



Centering on...

English Language Learners

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The UFT Teacher Center promotes teacher excellence and high academic achievement for students through professional development based on current research and best practices. Designed to deepen educators' professional knowledge, activities include in-classroom and in-school support, borough-wide and citywide networks, conferences, seminars and college and in-service courses. UFT Teacher Center is a collaboration of United Federation of Teachers, New York State Education Department, New York City Department of Education, participating schools and districts, School Support Organizations and area cultural institutions.

FROM THE RESEARCH

Challenges and Solutions

Reading *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for English Language Learners*, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York by Short and Fitzsimmons, underscores the challenges inherent in improving instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs) in middle and high schools. These students perform double the work of native speakers. Why? Because, say the authors, they are still developing proficiency in academic English and simultaneously, are learning academic content (2007, p. 1).

Before pointing to challenges and proposing solutions, they give thumbnail biographic sketches of students, capturing the diversity among English Language Learners and their consequent need for expert and tailored instruction.

As teachers, we can do a great deal. An essential first step is reading and studying the nine potential solutions. Following is a summary of the solutions, (p. 34– 38).

- Integrate instruction in reading, writing, listening and speaking right from the start.
- Teach the components and processes of reading and writing.
- Teach reading comprehension strategies.
- Focus on vocabulary development.
- Build and activate background knowledge.
- Teach language through content and themes.
- Use narrative language strategically.
- Pair technology with existing interventions.
- Motivate ELLs through choice.

Within the solutions are two instructional issues of major importance for all secondary-age ELL students. One is ELLs' need for oral literacy practice in the classroom. Short and Fitzsimmons point out that "academically literate" means the ability to "engage in the oral discourse of the classroom" and in order to allow ELLs the time they need, "not to sacrifice oral language practice for more time reading and writing" (p. 34).

Learning process skills in reading and writing is another major issue for ELLs. Citing several researchers, the authors note that ELLs who have already acquired basic skills now need "previewing, making predictions, paraphrasing and inferring (for reading) and brainstorming, editing and publishing (for writing)," (p. 34).

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Challenges and Solutions

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Next steps for us, practitioners, are assessment and analysis. As we proceed, our own questions emerge: How can I best assess my work in light of these solutions? Which are already incorporated in my practice? Which are not? These questions enable us to decide about steps to add, in what order and how. (Because these interact with and affect each other to such a degree, we realize that instructional change for ELLs calls for both thought and care.)

Transformation of the rich information in *Double the Work* into instructional change is an evolving process, not a by-the-numbers classroom prescription. The wide variability in our students' experiences means multi-level implications for our practice. What processes might we use as we continue? We can work independently, or with colleagues, either informally or in a study- or action research group.

The work of real instructional change takes time, planning, continuous reassessment and evaluation. *Double the Work*—richly, clearly and engagingly written—supports this work. It also encourages us to see the extent to which such effort is most definitely worth it—for its benefit to our practice and, most importantly, in service to our students' higher achievement.

Short, D. and Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for English Language Learners—A Report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, D.C.: The Alliance for Excellent Education. (Available in PDF and to order by mail at: www.all4ed.org.)

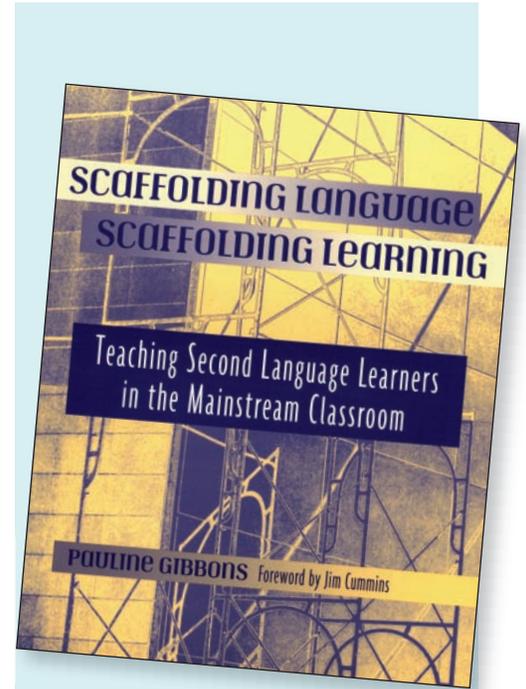


Scaffolding Language and Learning

Jim Cummins notes, in the forward to *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* by Pauline Gibbons: "Imposition of a one-size-fits all standard in curriculum content areas becomes highly problematic in a context where a significant number of students are in the process of acquiring basic knowledge of the language of instruction." He quotes Gibbons on the research "... it is very clear that ELL students require considerably more time to catch up to grade expectations in the academic registers of English as compared to the conversational registers (typically at least five as compared to less than two years). Too often students are left to fend for themselves after they have attained basic conversational fluency..." (p. v).

