
Why This Book?

The growing number of English language learners (ELLs) in our schools poses increasing challenges and opportunities to U.S. educators and policy makers. A generation or two ago, the achievement of children who came to school knowing little or no English was hardly a national issue. Today, it is. Between 1979 and 2007, the number of school-age children (5- to 17-year-olds) who spoke a language other than English at home nearly tripled, from less than 4 million to almost 11 million; children who speak a language other than English now constitute over 20 percent of all children ages 5 to 17 (Planty et al., 2009).

Not all of these students are limited in their English proficiency, of course. But many are, and the ELL population in U.S. schools is growing fast. In 1990, one of every 20 public school students (5 percent) in grades K–12 was limited in English proficiency. Today there are over 5 million ELLs—one in nine, or more than 10 percent of the school-age population. The number of ELLs has grown more than 150 percent since 1990, a period when the overall school population increased by much less (Goldenberg, 2008). Figure 1.1 shows the rate of increase of ELLs between 1989–1990 and

- Why is it important for educators to have a solid understanding of what research says about improving the achievement of English language learners?
- What kind of research on ELLs is discussed in this book?
- What two reports, published in 2006, provide the most comprehensive look at this research to date?
- What is *this* book's goal?
- Which question or issue has historically dominated research and debate about the education of ELLs?
- What other questions and issues are also important for educators to understand?

proficiency (e.g., early intermediate, intermediate) and even whether a student is to be classified ELL or English proficient (Stokes-Guinan & Goldenberg, in press). Unfortunately, assessing English language proficiency, particularly in a way that is instructionally useful for teachers, poses significant challenges with which educators and researchers around the country continue to grapple (Abedi, 2007, 2008).

WHAT ABOUT BILINGUAL EDUCATION?

The field of language-minority education and research has traditionally been dominated by the bilingual education issue. For years, the key question—sometimes it seemed the *only* question—was: What should be the language (or languages) of instruction for children who come to school less than fully proficient in English? Should they be instructed in their home language (for some period of time or even throughout their school careers)? Or should they be put into English instruction the moment they walk into school? Or somewhere in between?

This already complex issue is further complicated by the question of what our goal is for these students. If the goal is promoting achievement only in English, then the question becomes how much (if any) primary-language instruction is best for maximum achievement in English. However, if the goal is primary-language development and literacy *in addition to* English academic competence—that is, bilingualism and biliteracy—then the answer is likely to be different. Many would argue—and we would agree—that bilingualism ought to be our educational goal (see, most recently, Gándara & Rumberger, 2006), but clearly there is considerable disagreement over this.

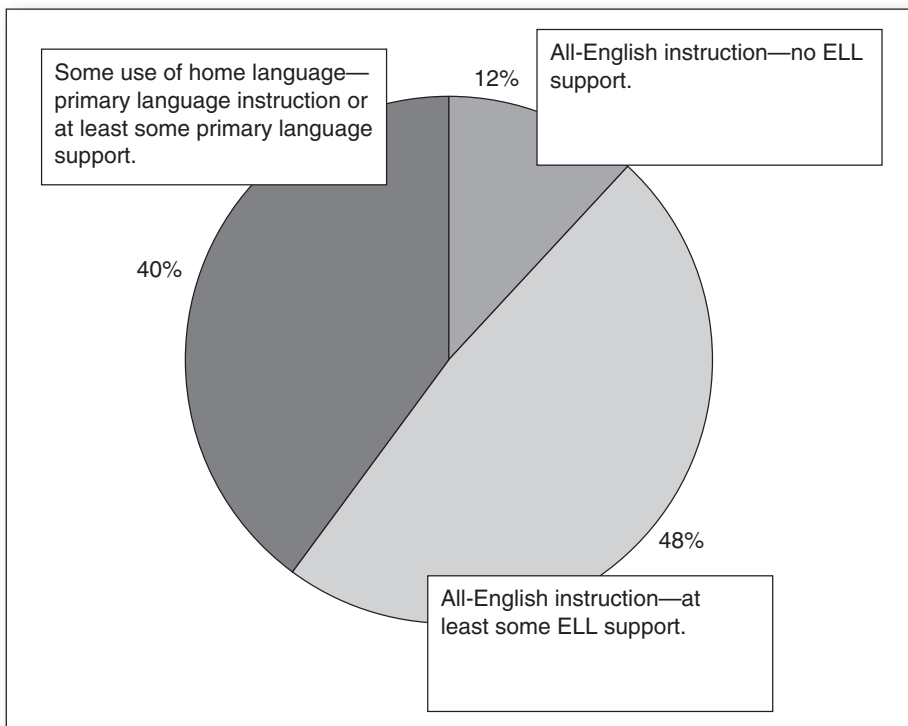
The bilingual education question has been extremely controversial and the subject of court cases, state legislation, ballot-box initiatives, op-ed pieces, political statements, and a great deal of posturing and overheated rhetoric. It is a topic about which passions run high, largely because language is not just a technical issue of what instructional method works better. Language is about identity, culture, and history. For many language-minority persons in the United States (and elsewhere around the globe), maintenance of the native language is a way to affirm identity, culture, and history while counteracting discrimination, disempowerment, and disrespect. On the other hand, many U.S. English speakers (and some immigrants who subscribe to what is sometimes not very flatteringly called an “assimilationist” view) stake out a position that is the mirror image: Use—and learn—English. Leave the home language and culture at home to enter the mainstream and become “fully American” (see, for example, Rodriguez, 1982, for a well-known example that stirred a great deal of controversy nearly 30 years ago).

