CAL practitioner brief

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Using Sheltered Instruction to Support English Learners

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Sheltered instruction is an essential component of any program for English learners (Genesee, 1999; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010; Williams, Hakuta, & Haertel, 2007; Wright, 2010). Sheltered instruction delivers language-rich, grade-level content area instruction in English in a manner that is comprehensible to the learners. When partnered with English language development and, when possible, native language instruction, sheltered instruction allows English learners to progress academically while developing proficiency in English (Faltis, 1993; Fritzen, 2011; Genesee, 1999; Short, 1991; Wright, 2010). Sheltered instruction also incorporates opportunities for students to develop general academic competencies, such as study skills, learner strategies, and critical thinking skills (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2012; Genesee, 1999; Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989).

This brief provides an overview of sheltered instruction. It first describes when and how to use sheltered instruction to support English learners. It then discusses fundamental components of sheltered instruction, including content and language objectives, instructional strategies (with suggestions for specific content areas), and assessment of content learning. It concludes with a list of resources to help teachers support students through sheltered instruction as they develop their English proficiency and master grade-level academic content.

When and How to Use Sheltered Instruction

Figure 1 illustrates how sheltered instruction should be part of a broader educational program for English learners that ideally includes the following:

- Native language instruction as a foundation for content area learning
- Sheltered instruction to continue content area learning as appropriate based on a student's level of English proficiency
- English language development to foster students' ability to listen, speak, read, and write in English

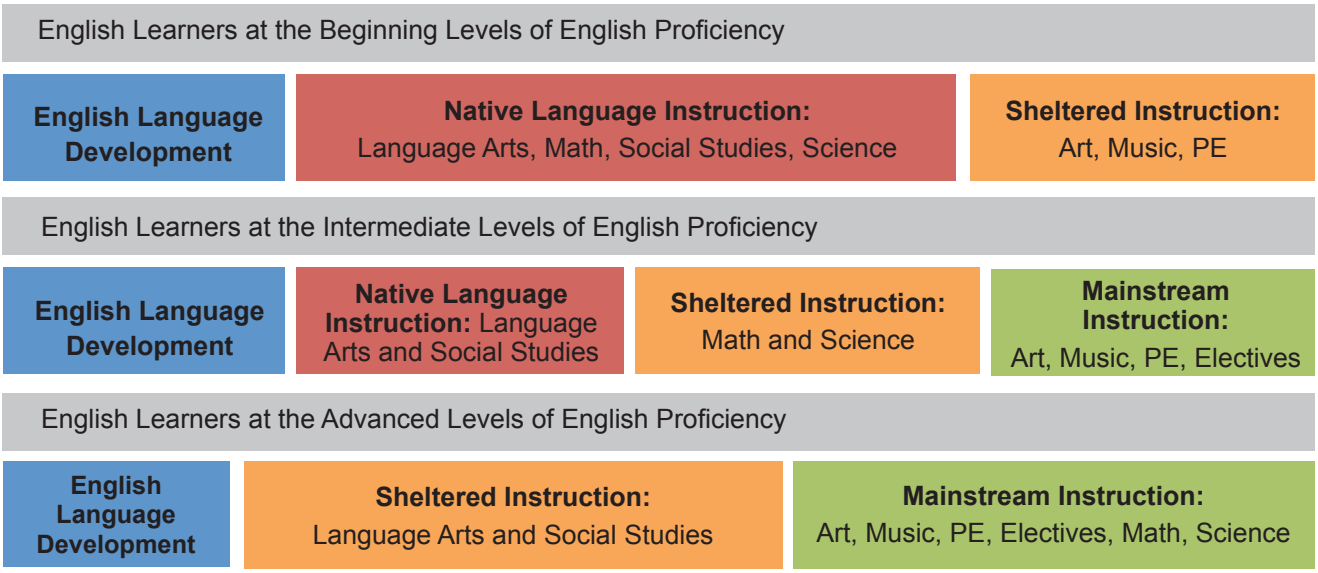

Figure 1. Sheltered instruction as one component of a comprehensive education program for English learners

The goal is for students to acquire the English proficiency and content area knowledge needed to transition successfully to mainstream instruction. Although many programs eliminate native language instruction when learners become proficient in English, it is beneficial to continue to provide them with opportunities to develop their native language skills.

