

Understanding Language

SUPPORTING ELL STUDENTS IN RESPONSIVE ELA CLASSROOMS



MELINDA J. MCBEE ORZULAK

Principles
in Practice

TEACHING ENGLISH
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Dear Reader,

As a former high school teacher, I remember the frustration I felt when the gap between Research (and that is, by the way, how I always thought of it: Research with a capital *R*) and my own practice seemed too wide to ever cross. Research studies—those sterile reports written by professional and university researchers—often seemed so out of touch with the issues that most concerned me when I walked into my classroom every day. These studies were easy to ignore, in part because they were so distant from my experiences and in part because I had no one to help me see how that research could impact my everyday practice.

Although research has come a long way since then, as more and more teachers take up classroom-based inquiry, this gap between research and practice unfortunately still exists. Quite frankly, it's hard for even the most committed classroom teachers to pick up a research article or book, figure out how that research might apply to their classroom, convince their administrators that a new way of teaching is called for, and put it into practice. While most good teachers instinctively know that there is something to be gained from reading research, who realistically has the time or energy for it?

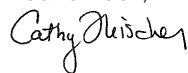
That gap informs the thinking behind this book imprint. Called Principles in Practice, the imprint publishes books that look carefully at the research-based principles and policies developed by NCTE and put those policies to the test in actual classrooms. The imprint naturally arises from one of the missions of NCTE: to develop policy for English language arts teachers. Over the years, many NCTE members have joined committees and commissions to study particular issues of concern to literacy educators. Their work has resulted in a variety of reports, research briefs, and policy statements designed both to inform teachers and to be used in lobbying efforts to create policy changes at the local, state, and national levels (reports that are available on NCTE's website, www.ncte.org).

Through this imprint, we are creating collections of books specifically designed to translate those research briefs and policy statements into classroom-based practice. The goal behind these books is to familiarize teachers with the issues behind certain concerns, lay out NCTE's policies on those issues, provide resources from research studies to support those policies, and—most of all—make those policies come alive for teacher-readers.

This book is part of the sixth series in the imprint, a series that focuses on teaching English language learners. Each book in this series focuses on a different aspect of this important topic and is organized in a similar way: immersing you first in the research principles surrounding the topic (as laid out by the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners*) and then taking you into actual classrooms, teacher discussions, and student work to see how the principles play out. Each book closes with a teacher-friendly annotated bibliography.

Good teaching *is* connected to strong research. We hope that these books help you continue the good teaching that you're doing, think hard about ways to adapt and adjust your practice, and grow even stronger in the vital work you do with kids every day.

Best of luck,



Cathy Fleischer

Principles in Practice

The Principles in Practice imprint offers teachers concrete illustrations of effective classroom practices based in NCTE research briefs and policy statements. Each book discusses the research on a specific topic, links the research to an NCTE brief or policy statement, and then demonstrates how those principles come alive in practice: by showcasing actual classroom practices that demonstrate the policies in action; by talking about research in practical, teacher-friendly language; and by offering teachers possibilities for rethinking their own practices in light of the ideas presented in the books. Books within the imprint are grouped in strands, each strand focused on a significant topic of interest.

Adolescent Literacy Strand

Adolescent Literacy at Risk? The Impact of Standards (2009) Rebecca Bowers Sipe
Adolescents and Digital Literacies: Learning Alongside Our Students (2010) Sara Kajder
Adolescent Literacy and the Teaching of Reading: Lessons for Teachers of Literature (2010) Deborah Appleman

Writing in Today's Classrooms Strand

Writing in the Dialogical Classroom: Students and Teachers Responding to the Texts of Their Lives (2011) Bob Fecho
Becoming Writers in the Elementary Classroom: Visions and Decisions (2011) Katie Van Sluys
Writing Instruction in the Culturally Relevant Classroom (2011) Maisha T. Winn and Latrise P. Johnson

Literacy Assessment Strand

Our Better Judgment: Teacher Leadership for Writing Assessment (2012) Chris W. Gallagher and Eric D. Turley
Beyond Standardized Truth: Improving Teaching and Learning through Inquiry-Based Reading Assessment (2012) Scott Filkins
Reading Assessment: Artful Teachers, Successful Students (2013) Diane Stephens, editor

Literacies of the Disciplines Strand

Entering the Conversations: Practicing Literacy in the Disciplines (2014) Patricia Lambert Stock, Trace Schillinger, and Andrew Stock
Real-World Literacies: Disciplinary Teaching in the High School Classroom (2014) Heather Lattimer
Doing and Making Authentic Literacies (2014) Linda Denstaedt, Laura Jane Roop, and Stephen Best

Reading in Today's Classrooms Strand

Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World (2015) Kristen Hawley Turner and Troy Hicks

Digital Reading: What's Essential in Grades 3–8 (2015) William L. Bass II and Franki Sibberson

Teaching Reading with YA Literature: Complex Texts, Complex Lives (2016) Jennifer Buehler

Teaching English Language Learners Strand

Beyond "Teaching to the Test": Rethinking Accountability and Assessment for English Language Learners (2017) Betsy Gilliland and Shannon Pella

Community Literacies en Confianza: Learning from Bilingual After-School Programs (2017) Steven Alvarez

Understanding Language: Supporting ELL Students in Responsive ELA Classrooms (2017) Melinda J. McBee Orzulak

Understanding Language

Supporting ELL Students in
Responsive ELA Classrooms

Melinda J. McBee Orzulak

Bradley University



National Council of
Teachers of English

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096

NCTE Editorial Board: Steven Bickmore, Catherine Compton-Lilly, Deborah Dean, Bruce McComiskey, Jennifer Ochoa, Duane Roen, Anne Elrod Whitney, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, Kurt Austin, Chair, ex officio, Emily Kirkpatrick, ex officio

Graphic Novel Excerpt from PERSEPOLIS: THE STORY OF A CHILDHOOD by Marjane Satrapi, translation copyright © 2003 by L'Association, Paris, France. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Any third party use of this material, outside of this publication, is prohibited. Interested parties must apply directly to Penguin Random House LLC for permission.

Staff Editor: Bonny Graham

Series Editor: Cathy Fleischer

Interior Design: Victoria Pohlmann

Cover Design: Pat Mayer

Cover and Chapter Opening Images: Yasmeen Alzate

NCTE Stock Number: 55646; eStock Number: 55653

ISBN 978-0-8141-5564-6; eISBN 978-0-8141-5565-3

©2017 by the National Council of Teachers of English.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the copyright holder. Printed in the United States of America.

It is the policy of NCTE in its journals and other publications to provide a forum for the open discussion of ideas concerning the content and the teaching of English and the language arts. Publicity accorded to any particular point of view does not imply endorsement by the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, or the membership at large, except in announcements of policy, where such endorsement is clearly specified.

NCTE provides equal employment opportunity (EEO) to all staff members and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical, mental or perceived handicap/disability, sexual orientation including gender identity or expression, ancestry, genetic information, marital status, military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, pregnancy, citizenship status, personal appearance, matriculation or political affiliation, or any other protected status under applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Every effort has been made to provide current URLs and email addresses, but because of the rapidly changing nature of the Web, some sites and addresses may no longer be accessible.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McBee Orzulak, Melinda J., 1976- author.

Title: Understanding language : supporting ELL students in responsive ELA classrooms / Melinda J. McBee Orzulak.

Description: Urbana, Illinois : National Council of Teachers of English, 2017 | Series: Principles in practice | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017020877 (print) | LCCN 2017039710 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814155653 | ISBN 9780814155646 (pbk.) | ISBN 9780814155653 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: English language—Study and teaching—Foreign speakers. | Education, Bilingual—United States. | Classroom management—United States.

Classification: LCC PE1128.A2 (ebook) | LCC PE1128.A2 M24 2017 (print) | DDC 428.0071—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017020877>

For the many teachers and students who play and learn in the
ELA sandbox of language every day, especially Maja. And to
mi familia, especially C and F, that we may play with
language for many years to come!

