

Title: Summary of information on academic language and vocabulary instruction for English language learners

Date: May 2014

Question: >> What does current research say about academic language and vocabulary instruction for English Language Learner (ELL) students?

Response:

This memo includes reports and articles, as well as organizations to consult, about academic language and vocabulary instruction for English language learner (ELL) students.

- Citations include a link to a free online version, when available.
- Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the article.

We have not done an evaluation of these resources, but rather provide them for your information only.

Reports and Articles

Aguirre-Munoz, Z., & Amabisca, A. (2010). Defining opportunity to learn for English language learners: Linguistic and cultural dimensions of ELLs' instructional contexts. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 15(3), 259–278.

Abstract: Past research demonstrates the critical role of the context of learning in the achievement of students. This body of work justifies research and development of more contextualized opportunity to learn (OTL) models. We expound on an OTL framework that represents contextual features that can enrich or constrain opportunities for English language learners (ELLs). Specifically, we aim to broaden the conception of OTL beyond exposure to content and begin to define the types of affordances ELLs should be provided to achieve content standards. A central argument is the integration of academic language instruction as an OTL component for examining ELL achievement.

August, D., Branum-Martin, L., Cardenas-Hagan, E., & Francis, D. (2009). The impact of an instructional intervention on the science and language learning of middle grade English language learners. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 2(4), 345–376.

Abstract: The goal of this study was to assess the effectiveness of an intervention—Quality English and Science Teaching (QuEST)—designed to develop the science knowledge and academic language of middle grades English language learners studying science in their second language and their English-proficient classmates. Ten sixth-grade science teachers in 5 middle schools in a large south Texas district participated in the study. For each teacher, 2 sections were randomly assigned to the intervention, Project QuEST, and 2 sections were randomly assigned to the district curriculum. The sample of students included English language learners, former English language learners, and fluent English-speaking students. Treatment effects were tested separately for science knowledge and vocabulary using a 3-level multilevel analysis of covariance (students nested within section, sections nested within teacher, and teacher) with the analogous pretest serving as the covariate. Analyses included fixed effects of treatment assignment and the covariate. Treatment effects were tested at the level of the section. Results indicated that posttest differences favoring the treatment group sections were statistically significant for both science knowledge and vocabulary.

August, D., Carlo, M., Dressler, M., & Snow, C. (2005). The critical role of vocabulary development for English language learners. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 20 (1), 50–57. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://www.pebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/August-Critical-Role-Vocab-for-ELL-2005.pdf>

Abstract: English language learners (ELLs) who experience slow vocabulary development are less able to comprehend text at grade level than their English-only peers. Such students are likely to perform poorly on assessments in these areas and are at risk of being diagnosed as learning disabled. In this article, we review the research on methods to develop the vocabulary knowledge of ELLs and present lessons learned from the research concerning effective instructional practices for ELLs. The review suggests that several strategies are especially valuable for ELLs, including taking advantage of students' first language if the language shares cognates with English; ensuring that ELLs know the meaning of basic words, and providing sufficient review and reinforcement. Finally, we discuss challenges in designing effective vocabulary instruction for ELLs. Important issues are determining which words to teach, taking into account the large deficits in second-language vocabulary of ELLs, and working with the limited time that is typically available for direct instruction in vocabulary.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in a second language: Report of the National Literacy Panel*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Executive summary retrieved on April 29, 2014, from http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/Executive_Summary.pdf

Excerpt: The National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth systematically and rigorously examined the research on acquiring literacy in a second language. Through this process, the panel learned what is known—and what is not yet known—about the complex process of learning to read and write in a second language. Policymakers and educators can use the panel's findings to benchmark their own practices and infuse research-based instruction into literacy programs for language-minority students. Researchers can enrich this knowledge base by focusing on the specific gaps in our knowledge, which in the future will enable U.S. schools to better educate English-language learners in English literacy.

Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M. J., Linan-Thompson, S., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf

Abstract: This practice guide provides four recommendations that address what works for English learners during reading and content area instruction. Each recommendation includes extensive examples of activities that can be used to support students as they build the language and literacy skills needed to be successful in school. The recommendations also summarize and rate supporting evidence. This guide is geared toward teachers, administrators, and other educators who want to improve instruction in academic content and literacy for English learners in elementary and middle school.

Collier, L. (2008). *The importance of academic language for English language learners*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://www.pebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/Academic-for-ELL-Collier-2008.pdf>

Excerpt: While native speakers may pick up academic language and its concepts with relative ease as they advance in school, the task is more difficult for ELLs. Some come to the U.S. at high-school age, meaning a huge game of catch-up must be played—especially since research shows that learning academic language can take four to seven years. Others may be second- or even third-generation immigrants who enter the school system in kindergarten, but never receive enough training in either their heritage language or English to be able to grasp academic language, falling behind more and more each year.

Crevecoeur, Y., Coyne, M., & McCoach, D. (2014). English language learners and English-only learners' response to direct vocabulary instruction. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 30(1), 51–78.

Abstract: We examined data from an 18-week kindergarten vocabulary intervention study to determine whether treatment outcomes had differential effects that favored English language learners (ELLs) or English-only learners (EOLs) and whether the relationship between initial English general receptive vocabulary knowledge and response to vocabulary intervention differed as a function of language status. Participants from 3 northeastern U.S. elementary schools within 3 separate school districts were assigned to either a treatment condition (ELLs, $n = 31$; EOLs, $n = 49$) or no-treatment condition (ELLs, $n = 17$; EOLs, $n = 25$). Trained interventionists delivered direct vocabulary instruction using 1 storybook twice per week in 20- to 25-min sessions. Results from 2×2 analyses of variance indicated that participants performed better if they were (a) in the treatment condition rather than the no-treatment condition and (b) categorized as an EOL rather than an ELL with evidence of an interaction effect on a target-word knowledge measure (TWKM). Regression analyses indicated that (a) the centered pretest Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test–III (PPVT–III) accounted for a statistically significant proportion of the variance in posttest measures for treatment participants and (b) language status did not explain any additional variance in posttest measures. Each of the 3 mediation models for the dependent measures TWKM, PPVT–III, and listening comprehension, using the independent variable language status and the mediating variable centered pretest PPVT–III, resulted in full mediation. Findings indicate that treatment ELLs and treatment EOLs would most likely perform equally well on posttest target- word and general receptive vocabulary measures if they had similar initial English general receptive vocabulary knowledge.

Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions. Portsmouth, NH: Center on Instruction. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL1-Interventions.pdf>

Excerpt: This document is organized in two sections: 1) instruction and intervention in reading for ELLs, and 2) instruction and intervention in mathematics for ELLs. Within each of these sections, the guiding conceptual framework is presented first, followed by a set of recommendations for policymakers, administrators, and teachers in K–12 settings who seek to make informed decisions about instruction and academic interventions for ELLs.

Freeman, Y., & Freeman, D. (2009). *Academic language for English language learners and struggling readers: How to help students succeed across content areas*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Book summary retrieved on April 29, 2014, from http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources%5CE01136%5Cnew_Academ_Lang_sample.pdf

Excerpt: While many educators are concerned about their students' lack of academic language, few could define academic language, identify which students have it and which do not, or give specific ideas about how to help students develop academic language. In this book we attempt to bring together information from researchers, teacher educators, linguists, and practitioners in order to clarify some of the confusions about academic language and provide suggestions for how to help ELLs and struggling readers succeed in school. In the seven chapters of this book, we talk about the students who need academic language, what it is, when and where it is used, the problems that textbooks cause, the different aspects of academic language, how to write objectives to teach academic language, and how to engage students in effective instruction to build academic language proficiency.

