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Creating a Sense of Urgency

According to recent findings by the Reparable Harm Report (Olsen, 2010), the majority of secondary school English Language Learners are “Long-Term English Learners (LTELs),” defined as English Language Learners (ELLs) who have been in the United States for more than six years but haven’t reached sufficient English proficiency or attained adequate academic gains in grade-level content. Due to their LTEL status, many ELL students are relegated to watered-down curriculum that will not prepare them for college and beyond. Instead of being given the intensive academic language support to meet the rigorous demands of grade-level content, far too many ELLs are thought to be cognitively unable to do more than their language fluency allows them to demonstrate. Also, ELLs have historically been allowed to be silent and invisible, as their cultural norms often keep them quiet and compliant in classroom settings. Currently, this is a pandemic issue in California, where one in three districts has a student population with 75 percent of their ELLs considered to be LTELs. But this must also sound the alarm and create awareness for districts and schools across the country before it is too late (Olsen, 2010). The issues of an inequitable education for some is also part of what U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2010) has termed the “new civil rights”: the achievement gap between groups of children—Latinos, African Americans, and ELLs compared with native English learners—is a moral and ethical imperative. As educators, we should not only want to close the achievement gap in order to get out of federal sanctions. We

should want to do this because it is the future that every child needs and deserves. As W. E. B. Du Bois suggested in 1949 in *The Freedom to Learn* and Linda Darling-Hammond reminded us in 1997 in her similarly titled book, *The Right to Learn*,

of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. . . . The freedom to learn . . . has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be. (p. 1)

We cannot and must not rest until every group of students receives the kind of education that they deserve. This book will remind the reader of a group currently struggling with inequity within the U.S. educational system, ELLs. It will also propose a way to create systemic urgency for this group of students, using both processes for change and an instructional strategy called ELL shadowing. ELL shadowing is a professional development design that involves a single teacher observing a single ELL during the course of a school day. I often describe the process as experiencing a day in the life of an ELL by taking a snapshot of his or her speaking and active listening experiences every five minutes over the course of two hours. This process becomes a powerful way to shed light on the specific linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs. ELL shadowing, in conjunction with follow-up professional development, allows educators to begin to create systemic instructional access and equity for ELLs.

PREPARING TEACHERS TO INSTRUCT ELLS

Teachers go into teaching with good intentions. But somehow the demands of the classroom—sometimes the size, the lack of resources, or the variability in language ability level—begin to wear on educators. These demands are coupled with the fact that teacher education and preservice programs are not doing enough to train teachers to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of this very specific student population (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). California, for example, with its surge in ELL numbers, has moved toward an embedded certification process, requiring, in most colleges and universities, one course that addresses the needs of ELLs while also integrating topics focusing on ELLs into the rest of the teacher preparation coursework. In

other words, teachers in California come out of teacher preparation programs with an ELL certification as part of their overall credentialing process. While this looks like a positive concept at the outset because all teachers become certified to teach ELLs, teachers no longer have to take additional coursework outside of their credentials to teach ELLs. Although every teacher is required to complete minimal coursework to teach ELLs, this is hardly enough to become effective with the specific needs of ELLs or the demands that teachers experience in the field once they are required to teach them. Although California is unique in this approach to preparing mainstream teachers to teach ELLs, the fact that the majority of states do not require such certification also demonstrates a need for focused and ongoing professional development on the specific needs of this group of students. Both preservice and inservice training about the needs of ELLs is needed to create systemic instructional and achievement change.

Focused and Ongoing Professional Development on ELLs

In addition to preservice training, teachers also need focused, sustained, and aligned professional development once they enter the field. If preservice teachers are receiving only one course focused on the needs of ELLs, and others receive no such course at all, then all teachers need additional opportunities to refine their scaffolding skills with ELLs once they enter the teaching field. According to findings from Learning Forward (formerly known as the National Staff Development Council), “Teachers are not getting adequate training in teaching special education or limited English proficiency students. More than two-thirds of teachers nationally had not had even one day of training in supporting the learning of special education or LEP [ELL] students during the previous three years” (Wei et al., 2009, p. 6). Specifically, teachers would benefit from both a series of courses and a variety of course work experiences that sensitize them to meet the specific linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs in our schools. Additionally, when teachers enter their classrooms, ongoing and focused professional development that supports them in best meeting the needs of ELLs and scaffolding instruction for this group of students is paramount to closing students’ literacy gaps (Soto-Hinman & Hetzel, 2009). Learning Forward also suggests that teachers need close to fifty hours of professional development to improve their skills and their students’ learning. This means that teacher learning must also be ongoing. Professional development must be focused, aligned, and coherent. It should not change from year to year or when the new flavor of the month appears. Teachers need time to become skilled at practices that will improve student achievement. Professional development should also be data driven, connected to the specific needs of students at a school site, and, therefore, personalized.