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
<i>NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)</i>	xi
Statement of Terminology and Glossary.	xix

Introducing the Principles

Chapter 1	Recognizing Strengths.	3
Chapter 2	Respect and Rigor in the Responsive Classroom.	18

Classroom Vignettes

Chapter 3	Structuring Responsive Learning Spaces in ELA Classrooms	35
Chapter 4	Understanding Language as a Resource for Academic and Social Contexts	69
Chapter 5	Supporting Respectful and Rigorous Reading Opportunities	94
Chapter 6	Assessing Teaching and Learning with ELL Students .	120
Chapter 7	Finding Resources and Collaborating with Others . . .	135

Annotated Bibliography	145
References	149
Index.	153
Author.	159

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to Cathy Fleischer for her feedback on the developing manuscript, as her editorial insights and wordsmithing have truly made this project what it has become. I also thank the other editors, especially Bonny Graham, and reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

I also would like to thank my family for support throughout the writing of this book. It has been such a joy to watch the project grow to fruition along with a first reader who is mostly interested in editing by taking sticky notes off of pages, and who delights me with the daily joys and complications of language acquisition.

Additionally, I offer a special note of thanks to the many teachers and students whose experiences have shaped my thinking and inspired this work. In particular, I offer endless gratitude to Maja, Rachel, Sewak, Ann, Ruth, Meghan, Cole, Eliana, and other teachers who opened up their classrooms and lesson plans to share best practices with me. You inspire me and your students daily! I'm also thankful to the countless teachers (like Ms. Denise of Lingua Garden) who inspire others with their passion for language and positive approach toward students. And I thank Mary Schleppegrell for her generosity with time and resources, along with numerous mentors who have shaped my language understandings, particularly Leslie Rex, Anne Curzan, Donald Freeman, and Anne Ruggles Gere. As my research student, Rachel Shore reviewed and contributed annotated bibliography entries that add to the book's resources, just one more active way she contributes to the field of English teaching. Finally, I thank Bradley University methods students, like Alysen, for inspiring me with ideas for shaping the final text's readability. This work also was supported in part by a Research Excellence Award grant from Bradley University.

Last, this book is seeped in the aromas of thirty-thirty Coffee Co., where the bulk of the manuscript was written and revised in the company of other community members and scholars, particularly my writing partner, Amy. This space reminds me of the importance of safe and welcoming intellectual environments for writing processes—and of all the teachers I've known at countless schools who create those spaces for hundreds of students every year at CICS Northtown Academy, Boston

Arts Academy, Chicago and Peoria Public Schools, and many others from Hawai'i to Illinois to Florida. If I could buy you all a fantastic cup of coffee to express my appreciation and admiration, I would!

NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)

Prepared by the NCTE ELL Task Force

Approved by the NCTE Executive Committee, April 2006

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.

Context

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) reported that in 2003–04 there were over five million English language learners (ELLs) in schools in the United States (NCELA, 2004). In the last ten years the ELL population has grown 65%, and the diversity of those students continues to challenge teachers and schools. Although 82% of ELLs in the United States are native Spanish speakers, Hopstock and Stephenson (2003) found that school districts identified over 350 different first languages for their second language learners.

Federal, state, and local policies have addressed the education of bilingual learners by implementing different types of programs. Different models of bilingual education, English as a Second Language, English immersion, and integration into mainstream classes, sometimes referred to as submersion, are among the most common approaches. Preferences for the types of programs have changed over time, responding to demographic and political pressures. (For a historical and descriptive summary, see NCTE's "Position Statement on Issues in ESL and Bilingual Education"; Brisk, 2006; Crawford, 2004.)

The best way to educate bilingual learners has been at the center of much controversy. Research points to the advantage of quality bilingual programs (Greene, 1997; Ramirez, 1992; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Willig, 1985) and the benefits of ESL instruction when language is taught through content (Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E., 1998; Marcia, 2000).

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

For a variety of reasons, however, the majority of ELLs find themselves in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students (Barron & Menken, 2002; Kindler, 2002). Although improving the education of ELLs has been proposed as a pressing national educational priority (Waxman & Téllez, 2002), many teachers are not adequately prepared to work with a linguistically diverse student population (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Menken & Antunez, 2001; Nieto, 2003).

Teachers working to better meet the needs of linguistically diverse students need support. NCTE encourages English teachers to collaborate and work closely with ESL and bilingual teaching professionals, who can offer classroom support, instructional advice, and general insights into second language acquisition. School administrators should support and encourage teachers to attend workshops and professional conferences that regularly offer sessions on bilingual learners, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. Schools should also consider seeking professional development for their teachers from neighboring colleges.

In turn, colleges and universities providing teacher education should offer all preservice teachers, as well as teachers pursuing advanced degree work, preparation in teaching linguistically diverse learners in their future classrooms. Coursework should be offered on second language writing and reading, and on second language acquisition, as well as on culture, and should be encouraged for all teachers.

Who Are the Students?

Bilingual students differ in various ways, including level of oral English proficiency, literacy ability in both the heritage language and English, and cultural backgrounds. English language learners born in the United States often develop conversational language abilities in English but lack academic language proficiency. Newcomers, on the other hand, need to develop both conversational and academic English. Education previous to entering U.S. schools helps determine students' literacy levels in their native language. Some learners may have age-/grade-level skills, while others have limited or no literacy because of the quality of previous schooling, interrupted schooling due to wars or migration, and other circumstances (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Given the wide range of English language learners and their backgrounds, it is important that all teachers take the time to learn about their students, particularly in terms of their literacy histories.

Immigrant students and the children of immigrants in the United States come from many cultural backgrounds. The background knowledge English learners bring to school greatly affects their performance. For this reason, teachers of English language learners should be sure to build background for content lessons rather than assuming that bilingual students come with the same background knowledge as mainstream students.

Teaching Bilingual Learners in Mainstream Classrooms

This section specifically addresses teaching language, reading, and writing, as well as the specific kinds of academic literacy that are often a part of most English and language arts

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

curricula. Although English language arts teachers have literacy as the focus of their teaching, many of these suggestions are useful for teachers working in the content areas as well. To acquire academic content through English, English language learners need to learn English. The academic language that students need in the different content areas differs, and students need scaffolding to help them to learn both the English language and the necessary content. For English language learners, teachers need to consider content objectives as well as English language development objectives.

Bilinguals need three types of knowledge to become literate in a second language. They need to know the second language; they need to know literacy; and they need world knowledge (Bernhardt, 1991). The sections below list key ideas for helping English language learners develop academic English proficiency. More detailed information on the topics covered in this section can be obtained from the topical bibliography compiled as part of this project.

To teach bilingual learners, teachers must get to know their learners.

Knowledge of the Students

Knowledge of the students is key to good teaching. Because teachers relate to students both as learners and as children or adolescents, teachers must establish how they will address these two types of relationships, what they need to know about their students, and how they will acquire this knowledge. The teacher-learner relationship implies involvement between teachers and students around subject matter and language and literacy proficiency in both languages. Adult-child relationships are more personal and should include the family. Focusing on both types of relationships bridges the gap between school and the world outside it, a gap that is especially important for many bilingual students whose world differs greatly from school.

Teaching Language

Second language learners need to develop academic proficiency in English to master content-area subjects. Teachers can provide effective instruction for these students by:

- Recognizing that second language acquisition is a gradual developmental process and is built on students' knowledge and skill in their native language;
- Providing authentic opportunities to use language in a nonthreatening environment;
- Teaching key vocabulary connected with the topic of the lesson;
- Teaching academic oral language in the context of various content areas;
- Teaching text- and sentence-level grammar in context to help students understand the structure and style of the English language;
- Teaching the specific features of language students need to communicate in social as well as academic contexts.

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

Teaching Literacy: Reading

Bilingual students also need to learn to read and write effectively in order to succeed in school.