We, educators, can make a major difference for students: when we change their learning environment and offer language scaffolds that also scaffold their learning. Thus, instruction increases students' independence. Gibbons details strategies in a variety of classroom settings and learning modalities, and which can be adapted within- and across content areas. With a bibliography and an index, there is a glossary of teaching activities cross-referenced to chapters. Aimed at teachers of elementary grades' mainstream classes, the book is valuable for teachers of any grade level who have even one student who is an English Language Learner.

Note: See *The Practitioner's Perspective* on page 3 for one educator's ideas for activities as scaffolding.



Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann.

Creating a Collaborative Classroom

The UFT Teacher Center staff member at PS 48, District 6, in Manhattan is **Laura Daigen-Ayala**. In many years of teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in varied configurations and classroom settings, she has evolved a complex and detailed professional vision of the learning environment needed for the academic success of students who are English Language Learners. It is informed by her experiences and her continued professional learning.

A cornerstone in English Language Learners' success, Laura feels, is a collaborative classroom, one where students' participation is expected, the norm, and in which groups form part of the scaffolding for each other's learning.

How can a teacher best organize effective groups? we asked. Through careful planning and preparation, Laura pointed out.

An essential ingredient in the group-forming process is the teacher's knowledge about the students. Getting to know students really well and accessing their prior knowledge is of key importance. Laura suggests creating a classroom that invites students to be involved by using a variety of strategies. Implementing these strategies meets a dual goal: engaging the students and allowing the teacher to know them better. This, in turn, is a basis for forming groups, which do not need to be composed of the same members for every class or activity.

Following are some of her ideas.

"Furnish" the Classroom Environment with Learning Opportunities

Have available many ways for students to identify things they know. Include:

- Pictures, graphic illustrations of people, places and things (both with and without labels).
- Word Walls (with and without graphics).
- Books full of pictures and images so students pick favorites to view or read.
- Files of travel brochures of many countries from agencies and print media.
- A map resource file; (use AAA and Google Earth).
- Labeled timelines, for example, of the school year, which students can illustrate to represent the special events and holidays in each month.
- A file of lyrics for encouraging students to learn—say and sing—songs.

More Ways to Get to Know Students Well

Find out what students already know before an activity and build on this as you plan the activity and form groups. Also: Interview students and when possible, ask students to interview each other. Create interest inventories and needs surveys that students can complete as a group, independently and with partners.

Build School-to-Family Ties

Meet and get to know students' parents and guardians. Learn about key issues in students' lives such as their previous school experiences. Let parents know how they can support their children's learning.

Explain that students can tell parents about what they are doing in school in both their first language and in English.

Welcome parents to be in touch with you about their concerns.

Create Shared Classroom Experiences to "Build-In" Prior Knowledge

Lead classroom experiences before an activity or lesson as a precursor because this allows students to access their memories of these experiences as prior knowledge for the lessons or unit. For example, students can:

- Go on a virtual field trip.
- Interview real people.
- Engage in a Do-Talk-Write activity, with key vocabulary posted for their use.
- Develop fluency and shared memories by using readers' theater.





¡Colorín Colorado!

Educators can use *¡Colorín Colorado!*, a Web site created through a partnership of Public Television Station WETA's Reading Rockets and the American Federation of Teachers. This is a free bilingual (English and Spanish) Web site for families and educators of English Language Learners.

Features include: instructional best practices, and many others: how to develop academic English skills and differentiate them from special skills, and downloadable lesson plans, handouts and progress forms.

Teachers who work with English Language Learners will find: ESL/ESOL/ELL/EFL reading/writing skill-building children's books, stories, activities, ideas and strategies to help students in PreK-3, 4-8, and 9-12 read, learn and succeed in the classroom.

For families, there is a wealth of resources about what "you can do at home, helping your child succeed in school" and "Let's Read: Fun Reading Tips," activities and more! There is a reading tip sheet in 11 languages that educators can also use.

The glossary gives access to a wide variety of education terms from "A" (academic literacy) to "W" (word roots). Receive a free T.ELL.E-Gram, a monthly newsletter for educators and you can view professional development Webcasts here. Receive teacher-tested tips, inspiring stories of success and research-based articles. Sign up at www.colorincolorado.org.

Coming soon on *¡Colorín Colorado!*, *AdLit.org*, a "premier resource on adolescent literacy for parents, practitioners and others," which is "committed to helping kids in grades 4-12 become better readers."

The screenshot shows the homepage of the ¡Colorín Colorado! website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Inicio, Home, Site Map, About Us, and Contact. The main header features the site's logo and the tagline "Helping children read...and succeed!". Below the header, there is a sidebar with a menu of categories such as "For Educators", "For Families", "Books & Authors", "Glossary", "Topics from A-Z", "Research & Reports", "Free Guides & Toolkits", "LearningStore", "Webcasts", "Podcasts & Videos", "E-Newsletters", "Web Resources", "Calendar", "About Us", and "Contact Us". The main content area is titled "New Technology in the New Year!" and features an article about using technology in the classroom. There are also sections for "Book of the Month" (The Snowman) and "Highlights". On the right side, there is a "Free newsletters" section with a sign-up form and a "MORE NEWS" section with a list of recent articles.



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