As Darling-Hammond (2009) suggests,

Teacher qualifications, teacher’s knowledge and skills, make more difference for student learning than any other single factor. Clearly,

this means that if we want to improve student learning, what we have to do is invest in teachers' learning. We have to be sure that teachers understand not only their content area, which is very important, but also, how do students learn? How do different students learn differently? How do students acquire language? How do second language learners need to be taught?

In this way, both preservice and inservice training must become more focused and aligned in both the course work and field work opportunities required, in order to ensure appropriate cultural and linguistic differentiation for ELLs. The ELL shadowing project is one way to provide a focused and sustained effort around the academic oral language development and listening needs of ELLs within a system.

What Is the ELL Shadowing Project?

The ELL shadowing project is a way to create urgency around the instructional and linguistic needs of ELLs, either in teacher training or in staff development. The process allows teachers to see firsthand, in classrooms that look like their own, the sense of urgency that exists when the specific needs of ELLs are not addressed systemically. There are different kinds of ELLs—newcomers who are highly literate, educated, or under-schooled; long-term ELLs who have been in the country six years or longer; and ELLs progressing predictably through the developmental sequence. It is imperative to tailor professional development and instruction to the specific needs of the ELLs at a school site (Olsen, 2006). With the ELL shadowing project, this means that if most ELLs at a particular school or district lay at the midrange of English language proficiency, students at that level of language progression should be tracked for the ELL shadowing experience. This will allow the system to draw attention to that particular level of proficiency need while encouraging everyone to focus on that one specific group for a particular period of time. Educators will then also be able to target follow-up professional development sessions and focus on instructional strategies for that specific group of ELLs. The time of random acts of strategy usage should be gone, and we must instead tailor instruction to data collected on gaps in instruction. The ELL shadowing project is a way to triangulate achievement data with classroom observations to better serve the academic needs of ELLs.

The ELL shadowing project also allows all teachers within a system—whether it be grade level or department, entire school, district, or county office—to focus on the specific needs of an ELL through the lens of one child. Systems often do not get the opportunity to reflect on their practices and focus their efforts in one direction. The ELL shadowing project is an opportunity to do so over a two-day period to begin a new systemic vision for change with this group of students.

The ELL shadowing project allows professional development to be focused and directed to the specific needs of the ELL population being

served within a system. Since specific classroom data on academic speaking and listening is collected through the ELL shadowing project, subsequent professional development can be differentiated and tailored so that the academic needs of ELLs within that particular system are met. In most districts and schools across the country, the needs of ELL populations are expansive, so the professional development and focus on this population of students must also be ongoing to properly address those needs. After the ELL shadowing project, there must be follow-up training on how to address the linguistic and cultural needs of this population of students so that ELLs begin to make the kind of progress needed to become proficient in English and academic content.

ELL Shadowing for Progress Monitoring

ELL shadowing can also be used regularly for progress monitoring when awareness has been created around a certain group at a particular level. For example, once follow-up professional development has been provided for teachers on how to create more academic oral language development in the classroom setting, teachers can visit each other's classrooms in order to monitor and learn from student engagement strategies being used. If professional development has been offered around incorporating productive group work structures, teachers can visit each other's classrooms to learn from colleagues to determine if the amount of listening and speaking has increased by using specific academic oral language development instructional strategies. In this way, ELL shadowing can be used alongside existing professional development structures, including instructional coaching models, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Response to Intervention (RTI), or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The ELL shadowing project can enhance and accompany other initiatives by placing a spotlight on the needs of ELLs within a system. Once specific needs have been determined for ELLs using the shadowing experience, existing structures that are in place can be used alongside the initiative to assist with sustaining instructional change. If existing structures are currently not in place, there are suggestions for creating such structures in Chapter 10 of this book.

