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~ ~ ****SPECIAL FEATURE**** ~ ~

ELLS AND ACHIEVEMENT TESTS: SURPRISING DATA FROM *THE COURSE CRAFTERS GUIDES TO THE ELL MARKET*

By Dr. Suzanne Irujo
ELL Outlook Staff Writer

Having spent almost 30 years as an ESL educator and teacher educator, I thought I was well aware of the challenges faced by English language learners when they have to take standardized tests in English. My long-held belief that such tests assess mastery of English (rather than mastery of the content they are meant to test) was reinforced by a recent statement from TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages): "English language learners cannot demonstrate their mastery of content without having already attained a high degree of English fluency" (*TESOL Position Paper on High-Stakes Testing for K-12 English Language Learners in the United States of America*, 2003).

What I was not aware of was the magnitude of the problem created when ELLs have to take high-stakes tests in English. That changed when I recently served as Consulting Editor for *The Course Crafters Guides to the ELL Market* and had pre-publication access to the information contained in these Guides. I was shocked at how few ELLs pass state achievement tests. For example, in California the average percentage of ELLs in grades 2 through 11 who achieved the proficient or advanced levels on the English/language arts state standards test in 2002 was 6.3%. For all state standards tests taken that year in mathematics in grades 2 through 11, the average percentage reaching those levels was 14.2%.

It isn't all bad news, however. There is cause for optimism in some of the information on test scores. In many of the large districts that are profiled in the Guides, former ELLs score better on state tests than do native speakers of English. The Guides also contain a wealth of information in addition to test scores. For example:

- the variety of bilingual and English-only program models for ELLs in the top 25 districts;
- the apparent connection between training in ESL strategies for mainstream teachers and the success of ELLs in academic settings;
- the needs for programs and materials to develop ELLs' academic language and skills in the mainstream classroom.

Information of this kind can serve as a guide for school systems as they develop programs for ELLs, prepare these students for testing, and design professional development opportunities for teachers. It can alert educational publishers to urgent needs in the ELL market. And it can raise everybody's awareness of the challenges that lie ahead in trying to ensure that districts with large numbers of ELLs successfully meet the challenges of *No Child Left Behind*.

The Course Crafters Guides to the ELL Market will be published in June 2003. The Guides contain profiles of the 10 states and 25 districts in the United States that have the largest population of ELLs. For each state and district, there is information and analysis of ELL enrollment, academic achievement, teachers, and funding. There is also a national overview summarizing trends, challenges, and opportunities. The Guides were created for two reasons: (1) because of the need for accurate, unbiased information about ELLs, given the rapid growth in ELL enrollment in school systems throughout the country; and (2) the difficulty of finding such information, given the often political nature of much of what the media report about the education of ELLs.

For more information on The Course Crafters Guides to the ELL Market please contact Lise Ragan, President and CEO, at lragan@coursecrafters.com.

~ ~ **IN THE NEWS** ~ ~

Just cut and paste links into your browser to view stories.

Lawyer, Latino activist tapped for Board of Education

The Sacramento Bee - 4/17/03

Appointment seen by some as a remedy to under-representation on CA state board

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/education/story/6469897p-7421391c.html>

Immersion reviving Hawaii's native language

The Boston Globe - 4/27/03

Program increases endangered language's hopes for survival

http://www.boston.com/dailyglobe2/117/learning/Immersion_reviving_Hawaii_s_native_language+.shtml

Court Orders State Board of Education to Immediately Cease Implementation of Underground Regulation

CABE News

Exclusion of alternative bilingual education classrooms from Reading First participation at issue

<http://www.bilingualeducation.org/news3.htm>

English-only Latinos on rise

The Arizona Republic - 5/5/03

Monolingualism creates social, generational divides for some

<http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/news/articles/0505speakingspanish.html>

~~ **ELL UPDATE** ~~

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROPOSITION 227: A FIVE-YEAR EVALUATION STUDY CONDUCTED IN LAUSD

After California voters passed Proposition 227 in June 1998, school districts were instructed to implement English-only structured English immersion (SEI) programs by the middle of the 1998-1999 school year. Except for the use of parent waivers, ELLs would not be allowed to enroll in bilingual education programs; "all children [would] be placed in English language classrooms" (California Education Code, Section 305).

