English Language Development in K-12 Settings: Principles, Cautions, and Effective Models

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In response to *No Child Left Behind* provisions, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) adopted the new English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards in 2004. Now an integral part of the Oregon content standards for K-12 grades, the ELP standards provide teachers with a blueprint of the forms and functions of English which ELL students (English Language Learners) are expected to master at different levels of language proficiency in order to make continued progress in their academic endeavors.

As a complement to the ELP standards, ODE launched in 2006 the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) to measure the proficiency levels that students have attained in English. The ELPA exam assesses proficiency in the four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), focusing on grammatical competencies (i.e., vocabulary, syntax, and morphology), ideational functions (e.g., descriptions, comparisons) and manipulative functions (e.g., requesting, giving instructions) (See Oregon Department of Education, n.d.).

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In an outgrowth of these actions, ODE has recently placed a strong emphasis on the need to provide ELL students in K-12 schools with explicit instruction on the forms and functions of the English language. When monitoring school districts' English Language Learner programs, ODE is now requiring that districts deliver a distinct K-12 curriculum for English language development (ELD) which is aligned with the new ELP standards, accompanied by effective instructional materials, and taught by qualified teachers. Offering separate ELD classes for groups that are developmentally and linguistically leveled, although not mandated, makes it easier for districts to demonstrate that focused language instruction is happening uniformly across schools (Fielding, 2007).

As ESOL teacher educators, we welcome ODE's new efforts. Oregon schools have recently seen a tremendous growth in ELL enrollment – an increase of more than 200% between 1993-94 and 2003-04 (NCELA, 2006) – but the needs of these students have not been adequately met. We are seeing more and more students who are identified as LEP (Limited English Proficient) when entering kindergarten, and who are still classified as LEP when they leave school 13 years later (Fillmore & Snow, 2000). There is an urgent need to reverse this trend, and ODE is doing its part to ensure that all students in Oregon achieve the language proficiency necessary to succeed in their academic and professional lives.

As a result of these state mandates, Oregon districts have been restructuring their programs to include ELD classes and have been investing in professional development on ELD instruction for their teachers. There is considerable controversy about offering ELD in separate classes, typically in a pull-out model, versus integrating ELD instruction within the mainstream classroom. We agree that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to ELD instruction. However, in this paper we would like to shift the discussion from programmatic concerns and focus on the components of effective ELD instruction that must be present to ensure student success.

We center our discussion around three principles of second language teaching and learning. It is

our hope that these principles will serve as guidelines to ensure quality ELD instruction, regardless of whether it is delivered as a separate subject or integrated within a content-based curriculum. We also discuss cautions to consider in implementing ELD pedagogy so that teachers do not succumb to a reductionist curriculum that emphasizes discrete knowledge of grammatical items. We end our paper by providing a framework for ELD lesson planning that thoughtfully integrates language objectives within rich academic content.

Principles of Second Language Teaching & Learning

1. ELD instruction should focus mainly on meaning, but also on language form.

Second language teaching methodologies have historically alternated between two types of approaches: "*getting learners to use* a language (i.e., to speak and understand it) versus *getting learners to analyze* a language (i.e., to learn its grammatical rules)" (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 3). Today there is overall agreement in the field that our goal as second language teachers should be "to have students use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately," as opposed to simply teaching them grammatical facts (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 255).

Ellis (2005) points out that language acquisition takes place only when learners are engaged in "encoding and decoding messages in the context of actual acts of communication" (p. 3). Meaning-focused activities foster fluency development and are intrinsically motivating for students. However, Ellis also cautions that learners need to attend to form in the context of communication in order for acquisition to take place. "Teachers who focus students' attention on linguistic form during communicative interactions are more effective than those who never focus on form or who only do so in decontextualized grammar lessons" (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 251). Contextualized grammar teaching can occur through an inductive approach, in which noticing of grammatical forms is derived through communicative use, or through a deductive approach, which builds awareness of grammatical rules by teaching them in an explicit way (e.g., through corrective feedback).

Larsen-Freeman (2001; 2003) reminds us that grammar teaching should be thought of as a set of skills to be mastered, rather than a set of rules to be learned. She suggests a grammar framework which we find quite useful in guiding instruction because it reflects the complexity of language. Her framework consists of three dimensions:

1. **form** (phonological, morphosyntactic and lexical patterns),
2. **meaning** (semantics), and
3. **use** (pragmatics or use in social context).