Gersten, R., Baker, S., Shanahan, T., Linan-Thompson, S., Collins, P., & Scarcella, R. (2007). *Effective literacy and English language instruction for English learners in the elementary grades: A practice guide* (NCEE 2007-4011). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/20074011.pdf

Abstract: The target audience for this guide is a broad spectrum of school practitioners such as administrators, curriculum specialists, coaches, staff development specialists and teachers who face the challenge of providing effective literacy instruction for English language learners in the elementary grades. The guide also aims to reach district-level administrators who develop practice and policy options for their schools. [REL West note: See Recommendation 3 (Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction), beginning on page 19, and Recommendation 4 (Develop academic English) beginning on page 23.]

Maxwell-Jolly, J., Gándara, P., & Méndez Benavídez, L. (2007). *Promoting academic literacy among secondary English language learners: A synthesis of research and practice*. UC Berkeley: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m14j4vp#>

Abstract: This report is a synthesis of research, challenges, and best practices in the education of secondary English learners (ELs). It incorporates a summary of three days of presentations and discussions by key national experts in the spring of 2005, observations and findings from our own research, and key issues from the research literature. The report provides an overview of the most

pressing issues facing schools in the instruction of secondary English learners. It also includes the perspectives of people in the schools and in the classrooms who are attempting to meet these students' needs, as well as individuals who have been grappling with the challenges from the world of policy. The report concludes with our recommendations for California education policy informed by all of the above: the challenges that secondary EL students and teachers face, the needs and limitations of teachers and schools in the state, and the best practices cited by both researchers and practitioners. Many recommendations were suggested. We have, however, attempted to highlight just a few that we consider to be the most immediately actionable.

National Council of Teachers of English. (2013). *The NCTE position paper on the role of English teachers in educating English language learners (ELLs)*. Urbana, IL: Author. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teacherseducatingell>

Excerpt: This position paper is designed to address the knowledge and skills mainstream teachers need to have in order to develop effective curricula that engage English language learners, develop their academic skills, and help them negotiate their identities as bilingual learners. More specifically, this paper addresses the language and literacy needs of these learners as they participate and learn in English-medium classes. NCTE has made clear bilingual students' right to maintain their native languages (see "On Affirming the CCCC 'Students' Right to Their Own Language" 2003). Thus, this paper addresses ways teachers can help these students develop English as well as ways they can support their students' bilingualism. In the United States bilingual learners, more commonly referred to as English language learners, are defined as students who know a language other than English and are learning English. Students' abilities range from being non-English speakers to being fully proficient. The recommendations in this paper apply to all of them.

Scarcella, R. (2003). *Accelerating academic English: A focus on the English learner*. Oakland, CA: Regents of the University of California. Available for purchase from <http://www.amazon.com/Accelerating-Academic-English-Focus-Learner/dp/B000B61CZA>

Book excerpt: In addressing key research findings in socio-linguistics, cognitive studies, language acquisition, literacy and education, this book is intended for teachers of English learners (ELs). Although primarily written for intermediate, secondary, and college teachers, the book also includes practical suggestions for teaching academic English in elementary schools. Academic English is the variety of English used in academic settings. It is used by native English speakers and by ELs with advanced proficiency in English literacy. Over the past twenty years or so, little attention has been given to teaching academic English. The assumption has largely been that all students, including ELs, can learn English on their own without instruction.

Short, D., & 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. Retrieved on May 1, 2014, from <http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/PDF/DoubletheWork.pdf>

Excerpt: To bring the issues and challenges confronting adolescent ELLs into focus, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), working on behalf of Carnegie Corporation of New York, convened a panel of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working in the field to offer their expertise. The panel agreed to a focus on academic literacy, that which is most crucial for success in school... During the course of the project, CAL researchers reviewed the literature on adolescent ELL literacy and conducted site visits to three promising programs. In addition, a sub-study was commissioned from researchers at the Migration Policy Institute to collect and analyze valuable information on the

demographic trends and academic achievement of ELLs. At the conclusion of the process, the panel recommended an array of different strategies for surmounting the challenges by making changes in day-to-day teaching practices, professional training, research, and educational policy. As a result, each “challenge” section in the body of this report is followed by an extensive “potential solutions” discussion. With the small but growing research base on the best practices for developing adolescent ELL literacy becoming more widely disseminated through increased dialogue among educators, researchers, and policymakers, the right strategies for helping these students attain their full potential are being determined.