Almost five years have passed since the implementation of Proposition 227, and the English-only movement has spread into Arizona and Massachusetts. SEI programs have been under evaluation and scrutiny by the Program and Research Branch of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) for almost four years (the first three years of this evaluation will be discussed in this article). Among the questions answered by reports from the first three years of the evaluation, led by Dr. Katherine Hayes, Project Director, are these:

- What are the best instructional practices for ELLs?
- What challenges has LAUSD encountered in implementing SEI programs district-wide?
- What are the effects of native language use on ELL academic achievement in SEI classrooms?
- How have teachers used English Language Development (ELD) and Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) techniques in SEI classrooms?
- What are the effects of mixing levels of ELD and grade levels in SEI classrooms?
- What are the effects of textbooks on the instruction of ELLs?

Research Methodology

Although the number of ELL classrooms studied varied from year to year, the same basic structure for evaluating ELL programs was used in each of the first three years of the evaluation of the structured English immersion program in LAUSD. Hayes and her team started with clear evaluation hypotheses and a few research questions that stated specifically what they wanted to find out. Using these evaluation hypotheses, schools were then selected to ensure district-wide representation.

Data collection included classroom observations by off-track or retired teachers, field notes, timelines of the interactions between teachers and students, maps of classrooms, and teacher, parent, and principal interviews. Data were then coded and fed into computers for analysis. Demographic and achievement information was also entered into databases for further study.

Evaluation hypotheses were refined and changed in successive years, and additional methods for collecting data in classrooms were added.

Year 1: Model A v. Model B

In the first year of implementation of Proposition 227 in LAUSD, schools were offered two options for structured English immersion programs (in addition to parent waivers, which would still allow ELLs to be enrolled in bilingual programs). In both models, instruction was meant to be primarily in English, but in Model A an ELL's native language was supposed to be used only for clarification, while in Model B an ELL's native language could be used for concept development.

After the first year of evaluation, it was found that Model A and B classrooms were "more alike than different" (LAUSD, "Evaluation of SEI Program, Final Report Executive Summary: Year 1"). In general, in both Models A and B, "there was a great deal of confusion with respect to the definition and implementation of Structured English Immersion" (LAUSD, "Evaluation of SEI Program, Final Report: Year 1"). Teachers stated in interviews that there was a lack of both resources and training to help them teach ELLs. Almost all teachers interviewed also noted that "parents did not and could not help their offspring with their homework" ("Final Report: Year 1").

Certain significant demographic trends of structured English immersion classrooms became clear from the first year data: "It was not uncommon for sample classrooms to consist of a mixture of different grade levels (more than 18%). . . and a mixture of students with three or more different ELD levels (more than 50%)" ("Final Report: Year 1"). In addition, over one-fourth of the teachers in the sample had no state or district authorization to teach ELLs. The evaluation found that "The more heterogeneous the class (grade, instructional model, ELD level, languages), the greater the challenge for the teacher to differentiate instruction" ("Final Report: Year 1"). With the majority of SEI classes having three or more ELD levels, a significant number of classes having different grade levels combined, and more than 25% of teachers having no state or district authorization to teach ELLs, differentiating instruction for ELLs at different grade levels and ELD levels would be made that much harder.

* ELLs in Model A (less native language) generally outperformed ELLs in Model B (more native language) on the SAT9. However, since most of the lower level ELD students were in enrolled in Model B classes, this may not be a fair comparison.

Year 2: The Implementation of McGraw-Hill/SRA's *Open Court*

In the second year of implementation, more than 40% of the classrooms had a mixture of ELLs with three or more different ELD levels—a decrease from more than 50% in the previous year. The common subject area for all sample classrooms, as in year 1, was language arts. In the second year of evaluation, efforts were focused less on differences between Model A and B classrooms and more on the instructional services provided to ELLs: “Since no important differences were found between models of implementation of structured English immersion, we have begun to focus on wider questions” (LAUSD, “Evaluation of the Structured English Immersion Program: Year 2 Report”).

In a focused comparison of twenty high and low achieving SEI classrooms, it was found that “teacher experience, number of ELs [ELLs] per classroom, and the type of primary language support provided to English learners [ELLs] played a role in student test outcomes” (“Year 2 Report”). In low achieving classrooms, teachers were usually frustrated, lacked enthusiasm, and had discipline problems with ELLs; in high achieving classrooms, teachers had high expectations, practiced writing, engaged in test preparation, and used accommodations through ELD and/or SDAIE techniques. In addition, it was observed that ELLs at “higher levels of English proficiency were acquiring additional English language skills at a greater rate than their less English proficient peers” (“Year 2 Report”).