What ELL Shadowing Is Not

It is important to note that ELL shadowing is not intended to be the be-all and end-all—it is not a panacea or a silver bullet. ELL shadowing is the beginning of awareness and focus on the specific academic literacy needs of ELLs, but educators often don't view their classrooms and students in the same way after having had the experience. After a recent ELL shadowing training in Lucia Mar Unified School District in Arroyo Grande, California, where ninety teachers and administrators were in attendance, educators reflected in their evaluation of the training with comments like "I will never look at classroom instruction the same again," "This is the most powerful professional development I have ever been

through,” and “I think that shadowing should be done every year to reflect on our teaching” (confidential training evaluations, 2010).

Still, the ELL shadowing project is only the first step in creating systemic achievement and instructional change for ELLs within a system. Once the ELL shadowing project itself has been completed, ongoing and sustained follow-up professional development must also be provided so that teachers then know *how* to change instructional practices in their classrooms for ELLs. As suggested earlier, fifty hours of sustained and consistent professional development over time is needed in order to begin to change teacher practice (Wei et al., 2009). This book contributes to teacher development by providing (1) ways of shadowing an ELL in order to create urgency and (2) specific instructional strategies to change systemic practices and scaffold instruction via academic language development techniques once ELL shadowing has been completed.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Throughout the book, we follow one ELL student named Josue. Although a pseudonym has been used, Josue is a compilation of many ELLs that I have shadowed since 2003. Chapter 2 introduces the history and context of ELL shadowing, with its inception in the Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) Local District 6. Chapter 3 provides a mini case study about Josue with specific emphasis on the classroom observation of this ELL. Josue’s achievement results have been included both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 6. We also follow Josue’s progress in listening and academic speaking throughout several chapters (academic speaking in Chapters 4 and 7 and academic listening in Chapters 5 and 7). You will find some redundancy in the book. That is intentional in order to ensure a clear understanding of how to complete the ELL shadowing project. In this way, Chapter 4 provides the research base for academic oral language development but also introduces how to use the ELL shadowing protocol for academic language specifically. Similarly, in Chapter 5, the reader is introduced to the importance of teaching academic listening explicitly as well as how to use the protocol for listening specifically. Chapter 6 presents an overview of the logistics of setting up an ELL shadowing training in a school, district, or county. In Chapter 7, the reader will find a detailed overview of how to use all portions of the ELL shadowing protocol to ensure that the process is adhered to with fidelity. Chapter 8 discusses how to analyze results from an ELL shadowing project, and Chapter 9 introduces how a system might leverage change based on the ELL shadowing experience. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses what to do after the ELL shadowing experience, including strategy suggestions for ways to elicit more academic oral language development and listening in a classroom setting. The accompanying online video clips present classroom teachers in diverse classrooms implementing Think-Pair-Share for listening and speaking,

productive group work for listening and speaking, and the Frayer Model for vocabulary development.

This book is also primarily based on the text *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* by Pauline Gibbons (2002), in which she discusses how to scaffold the literacy domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing with ELLs. The ELL shadowing experience is primarily based on the speaking (Chapter 2) and listening (Chapter 6) chapters of Gibbons's text, as these are the two domains that educators will monitor when they engage in shadowing. Although other literature has been cited, the ELL shadowing project was created as a culminating experience after a book study on the Gibbons text in 2003 in District 6 of the LAUSD. More about the historical context of ELL shadowing can be read in Chapter 3.

This book is not intended to be the only source for reading on the importance of academic literacy with ELLs. Additional study groups during PLCs or department or grade-level meetings can be formed after the ELL shadowing project in order to extend knowledge of academic oral language development and active listening. Similarly, the academic oral language development definition and instructional strategies outlined in Chapter 10 are starting points for systemic change, but they are not intended to be the only definition or strategies used.

As you read about Josue throughout this book, think about an ELL in your own classroom. When you shadow an ELL, think about what you might do differently in your own classroom the very next day. Thinking about what you do every day to scaffold instruction for ELLs will assist not only in closing the achievement gap but also in creating instructional access for ELLs in their academic futures.

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