Ideally, at the earliest stages of English language development, learners participate in sheltered instruction only for highly context-embedded areas such as art, music, and physical education, with other content instruction provided in their first language. Once students have an intermediate level of English proficiency, they can transition into sheltered English for grade-level math and science instruction (two content areas that easily lend themselves to context-embedded instruction). Finally, at the advanced levels of English proficiency, students can learn social studies and language arts through sheltered instruction and move into mainstream instruction for most previously sheltered areas. In this way, as the students' levels of English proficiency increase, so do their exposure to and participation in sheltered instruction, followed by their eventual transition to mainstream instruction (Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Wright, 2010).

It is important to note that the model presented in Figure 1 may need to be adjusted based on the age of the students and may not be feasible in all schools. Feasibility is influenced by the availability of bilingual teachers and resources, state laws and policies about the language of instruction, and the number of English learners in a school or at a grade level. Often, students at beginning levels of English proficiency participate in sheltered instruction for all content area learning and receive no native language instruction. When this is the case, schools should aim to provide them with teachers who are prepared to teach both content and language. Teachers who have a bilingual or ESL endorsement, teachers who have extensive training or education related to English learners, and even teachers who share students' non-English language may be best suited to support all levels of learners through sheltered instruction.

Fundamentals of Sheltered Instruction

To better provide English learners with access to core content concepts, multiple efforts and approaches have been used over time. Early approaches to fostering second language competencies included grammar-translation and the audiolingual method. As more English learners entered U.S. schools in the 1970s, educators designed special English language development courses that embraced a communicative approach. In the 1980s, researchers and educators began to see the benefit of developing language through the use of

grade-level content curricula, and content-based English classes became a popular approach to educating English learners. However, concerned that language development was taking a backseat to the teaching of content, ESL and content-area teachers began collaborating to strategically and systematically incorporate English language development into content-area instruction. This integration is now generally referred to as sheltered instruction (Echevarría & Short, 2010).

Since the rise of sheltered instruction in the early 1980s, the most prominent models that have been used in schools include the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA; Chamot & O'Malley, 1986), Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE; Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008), the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model (Short & Echevarria, 1999), and Guided Language Acquisition and Design (GLAD; Brechtel, 2001). These models share the following features:

- A focus on content and language objectives
- Making content comprehensible for students by—
  - Connecting students' backgrounds and prior knowledge to content area concepts
  - Explicitly teaching content vocabulary, academic language, and language structures of the content area
  - Presenting cognitively demanding information and tasks in context-embedded ways (e.g., graphic organizers, visual representations)
  - Using cooperative learning to facilitate content understanding and promote language development through language use
- The use of alternate assessments to accurately determine what students know about a content area regardless of their English proficiency level

While often mistaken as "just good teaching," quality sheltered instruction requires teachers who are not only certified to teach their content area but who also know how to teach English learners effectively (as evidenced, e.g., by an ESL endorsement). Sheltered instruction teachers must be able to use their knowledge of approaches that promote both content and language learning along with their knowledge of second language acquisition and of their students' culture, language, and community to address the unique needs of English learners in purposeful ways (August & Hakuta, 1997; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

Setting the Stage: Content and Language Objectives

The use of instructional objectives is a relatively well-established practice in U.S. K–12 classrooms and has some research base to indicate that their implementation can lead to enhanced learner performance in areas like reading and math (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). In sheltered instruction, teachers utilize two types of instructional objectives: content and language.

Content objectives, typically derived from state content standards, state the cognitive skills or knowledge that students are expected to acquire during a lesson and specify how students will demonstrate what they have learned. For example, see the possible content objective below for a seventh-grade standard from the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS):

> *NGSS Standard MS-LS1-2:* Develop and use a model to describe the function of a cell as a whole and ways parts of cells contribute to the function.
>
> *Possible content objective:* Students will analyze how parts of a cell function in normal cells and cancerous cells to demonstrate knowledge of parts of a cell.

As a result of the standards-based reform movement in the United States, most teachers are familiar with the practice of creating content objectives. However, using language objectives to drive classroom instruction for English learners is still a relatively new idea, and the literature suggests that teachers require much support in order to become comfortable creating objectives that identify academic language worth teaching (Baecher, Farnsworth, & Ediger, 2014; Fisher & Frey, 2010; Short, Himmel, Gutierrez, & Hudec, 2011). Familiarity

in creating, posting, and teaching to language objectives is important to ensure that English learners have equal access to the curriculum (Hudson, Miller, & Butler, 2006; Short, Echevarría, & Richards-Tutor, 2011). By definition, English learners are still learning academic English and hence may not be able to access and engage with the content concepts without explicit language instruction (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2012; Lyster, 2007).