Leaving aside for the moment that using English in school exclusively might not be the way to maximize learning English and academic content *in*

There are other program configurations as well, such as “newcomer classes” designed for immigrant students new to the country and “pull-out ELD or ESL classes,” where students go with an ELD/ESL teacher for a period during the school day. These types of approaches can coexist with or augment other programs such as English immersion. (See Genesee, 1999, for a full description of these and other program alternatives for English learners.)

But what sorts of instructional environments are ELLs *actually* in? The question is difficult to answer, partly because of inconsistencies from state to state in how terms and programs are defined and reported. As shown in Figure 1.2, according to a 2001–2002 survey, 60 percent of English learners are in essentially all-English instruction: A fifth of these students—about 12 percent of all ELLs—are in all-English instruction and apparently receive no services or support at all related to their limited English proficiency

Figure 1.2 Instructional Language for ELLs



Note: Percentages are approximations, and there is wide variability within each segment. “All-English instruction—at least some ELL support” might be an overestimate since “All-English instruction—no ELL support” is probably illegal. See text for further details.

Source: Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Stephenson, Pendzick, & Sapru, 2003.

Table 4.1 (Continued)

	<i>Conversational Language Tends to . . .</i>	<i>“Hybrid” Area</i>	<i>Academic Language Tends to . . .</i>
Examples	<p>An animated conversation between friends discussing a date the night before.</p> <p>Two experienced divers, planning a scuba diving trip, decide locations and gear they will need.</p> <p>Softball players arguing over whether a player was out when she ran to first base.</p> <p>Ordering from a menu at a family restaurant.</p> <p>Friends watching a movie and making occasional comments, observations, and jokes to each other.</p> <p>Taking turns during show-and-tell sharing with the class a favorite toy from home.</p>	<p>Conversation with someone who speaks with little expression, uses little eye contact, and does not respond to others’ behaviors or responses.</p> <p>A speaker uses expressions such as “if you juxtapose the two” instead of “if you put them side by side” or asks, “What are the parameters here?” instead of “What do we need to consider?”</p> <p>A person explains to her friend what it was about a television program that she found so moving and insightful.</p>	<p>A professor of contemporary literature presents a postmodern poststructuralist analysis of <i>The Sound and the Fury</i>.</p> <p>A sociologist is interviewed on a news program and asked to explain the impact of the economic downturn on community-based organizations.</p> <p>A student must explain his reasoning, in writing, when solving a mathematical word problem.</p> <p>Coworkers at a public relations firm must present and argue for their proposed campaign to rehabilitate the tarnished image of a client.</p>

Source: Categories based on Fillmore and Snow, 2002; Scarcella, 2003; Schleppegrell, 2001; Valdés, 2004.

Academic language is more than content, or “technical,” vocabulary. Since the studies published in the CREDE and NLP reports, some promising approaches have been used in many school districts. Michael Halliday’s (1994) theory of systemic functional linguistics has received considerable attention as a way of understanding the *language* demands of academic writing and discourse (e.g., Droga & Humphrey, 2005; Schleppegrell & Achugar, 2003). According to systemic functional linguistics, the purpose of a text is what most influences syntax and word choices (Dutro & Moran, 2001; Schleppegrell, 2001). For example, to retell an event in narrative form requires knowledge of story structure and the ability to use past tense verbs and time sequence transition words. School-based texts also use organization and presentation strategies that are highly formalized and conventionalized, since the common purpose of most school-based language tasks is to present (presumably) objective information authoritatively in a highly structured fashion (Schleppegrell, 2001). Although it is certainly plausible that students must understand those aspects of academic language that are used in school and vital for understanding readings, lessons, and classroom discussions, we do not yet have data to support the idea that systematically teaching these linguistic features helps ELLs learn both academic content and academic language.

Following are portions of two lessons, one for elementary school (Box 5.3) and one for high school (Box 5.4), that illustrate sheltered instruction that also teaches academic language. The sheltered strategies include teaching content vocabulary, syntax, and language structures as they relate to the lesson’s content.

Box 5.3

Elementary School Academic Instruction Scenario

Mrs. V. has been teaching a third-grade standards-based science unit on environments and adaptations using the saguaro cactus as a topic. The third-grade standard for life sciences is that students will understand the concept that “adaptations in physical structure or behavior may improve an organism’s chance for survival.” Students should know, for example, about diverse forms of life, their different structures, the different environments they live in, and how different environments increase or decrease the chances some plants and animals will survive and others will not. ELD levels in this class range from intermediate to fluent English. Mrs. V. says, “Today we are going to learn about the saguaro cactus and the ways it is adapted to its environment, that is, the reasons why it is able to survive in the desert while other plants could not.”

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