The second year of implementation was marked by the widespread implementation of McGraw-Hill/SRA's *Open Court* reading program by LAUSD. (Although *Open Court* was not the only textbook program used, it was used by a majority of ELLs in the sample taken. Teachers also created their own texts, supplemented, and adapted texts.) In fact, “no significant changes were observed in the pattern of instructional practices between Year 1 and Year 2; however, the structure imposed by the adoption of *Open Court* has resulted in fewer observations of ELD strategies and SDAIE practices and more instances of independent work or seat work at the expense of small group activities” (“Year 2 Report”).

The evaluation goes on to state that “*Open Court*, the most widely implemented program, is highly structured and prescriptive. Teachers implementing *Open Court* were instructed to ‘follow the program exactly as designed.’ However, the program was not designed for English learners.” In addition, “there was a great confusion between structured English immersion and *Open Court*. In fact, one principal noted, ‘We hope *Open Court* will be our structured English immersion.’” (“Year 2 Report”). Overall, it must be noted that “despite the problems and frustrations expressed in the interviews, most teachers feel that the structured English immersion program—in its *Open Court* format—is meeting the needs of the great majority of EL's [English language learners] and EO's [English only students or native speakers of English]” (LAUSD, “Evaluation of the Structured English Immersion Program, Year 3 Report”).

Year 3: A Merger of Two Programs

Until the end of the 2001-2002 school year, LAUSD offered two models of instruction, Models A and B. By 2002-2003 (the fourth year of the evaluation), the

SEI program in LAUSD was simplified, with only one program offered. During year 3 of the evaluation, although both Models A and B were still offered, the evaluation focused on instructional services provided to ELLs, not on the difference between models.

It was observed in year 3 of implementation that “we have fewer mixed grade classes, but more mixed ELD classrooms. There are also fewer teachers holding emergency permits” (“Year 3 Report”). In the second grade, ELLs in classrooms with two or fewer ELD levels generally had significantly greater language, math, and reading gains than their peers in classrooms with three or more ELD levels. Teacher interviews revealed that there was a consensus that the SEI program was working, as measured by oral English production and test scores. Some teachers raised a flag of caution, however: they believed that the ELLs’ “‘use’ of English might, in many cases, amount to mere ‘decoding,’ masking a fundamental lack of understanding and genuine comprehension” (“Year 3 Report”). Editor’s comment: Further study, and a tracking of ELL test scores through high school, would be necessary to determine whether this was merely a fear of some teachers or a real effect.

Because of space constraints, we were not able to discuss all of the results of the evaluation of the structured English immersion program in LAUSD. To view the full evaluation reports, please visit <http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/lausd/offices/perb/>.

~~ **AT ISSUE** ~~

A NEW DAY, A NEW FOCUS IN TEACHING ENGLISH LEARNERS: SCIENCE

By Dr. Olga Amaral
ELL Outlook Contributing Writer

Ms. Rodriguez is a fifth grade teacher who is just beginning to teach a science unit on magnets and motors. She wants her students to become familiar with the materials they will use, so she begins by distributing various materials to the students in the class. Examples include 48 D-cell batteries, 36 magnetic compasses, 36 battery holders, 36 small electric motors, one battery tester, one roll of copper wire, nine screwdrivers, and so on. Ms. Rodriguez begins by asking who has the battery tester. Latisha responds, and a series of questions follow as Ms. Rodriguez leads the class to speculate on what it might be used for and what they think they might be studying in science that would require a battery tester.

Juan has been in Ms. Rodriguez’ classroom since the beginning of the year, but his English skills are still very limited. He had been given the battery holders. He was visibly shaking each time the teacher called for the next item on the inventory. He understood when she called for 36 of something, but didn’t know the name for the items he was holding. As a result, he would half rise in his seat, look around the class to see if any other student was rising, and quickly sit down when another item with 36 pieces was identified. He was momentarily off the hook. He relaxed, but as the teacher approached closure on her questions about that item, he would begin to stir again. At the end of the inventory, each student had to go to the board to write the name and number of objects he or she held. Juan panicked and didn’t move. Ms. Rodriguez kindly encouraged him to go to the board, and he finally managed to write *bateri*. It is likely that he drew from his knowledge of the Spanish word *batería* to attempt writing the word in English, but he couldn’t write the word *holders*. (Editor’s

note: This vignette is based on an observation conducted at Mains Elementary School in Calexico, California.)