Short, D., Fidelman, C., & Louguit, M. (2012). Developing academic language in English language learners through Sheltered Instruction. *TESOLQUARTERLY*, 46(2), 334–361. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolc/downloads/TQ_vol46-2_shortfidelmanlouguit.pdf

Abstract: This article describes a study examining the effects of Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model instruction on the academic language performance of middle and high school English language learners. The SIOP model is an approach for teaching content curriculum to students learning through a new language. Teachers employ techniques that make the content concepts accessible and also develop students’ skills in the new language. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research was conducted in content area and English as a second language classes in two districts in northern New Jersey over 2 years. The analysis presents student achievement data from state-mandated language proficiency tests in the final year of the intervention, after most of the treatment teachers had completed their professional development in the SIOP model. There were statistically significant differences in the average mean scores in favor of the treatment student group on Writing, Oral Language, and Total English scores of the IDEA Language Proficiency Tests with small to medium effect sizes. The results from this study show that the SIOP model offers a promising approach to professional development that can improve the quality of instruction to English language learners and increase their English language achievement.

Silva, C., Weinburgh, M., Malloy, R., Smith, K., & Marshall, J. (2012). Toward integration: An instructional model of science and academic language. *Childhood Education*, 88(2), 91–95.

Abstract: In this article, the authors outline an instructional model that can be used to optimize science and language learning in the classroom. The authors have developed the 5R instructional model (Weinburgh & Silva, 2010) to support teachers as they integrate academic language into content instruction. The model combines five strategies already familiar to teachers helping English language learners (ELLs) understand and begin to use academic language. With thoughtful planning, four of the strategies—“replace,” “reveal,” “repeat,” and “reposition”—are utilized by the teacher as opportunities emerge within the lesson, and are context-anchored. The fifth strategy—“reload”—can be used by teachers to reinforce language introduced in previous lessons, and is context reflective. Having used the 5R Instructional Model with ELL students, the authors believe that it is a powerful teaching tool that can benefit not only ELLs but all students. They believe using this model helps students develop the academic and transitional language necessary to engage in the specialist discourse of the sciences.

Taboada, A., & Rutherford, V. (2011). Developing reading comprehension and academic vocabulary for English language learners through science content: A formative experiment. *Reading Psychology*, 32(2), 113–157.

Abstract: This formative experiment explored the extent to which two instructional frameworks that varied in the explicitness of academic vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategy

instruction, and supports for student autonomy influenced reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, perceptions of autonomy supports, and reading engagement in fourth-grade English-language learners (ELLs). In the contextualized vocabulary instruction (CVI) framework, four reading comprehension strategies were integrated with two autonomy-supportive (motivation) practices and implicit instruction of academic science vocabulary. In the intensified vocabulary instruction (IVI) framework, students experienced explicit instruction of academic science vocabulary in relation to reading, without explicit strategy instruction or attention to autonomy supports. Results indicated that the IVI framework increased students' academic vocabulary even 3 weeks after the intervention was over, whereas CVI benefited students' reading comprehension as well as their perceptions of autonomous learning in the classroom. Both quantitative and qualitative results are interpreted under the lens of formative experiments.

Wessels, S. (2011). Promoting vocabulary learning for English learners. *The Reading Teacher: A Journal of Research-Based Classroom Practice*, 65(1), 46–50. Retrieved on April 29, 2014, from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1145&context=teachlearnfacpub>

Abstract: Vocabulary knowledge, which is key to the reading comprehension of English learners (ELs), must be a focus for every teacher in today's increasingly diverse schools, including those in the mainstream classroom. This article strives to increase awareness of the five characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction as well as demonstrate how such characteristics can be variously emphasized in the before-, during-, and after-reading phases of the instructional process. Research-based strategies can provide teachers and ELs with a gateway to increased vocabulary learning. One such strategy, the Vocabulary Quilt, is explored in depth to illustrate how teachers can use a single strategy throughout the lesson to access students' background knowledge, support students in making critical content connections, and guide students to higher levels of word knowledge.

