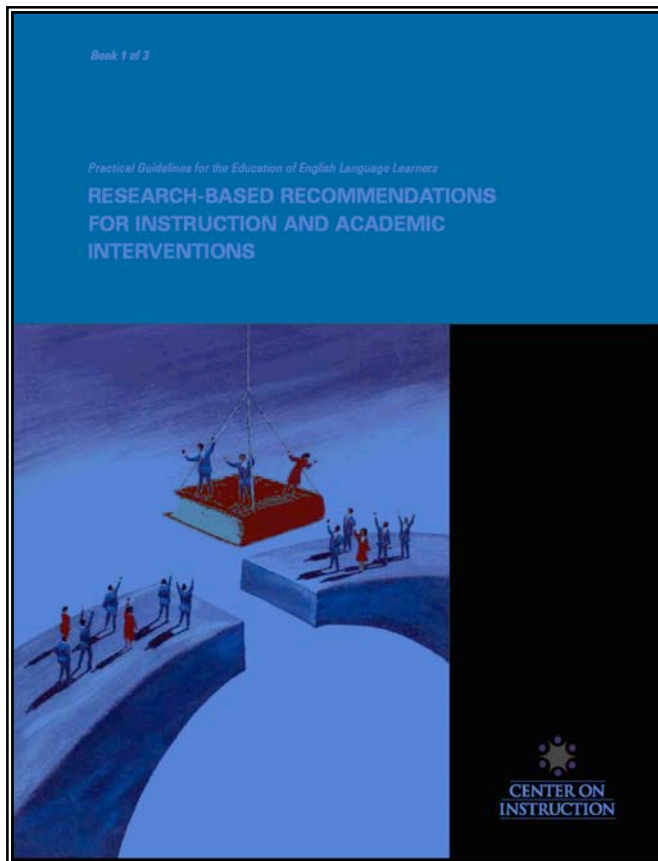
## □ Book series

- *Research-based Recommendations for Instruction and Academic Interventions*
- *Research-based Recommendations for Serving Adolescent Newcomers*
- *Research-based Recommendations for the Use of Accommodations in Large-scale Assessments*



# *Book 1: Instruction and Intervention*

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- Foreword
- Overview
- Reading
  - Conceptual Framework
  - Recommendations
- Mathematics
  - Conceptual Framework
  - Considerations

Research-Based Recommendations for

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*Reading Instruction and  
Intervention*



## *Recommendation #1:*

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ELLs need early, explicit, and intensive instruction in *phonological awareness* and *phonics* in order to build decoding skills

## *Recommendation #1 (cont'd)*

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Early, explicit, and intensive instruction in *phonological awareness* and *phonics*:

- Do not wait until oral language proficiency is at the same level as native peers; start early
- Need a close match between the child's source of difficulty and the code-based intervention
- PA and Ph are highly correlated across alphabetic languages (i.e., correlations above .9)

## *Supporting word reading acquisition*

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- ❑ Formats for explicit, intensive, and systematic instruction and intervention in phonological awareness and phonics for ELLs
  - **Class-wide instruction** to prevent the majority of difficulties
  - **Supplemental**, small group intervention for at-risk learners experiencing difficulties
  - **Intensive**, 1:1 remedial support for children with sustained difficulties



## *Recommendation #2:*

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K-12 classrooms across the nation  
must increase opportunities for ELLs  
to develop *sophisticated vocabulary*  
*knowledge*

# *Effective Vocabulary Instruction*

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- ❑ *Explicit* – direct instruction of meaning along with word-learning strategies;
- ❑ *Systematic* – teaching words in a logical order of difficulty and relevance;
- ❑ *Extensive* – incorporating vocabulary across the curriculum; and
- ❑ *Intensive* – teaching multiple meanings of words, relations to other words, and different forms of words

## *Recommendation #3:*

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Reading instruction in K-12 classrooms must equip ELLs with strategies and knowledge to *comprehend* and *analyze* challenging narrative and expository texts