Language objectives articulate for learners the academic language functions and skills they need to master to fully participate in the lesson and meet the grade-level content standards (Echevarria, Short, & Vogt, 2012). Quality language objectives complement the knowledge and skills identified in the content objective. Here is a sample language objective that corresponds to the sample content objective mentioned earlier:

> Students will be able to **summarize in writing** the differences and similarities between normal and cancer cells using the following key words and phrases: *unlike, in contrast to, the same as, similarly, cytoplasm, nucleus/nuclei, nucleolus,/nucleoli, and chromatin.*

Though the impetus behind language objectives was to provide English learners with equitable instructional opportunities, there is growing consensus that many students can benefit from the clarity that comes with a teacher outlining the requisite academic language to be learned in each lesson (Lindhal & Watkins, 2014; Zwiers, O'Hara, & Pritchard, 2014).

Creating Appropriate Language Objectives

Language objectives should be informed by the grade-level content standards and, more narrowly, by the daily content objectives. Once teachers have articulated content objectives that support the content standards and tasks, they must identify and analyze the academic language embedded in those tasks. This academic language will become the basis for the lesson's language objectives. In other words, teachers should keep the perspective of English learners in mind and ask themselves, "Of all the skills and functions addressed in my lesson, which is most important for helping students meet the grade-level standard and develop or enhance their academic language proficiency?" Like content objectives, language objectives must be measureable (i.e., teachers must be able to observe and assess the students' mastery of the objective) and written in language that accounts for the linguistic and cognitive development of the students.

Although teachers who shelter instruction typically include all four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in a lesson and highlight one or more grammatical structures or language learning strategies, they do not need to post a language objective for every language-related task present in the lesson. Teachers address many instructional needs in a 50- or 60-minute lesson. Rather than highlight all language uses in a particular lesson, it is perhaps more useful for teachers to think about what is nonnegotiable in that lesson in terms of language. This nonnegotiable then becomes the impetus for the language objective. The language skill or concept is then directly taught during the lesson, and students participate in a measurable language task. The following classroom vignette illustrates two teachers' process toward identifying language and literacy forms.

Mr. Zhang's 7th grade science students have been working on the cell cycle. The content standards for 7th grade science indicate that students must be able to investigate and understand that all living things are composed of cells, with a key concept being cell division. The content objective for this lesson asks the students to demonstrate knowledge of parts of a cell by comparing and contrasting a normal cell with a cancer cell.

Because the students have already focused on the new vocabulary and grammar structures in this unit, Mr. Zhang and Mr. Lewis, the ESL teacher, decide that addressing the language functions required to complete tasks should be their next linguistic goal for the students. From there, Mr. Zhang and Mr. Lewis brainstorm some scientific language and functions related to the cell cycle that might need to be directly taught in order for the students to master the content and English language proficiency standards:

- The language of comparison—in order to have students explain what they learned about the normal and cancer cells (e.g., *more than*, *less than*)
- Recording ideas in a graphic organizer—for students to be able to identify main ideas and organize them (e.g., Venn diagram)
- Summarizing either orally or in writing—in order to have students demonstrate mastery of the topic

Once Mr. Zhang and Mr. Lewis have identified the language objectives they want to focus on, they must look at the state's Grades 6–8 English language proficiency standards. When they look at the standards, they see that the students at low–intermediate to advanced language proficiency must be able to record information from oral input and explain, with detail, the similarities and differences between ideas, concepts, or things. Given these standards and the content objective, they decide that the best use of class time is to highlight oral language development and thus create the following language objective:

> Students will be able to **orally explain** the differences and similarities between normal and cancer cells, using the following key words/phrases*: unlike, in contrast to, the same as, similarly, cytoplasm, nucleus/nuclei, nucleolus/nucleoli, and chromatin.*

From Himmel, 2012. Reproduced with permission from Colorín Colorado.

As illustrated in this vignette, teachers can use a variety of approaches to create language objectives, thinking about worthwhile language and literacy to teach from the perspectives described below.

Key vocabulary, concept words, and other academic words that students will need to know in order to talk, read, and write about the lesson. These words might include general academic terms, like *distribution,* which appear in many different content areas, or content-specific words, like *nuclei*.

Language functions related to the topic of the lesson, such as describing, explaining, and comparing. See the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards (2007) and the *Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards Corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012) for examples of these functions for English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Teachers can also access language functions related to content areas in their grade-level content area standards.

Students' language skills. Typically, sheltered instruction lessons include opportunities for English learners to use listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, but not all four domains are directly taught and assessed in one lesson. As teachers plan language objectives, they can consider students' language abilities as well as the language skills needed to accomplish the lesson's activities. For example, if the students must report on what they observe during a scientific demonstration and they need to develop their speaking skills, the language objective might state that they will be able to present a short, structured talk on the outcomes of the experiment.