She encourages teachers to answer these questions when planning instruction of a particular grammatical structure: *How is it formed? What does it mean?* and *When/Why is it used?*

Communicative approaches based on hands-on tasks and projects or on content-based material can effectively address the three dimensions of grammar in Larsen-Freeman's framework. When grammar teaching has the purpose of supporting students in the completion of a task or in their making sense of the content, then attention to form, meaning, and use can be interwoven within a lesson in strategic and purposeful ways. When students feel the need to focus on grammar, they will be naturally motivated to do so.

2. Learners do not learn grammatical forms one at a time.

Larsen-Freeman (2001) points out that grammatical structures do not simply appear in a learner's language "fully developed and error-free" (p. 255) once they have been exposed to them. "Learning is a gradual process of mapping form, meaning, and use" (p. 255). Even when students seem to have acquired a certain grammatical form, they often start making mistakes again once new forms are introduced. Since different aspects of form, meaning, and use may be acquired at different stages of language development, it is important to recycle grammar points throughout the curriculum. Rather than adopting a linear sequence of grammatical points for instruction, Larsen-Freeman recommends that teachers assess their students' needs and introduce new structures thoughtfully according to students' developmental readiness to learn.

Larsen-Freeman (2007) also warns against a grammatical scope and sequence that is set in advance with prescribed structures to cover. Instead, she advocates for an approach that will let teachers both introduce new forms purposefully within lessons,

and at the same time teach the forms that emerge naturally in communicative activities. As she puts it, "we make the path by walking." In other words, we build the grammatical curriculum by teaching it to particular learners in particular classrooms.

It is also important to remember that language learning is not simply a linguistic process. Language acquisition is dependent on psychological and sociocultural factors that may vary greatly from learner to learner. Therefore, two intermediate-level students who seem to be at the same stage of language acquisition may learn certain structures at very different rates because of their individual personality factors (e.g., self-esteem, willingness to take risks) or because of larger sociocultural factors (e.g., family acculturation, attitudes toward the larger community). Teachers should tailor instruction according to the individual traits of their learners and the characteristics of the local context of the school, the student's family, and the community.

language practice must extend to the discourse level rather than stay at the abstract sentence level

3. ELD instruction should provide extensive input, and it should also give students opportunities for output and interaction.

Krashen (1982) contends that acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to "comprehensible input," or language that contains some structure that is "a bit beyond" the learner's current level of competence (p. 21). When learners are exposed to comprehensible input, in Krashen's view, they are able to understand the language and still are challenged to make progress. Teachers can use different strategies to make input comprehensible, for example, through the use of visuals, gestures, shorter sentences, and simpler vocabulary. To maximize students' exposure to comprehensible input, teachers can set up structured tasks within and outside the classroom. For example, providing extensive reading programs based on carefully selected literature that is appropriate to the age and the level of the students creates opportunities for students to receive input outside of the classroom (Ellis, 2005).

Long (1985) extended Krashen's hypothesis by formulating what has come to be called the interaction hypothesis. According to Long, the negotiation of meaning that occurs during interactions between more and less fluent speakers can facilitate language learning. He found that certain conversational adjustments such as clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, repetitions, and extensions serve to prevent communication breakdowns and to provide learners with the comprehensible input needed for successful language learning.

Swain (1985) pointed out that input by itself is not sufficient for language acquisition. Learners also need to have opportunities to produce output, which can aid language acquisition in different ways. Output "forces syntactic procession (i.e., it obliges learners to pay attention to grammar) and it allows [them] to test out hypotheses about … grammar" (Ellis, 2005: 9). Ellis also points out that providing opportunities for interaction and output can serve as a form of mediation in learning, thereby "enabling learners to construct new forms and perform new functions collaboratively" (p. 10).

Cooperative activities in the classroom and targeted practice in a range of social and academic contexts can give students a reason to pay attention to language. It is important to remember, however, that language practice must extend to the discourse level rather than stay at the abstract sentence level, and that it needs to occur both orally and in writing (Celce-Murcia, 2002).