Teachers can support English language learners' literacy development by:

- Introducing classroom reading materials that are culturally relevant;
- Connecting the readings with the students' background knowledge and experiences;
- Encouraging students to discuss the readings, including the cultural dimensions of the text;
- Having students read a more accessible text on the topic before reading the assigned text;
- Asking families to read with students a version in the heritage language;
- Replacing discrete skill exercises and drills with many opportunities to read;
- Providing opportunities for silent reading in either the students' first language or in English;
- Reading aloud frequently to allow students to become familiar with and appreciate the sounds and structures of written language;
- Reading aloud while students have access to the text to facilitate connecting oral and written modalities;
- Stimulating students' content knowledge of the text before introducing the text;
- Teaching language features, such as text structure, vocabulary, and text- and sentence-level grammar to facilitate comprehension of the text;
- Recognizing that first and second language growth increases with abundant reading and writing.

Support reading comprehension by:

- Relating the topic to the cultural experiences of the students;
- “Front loading” comprehension via a walk through the text or a preview of the main ideas, and other strategies that prepare students for the topic of the text;
- Having students read a more accessible text on the topic before reading the assigned text;
- Asking families to read with students a version in the heritage language;
- Doing pre-reading activities that elicit discussion of the topic;
- Teaching key vocabulary essential for the topic;
- Recognizing that experiences in writing can be used to clarify understanding of reading.

Teaching Literacy: Writing

Writing well in English is often the most difficult skill for English language learners to master. Many English language learners are still acquiring vocabulary and syntactic competence in their writing. Students may show varying degrees of acquisition, and not all second language writers will have the same difficulties or challenges. Teachers should be aware

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

that English language learners may not be familiar with terminology and routines often associated with writing instruction in the United States, including writing process, drafting, revision, editing, workshop, conference, audience, purpose, or genre. Furthermore, certain elements of discourse, particularly in terms of audience and persuasion, may differ across cultural contexts. The same is true for textual borrowing and plagiarism. The CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers is a useful resource for all teachers of writing to examine.

Teachers can provide instructional support for English language learners in their writing by:

- Providing a nurturing environment for writing;
- Introducing cooperative, collaborative writing activities which promote discussion;
- Encouraging contributions from all students, and promoting peer interaction to support learning;
- Replacing drills and single-response exercises with time for writing practice;
- Providing frequent meaningful opportunities for students to generate their own texts;
- Designing writing assignments for a variety of audiences, purposes, and genres, and scaffolding the writing instruction;
- Providing models of well-organized papers for the class. Teachers should consider glossing sample papers with comments that point to the specific aspects of the paper that make it well written;
- Offering comments on the strength of the paper, in order to indicate areas where the student is meeting expectations;
- Making comments explicit and clear (both in written response and in oral responses). Teachers should consider beginning feedback with global comments (content and ideas, organization, thesis) and then move on to more local concerns (or mechanical errors) when student writers are more confident with the content of their draft;
- Giving more than one suggestion for change—so that students still maintain control of their writing;
- Not assuming that every learner understands how to cite sources or what plagiarism is. Teachers should consider talking openly about citation and plagiarism in class, exploring the cultural values that are implicit in the rules of plagiarism and textual borrowing, and noting that not all cultures ascribe to the same rules and guidelines. Students should be provided with strategies for avoiding plagiarism.

Teaching Language and Content

The best way to help students learn both English and the knowledge of school subjects is to teach language through content. This should not replace reading and writing instruction in English, nor study of literature and grammar. There are three key reasons to do this:

1. Students get both language and content.

Research has shown that students can learn English and subject matter content material

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

at the same time. Students don't need to delay the study of science or literature until they reach high levels of English. Instead, they can learn both simultaneously. Given the time limitations older students face, it is crucial that classes provide them with both academic content-area knowledge and academic English.

2. **Language is kept in its natural context.**

When teachers teach science in English, students learn science terms as they study biology or chemistry. The vocabulary occurs naturally as students read and discuss science texts.

3. **Students have reasons to use language for real purposes.**

The primary purpose of school is to help students develop the knowledge of different academic disciplines. When academic content is presented in English, students focus on the main purpose of schooling: learning science, math, social studies, or literature. In the process, they also learn English.

Selecting Materials

- Choose a variety of texts around a theme.
- Choose texts at different levels of difficulty.
- Choose reading and writing materials that represent the cultures of the students in the class.
- When possible, include texts in the native languages of the ELLs in the class. The following considerations should be used as a guide for choosing texts that support bilingual learners:
 - Materials should include both literature and informational texts.
 - Materials should include culturally relevant texts.
 - Authentic materials should be written to inform or entertain, not to teach a grammar point or a letter-sound correspondence.
 - The language of the text should be natural.
 - If translated, the translation should be good language.
 - Materials should include predictable text for emergent readers.
 - Materials should include texts with nonlinguistic cues that support comprehension. (For a more comprehensive checklist, see Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E., 2002; Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S., 2004.)

Low-Level Literacy Immigrant Students

Late-arrival immigrant and refugee students with low literacy skills have been found to benefit from Newcomer programs or Welcome Centers designed for 1–3 semesters of high school (Boyson & Short, 2003; Schnur, 1999; Short, 2002). The focus is to help students acquire beginning English skills and guide students' acculturation to the U.S. school system before enrollment in regular ESL language support programs or content-area classrooms. The integration of such programs in high school English departments should be encouraged.

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

Conclusion

As the number of bilingual learners in mainstream classes increases, it becomes even more important for mainstream teachers to use effective practices to engage these students so that they can acquire the academic English and the content-area knowledge they need for school success. The guidelines offered here are designed as initial suggestions for teachers to follow. However, we recognize that all teachers need much more. Teachers need continued support and professional development to enable all their students, including their bilingual students, to succeed.

References

- American Federation of Teachers. (March, 2004). *Closing the achievement gap: Focus on Latino students* (Policy Brief 17). Retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://www.aft.org/teachers/pubs-reports/index.htm#english>.
- Barron, V., & Menken, K. (2002). *What are the characteristics of the bilingual education and ESL teacher shortage?* Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs.
- Bernhardt, E. B. (1991). A psycholinguistic perspective on second language literacy. Reading in Two Languages. *AILA Review*, 8, 31–44.
- Boyson, B. A., & Short, D. J. (2003). *Secondary school newcomer programs in the United States* (Research Report 12). Santa Cruz, CA, and Washington, DC: Center for Research on Education Diversity & Excellence.
- Brisk, M. E. (2006). *Bilingual education: From compensatory to quality schooling*. (2nd ed.) Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Crawford, J. (2004). *Educating English learners*. Los Angeles: Bilingual Education Services.
- De Jong, E. J. (2002). Effective bilingual education: From theory to academic achievement in a two-way bilingual program. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 26(1), 1–15.
- Fillmore, L. W., & Snow, C. (2002). What teachers need to know about language. In C. T. Adger, C. Snow, & D. Christian (Eds.), *What teachers need to know about language* (pp. 7–53). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Freeman, D. E., and Freeman, Y. S. (2004). *Essential linguistics: What you need to know to teach reading, ESL, spelling, phonics, and grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E. (1998). *ESL/EFL teaching: Principles for success*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Freeman, Y. S., and Freeman, D. E. (2002). *Closing the achievement gap*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gándara, P., Rumberger, R., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Callahan, R. (2003). English learners in California schools: Unequal resources, unequal outcomes. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(36). Retrieved March 28, 2006, from <http://epaa.asu.edu/>.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Greene, J. P. (1997). A meta-analysis of the Rossell and Baker review of bilingual education research. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 21.

The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

- Hopstock, P. & Stephenson, T. (2003). *Native languages of limited English proficient students*. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved March 5, 2006.
- Kindler, A. L. (2002). *Survey of the states' limited English proficient students and available educational programs and services 1999–2000 summary report*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Education Programs (NCELA). Retrieved Dec. 26, 2003, from <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu>.
- Krashen, S. (1996). *Under attack: The case against bilingual education*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.
- McQuillan, J., & Tse, L. (1997). Does research matter? An analysis of media opinion of bilingual education, 1984–1994. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 20(1), 1–27.
- Menken, K., & Antunez, B. (2001). *An overview of the preparation and certification of teachers working with limited English proficient students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse of Bilingual Education. Retrieved July 28, 2003, from <http://www.eric.org/pages/digests/ncbe.pdf>.
- NCELA. (2006). *The growing number of limited English proficient students 1991–2002*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- Nieto, S. M. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?* New York: Teachers College.
- Pally, M. (Ed.) (2000). *Sustained content teaching in academic ESL/EFL: A practical approach*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Ramirez, J. D. (1992). Executive summary. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 16, 1–62.
- Rolstad, K., Mahoney, K., & Glass, G. V. (2005). The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English language learners. *Educational Policy*, 19, 572–594.
- Schnur, B. (1999). A newcomer's high school. *Educational Leadership*, 56(7), 50–52.
- Short, D. J. (2002). Newcomer programs: An educational alternative for secondary immigrant students. *Education and Urban Society* 34(2), 173–198.
- Solomon, J., & Rhodes, N. (1995). *Conceptualizing academic language*. Washington, DC: The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. M. (2001). *Children of immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, University of California, Santa Cruz.
- Waxman, H. C., & Téllez, K. (2002). *Research synthesis on effective teaching practices for English language learners* (Publication Series No. 3). Philadelphia: Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Willig, A. C. (1985). A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research*, 55(3), 269–317.