The Challenge for English Learners

Teachers serving ELLs often try to keep their lessons and the language of delivery as simple as possible. On the surface, the scenario above appears to be a good way to teach vocabulary to ELLs. In fact, the word *battery* is a cognate of the Spanish word *batería*. There is an assumption that Juan would know what a battery is, its most common uses, and so forth. Unfortunately, not all students necessarily have the background needed to know about things like this, nor can all words be cognates. Furthermore, while Juan was listening for cues so he could stand up and identify his objects at the appropriate time, he wasn't concentrating on what was happening with other items or other students. He missed most of the information that the teacher elicited regarding other items. In many classes, this activity might have excluded Juan altogether if the teacher had just held up an item and called out her questions to whomever would answer, instead of handing out materials to each student. There is a tendency to think that this type of oral interaction may be easier for ELLs than using written text, but in fact, it can be just as difficult for students. By the end of this unit, students are expected to complete several tasks. One is a concept map (Kinsella, "Moving from comprehensible input to 'Learning to learn' in content-based instruction," 1999), done by students working in small groups (concept maps are webs of information on the unit representing the various concepts covered). All students are also expected to complete individual notebook entries about their understanding of magnets and motors. Juan is very far from having the level of linguistic skill to be able to do either of these tasks successfully.

Materials for ELLs in the Science Classroom

At the elementary level, there is a debate about the kinds of instructional materials in science districts should adopt: those designed to conduct experiments, provide hands-on experiences, and promote inquiry-based instruction (science kits), or textbooks that may not encourage inquiry or experimentation. At the secondary level, science classes have laboratory exercises with directions for conducting experiments that even native English speakers find challenging. For years, researchers have discussed the need for ELLs to have as many real objects as possible (Faltis & Hudelson, *Bilingual Education in Elementary and Secondary School Communities*, 1998) since students benefit from visual and kinesthetic cues as they try to associate the language with the items being discussed. As we have seen in Juan's case, even the use of objects to conduct experiments brings challenges. Working without them, however, and being limited to text-driven instruction, would further inhibit Juan's ability to focus on the science content and the language required to understand that content. If textbooks are used, it would be very useful to have mini-kits to accompany them so that teachers could readily access items that would enhance comprehension.

Using science kits gives teachers the opportunity to relate discussions to specific objects and tasks that are more concrete for students. However, kits are not developed with ELLs in mind, so the task of blending the teaching of scientific concepts and the language development needs of ELLs is therefore left up to the teacher. Publishers could help by providing simple things such as a chart with labeled pictures of each item from the kit. Reading materials about the science topics that are designed with ELLs in mind would increase students' conceptual understanding

as well as further developing their language skills. Teachers would benefit from having primary language reading materials or, at a minimum, English reading materials at different ability levels included in each kit (McCallum, Presentation made to California Science Project Directors, 2003). Having a selection of brief readers that would include scientifically correct information covering two or three concepts within each kit would go a long way to help teachers reach students at various levels of language development.

Ideas for Increasing ELLs' Conceptual Understanding through Academic Language Development (ALD)

Regardless of which instructional materials (kits or textbooks) are used, it is important to have many different types of tools available to assist teachers in reaching ELLs. The most effective way of reaching them is to have teachers integrate conceptual and linguistic development in every lesson they teach (Their & Daviss, *The New Science Literacy*, 2002). An example from a middle school science class utilizes a key ring with vocabulary from a science lesson. The teachers bought plain circular key rings and had science vocabulary with brief explanations printed on cards about one inch long, made of heavy stock paper. A key ring will hold all "difficult" words for a unit. Students can refer to it in class when they need to access a particular technical word and take it home to assist them in completing homework assignments. It sounds simplistic and is nothing more than a gimmick on the theme of flashcards, but teachers report that it is effective with ELLs and would be appropriate for any student. Another example is from a class where the majority of students were native Spanish speakers. The teacher created a word wall of scientific terms with their Spanish cognates. For classrooms with multiple languages represented, a word wall in English is still a good visual to help the teacher refer to the words as she describes or discusses them. It also helps to reinforce the student's ability to read and write those words. These are the things that teachers end up having to create themselves because they're not readily available elsewhere. Having these materials available commercially would ease the workload for teachers.