Grammar or language structures common to the content area. For example, if students will be asked to create an analogy between being a child in a family and being a colonist as a subject of England, the language objective could address the use of comparative language and language structures to write about how these two situations are similar and different.

Language learning strategies that support comprehension of the lesson. For example, if students are starting a new chapter in the textbook, the strategy of previewing the text might be an appropriate language objective.

(Adapted from Short, Himmel, Guttierez, & Hudec, 2011).

Sharing the Objectives With Students

To help students take ownership of their learning, it is important that the objectives be shared with them at the beginning of the lesson and reviewed

with them at the end. This allows them to assess the ways in which they have met the objectives. To ensure that the objectives are comprehensible, teachers sometimes use color coding to highlight what students will be learning and the tasks they must complete. Images or pictures can also make academic vocabulary in the objectives more comprehensible for English learners.

Posting and referring to objectives varies according to instructional context. Some teachers like to have the students choral read the objectives, while teachers of older students sometime have them write the objectives in their journal in addition to asking a student to read them aloud. Some science teachers prefer to reveal the objectives later in the lesson, perhaps after the warm up or exploratory activity, so they can still maintain an inquiry-based approach (Echevarria & Colburn, 2006).

In addition to posting and referring to the objectives at the beginning and end of a lesson, it is important to refer to them throughout the lesson. Having students assess their progress midway through a lesson can provide valuable formative assessment data that teachers can use to better meet their students' needs. For example, if the language objective is to use persuasive language in writing, and students indicate with a thumbs down that the task of writing a persuasive letter to a historical figure is too difficult, the teacher might re-teach a mini-lesson on persuasive language or utilize more scaffolds, such as providing a model of persuasive writing, giving the students sentence frames, or reminding students of the word wall that contains vocabulary terms used to persuade.

When implemented correctly, content and language objectives provide a road map for both the teacher and the students and help the students take ownership of their content learning and language development.

Strategies for Sheltering Instruction in the Content Areas

There are considerations specific to the use of sheltered instruction in the content areas that teachers should be aware of. This section describes these considerations and offers specific strategies for sheltering instruction in math, science, social studies, and language arts. It is important to note that a strategy described under one content area may also be effective in other content areas.

Mathematics

Although math is often assumed to be an easy content area to teach to English learners ("It's just numbers, right?"), teaching math through sheltered instruction is more complicated than some may think. First, when it comes to connecting students' background knowledge and prior experiences to the math curriculum, teachers need to remember that English learners may have learned to add, subtract, multiply, and divide using different computational methods than those taught in U.S. schools. Some may have learned to use commas where we use decimal points (e.g., $15,00 instead of $15.00) and vice versa (e.g., 10.000 instead of 10,000 for ten thousand). Chances are also good that English learners will not be familiar with the U.S. system of measurement (inches, feet, cups, ounces, pounds, etc.), having learned the metric system instead.

When approaching the explicit instruction of vocabulary, teachers need to pay close attention to the various types of math vocabulary students need to learn:

- Words specific to math, such as *divisor* and *quotient,* as well as common English words that, when used in math, take on a particular meaning, such as *table, tree, cone, face, positive,* and *negative*
- Math synonyms or different terms that indicate the same operation, such as *add, plus, sum,* and *combine*
- Functional vocabulary that students will use to interpret math problems and communicate their mathematical thinking and ideas, such as *solve, graph,* and *compare*

Teachers must also consider the syntax of math. First, there is not always a one-to-one correlation between something written using math symbols (e.g., $18 > 7$) and the words used to write or say it (e.g., eighteen is greater than seven). Another challenge when translating math symbols into spoken or written words is word order. For example, the numerical sentence $(3x)^2$ may be read as "the square of three times x." English learners also

need to understand the language structures used in math, such as comparatives (e.g., *greater than),* prepositions (e.g., *two into four),* and structures that signal logical connections *(if . . . then).*

Word walls, sentence strips, and charts or dictionaries that include visuals specific to the lesson vocabulary can help make math lessons comprehensible for English learners. The sentence strips should include math phrases commonly written with math symbols (e.g., > for *greater than*, = for *equal to*) and their spelled-out versions. Useful manipulatives include a protractor, a hundreds cube, and fraction strips. Teachers can also model the steps to be followed in solving problems using a doc cam or white board that allows them to use a print size large enough for all students to see from anywhere in the room. While modeling math procedures, teachers can use predetermined sentence stems to describe what they are doing. In this way, they are modeling not only the math skills but also the language used to describe the math procedures, paying close attention to the syntax challenges mentioned above.