For more resources to support English language learners, see <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teacherseducatingell>.

Statement of Terminology and Glossary

Steven Alvarez, St. John's University

Betsy Gilliland, University of Hawai'i Mānoa

Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, University of New Hampshire

Melinda J. McBee Orzulak, Bradley University

Shannon Pella, California State University, Sacramento

As authors of the various books in the Teaching English Language Learners strand of the NCTE Principles in Practice (PIP) imprint, we have made a concerted effort to use consistent terminology in these volumes. All of us have thought long and hard about the ways in which we label and describe bilingual and ELL students and the programs that often provide these students with additional support. Even so, readers will notice some variation in terms used to describe students, classrooms, and teaching practices. The concern over terminology is part of a long-standing discussion and trends in the labeling of these students, as well as of the fields that conduct research on teachers and students working across languages to teach and learn English. Often the shifting among terms leads to confusion and contention for teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and policymakers.

To address this confusion and tension, we begin each book in this strand with a glossary of common terms and acronyms that are part of current discussions about meeting the needs of these students in English language arts classrooms and beyond. For many readers, the terms themselves and the ongoing shift to new terms can be alienating, the jargon dividing readers into insiders and outsiders. But often the shift in terms has a great deal to do with both policy and issues of identity for students. For example, up until the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, most educational documents referred to these students as *bilingual* or *ESL*, both of which acknowledge that English is a second language and that a student has a first language as well.

The term *English language learner* was adopted with NCLB and brought into our schools and the larger public discourse. In fact, in 2002 the US Department of Education renamed the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs. It became the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students, now identified simply as the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). The change indicated a shift away from acknowledging students' home languages or bilingual abilities. Close to two decades later, the term *English language learner* remains prominent in educational policy and in many textbooks geared toward teachers and teacher educators. Its prominence and familiarity in the literature makes it an accessible way to talk about these students. Yet, as we have heard from many students through the years, the term *English language learner* can also be limiting. As one student asked, "When do I stop being an English language learner and get to just be an English language user?" The term also works against efforts to acknowledge the competencies and linguistically sophisticated talents these students have as translators, bilingual speakers, and cross-cultural negotiators.

Statement of Terminology and Glossary

In these PIP volumes, we use the term *English language learner* as a way to reach out to readers who see and hear this term regularly used in their schools, in their hallways, and in other helpful books in the field. However, some of us also use the terms *multilingual* or *bilingual* in order to encourage a discussion of these young people not simply as novice English learners but as individuals with linguistic and academic competencies they have gained from bilingual/multilingual experiences and literacies.

Glossary

Bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual: These terms refer to the ability to use (i.e., speak, write, and/or read) multiple languages. For many ELL-designated students in US schools, English is actually the third or fourth language they have learned, making *bilingual* not necessarily an accurate term.

Emergent bilingual: This term has been proposed as a more appropriate term than *LEP* or *ELL*, because it points to possibilities of developing bilingualism rather than focusing on language limits or deficiencies (García, 2009).

English as a foreign language (EFL): Refers to non-native English-speaking students who are learning English in a country where English is not the primary language.

English as an international language (EIL) or English as a lingua franca (ELF): These are terms used to refer to global conceptions of English, or English used for communication between members of various nations.

English as a second language (ESL): Readers may be most familiar with this term because it has been used as an overarching term for students, programs, and/or a field of study. Currently the term usually refers to programs of instruction (i.e., study of English in an English-speaking country); however, *ESL* was used in the past to refer to English language learning students.

English language learner (ELL): In keeping with the terminology used in the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*, this PIP strand employs the term *ELL*, which is commonly used in secondary schools as the short form of *English language learner*. The term refers to a complex, heterogeneous range of students who are in the process of learning English.

English learner (EL): This is the preferred term of the California Department of Education (and, increasingly, other states). California is the state with the largest number and percentage of emergent bilingual students enrolled in public schools. Over the past twenty years, California has moved from *LEP* to *ELL* and, most recently, from *ELL* to *EL*.

First language (L1) and second language (L2): *L1* has been used to refer to students' "mother tongue" or "home language" as they learn additional languages (referred to as *L2*).

Generation 1.5: This term, originally used in higher education, often refers to students who have been long-term residents in the United States but who were born abroad (al-

Statement of Terminology and Glossary

though the term is sometimes also used to refer to US-born children of recent immigrants). The designation of 1.5 describes their feelings of being culturally between first- and second-generation immigrants; they are often fluent in spoken English but may still be working to command aspects of written English, especially academic writing. As long-term residents, these students may reject *ESL* as a term that has been used to refer to recent immigrants to the United States.

Limited English proficiency (LEP): This abbreviation may be used in some educational contexts to refer to a designation used by the US Department of Education. Many scholars see this as a deficit term because of its focus on subtractive language (language that implies a deficiency) under a monolingual assumption of proficiency.

Long-term English language learner (LTELL): Currently in use in some states, this term refers to K–12 students who have been enrolled in US schools for many years and continue to be stuck with the ELL designation long past the time it should take for redesignation. Like Generation 1.5 students, LTELLs may have spent most if not all of their education in US schools. For a variety of reasons, including family mobility, inconsistent educational programs, and personal reasons, they have not had opportunities to learn academic language sufficiently to pass English language proficiency tests and other measures of proficiency for redesignation (Olsen, 2010).

Mainstream: This term is increasingly antiquated due to shifting demographics in the United States. In practice, it often refers to nonremedial, nonhonors, nonsheltered classes and programs. Sometimes it is used to refer to native or monolingual English speakers as a norm; changing demographics, however, mean that schools increasingly have a majority of culturally and linguistically diverse students, so it's been argued that a linguistically diverse classroom is the "New Mainstream" (Enright, 2011).

Monolingual: This term is used to refer to people who speak only one language, although often this label masks speakers' fluent use of multiple dialects, or variations, of English—an issue of particular concern when working with culturally diverse students who use other varieties of English (such as Hawai'i Pidgin or African American Vernacular) in their lives outside of school. The monolingual English label can mask these diverse students' need to learn academic English just as much as their immigrant classmates do. Much of what this PIP strand discusses is relevant to students who utilize multiple varieties of English; teachers can support these students by acknowledging their multilingualism and helping them learn to use English for academic and other purposes.

Native or non-native English speakers (NES, NNES): Some materials contrast native English speakers (NES) with non-native English speakers (NNES). As with *monolingual*, the term *native speaker* is increasingly unclear, given how many long-term ELLs speak English fluently without a "foreign" accent and yet technically have another world language as their home or first language.

Newcomer: Some school districts have separate one-year programs for "newcomers," or students who are newly arrived in the United States, in which students learn not just "surviv-

Statement of Terminology and Glossary

al” English, but also how school works in the United States. As the position statement discusses, it’s sometimes argued that newcomer programs benefit “low-level literacy immigrant students” and/or students with interrupted formal education who may have limited literacy in their first language (L1). Other newcomers may be fully literate in L1, especially by high school, and may or may not benefit from being isolated from the mainstream curriculum. For older students, the challenge is to move away from “low-level” ideas of literacy assessment that may discount the literacies of these students.