Teachers Playing Dual Roles

Sometimes, especially in high schools, teachers view themselves strictly as teachers of content and believe that language development needs to occur in the English department. There is a need to develop a greater understanding about the role that language plays relative to cognitive development in science. Materials used can increase the focus on vocabulary study as well as providing ideas for teachers about using strategies that are typically considered best practices for ELLs (Valdés, *Learning and Not Learning English*, 2001).

In a science class at a high school, Thelma was asked to write a report about animals. She had been in the U.S. for three years and was well on her way to understanding most of what her teachers said. She worked hard on her report and was terribly disappointed when she received a grade of F on it. At first, she wasn't going to do anything about it but with some encouragement from another teacher, she decided to ask why she had gotten the failing grade. The explanation was that the report was about animals that were extinct. Thelma had written a report about skunks because she had understood the directions for the report to be about "animals that stink." (Editor's Note: This case comes from Calexico High School in Calexico, California.)

This teacher probably didn't know that Thelma needs written as well as oral cues. Asking Thelma to reiterate what the assignment was, or to present an outline of the report in advance, would have helped to catch the misunderstanding, thereby avoiding the poor grade. It also would have gone a long way toward helping Thelma to learn more about animals that are extinct.

Olga Amaral is an Associate Professor at San Diego State University. She has directed the Imperial Valley Science Project for the last three years as well as being a co-PI in the Valle Imperial Project in Science (VIPS), an NSF funded initiative to improve science education in a consortium of 16 districts led by the El Centro School District in collaboration with San Diego State University.

Further Resources:

Laplante, B. (1997). *Teaching science to language minority students in elementary classrooms*. NYSABE, V. 12.

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/miscpubs/nysabe/vol12/nysabe124.htm>

Sutman, F. X., Guzman, A. C., Schwartz, W. (1993). *Teaching science effectively to limited English proficient students*. ERIC Digest, N. 87.

<http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/digest/dig87.asp>

~~ FROM THE FIELD ~~

CAROL IRWIN TALKS ABOUT CHANGES IN TENNESSEE

By Michelle Adam
ELL Outlook Staff Writer

It seems like only yesterday when Carol Irwin started teaching seven students as part of a new English as a Second Language program within the Lebanon Special School District, about 30 miles east of Nashville, Tennessee. That was about four years ago. Now, the same school district has more than 138 students learning English as a second language.

"So much has changed so quickly. In the past ten years we have had major growth. In 1993, we had less than 4,000 ELL students in Tennessee. Since then we've had over a 500 percent increase," said Irwin, who now serves as ESL coordinator for the State of Tennessee. "When I was teaching, Asians [specifically Indians] made up the predominant student population. Even two years ago, the predominant languages in Tennessee were Asian-based. Last year, however, Spanish became the number one language. Of this year's 15,000 ELL students, around 9,000 speak Spanish."

If there's anyone who has witnessed change first hand within Tennessee's ESL programs, it is Irwin. In 1996, she began teaching English Language Learners while simultaneously obtaining ESL endorsement; she received a Masters in the same field by 1998. Irwin had initially intended to work as a traditional middle school teacher upon obtaining her teaching degree in 1995. But after facing closed doors in this arena, she applied for an ESL position that had just opened. As an itinerant ESL teacher, Irwin traveled among five schools and pulled out students from classrooms to assist them with their English. Irwin later obtained her Specialist in Education Degree (Ed.S.) in 2001.

Learning on the job and taking courses while teaching is something that many teachers besides Irwin have had to do in Tennessee. As she describes it, "when the need for teaching ESL came, it came fast." Teachers and administrators in the state can barely keep up with the growing demands of teaching ELL students, who are now predominately made up of Spanish-speaking Mexicans. That is why, after years of inconsistent ESL leadership, Irwin was brought on as the state's ESL coordinator in October of 2000.

During her initial period as coordinator, Irwin received a majority of calls from ESL teachers who were pursuing endorsements while doing their jobs. Now, because of the growing number of ELLs in the state, she increasingly conducts training for regular classroom teachers needing to adjust to rapidly changing demographics.