The use of these strategies provides scaffolding for students at varying levels of English proficiency to work through math problems, help them talk through the procedures as they go, and report out to the class what they did to solve a problem (Moschkovich, 2012). Teachers should also teach and encourage the use of non-math phrases that support group work, such as *Can you please repeat that?* and *Can you show me what you mean?* When placing students in groups, teachers should consider each student's ability in language and math and, if possible, partner students at lower levels of English proficiency with classmates who share their native language.

Science

With its tangible concepts and processes that are perfect for hands-on learning, science is considered a good subject to shelter for English learners, even for those students at lower levels of English proficiency (see Figure 1). The inquiry approach is recommended in sheltered instruction (Deussen, Autio, Miller, Lockwood, & Stewart, 2008; Settlage, Madsen, & Rustad, 2005; Wright, 2010), but inquiry poses certain challenges for English learners. While students at all levels of language proficiency will be able to engage with the thinking demands of inquiry—questioning, predicting, hypothesizing, and testing—English learners will need varying levels of support to develop the language of these processes. As with math instruction, it is necessary to teach the language of inquiry if students are expected to use it with peers or in writing as they work through inquiries in science. When the language of inquiry is directly taught, modeled, and supported through vocabulary instruction and the use of sentence stems, students will be able to work collaboratively and write about their inquiry experiences. Some English learners, because of their cultural background, may not be comfortable with some of the expectations involved in inquiry, such as making predictions and working through possible solutions. It is important for teachers to get to know the background of their students and, when necessary, make the norms and expectations of inquiry clear to help bridge any cultural differences (Lee, 2002; Lee & Buxton, 2011).

Although directly teaching content area vocabulary at the beginning of a lesson or unit might impede some aspects of the inquiry approach, teachers should consider which words they could teach up front and why. For example, students might need support with prepositions, adjectives specific to physical characteristics (e.g., colors, textures, and states of matter for describing what they might see in an inquiry investigation), and verbs commonly used in inquiry (e.g., *be, have,* and *looks like)* (Deussen et al., 2008; Janzen, 2008). Teachers can pre-teach these words along with language structures specific to inquiry, such as structures for conducting experiments (e.g., predicting/hypothesizing, describing, comparing, analyzing), sharing findings (e.g., explaining, summarizing, questioning) and arguing (e.g., supporting ideas with data, responding to others' ideas) (Quinn, Lee, & Valdés, 2012).

Teachers can also make content more comprehensible by incorporating multiple forms of input throughout a lesson. Posters, diagrams, other visuals, and hands-on experiments are great ways to bridge content and language divides. Visual tools can also be used to make directions accessible for English learners—for example, by using images to show steps in a lab or to illustrate lesson agenda

items. Of course, consistent routines in the science classroom, whether for daily activities or for experiment or lab procedures, are an added benefit for English learners.

Science teachers often utilize cooperative learning or peer work. When grouping students in a sheltered classroom, teachers should consider the language proficiency of English learners, as well as their background knowledge and experience with science. If the class includes English proficient students, then ideally groups would include a heterogeneous mix of language abilities that could allow students at various levels of English proficiency to communicate with other English learners and with proficient English speakers in social and content interactions. Heterogeneous groups can promote English language development while also allowing native language communication as students navigate through new science content. Regardless of group configurations, teachers need to explicitly teach cooperative learning norms, such as appropriate ways to ask questions and make suggestions (e.g., *Can you please repeat that? Can you show me what you mean? What if we also tried . . . ? I'm not sure about . . . . What do you think? I don't understand . . .)* and turn-taking and other participation expectations.

Finally, teachers can use graphic organizers to make content comprehensible for English learners and to support their participation in oral and written expressions about their learning (Hamilton, 2005). For example, when teaching lab procedures, a teacher can use a flow map to show the progression of steps for a given experiment. Then, when asking students to report out on their progress in the lab, the teacher can display the graphic organizer along with sentence stems to support student output: *Today we were able to complete everything up to . . . . Tomorrow we need to begin with . . .* . In this way, students can access the key words included in the flow map and, if necessary, point to the graphic organizer as they orally share out what they were able to accomplish and where they will begin the next day.

Graphic organizers are also useful in making content presented through text (e.g., science books, articles, lab reports) more comprehensible to English learners. Typically, students who are still developing their abilities to read in English struggle to read and comprehend grade-level science texts. Teachers can shelter instruction by illustrating, condensing, or summarizing key concepts from text in a visual way using graphic organizers that are appropriate for the topic. As students work toward proficiency in English, teachers have the added responsibility of teaching them the discourse of science and how to read the types of information texts typically found in science learning environments. They must help students learn to interpret information from diagrams or visuals found in a text, to understand that some information may be presented only in the image or only in the text, and to identify key ideas and supporting details—recognizing that in many science texts, the details precede the main idea (Wright, 2010).