Resident or local bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual: These terms are sometimes used to refer to students who reside in the United States (in contrast to those who are on student visas). Resident students may or may not be US citizens, others may not have permanent resident status, while still others may not have immigration documentation at all.

References

- Enright, K. A. (2011). Language and literacy for a new mainstream. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(1), 80–118. doi: 10.3102/0002831210368989
- García, O. (2009). Emergent bilinguals and TESOL: What’s in a name? *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(2), 322–26. doi:10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00172.x
- Olsen, L. (2010). *Reparable harm: Fulfilling the unkept promise of educational opportunity for California’s long term English learners*. Long Beach, CA: Californians Together.

Introducing the Principles



Recognizing Strengths

My Journey to Understanding ELL Students in the ELA Classroom

The Realization of What I Didn't Know

In one of my earliest secondary school teaching experiences as a full-time teaching volunteer in a school for long-term suspended students, I visited the family of one of my students, Arturo.¹ As I stood in the living room among the carefully arranged family pictures and the Spanish-language Bible on the shelf, Arturo began speaking rapid-fire Spanish with his mother. Struggling to follow along with my limited high school Spanish, I had new insight into my student: suddenly, I was privy to a whole set of his language skills that had been invisible to me up to that point, especially his oral language fluency in this different context and his level of literacy in a language other than English. Over time and continued teaching, I began to appreciate how students like Arturo are able to communicate in different languages or varieties of English with different audiences, an appreciation that became a key to a new understanding of language.

1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this book for names of students, teachers, and schools unless a teacher has specified otherwise.

As my teaching career continued, I began to take note of the specific ways many students (not just English language learners) struggled to understand Shakespearean English as we read *Hamlet* and of the writing patterns for students who spoke American Sign Language or who had recently moved to Boston from Haiti. These experiences helped me notice the many facets of language (oral, written, academic, and social) and the complex ways that language played out in the English language arts (ELA) classroom. I noticed how issues of multiple English language varieties, as well as multilingual language learning, challenged the beliefs I (and many other teachers, I believe) held about what it meant to be a “good” English teacher. Most prominent of these is the belief that we are the keepers of a singular English that’s valued in all contexts and with all audiences. This belief, I learned, can obscure the ways that better understanding of the complexity of language can help us as ELA teachers be more responsive to students, especially linguistically and culturally diverse students.

My point is that as we consider language understandings in our teaching of English language learners (ELLs) and others, we must consider *What counts as language?* and *What do we mean by “language”?* Do we mean, as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) suggest, that language means conventions, vocabulary acquisition, and/or “grammar”? Or is it something more? When I first started teaching, I mostly thought in the CCSS way: seeing language as a tool that helped us to communicate. Years later, I learned new ways of thinking about language from researchers and linguists in a second language interest group at the University of Michigan: seeing language as an emergent, dynamic system (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006) and learning about the inextricable links between language, concepts, and culture.

Several years after my experience with Arturo, teaching at a school in Chicago where my students came from a wide range of backgrounds, I began to expand my understanding of language in connection to bilingualism—or multilingualism, to be more accurate. I realized that while many of my students spoke English with the same accent I did, the grammatical patterns that emerged in their writing surprised me. I wondered if these students were bilingual even though they didn’t seem to be what I thought of as English as a second language (ESL) students. Surprisingly, some of these students struggled in their Spanish classes, unable to take the second-level Spanish class at our school, even though their parents spoke Spanish at home. As I watched these multilingual students try to figure out which language class to take, I realized that I couldn’t make assumptions about links between culture and language ability.

Increasingly, I began to recognize the importance of language variation for all speakers of English. While I am aware that teaching about language variation as

a second language can be problematic politically (e.g., the Oakland Controversy, or “Ebonics Debate”), I came to learn that language variety can be a reality for all students, including for ELLs or multilingual students who may also learn different language varieties, such as what has been described as “Spanglish” or Chicano English. The reality is that a wide range of students, not just ELLs, experience academic language struggles. Recent calls to look at students’ *code-meshing* (the merging of different language varieties, or codes) remind us that in today’s increasingly global and wired communities, it is important to support all of our students’ needs for linguistic flexibility in English—academic, social, and meshed versions of academic and social English. Further, we as teachers must understand the realities of language learning that takes place prior to and outside of schooling. We need to gauge the linguistic depth students already have, whether these linguistic elements are due to English language variation or to second, third, and fourth languages. In sum, we need to be able to apply a sociolinguistic perspective of patterns available to students rather than fixating on “errors.” This sociolinguistic perspective means that we explore the varied ways language use interrelates with power dynamics, identities, cultures, and contexts.

Over time, it also dawned on me how many benefits my multilingual students brought to our engagement with ELA content. I saw that many of my assumptions about what counts as “language” and which students in my classrooms brought varied language use were dead wrong, and I wondered about the ways complicated *language beliefs* intersected with *language use*. I had assumed that multilingual students would value their home languages. In reality, though, I found that not all students valued their ability to use multiple languages, and some teachers saw multilingual students as simply posing problems, not adding rich resources to their classes. Some ELL students took the fervent position that English should be the only language used in the United States. Yet these same students enjoyed writing poems that incorporated Spanish and English or Polish and English, translated for their families during family conferences, or went to Ukrainian language school on Saturdays.

I also realized that one of my (erroneous) underlying language understandings was that language use was easy to identify and that it would be obvious to me if students knew other languages. Without familiarity with second language acquisition, I was like many teachers who interpret some students as more “fluent” than others because of their oral language skills and didn’t always notice the support students needed for academic language. I began to realize how much simpler it was to step into the traditional ELA teacher role in language study—e.g., to drill on format and grammar based on assumptions about the transfer of grammar or vocabulary exercises to actual writing. Many of my ELL students actually liked

these cut-and-dried grammar lessons. Unfortunately, the transfer to their writing was often minimal at best.

I felt overwhelmed by what I didn't know about my students and their language use, even as I worked with limited support staff providing English language support, special education support, and translation for families. I was unsure about so many things: Should I call students' homes without a translator? How could I (or even should I) help a student edit a poem written in her home language? Should I ask for help from my Spanish teacher colleague? What should I do with my students who regularly spoke Russian, French, or other languages when all I knew was English and a little Spanish?

My "aha" moment from all this observation and wondering came down to this: language in all its variation and difference is complex. It's not enough to just "appreciate" multilingual students' language abilities in some kind of abstract manner. We have to understand facets of language use and acquisition to really understand and use students' assets in ELA teaching. We also have to understand myths about language and multilingualism that can obscure our deployment of best practice. These understandings (and misunderstandings) about language can be overwhelming as a teacher.

Scholars have described a long list of potential myths, such as that learning two languages confuses people, that there is one stable English used in all contexts, that correcting errors should always happen right away, that speaking a language well means someone is fluent, or that recent immigrants are the first immigrants to ever want bilingual education or to refuse to learn English—all of these myths and others are still in circulation. (See Soltero [2011] for a full discussion of conscious and unconscious myths related to language.) We need to consider this complicated landscape of language and not be intimidated by what we don't know. The questions we ask help us better understand the many assets of our multilingual students,—as well as the assets they (and our more complex understandings of language) can bring to our classrooms.

The Quest to Learn More

Determined to learn more about the patterns that seemed to be emerging in some of my writers' prose, I took a summer course to extend my Spanish language knowledge. This course opened my eyes to the language variations that exist not only in Spanish but also in the many other languages that were part of my students' lives. I began to notice the ways verbs, like the subjunctive, functioned; the ways differences in word order (like more flexibility in word order in Spanish) influenced students' syntax; how long noun groups used in academic language could be

challenging when the first language usually places modifiers after nouns; the ways alphabet differences could cause challenges (as in Arabic); the ways differences in levels of language modality affected understanding; how articles might or might not be used (as in Russian). I applied some of my new knowledge in my teaching, and then continued to learn by attending professional development sessions focused on the challenges of teaching English language learners with a variety of first languages and on ways of supporting reading and writing in diverse schools. I attended sessions at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Convention and learned from other teachers. Later, as I learned more about educational linguistics and read about second language acquisition and approaches to teaching English language learners, I began to understand some of the complexities inherent in my experiences.