# *Effective comprehension instruction*

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- Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade
  - Instruction must include a focus on books that are **read aloud and discussed**
    - ❖ Provides opportunities for ELLs to develop and extend language through structured talk
    - ❖ Use modeling and explicit comprehension strategies
      - Predicting, monitoring, and summarizing
- Upper elementary grades
  - Focus on teaching **academic language and sentence structure**
- Middle and High School grades
  - Increase variety of more sophisticated **content texts** with an emphasis on strategies for comprehension and word learning

## *Effective Comprehension Instruction*

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- ❑ Teaching students to **make predictions** consciously *before* reading
- ❑ Teaching students to **monitor their understanding** and **ask questions** *during* reading
- ❑ Teaching students to **summarize** what they have read *after* the reading activity

## *Recommendation #4:*

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Instruction and intervention to promote ELLs' *reading fluency* must focus on vocabulary development and increased exposure to print

# *Small group oral reading*

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- Students read aloud, stumble, get corrective feedback, keep going
- Practice reading with appropriate phrasing and expression, and opportunity to process for meaning and understanding
  - ❖ Discuss comprehension in a group
- Generally used today in early elementary special ed., but beneficial for ELLs through upper grades

# *Repeated Reading Interventions*

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- ❑ Empirically-based intervention where students practice orally reading instructional level expository or narrative passages
  - Students re-read the passage until they
    - ❖ meet their oral reading fluency goal,
    - ❖ read the passage with very few errors, and
    - ❖ read with acceptable phrasing and expression
  - ELLs benefit from *oral discussions*
    - ❖ Pre-teach vocabulary words
    - ❖ Teacher leads the discussion about words, meaning



## *Recommendation #5:*

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*ELLs need significant opportunities to engage in structured, academic talk across all K-12 classrooms*

## *Recommendation #5: (cont.)*

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- ❑ **ELLs often lack the academic language necessary for comprehending and analyzing text**
  - Many ELLs who struggle academically have well-developed conversational English skills
  - Challenging academic language appears in higher grades' reading materials
    - ❖ Often long after ELLs have stopped receiving specialized language support

## *Recommendation #6:*

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Independent reading is only beneficial when:

1. it is *structured* and *purposeful*,
2. there is a good *reader-text match*

# *Independent Reading*

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A good reader-text match is critical:

- Too many unfamiliar words is not a useful way to build vocabulary or comprehension
- A good match requires 90-95% accuracy

# *Planning Independent Reading*

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- Is there a match between the reader's ability and the text characteristics?  
Is the reader able to read the text with 90% accuracy?
- Is there a ratio of *known* to *unknown* words that supports vocabulary knowledge development during independent reading?
- Is there a relationship between the content of the book(s) for independent reading and the content and material being covered in the class?
- Is there a follow-up activity or discussion planned to be held after independent reading?
- Do the teacher and the EL learner have a shared understanding of the purpose or goal that guides that particular session of independent reading?

# *Support for teaching academic language*

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- What are the barriers that would limit the use of academic language in classrooms?
- What are teachers in the states you serve doing to implement the use of academic language?
- How can policymakers encourage and support the consistent use of academic language throughout districts and the state?
- Which standards in your state may be used to support the use of academic language?

# *Key sources of information*

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- ❑ August, D. L., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in a second language: Report of the National Literacy Panel*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- ❑ Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.
- ❑ Genessee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W. M., & Christian, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- ❑ Scarcella, R. (2003) *Academic English: A Conceptual Framework*. UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute Technical Report 2003-1. <http://lmri.ucsb.edu>
- ❑ Short, D. J., & Boyson, B.A. (2004). *Creating Access: Language and Academic Programs for Secondary School Newcomers*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- ❑ Short, D. J., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the Work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

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Don't count your days...

*... make your days count!*







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