Social Studies

With its abstract concepts and texts that include a high concentration of new vocabulary, complex sentences, passive voice, and pronouns, social studies is a challenging subject to learn in a second language. For this reason, it is recommended that social studies be taught in the students' first language until they have an intermediate level of English proficiency (Weisman & Hansen, 2007). Once students' English proficiency is sufficient to enable them to learn social studies through sheltered instruction, there are some things teachers can do to make the content comprehensible.

An important strategy is to connect the content to students' background knowledge and experiences. Teachers must remember that some students may not be familiar with terms, concepts, and experiences related to the United States (Weisman & Hansen, 2007; Wright, 2010). From geography concepts (nation, state, city, town) to legislative concepts (national and state government systems) to historical events (Civil War, Civil Rights Movement, 9/11), teachers must be keen to access information that students do have and then build any background knowledge that is essential for learning about the concept under study. Connecting to students' backgrounds and prior knowledge also means opening up space for them to share knowledge or perspectives on a topic that may be different from those presented in the text or curric-

ulum. Teachers should keep in mind that a lesson taught using a sheltered instruction approach may take more time given the amount of background knowledge the teacher must first help the students develop.

Another useful strategy involves using a modified K-W-L chart (to show what the class **k**nows, **w**ants to know, and has **l**earned) at the beginning of a unit. This offers teachers a more layered and context-embedded approach to access and build on students' background knowledge and allows students to share personal connections to the learning at hand. To use this strategy, a teacher selects three or four items relevant to the lesson, such as maps, photographs, video clips, picture books, or realia, and uses them to talk with students about what they know and what questions they have. For example, when introducing a unit on the Japanese internment camps during World War II, a teacher could gather a picture of Japanese American families waiting in line to board a bus, a picture of Japanese Americans behind barbed wire fences, the book *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki, and a newspaper article from the 1940s that talks about the internment of Japanese Americans. The teacher presents one item at a time to the class, asking "What do we know from this?" and "What questions do we have?" Taking the time at the beginning of a unit to access students' prior knowledge, a teacher can see the connections the students are making, what they already know, and which concepts still need to be addressed. (See chapter 9 of Allen, 2000, for more information on this modified approach to the K-W-L strategy.)

Finding alternative ways to present information is a particularly useful strategy in social studies, where texts are typically very difficult for English learners to read independently. One alternative would be reading texts to or with students. Ideally, teachers would also use context-embedded tools such as videos, documentaries, reenactments, images, diagrams, maps, and realia. When using films or video clips, it is important to stop and talk with students throughout, taking time to further scaffold the information presented (through visuals, gestures, translation of key words) and to check students' comprehension. Graphic organizers are another excellent tool for presenting cognitively demanding information to students before or in lieu of independent reading. Graphic organizers can illustrate the concept as well as the overarching structure of the information being presented (e.g., classification, description, sequence, cause and effect). Then, when students are asked to talk or write about the topic, the teacher can use the graphic organizer to teach the necessary language structures to do so. For example, teaching the language of cause and effect might include phrases such as *led to, which caused,* and *resulted in.* Pairing the language teaching with the visual representation of the information in the graphic organizer supports both language and content learning.

When explicitly teaching vocabulary and language structures in social studies, it is important to recognize that many key vocabulary words represent large, abstract concepts. So, while tools such as maps, timelines, charts, and so forth maybe be helpful for teaching some academic words, other concepts—such as taxation, poverty, and government—might be hard to represent in an image or picture. For abstract concepts, taking a long-term approach to developing students' understanding is best. Using many of the strategies presented above, teachers can support English learners in developing their understanding of concepts over time.

Language Arts

Language arts broadly includes two areas: reading and writing. Educators often talk about reading in two ways: learning to read (e.g., letter recognition, phonemic awareness, word identification) and reading to learn (e.g., comprehension and analysis of text). Similarly, writing may be thought of as learning to write (e.g., letter formation, spelling, punctuation) and writing to communicate (e.g., telling stories, explaining, arguing a point, providing information). Comprehensive coverage of how English learners develop a second language is beyond the scope of this brief. What it offers instead are a few considerations for sheltering language arts content to help students learn to read and write for a variety of purposes. (See the resource section for in-depth resources on the language and literacy development of English learners.)