I started to realize over time that a simple understanding of English as a second language is not enough to support the range of learners who are the new reality in the “mainstream” classroom. As I taught, I began to realize:

- I couldn't always tell which students were multilingual based on accents.
- Some students who were multilingual already interpreted their abilities as deficits, so they wouldn't admit to outside language use.
- Some patterns would emerge based on home language use, but not always.
- Some of my best, worst, and average writers and readers fit the category of “ELL” or multilingual learner.
- Rigid grammar book instruction helped none of us.

Over time, as I began to complicate my understanding of multilingual students, I started to notice something else: the many joys of having a multilingual ELA classroom, in particular that students who had multiple language abilities could offer a lot to our discussions of language, grammar, and much more. Initially, I was distracted from seeing this benefit because I was so focused on my need for resources. A deeper understanding of the demands of language learning (written, oral, academic, and other), as well as of culture and language and many other areas, was a benefit to be mined in my classroom.

The Discovery of Possibilities from Understanding Language: Benefits for All

What does it mean to understand language? You may be like me and need resources to fully experience the joys of understanding how language is used in multiple and exciting ways in your classroom. You may have some of the same issues I did, like the need to better understand the complexities surrounding ELL students in

a mainstream classroom. You may need more information about what the range of “language learners” looks like. You may need clarification about why some strategies are working and/or not working. You may just need some new ideas. You may be encountering linguistic diversity for the first time, in a new context, or with a new group of students. You may have a recent addition to your classroom who has changed the teaching and learning dynamic. You may be noticing variations in your students’ writing and reading approaches, strengths, and skills but aren’t sure what to do next. Or you may be a new or preservice teacher who is aware of your limited preparation for teaching ELLs or who wants to extend your initial insights.

You are not alone. I’m painfully aware that my limited knowledge of ELL students stymied my own instruction at times, similar to the way I now see many new teachers approaching their ELLs. In my current research in my role as an English educator, I’ve learned that new teachers often experience surprises based on language and/or the complexity of linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Inevitably, dynamics of language and power emerge in classroom interactions. One unfortunate reaction I’ve noted is that many mainstream teachers see ELL students either as the purview of someone else or as a problem to be overcome.

My journey shows me something different: that ELL students *should* be our purview because understanding language is key to improving ELA instruction for all students. Our mainstream ELA classrooms provide crucial opportunities for academic and interpersonal language learning, and these opportunities are even richer in a multilingual classroom.

I’ve titled this book *Understanding Language*, intentionally using the *-ing* verb tense, or progressive tense, to show that learning to understand language remains an ongoing process due to the varied contexts, time periods, and interactions in which we live, learn, and teach. That’s one reason why in each chapter I ask you to consider questions to get you started on new steps in the process. And because language is intensely personal and individual as well as embedded in much larger cultural, institutional, and interpersonal contexts, I’ve framed each chapter with my own experiences as well as those of other teachers, some of whom are multilingual themselves and others who are functionally monolingual like me. Understanding language means considering how our own experiences, and those of our students, intersect with myths about language, as well as with the oral, written, academic, and social uses of language. Better understanding language allows us to shift from deficit-based to asset-based understandings.

Challenge or Opportunity? Language Choices for Framing and Perceiving Reality

As an illustration of how metaphors and beliefs shape understandings of teaching English language learners, consider the following terms often used to describe language use and ELL students:

- Bi-/multilingual
- Challenge
- Contributors
- Double the work
- Fluent
- Strength
- Home language
- Learner
- Limited
- Monolingual
- Potential
- Problem
- Proficient
- Second language
- Surprise

Which terms do you see as positive, negative, or neutral?

Look at Figure 1.1. Is this how you classified the terms? Are there other terms you might add?

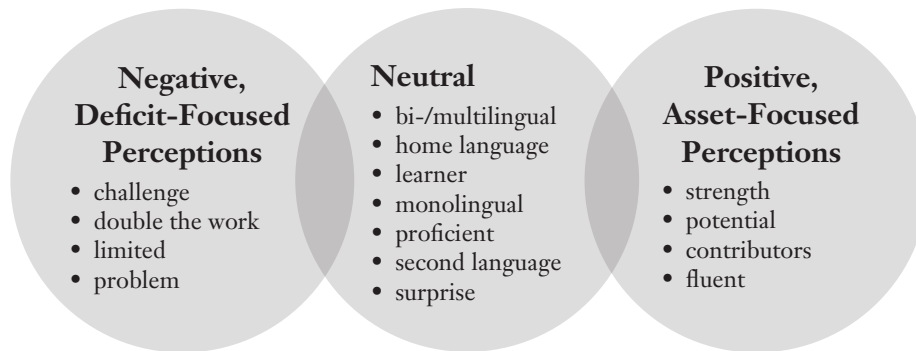


Figure 1.1. Perceptions of ELL students and language understandings.

Keep these terms in mind as you continue reading as I suggest why and how metaphors matter.

Why Our Metaphors Matter

I realized that having ELL students is like having a gift.

—Sewak, early-career English teacher

They're our bread and butter.

—Maja, experienced English teacher

In this book, I'll be drawing on key principles and teachers' examples to help us shift from deficit-focused ways of understanding linguistically diverse students and their language in our classrooms toward asset-focused ways. By showing how principles can play out in practice, this book can help teachers recognize and apply

the ways teaching ELL students draws on and strengthens best practice in ELA instruction.

Metaphors are an important way we frame the world around us—and for teachers, this framing can impact not only our relationships with students but also their success in our classrooms. For instance, in some multicultural classrooms, the metaphor of teacher as helper has been shown to be less effective than the metaphor of teacher as intercultural communicator (Hyland, 2005). *Helper* in this case implies a more patronizing model, whereas *intercultural communicator* implies a sense of two-way exchange that recognizes the need for mutual learning and appreciation.

Seeing ourselves as *intercultural communicators* creates opportunities for two-way exchange that recognizes the need for mutual learning and appreciation.

Thinking metaphorically can help us understand the ELL students in our classrooms in different ways: as a challenge or surprise, as an opportunity or asset, or as someone else's problem. Over my years of teaching and learning, these different metaphors have all resonated with me at various points as I've shifted from being overwhelmed by the gaping chasm in my language understandings to being excited about the possibilities for building bridges, or creating intricate gridwork, as I learn more about language while I teach and learn with students. Paying attention to these metaphors is important because they shape how we understand language in the spaces of our classrooms. When ELL students are framed as a challenge, a difficulty, or something external to our "regular classrooms," we cast them as burdens or interlopers. What happens if instead we frame these students—and especially our need to understand how they do use and can use language—as an opportunity? While we still may feel "under water" or overloaded at times, how might this reframing help us as teachers?

Understanding the strengths brought to ELA instruction by ELL students is something I wish I had recognized earlier in my teaching. I wish I'd known more about so many areas of how language works, such as distinctions between oral and written language practices, which would have helped me create a richer language learning environment for all students.

This book is a response to what I wish I had known as a classroom teacher, especially in my early years of teaching language learners of various types. It focuses on research and teaching examples that provide glimpses into experienced classroom teaching that honors the strengths available in linguistically diverse classes.

In Practice: The Strengths ELL Students Bring to ELA Classrooms and Our Understandings as Intercultural Communicators

Key Practices in This Vignette

- Incorporating and valuing students' perspectives and experiences
 - Building on students' assets (visual literacies and cultural experiences)
 - Understanding opportunities that exist in multilingual classrooms
 - Seeing oneself as an intercultural communicator
 - Considering varieties of English—regional, international, academic
-

Florida teacher Sewak, who grew up in Chicago with strong roots in the Caribbean, describes how the strengths of ELL students add to the “taste and flavor of the class. It can give you prompts for discussion and it gives you a larger variety [of perspectives and experiences].” Sewak was sensitized to the struggles of ELL students from a young age, as he saw how his cousins who used Caribbean English initially struggled with their schoolwork because they didn’t always use the same sentence structure and lexicon as other English-speaking students. Further, his own multilingualism shapes his appreciation for how language affects our classrooms and helps him see languages as an asset in ELA learning.