"The teachers want to know, 'what do I do?' All of a sudden they're getting students who don't speak English," said Irwin. "Initially, the majority of ELL students were in urban areas, and the smaller districts didn't think it would impact them. They were hoping it would go away. Today, over 75 percent of the districts in Tennessee have ESL students. We are getting more funding now for these school districts than at any other time in the past. And now every district needs to have a compliance program on file for services for ELL students, because even if they don't have them, they will."

Since becoming ESL coordinator, Irwin has replaced the five different tests used by school districts with one language assessment consistent with statewide standards. She has become a strong advocate and educator for ESL, organizing educational and legal workshops for a growing number of ESL teachers. She has also worked hard to bring Tennessee into compliance with legal guidelines of the U.S. Office for Civil Rights.

In terms of *No Child Left Behind*, Irwin has made certain that all ELL students are included in state accountability measures. Prior to this year, first-year, as well as second- and third-year students who did not measure proficient enough in English were exempt from this process. Irwin has also made efforts to better inform ELL parents of the numerous choices of classes and support programs now available for their children under *No Child Left Behind*.

Tennessee is, by law, an English-only state, which works well for Irwin, who is a strong advocate of this teaching approach. "The students do real well. They make tremendous gains learning in English only," she said. "If you want to learn a language you have to interact with native speakers. English immersion is effective. It does work." Even if her state were able to provide bilingual programs, Irwin said they could "in no way be effective," since Tennessee programs serve more than 100 different languages (ELL students come from Somali refugee camps and Kurdish settlements, as well as a host of Asian countries).

In many of the state's smaller ESL districts, itinerant teachers travel between schools and pull students out of their classrooms to provide English instruction. Larger ESL districts have self-contained classrooms dedicated to teaching academic skills in content areas. Either way, many teachers in the state either use the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), in which they teach learning strategies along with content instruction and language strategies, or the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), teaching content areas in a less language-dependent environment.

"I want the ESL teachers and classroom teachers to know how to modify content area to the extent that the students can be successful," said Irwin, who will soon provide workshops in sheltered instruction in content areas for teachers across the state educational system.

Keeping up with the growing demand for ESL programs in Tennessee means providing enough support and instruction to new teachers interested in teaching English Language Learners. Attending to this need during the past five years has been a challenge in itself for Irwin. As she said, "So many districts have had one teacher, and therefore teachers have lacked guidance. Also, even in 1998, we had only three colleges and universities offering ESL endorsements."

As for today, said Irwin, "We have a lot more grants and funding to help teacher training. We also have 11 colleges and universities providing ESL endorsements." Irwin has also organized additional professional development courses for teachers, and herself teaches an ESL methodology course at Tennessee State University.

Irwin has built consistency in teaching methods across the state, and is currently working on creating alternative assessments for language proficiency and grade-level language arts skills. She is developing an alternative assessment for ELLs as part of *No Child Left Behind*, and is doing so along with a consortium of states like Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. "There is more alignment now, from instruction to assessment to state standards," she said. "We are currently looking for materials that meet the needs of student requirements for each grade level."

Tennessee is in the process of reviewing new textbooks as part of its six-year ESL textbook adoption cycle. When asked what she felt publishers needed to include in textbooks, Irwin said the following: "They need to address older students who have limited English proficiency. They need to get higher interest, low-language-level materials out there. When you get students coming in at junior high or high school who don't know English, you can't go back to baby books. I think there is still a big void in this area."

Working long hours while trying to keep up with the growing demand for ESL programs in Tennessee can feel like an uphill battle. But for Irwin, it's well worth it. "It's scary but exciting at the same time. It's a great job. I've had a tremendous response across the state. I get constant comments of appreciation," she said.

"When I was the only ESL teacher in my district, I realized there wasn't a lot of support. I knew a lot of things that needed to be changed, and it couldn't be changed from the teachers up. It had to come from the top down. Administrators had to see the importance of it. I knew they needed somebody who could see where we had to be in order to address the needs of ELLs. We are getting there. It's slow, but steady."

~ ~ FROM THE STATES ~ ~

INNOVATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM: THREE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS COLLABORATE TO CREATE IMMIGRATION UNIT

The Immigration Experience, Celebrating Our Differences unit was developed through a collaboration among Connie Mannel, an ESOL teacher, Dianne Burke, an English/Language Arts teacher, and Steve Herbert, a social studies teacher, all in a Massachusetts middle school. This unit offers an exciting way for ELLs and native speakers of English to explore their family stories, and in doing so, learn to recognize what they have in common, as opposed to being embarrassed by what draws them apart. The unit is aligned with both TESOL standards and Massachusetts Department of Education English/Language Arts standards.