Considerations for teaching English learners how to read and write

One of the main ways to make content comprehensible for English learners is to connect the content to their prior knowledge and experience. Knowing students' backgrounds and first language proficiency is the first step in sheltering reading and writing instruction. Research shows that students' reading and writing abilities in their first language support their acquisition of reading and writing skills in English (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bialystok, 2002; Collier & Thomas, 1992).

If the school does not assess students' first language abilities, teachers should communicate with the students and their parents about what the children can do and enjoy doing regarding reading and writing. If an English learner can read and write in the first language, then these cognitive abilities can be transferred to reading and writing in English (Cummins, 2000). The teacher can shelter instruction by using what a student already knows about reading and writing and by valuing the child's first language abilities as an aid to the acquisition of reading and writing skills in English (Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010). Skills that commonly transfer from one language to the next include phonological awareness, print concepts, the knowledge that text is made up of letters and words put together in a specific format, and the understanding that language is made up of words and symbols that have meaning (Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010, p. 33). Hence, once a student has learned to read in one language, that student does not need to be taught the mechanics of learning to read in a second or third language.

Teachers can also shelter instruction by presenting learning in context-embedded ways, such as these:

- Starting with commonalities between a student's first language and English (sounds, patterns, print concepts)
- Using culturally relevant or high-interest words for phonemic awareness instruction
- Using words and phrases that students know as the basis for practicing letter formation and for learning print concepts and spelling patterns (Ford, n.d.; Helman, 2004; Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010)

Considerations for teaching English learners how to read to learn and write to communicate

When sheltering instruction to help English learners comprehend text and write to communicate, it is important to keep in mind two key factors that affect student learning: students' ability to read and write in the language of instruction; and students' background, culture, and interests. Because language arts involves reading and writing in English, students' proficiency in English is a factor. This factor can be mitigated, to some extent, by integrating students' background experiences, knowledge, and interests into language arts instruction. Familiarity with the content of a text can offset comprehension difficulties stemming from a student's reading ability (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008). For literature, this could be familiarity with the setting, the characters, or a relatable issue or problem; for informational text this could be familiarity with the topic, idea, or person under study. Similarly, writing about a shared experience (e.g., a field trip or science experiment) or about a topic familiar to students (e.g., their routine for getting ready for school) can offset the challenges of learning to write different types of texts as well as learning the writing process (Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010; Peregoy & Boyle, 2008; Wright, 2010). When teachers use texts or choose writing assignments based on students' background and interests, they are presenting cognitively demanding content in context-embedded ways.

Another excellent way to shelter language arts instruction is to use and develop students' listening and speaking skills while they are engaging with and writing texts. Several sheltering techniques that use oral language scaffolds are described below.

Reading the text aloud to students. A text can be read aloud by the teacher or a student, or the teacher can play an audio recording of the text.

Using interactive reading strategies that utilize and build on students' listening and speaking abilities as they make sense of and engage with text. Strategies such as Think-Pair-Share, Directed Listening/Thinking Activity (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008), Critical Questions, and Visualize-Interact-Predict (Herrera, Perez, & Escamilla, 2010) allow students to learn about

reading concepts (e.g., predicting, finding the main idea, determining the meaning of unknown words) through listening and speaking. These strategies allow English learners to talk with a peer, a small group, or the teacher as they participate in lessons and demonstrate their understanding of the concepts. The reading concepts learned through talk then transfer to the skills students will use when they read and engage with texts independently.

Bringing students attention to general academic terms to counteract publishers' tendency to focus on low-utility and specialized vocabulary in language arts texts. During shared reading experiences or close reading, teachers can prompt students to select words that might be essential to the understanding of a short passage. Teachers can also utilize instructional techniques such as List Group Label (GLOBE Tech, n.d) and Concept Definition Maps (Reading Educator, n.d.) to provide students with multiple opportunities to interact with the words at a semantic level.

Building on ideas and stories dictated by students to promote reading comprehension and writing abilities while at the same time showing students that through reading and writing we communicate. The Language Experience Approach (Dixon & Nessel, 1983) is a method wherein students dictate the text to be studied. It could be a personal story a student wants to share or a dictation about an experience the class shared. A student (or students) dictates the ideas to a writer (usually the teacher, but the writer could also be a more capable peer), who writes the ideas verbatim. The written texts are then used to support students' comprehension and analysis of text (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008; Wright, 2010). Sheltering through oral language allows English learners to understand and participate in language arts content, and research shows that this kind of sheltering is key to helping students move beyond word-level comprehension to text-level analysis (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Teachers must also provide scaffolds to support students in learning the writing process and in writing texts for a variety of purposes. Two techniques for sheltering writing instruction are described below.