For instance, students can discuss the cultural backgrounds that influence their interpretation of literature. They can unpack the way their visual literacy (i.e., how they interpret images) can be influenced by where they grew up, their cultural references and texts, and/or artwork in their home communities. Sewak’s ninth-grade ELA classes include ELL students from varied backgrounds—many who are newcomers to the United States and placed directly in his class—and he uses the first week of school to lay the groundwork for a welcoming and engaged learning community.

To do so, Sewak assigns an About Me paper as an opening activity to start establishing students’ comfort level in the classroom and to emphasize the importance of cultural and family background to their class learning as a team. In the paper, students respond to multiple questions asking them to describe their families, cultures, and backgrounds using both words and images (pictures or drawings).

Sewak models by sharing his own About Me example that includes both words and images, purposely highlighting a picture answer first to show the value of using an image and to encourage students to use their own images; the goal is to build comfort levels for newcomer ELL students who may be able to express more with image-based answers at this point in their language learning.

Sewak points to a picture of brightly lit lamps on his paper: “Here’s an example of culture, a cultural festival. You may not know that in my family’s Caribbean background, Diwali is celebrated, a Festival of Lights. This lamp represents that festival so important to my cultural background.” Further explaining the importance of their culture

continued on next page

to his family, Sewak points to a coconut and describes the huge role of coconuts in various everyday and special occasion foods he grew up eating, explaining the role of coconuts as a major export in the region of his family's origin.

After Sewak shares his examples, students begin making connections, saying, "Wait, I have something like that in my culture, too." They add pictures to their own About Me papers, which they share with the group while sitting in one large circle, a structure Sewak uses to help students take immediate ownership as part of the class. The group considers, "What is my culture?" And students who never thought of a particular holiday or tradition as culture begin noticing comparisons and clarifying how events or experiences reflect important aspects of their familial and cultural backgrounds.

This emphasis on cross-cultural and community-based learning continues throughout the year in Sewak's class. On Fridays, during the last ten minutes of class, two students share a picture that represents a recent event, world connection, or family tradition that is important to them. Eventually, a giant bulletin board labeled "Who We Are" includes images from the 150 students in Sewak's classes.

This awareness of identities, cultures, and values becomes a key part of the students' ongoing engagement with ELA texts. Before each new text they read, students turn to a Reflection section in their binders and write predictions and connections based on an initial overview of the text. In these reflections, students frequently draw on events, experiences, and cultural traditions they have shared in class, making connections between literary characters, themes, settings, and their own lives.

For example, this sense of familiarity and ownership enriches their group reading of a story about a family broken down by war in the Middle East. At first many students see the story as disconnected from their lives, until one student (from a different war-torn country) describes firsthand personal experiences as a teenager leaving home during war and even shares images, helping the group make connections to the short story. When reading *The Odyssey*, students consider how cultures and traditions interrelate with the story (and their own experiences), eventually combining a Socratic seminar with a food festival.

Sewak's goal is for students to learn about themselves and one another—noticing commonalities and strengths as they work as a team to explore what is important, a goal that students have recognized by describing Sewak in the yearbook as a teacher who makes all incoming ninth graders feel welcome.

Moving from a Deficit Lens to an Asset-Based Lens

There are too many heartbreaking stories of ELL students who are ignored, stigmatized, or underserved in their secondary schools. How we think about the presence of ELL students in our ELA classes makes a difference. When we shift from seeing ELLs through a deficit lens and instead recognize the assets they bring to a classroom, we can begin to find ways to improve our teaching and the learning of all our students.

Deficit lenses are not always obvious; rather, they manifest in multiple ways. One way is when teachers fall into the trap of seeing difference as deficiency, as something that doesn't belong in our English classes. A preservice teacher in one of my research studies, Zack, demonstrated this when he explained: "Having English language learners would be difficult, a challenge. It would be harder, but I guess there's another department for them."

Deficit lenses also arise when we see ourselves as language gatekeepers who must point out the "deficient" language use of students as part of our job—despite research that suggests the position of English teachers as all-knowing experts about language can cause anxiety and actually prevent teachers from implementing a more generative, student-affirming approach (McBee Orzulak, 2012, 2013). This is even more often the case when dealing with ELL students.

Finally, we may be blindsided by what we don't know or don't see in our classrooms, by the assumptions we make about who is a language learner and who is not and by what it means to be a language learner. Student teacher Lindsey explained: "My biggest surprise during parent-teacher conferences was learning that two additional students spoke a language other than English at home."

As ELA teachers, we can work to avoid these three problem areas that keep us from using an asset-based pedagogy with ELL students, a pedagogy that focuses on the strengths and abilities these students bring to the classroom. This book provides resources to help us unpack these misunderstandings of language and

1. Avoid seeing language difference as a problem
2. Avoid taking on the role of language gatekeeper
3. Avoid ignoring the presence of linguistic diversity

Better understanding language can help us avoid these problem areas and reframe curricular challenges into positive steps for improving our ELA classrooms.

What Mainstream Teachers Need to Know: Advice from a District ELL Coordinator

Eliana, who serves as district ELL coordinator, describes what she most wishes mainstream teachers knew about teaching ELL students:

The number one idea I wish teachers knew about English language learners is that they have great potential to be successful with the appropriate supports in place. Although they may not necessarily be able to demonstrate their abilities in a sophisticated way, . . . it does not mean that they do not have sophisticated ideas.

These students have unique and diverse experiences and perspectives that they can draw upon to make meaningful contributions to a school community. What they don't need is to be pitied, have their hands held at every turn, or have lower standards of achievement or lower expectations applied to them. That will not help them in the long run. It will not help them to access opportunities in the future beyond the K–12 school experience. Teachers must focus on what will prepare [ELL students] for their future and what they need to do to support them in achieving at the highest levels. And as for the parents of ELs, what they want is what every parent wants—for their child to be happy and to succeed.

Varied Dimensions of Strengths: What We Know about ELL Students

We know from the work of scholars focused on how schools best work with ELL students that a positive approach matters (e.g., Soltero, 2011). Our schools need to affirm the value of ELLs and use their home culture and language as assets. To do so, we need to continue language support in mainstream classrooms. We need to understand the range of ELLs in our classrooms and how to engage this diversity of ELL students in rigorous learning in heterogeneous classrooms.

First, we have to better understand the spectrum of experiences ELL students bring to our classrooms, as they do not fit a single profile. As preservice teacher Zack describes and as some of us have assumed, “Aren’t English language learners the students who are in the ESL room down the hall?” It is true that some districts define *English learners* or *ELs* as students who qualify for isolated programs due to language learning needs (e.g., Illinois, where I teach, is one of these states). The reality is that the official numbers of language learners do not always reflect the current multilingual reality of our classrooms, as there are different metrics for determining which students are considered “ELL” or “LTELL” or “LEP” or any number of acronyms that have been used to identify language learners; and this official number, based on limited tests, often doesn’t reflect the complex picture of which students are still learning English reading, writing, speaking, or listening skills—skills that develop at different speeds and in different ways. Taking one picture of one row of the produce section in a grocery store, for example, will not tell you the whole story about the vegetables available at that store. Similarly, language learning tests offer only a snapshot of the language knowledge of any given student.

The reality is that the US population continues to change rapidly. As the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)* notes, the growing number of linguistically diverse students already affects our classes and will continue to do so. The next generations will reflect the potential for increased linguistic diversity in the United States. Americans have an exciting opportunity to catch up with our global neighbors in terms of language learning by helping to shift the US population to a majority of multilingual, globally-savvy language users rather than proudly monolingual isolationists.

Since even native speakers continue to learn English throughout their lives, defining *ELL* and what it means to be an English language learner is complicated. Shifting definitions, by various stakeholders, for English proficiency “levels” create challenges for defining what it means to be classified in this way. Again, ELL students bring a spectrum of experiences to the classroom rather than a single profile, and there are many factors that lead to this diversity; social class, geographic origin, educational background, race/ethnicity, and cultural background all factor into students’ identities, as I discuss further in Chapter 3.