Cautions in Implementing ELD Instruction

Unfortunately, in our observations of ELD classes in different Oregon districts, we have seen a tendency to focus on grammatical forms in isolation without much regard to communicative meaning or use. We have talked to several ELD teachers who tell us that they have been encouraged to use the *ELD Matrix of Grammatical Forms* (Dutro, 2005) as their main guide for ELD instruction. In fact, many ELD teachers are encouraged to keep the *Matrix* on hand and, during class, check off the forms they have taught one-by-one. The result, as we have observed, are grammar lessons that consist mostly of repetition of sentence patterns, with very little opportunity for practice at the level of extended discourse.

Dutro's (2005) lesson-planning examples also emphasize this type of decontextualized grammar practice. Table 1 shows an excerpt from Dutro's handbook which exemplifies this reductionist approach to grammar teaching (2005).

Table 1. Grammar Practice

Teach & Practice Language Pattern: I need __________.

I Do It: *I need scissors*. (Teacher holds out hand. A student gives scissors). Repeat with other objects. Students take turns handing the objects.

We Do It: *Repeat after me*: I need glue. (A student holds out hand. Teacher gives glue)

Choral: I need glue. *What do I need?*

[Beginning student]: glue

[Early Intermediate student]: I need glue.

Repeat for other objects

You Do It: One partner says I need ________. The other partner gives the object.

Partners alternate roles

Taking Language to Application: Teach and review vocabulary for supplies needed for an art project (Ex: red paper, green paper, scissors, glue, white yarn, etc.) Teach and post variation on language pattern: *We need* ________. Each team writes a list of the supplies needed for project. Designated team member comes and requests both the items needed.

From Dutro (2005: 3A.14)

The lesson in Table 1 is reminiscent of the audiolingual method of the 1950s and 1960s, which was based on "mimicry and memorization" and the manipulation of language "without regard to meaning or context" (Celce-Murcia, 2001: 7). The emphasis in these exercises on drills and repetition reflects a strong behaviorist approach to language learning. Very few opportunities are provided for meaningful interaction or unrehearsed production of output.

Although there is minimal attention to meaning (i.e., through the use of objects), the question-answer interchanges are quite artificial. In real communicative contexts, individuals do not say things like: "*I need glue. What do I need?*" In considering Larsen-Freeman's three-dimensional framework discussed above, it would be fair to say that lessons such as these have an exclusive focus on form, at the expense of meaning and use.

We have found Dutro's (2005) *EXPRESS Placement Assessment* to be equally problematic. This test is designed for initial placement in an ELD instructional level, and it focuses solely on the grammatical accuracy of a student's oral responses given to prompts related to a picture. As noted above, learners do not acquire grammatical structures one at a time. This test, however, relies on an arbitrary grammatical sequence to determine students' language proficiency levels. For example, if students are able to produce sentences with the present progressive and to form Wh- questions correctly, they are placed at the Early Intermediate level. If they can produce sentences using the past simple and the comparative form, they are placed at the Intermediate level, and so on.

The test does not measure students' comprehension skills, their communication abilities in interactions, or their pragmatic competence. In answering the question, "*What did the girl buy*?", for example, the only acceptable answer would be "*She bought ice cream*." If the student says "*Ice cream*," as fluent English speakers might reply, the student is not given any points. Again we see an emphasis on artificial language use, focusing exclusively on grammatical competence.

Also worrisome is the emphasis on oral skills and on social uses of language. Cummins (1996) suggests that there two different types of language skills exist: BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). BICS involves the skills and functions that are necessary for communication in everyday social contexts. It involves simpler language processes because it generally occurs in context-embedded situations. CALP, on the other hand, is the language needed to succeed in school. It involves complex language that is generally more abstract and context-reduced than that for everyday use outside the classroom. CALP is also connected with higher levels of conceptualization and critical thinking skills (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2006) and must be explicitly taught in school in order to be developed.

Unfortunately, because a lot of the ELD instruction that is occurring is schools nowadays has a heavy focus on the oral production of isolated sentences, students are not getting practice in the skills that are necessary for the development of CALP competence, such as reading a variety of texts, giving oral presentations, and writing well-organized essays. A popular ELD set of materials which has been widely adopted in Oregon (*Carousel of IDEAS*, 2006) encourages practice in the use of prepositions through the following commands: *"Put the camel near the bathing suit"* and *"Put the parrot far from the diaper."* Obviously, this type of oral practice of simple, decontextualized, meaningless sentences will never translate into the robust skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking that are necessary for high levels of academic achievement.