Using a combination of direct and interactive instruction. Direct instruction involves the direct teaching of skills or strategies, such as identifying discourse patterns for text types, revising a peer's paper, using transitional words and phrases between paragraphs, and using dialogue in a story to show emotions. Interactive instruction involves students working with others in pairs, small groups, or as a class to produce written texts. Examples include writing a class book, writing a manual for classroom procedures, or writing a report on a science concept studied in class. The Language Experience Approach is useful for supporting students' writing experiences. English learners with limited writing ability in English can participate in writing experiences and demonstrate their understanding of writing skills and strategies through dictation (Peregoy & Boyle, 2008; Wright, 2010). This combination of direct and interactive instruction is very effective for English learners (Genesee & Riches, 2006).

Providing students with sentence frames and key words to support their writing. For students who are ready to move beyond the support that dictation provides, sentence frames or key words offer a next level of scaffolding to support student output. After some direct instruction, modeling, and time to talk through ideas with a peer, English learners can use sentence frames to start their writing or to add structure to their ideas. For example, "It all started when . . . " is a sentence stem that can help students start a basic narrative. "I think . . . because . . . " is a stem that can help add structure to an opinion piece. Sometimes, providing students with key words from a word bank or word wall can be the right amount of support. In deciding which stems or key words to use, teachers should consider the writing task, the students' writing ability in English, and the students' understanding of the vocabulary needed to complete the task. Hence a teacher's understanding of students' language background and proficiency and familiarity with instructional techniques that scaffold the four language skills are essential in effectively sheltering language arts instruction.

Assessing Content Learning in Sheltered Instruction

Effective sheltered instruction teachers continually assess student progress toward the content and language objectives of the lesson and use formative

assessment data to plan lessons that meet the linguistic and academic needs of all of their students. Teachers of English learners must understand that until students reach a certain level of English proficiency, content area achievement can be masked by limited language ability (Abedi & Lord, 2001). Indeed, the results of most classroom assessments reflect students' language proficiency, even if their intended purpose is to measure only content area achievement. Although teachers have little control over the standardized, summative assessments administered to their students, they can also reflect on and use appropriate formative assessments. Teachers who shelter instruction should be purposeful about the goal of the assessment instruments they use (i.e., what they want their assessment to measure) and modify them as appropriate.

The following test item illustrates the confounding relationship between content knowledge and language proficiency:

> *All of the following are examples of the causes of the Industrial Revolution in England except*
>
> a. *Advances in technology*
> b. *Religious uniformity*
> c. *Government stability*
> d. *Increased trade overseas*

Although the intent of the item is to assess whether students know the causes of the Industrial Revolution, what this item measures for some English learners is whether they understand the meaning of the word *except*.

To mitigate the influence of low English proficiency when assessing content knowledge, teachers need to adapt the assessments they use—especially formative assessments, which often provide the most relevant data for day-to-day instruction. One way to do this is to reduce the linguistic demands of the assessment—for example, by avoiding grammatical structures that English learners may not know. Another strategy is to provide linguistic supports such as sentence frames for students who are not yet able to write complete sentences or paragraphs for essays and short-response items. Teachers can also let students use a word wall and glossaries in English and their native language, or let students show mastery in different ways: via nonverbal response, hands-on activities, models or visual displays, or sorting (Gottlieb, 2006; Valdez-Pierce, 2003).

Teachers may also choose to adapt assessments so there is purposeful measurement of academic language. For example, if the language objectives in a social studies unit focus on comparative language, the teacher would want to explicitly assess student mastery of comparative language. So, for example, in addition to using multiple choice or true/false items on the assessment for the unit, the teacher might include items that require extended language production. Perhaps the students will write a short paragraph with the expectation that at least four of the comparative language structures taught in the lesson be used in the response. The teacher could also ask the students to upload a media file where they present a short talk that incorporates comparative language. When teachers identify the purpose of their assessments and are cognizant of the interdependence of content and language ability, they will get more reliable data about their students' ability and be better prepared to adjust instruction accordingly.

Conclusion

As research in sheltered instruction and professional development indicates, teachers who set off to shelter instruction for English learners will need comprehensive and job-embedded professional learning opportunities to effectively explore and integrate effective instructional ideas (Short, 2013) such as those addressed in this brief. Moreover, teachers will need the support of colleagues and administrators to harness and effectively use available resources to better amplify academic language instruction in the content areas for English learners. Consulting the resources listed below is one way to begin the process of sheltering instruction in order to help English learners master academic content while developing proficiency in English.

Resources

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