The constantly shifting terminology and alphabet soup of acronyms can be one of the challenges facing us as we work to better understand teaching in linguistically diverse classrooms. While not everyone will agree with the definitions for all the terms describing English language learners, the authors of the Principles in Practice strand on teaching ELLs (of which this book is a part) collaborated to compile a streamlined Statement of Terminology and Glossary, one that reflects the most current terms and definitions by a group of us who are heavily steeped in the research and practice surrounding linguistic diversity. We offer this list (see pp. xx–xxii) with caution, as we are well aware that terminology describing students—and their language use—often reflects power dynamics. It is easy for terminology to reflect a deficit or exclusionary perspective. The multiple, evolving terms reflect the complexities of language, identity, and academic literacy. Different terminology has been used over time by different stakeholders and has evolved based on demographic shifts, deepening understandings of language, and more complex descriptions of students’ use of language. As the *English Journal* column “Lingua Anglia” notes, it’s important that we consider moving beyond deficit terminology; the author suggests using the term *multilingual learner* in order to describe students in an asset-based manner (Hickey, 2015).

Even though this imprint strand uses *English language learning* students, or ELL students, to refer to a broad spectrum of students, the question of what terminology do/should we use and why is one that we continue grappling with as we learn more about language in our classrooms. I remind myself that the goal is not necessarily to find the perfect label. Although accurate and precise descriptions of our students and their language use can matter, what is more important are the underlying messages reflected in those labels or terminology. The point of terminology, after all, is to help us understand, support, and affirm our students and their language use.

Next Steps: Better Understanding the Benefits of Language Understandings and the Presence of ELL Students

This book is designed to help mainstream English teachers like you explore the ways understanding language can build your repertoire as an effective teacher of all students. No matter what labels might (or might not) apply to your students, we want all of them to learn savvy ways for using language and engaging in the study of English language arts. The reality is that best practice for teaching ELL students can actually provide benefits for all students. Furthermore, understanding this reality can help us justify both new and tried-and-true ELA methods to our stakeholders, including administrators, parents or guardians, and other teachers.

To do so, in this book you and I together will explore “understanding language,” or key notions that help us create responsive classrooms that prioritize

respect and rigor. Specifically, we explore how mainstream ELA teachers might begin to understand language in new ways to benefit both ELL and non-ELL students housed in the same classroom.

As a starting place, I discuss supportive teaching resources to help unpack the opportunities inherent in having ELL students and recognizing their strengths in your classroom. The book addresses responses to common curricular challenges to help you get started as you consider how key language understandings can provide support for (1) structuring positive environments for students as both learners and adolescents; (2) providing a language focus in our teaching; and (3) assessing the range of ELL students.

This book provides a series of entry points into the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners* (from here on referred to as the *NCTE Position Paper*), a document that encourages ELA teachers to acknowledge research in language acquisition and support for multilingual students. I focus on the position paper's description of *knowing students*, *teaching language and content*, and *teaching literacy* (reading and writing), as outlined in Chapter 2. Understanding these areas can help us create classrooms that harness ELA's potential to offer all students key literacy/language skills (reading, writing, and speaking). The principles also support important mindsets and approaches, such as critical, inquiry-based, and multicultural approaches.

The book's goal is to highlight how teachers can create rich, safe ELA classroom environments for ELL students alongside other students in the mainstream classroom by exploring an overarching question: *How do we understand language in order to create rigorous, responsive classroom environments that value ELL students?* Across the chapters, we'll look at strategies for supporting linguistically diverse students in mainstream ELA classrooms that prioritize both respect and rigor. As part of answering this question in a tangible way, the book offers examples of how effective teachers incorporate the cultural and linguistic knowledge of their students to put the principles of respect and rigor into practice as they

- Structure peer-to-peer groups
- Encourage class participation
- Create opportunities for authentic literacy learning and language use
- Select texts and plan units
- Assess student learning and teaching practice

We'll look at research and examples from practice to help regular secondary English teachers support ELL students. We'll also consider specific ways to teach reading and writing that engage all students while supporting ELLs.

For example, Chapter 2 further describes how a responsive approach is one

that notices and understands the strengths of ELL students and uses their presence to guide respectful and rigorous instruction for all students as we unpack our own cultural and linguistic expectations. Chapter 3 explores the role of discourse in developing positive relationships in classroom spaces, because creating responsive environments with a range of students helps to extend possibilities for critical thinking and literacy. These understandings of responsive classroom discourses help us counteract deficit discourses related to ELL students through our “mainstream” or “regular” classrooms if they provide spaces for valuing ELL students rather than marginalizing them. You will also learn ways to structure positive environments for students as both learners and adolescents, and to position them as visibly contributing community members. You will read examples of how teacher-student relationships can affirm student identities as part of an approach to supporting language learning.

Because of the wide range of students who could classify as ELL in our mainstream classes, we have a responsibility and challenge to better understand that range and what shifts in instruction might be necessary. That’s one reason Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on how to use principles of respect and rigor to help us respond to curricular challenges we face in planning instruction and assessment for the range of ELL students in our classrooms. Chapter 4 explores how understandings of varied language demands and resources (i.e., oral, written, academic, and social) help us support language learning and encourage active participation in our literacy communities. Chapter 5 describes how to use our understandings of multilingual learners to better support students in rigorous, responsive reading communities, with attention to how we frame and select texts, scaffold active engagement with those texts, and pair reading and writing tasks. Chapter 6 affirms ways to use assessment productively to communicate high expectations for all students by prioritizing authentic assessment through shared discourses, formative assessment, self-assessment, multiple assessments, and teacher inquiry.

The book also offers ways to build a bridge between stakeholders in your classroom, school, and community contexts. Considering the needs of ELL students can provide us with opportunities to promote better community engagement and collaboration with others, as discussed in Chapter 7.

Getting Started: Questions to Ask Yourself

Considering an Asset-Based Perspective

- What are the strengths of our ELL students?
- What opportunities are available in a multilingual classroom?
- What have you learned from your ELL students
 - about language?
 - about culture?
 - about learning?
 - about yourself?
- What asset-based terms can you use to refer to your ELL students and the process of language learning?

Teaching English Language Learners

(adapted from the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners [ELLs]*)

What knowledge and skills do mainstream teachers need in order to develop effective curricula that engage English language learners, develop their academic skills, and help them negotiate their identities as bilingual learners? This position paper addresses the language and literacy needs of these learners as they participate and learn in mainstream ELA classes. Specifically, it addresses ways teachers can help these students develop English as well as ways they can support their students' bilingualism.

The growing population of English language learners in our schools and the diversity of these students continue to challenge teachers. Federal, state, and local policies have addressed the education of bilingual learners by implementing different types of programs. Still, for a variety of reasons, the majority of ELLs find themselves in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students. Although improving the education of ELLs has been proposed as a pressing national educational priority, many teachers are not adequately prepared to work with a linguistically diverse student population.

Connected to a strong research base, the position paper offers approaches to teaching that center on:

- Knowledge of Students
- Teaching Language
- Teaching Literacy: Reading
- Teaching Literacy: Writing
- Teaching Language and Content
- Selecting Materials

Engaging with critical questions such as *What counts as language?* and *How can I know when a student is struggling with language?*, Melinda J. McBee Orzulak explores how mainstream ELA teachers might begin to understand language in new ways to benefit both English language learner and non-ELL students learning in the same classroom. Offering supportive teaching resources and ways to notice and understand the strengths of ELL students, McBee Orzulak outlines strategies for respectful and rigorous instruction for all students as we consider our own cultural and linguistic expectations. She also addresses responses to common curricular challenges such as (1) structuring positive environments for students as both learners and adolescents; (2) providing a language focus in our teaching; and (3) assessing the range of literacies our ELL students possess. To meet the needs of inservice and preservice teachers, unique features of the book include Key Understandings and Getting Started questions with each chapter, key practices linked to classroom vignettes, sample assignments, and lists of next steps and resources.

Understanding Language provides a series of entry points into the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*, focusing in particular on knowing and teaching all of our students—monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual—both language and content.

Melinda J. McBee Orzulak is an associate professor at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, where she teaches future teachers and serves as the English education coordinator.



National Council of
Teachers of English

www.ncte.org