Organizations to Consult

The Academic Language Development Network

<http://aldnetwork.org>

From the website: The Academic Language Development Network (ALD Network) is a collaborative project focused on the academic success of all students who need to improve their abilities to use language in school. The Network focuses on research-based teaching and assessment practices for developing the complex academic language, literacy, and thinking skills that support the learning of the Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, ELD, and other new standards. One of the main purposes of this network is to share ongoing research and effective professional development resources for building system-wide capacity to meet the instructional needs of academic English learners.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)

<http://www.cal.org/create/index.html>

From the website: CAL's experienced staff of researchers and educators conduct research, design and develop instructional materials and language tests, provide technical assistance and professional development, conduct needs assessments and program evaluations, and disseminate information and resources related to language and culture.

Two relevant resources are available for purchase:

- *Developing Academic Literacy and Language in the Content Areas*: Based on a 21st century approach to academic literacy that is aligned with today's rigorous standards, this resource provides research-based strategies and practical, hands-on tools to help educators develop effective classroom activities. *Developing Academic Literacy and Language in the Content Areas* focuses on helping English learners develop academic literacy and language skills while also developing content knowledge (<http://www.cal.org/resources/pubs/developing-academic-literacy-and-language-in-the-content-areas.html>).
- *Listening and Speaking: Oral Language and Vocabulary Development for English Language Learners*: This professional development resource package was created for use in CAL's *Hot Topics in ELL Education* workshops and institutes. CAL is making the professional development workbook and companion video available for sale to make these resources available as knowledge building, practical tools for educators. These resources provide a rich collection of information, activities, and strategies for teachers, schools, districts, principals, and administrators seeking to learn more about these critical topics (<http://www.cal.org/resources/pubs/listening-and-speaking.html>).

The Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE)

<http://www.cal.org/create/index.html>

From the website: CREATE had a focused program of research designed to address the critical challenge of improving educational outcomes of English learners in content area classrooms by

- enhancing the empirical research base for readers in Grades 4–8,
- developing and testing effective interventions that promote content knowledge and language and literacy development simultaneously,
- investigating the features of instruction and scaffolds that facilitate learning for English learners in content area classrooms (e.g., oral language development, shared interactive reading, direct vocabulary instruction, traditional text v. modified text),
- designing, testing, and delivering professional development that ensures that teachers implement effective classroom practices to help English learners achieve high standards, and
- implementing a comprehensive school-wide intervention delivering curricula, professional development, and coaching sessions for content area teachers.

Center on Instruction–English Language Learning page

<http://www.centeroninstruction.org/topic.cfm?k=ELL>

From the website: The Center on Instruction offers materials and resources for English Language Learners that help educators improve academic outcomes for diverse learners and those diverse learners with learning disabilities.

Colorín Colorado—Academic Language for English Language Learners page

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/academic/>

From the website: Colorín Colorado is a free web-based service that provides information, activities and advice for educators and Spanish-speaking families of English language learners (ELLs). This resource section features information about academic language instruction for English language learners and provides a number of strategies and suggestions for ESL, content-area, and classroom

educators. [See also Vocabulary Development page:
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/teaching/vocabulary/>]

**National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction
Educational Programs (NCELA)**

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>

From the website: Authorized under Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA) supports the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA) in its mission to respond to Title III educational needs, and implement NCLB as it applies to English language learners (ELLs). [See publications page at <http://www.ncela.us/publications.>]

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“English language learners” OR “English learners” AND “vocabulary instruction” OR “academic language instruction”

Search of Databases

ERIC, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar

Additional Organizations/Websites Searched

The Academic Language Development Network, Center for Applied Linguistics, Center on Instruction, CREATE, Colorín Colorado, National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition in the Classroom

Criteria for Inclusion

In general, when REL West staff review resources, we consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.