Integrating Content and Language Needs of ELLs

Developing proficiency in the English language is one facet of a solid program for English Language Learners. As we have described, students who are learning English need consistent instruction in the English language, just as a native English speaker needs classes and explicit instruction to develop proficiency in another language, such as Spanish or French. The other facet of a program that meets the needs of ELLs is access to meaningful content instruction (Fielding, 2007).

Because an ELD program addresses the language needs of ELLs but does not address the need for comprehensible content instruction, ELD as a standalone program is not sufficient to meet the academic needs of ELLs (Crawford, 2004). ELD needs to complement a program such as bilingual education or sheltered instruction that focuses on content, such as math, science, social studies, and language arts. Similarly, sheltered or bilingual content without ELD does not sufficiently address the needs of students who are learning English as their second or additional language.

In the ESOL/Bilingual Education program at Western Oregon University, we train preservice and inservice teachers to deliver content that is "sheltered" or differentiated for ELLs at different proficiency levels. Regardless of the language of instruction (native language or English), we encourage content or classroom teachers to learn about different models for sheltered instruction, such as GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) and SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), and implement an eclectic approach. This is not "random eclecticism," where teachers haphazardly choose activities, but rather "informed eclecticism," where teachers draw from a wide range of tools to plan, implement, and assess instruction that will benefit ELLs, as well as all other students.

For example, in our lesson plan template at WOU, teachers learn to develop lessons that not only have content objectives that align to Oregon's standards, but also have language objectives from the English Language Proficiency Standards. Combining content and language objectives is a common feature of SIOP. Teachers are asked to include learning strategies that will be introduced and taught by the teacher, but over time will be internalized by students, which is emphasized in CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach), another approach to sheltered instruction.

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We foster the increased focus on classroom lessons that encourage purposeful speaking and listening to improve the oral skills of ELLs, in addition to literacy. GLAD has many features that address all four language skills, such as chants and collective readings, so we encourage teachers to draw from these ideas. In essence, we encourage preservice and inservice teachers to develop a foundation in the principles of sheltered instruction and purposefully draw from the rich array of resources that will meet the cognitive and linguistic needs of their ELL students.

One way to think about this complementary approach to the content and linguistic needs of English Language Learners is through an analogy of a basketball coach and trainer. The trainer works on physical fitness with basketball players so they have the ability to sprint and jump, as well as have sufficient endurance to play in the game. Fitness is the primary objective, but players are prepared with basketball in mind. In other words, the trainer is cognizant of the fact that they will be playing basketball and not long-distance running. The basketball

coach, in turn, prepares the players to organize an offense, the defense, and "fast breaks." The coach knows what types of activities were completed in the training session and helps the players to integrate the physical skills that are being developed into knowledge about the game of basketball. Some activities, such as dribbling, will be a focus of both the trainer and the coach. While the trainer would focus on the physical aspects of dribbling, such as sprinting effectively while dribbling the ball, the coach would speak to the strategy of when to dribble and when to pass to another player.

Basketball players need both types of expertise. Without the trainer, they might not have the physical capabilities to finish or excel in the basketball game. Without the coach, players could be superior physically but might not understand the offensive and defensive strategies in order to compete. Similarly, English Language Learners need both types of expertise. They need a "trainer" to help them develop proficiency in the English language, as occurs in ELD. They also need a "coach," who can help them utilize these developing language skills as they access content, such as math, science, social studies, and language arts.

Ideally, ELD teachers and content teachers will have the opportunity to communicate frequently about their students

It may be that a basketball program has two different people: both a coach and a trainer who work together in complementary roles. In other situations, one person could serve the function of both roles. During basketball practice this person may first "train" the players by working on physical skills and endurance, and then later "coach," by focusing on the game's philosophy so that players can execute well during a game. There will be times when players are using all of their skills in one setting, such as a practice game or scrimmage, where endurance and execution both are being utilized. During a scrimmage the "coach" might notice that players are not dribbling the ball well and stop the practice game in order to "train": review the fundamentals, have players work on some physical strengthening, and then return to the practice game.