Originally a mainstream English teacher, Connie Mannel has been working as an ESOL (or ESL) teacher in the Dedham Middle School in Massachusetts for a number of years. Out of the 462 students enrolled in the 6th and 7th grades in the school, 21 are ELLs. In Dedham Middle School, ELLs take mainstream math and science classes as early as possible. Simultaneously, ELLs at beginning levels learn conversational English in an English class before transitioning into mainstream English and social studies classes. It's Mannel's job to "make sure all ESOL students pass their subjects—whether it be English, math, or science." Mannel co-teaches in some mainstream classes, providing effective learning strategies for all students, not only for ELLs. In addition, Mannel works with ELLs in small groups in a separate setting, to reinforce mainstream material for which students are responsible.

Mannel feels that "placing kids lacking English skills into the mainstream classroom can work, provided they have proper support." Strong support strategies for teaching ELLs are effective strategies for all students. The activation of student background knowledge (a chance for all students to learn different perspectives), the use of graphic organizers to make language and concepts comprehensible, the use of visuals, the practice of "dip-sticking" or asking questions to guarantee students' comprehension, and the teaching of new vocabulary by using context clues are just a few.

On the other hand, ELLs also often need support that mainstream students don't. The modification and scaffolding of existing textbook language to match the English proficiency skills of ELLs is one example. With modification, mainstream materials are comprehensible for ELLs. On this point, Ms. Mannel criticizes publishers. The ELL "tips" provided by publishers are often unhelpful or too preliminary to be of use. Transcribing texts is a lot of work for ESOL teachers, and publishers need to recognize the need for ELL textbooks that coordinate with existing mainstream texts. "I keep waiting for publishers to wake up to the need for ELL-modified materials that coordinate with mainstream classroom materials."

The Creation of *The Immigration Experience Unit*

Mannel noticed that while in mainstream classes, "sometimes the kids [ELLs] were self-conscious about coming from a different background." Recognizing a social and academic divide between her ELL students and the mainstream, Mannel felt that students needed to understand what they have in common. Hence the challenge behind the creation of the *Immigration Experience*.

Mannel team-teaches with Dianne Burke in a mainstream English/Language Arts classroom. She makes sure that "whatever [she does] in the classroom is geared to ESOL standards and English/Language Arts standards," believing that "it is good for everyone." Mannel and Burke start their unit with an examination of art (for example, Domingo Robelo's *The Emigrants* and Tomaz Viera's *The Returnees*), in

order to access their students' background knowledge. This helps their students get to their own family stories and how their parents or more distant ancestors might have struggled to come to America. Students then watch a video called *A Place at the Table*, produced by Teaching Tolerance, and read newspaper articles about real-life struggles with racism, intolerance, and prejudice. They also read short stories that analyze cultural misunderstandings.

Next, students go home to their parents and relatives to find out about their own family stories. "Kids interview parents to get stories, not 'yes' or 'no' responses," Mannal says. She encourages students to make connections between what is being learned in school and family histories. They then write up what they learned in the form of a report. The culmination comes with presentations that are broadcast on local television, and Mannal and Burke encourage their students to display their work in the library. ELLs are involved as much as native speakers of English. "They love it," Mannal said. "ELLs are proud to tell their stories. All students are proud of what they have accomplished and want to share with everyone how much they learned."

The final step is a field trip to the Dreams of Freedom, Boston's Museum of Immigration. Graphic examples of everything they have learned are represented there. Immigration experiences of common people and celebrities alike are enthusiastically explained.

While Ms. Mannal has always taught the appreciation of differences as part of her ESOL curriculum, she is particularly excited about the uniqueness of this unit. Because it reaches a wider audience, "we're not just 'preaching to the choir' because we're not just teaching ELLs. By teaching ELL inclusion, Dianne and I are reaching native English speakers too." Mannal and Burke have shared their message with other teachers, too. They have presented at MATSOL (Massachusetts Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages) Conference, at the Dreams of Freedom Museum of Boston, and to teachers in their school district.

"All in all, *The Immigration Experience, Celebrating Our Differences* has provided one of the most gratifying teaching experiences in our careers," says Mannal.

For more information on the Immigration Experience, Celebrating Our Differences unit, please contact Connie Mannal at cmannal@dedham.mec.edu.

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