Similarly, schools may have one person who serves joint roles, such as an ESOL-endorsed teacher who delivers both ELD for their English Language Learners and sheltered content instruction for the entire class. The challenge for this person is having a set or consistent time for explicitly teaching the linguistic skills that ELLs need to learn in addition to delivering sheltered content lessons that then reinforce those language skills. As in a practice game, there will be lessons that directly reinforce something that was taught in ELD. For example, if the focus of ELD was the conditional tense and the lesson called for students to write a paragraph using the form, "If I were President, I would . . ." the teacher would be developing both English language proficiency and content (writing) skills. It is up to the teacher, as expert, to determine when to focus on language, when to focus on content, and when students are ready to apply their knowledge of both simultaneously.

If schools have both sheltered content (or bilingual) teachers and ELD specialists, they have two experts working with ELLs. The goal for this "ESOL team" is to ensure that their roles complement each other. Ideally, ELD teachers and content teachers will have the opportunity to communicate frequently about their students. Administrators who recognize this need can organize regular opportunities for these ESOL teams to get together, debrief what students have been learning, and determine the next steps for instruction.

At a minimum, ELD teachers can write weekly or bimonthly notes to content teachers letting them know the types of sentence structures and language functions they have been working on, and the language features that students have mastered. In this way, content teachers can reinforce what ELLs are learning in ELD by applying applicable language objectives into their lessons. In turn, content teachers can let ELD teachers know when they have finished a unit because that content and vocabulary is now known or familiar to ELLs, and ELD teachers can use that content as the vehicle for language instruction (Dutro & Moran, 2003).

From conversations with teachers and administrators in schools where there are ELD specialists, it appears that the ELD Pullout model is the most common approach in Oregon's elementary schools. ELD Pullout has been critiqued as a problematic

method (Crawford, 2004) because ELL students are missing content instruction when they are removed from the classroom. In addition to the stigma attached to any type of pullout program and the time wasted in having students walk from their classroom to the ELD room (which is often an inferior space, such as a remodeled closet), difficulties in scheduling have created the following concerns, to name a few:

1. ELD groups with more than two consecutive ELP levels in one group, such as beginners (level one) in the same group as intermediates (level three).
2. ELD specialists whose overloaded schedules cannot accommodate ELLs at the higher ELP levels (early advanced and advanced), so those students do not receive ELD. (ELLs need ELD until they are officially redesignated or exit the ESOL program.)
3. ELLs being pulled out of class during content lessons or returning when the content lessons are already in progress.
4. ELLs not receiving daily ELD instruction because ELD specialists service multiple schools.

A model that addresses some of these concerns is having the ELD teacher "push-in" to the classroom. In this approach, all students – ELLs and native English speakers – are working in groups in the sheltered or mainstream classroom. Each group rotates to meet with the teacher, and when students are not with the teacher, they are working on something independently. During one of the "independent" rotations, the ELL students go with the ELD specialist. An added benefit of the push-in model is that the ELD teacher can get to know the classroom context of the ELLs and therefore increase opportunities to share information with the content teacher.

Another model that meets multiple needs is where all students at one or two grade levels have language development at the same time, ideally not at the end of the day. For example, from 11:00 to 11:30, the first and second grade teachers level their students to make homogenous groups based on English language proficiency (from ELPA or Woodcock-Muñoz scores). Beginning and early intermediate ELLs would go to one room with one of the teachers, intermediate ELLs would go with another teacher, and early advanced/advanced ELLs go with a third teacher. At the same time, the native English speakers are grouped together; the number of groups depends on the number of students, of course. This is an opportunity to teach Spanish as a second language if bilingual teachers are available. Other ideas would be riddles, language-based brain teasers, or other advanced language skills that would not be appropriate for students developing their English.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When designing complementary programs to meet the unique language and content needs of English Language Learners, schools must take into consideration their varied teaching faculties, resources, and student populations. While common components of successful implementation can be identified, different structures will reflect the diversity of teaching contexts throughout the state. Although outside the scope of this article, it is important to point out that any successful program for English Language Learners must also include a strong first language literacy component and meaningful ways to build connections between the schools, students' homes, and the local community. We hope that the principles of effective ELD pedagogy presented here will serve as a guide for districts to help students develop English language proficiency and reach their academic goals.

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