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# Helping English Language Learners Succeed

2nd Edition



**Carmen Zuñiga Dunlap**

Foreword by Sonja Bloetner

# Introduction

Four framing questions inform this book:

- What are best practices for teaching English language learners?
- What are the theoretical foundations of these best practices?
- What do these best practices look like in the classroom?
- How can teachers use these best practices to help their English language learners succeed?

Experienced teachers with increasing numbers of English language learners, novice teachers who seek additional professional development, teachers who want to incorporate the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS for ELA) to more intentionally support English learners, English language development / English as a second language curriculum coordinators seeking ways to assist classroom teachers, and ELD/ESL teachers outside the United States looking to further support students in overseas settings will find professional support in the chapters ahead. This book details classroom practices and approaches that support listening and speaking, vocabulary development, reading comprehension development, and writing development. These practices, approaches, and strategies are anchored in established key constructs, theoretical frameworks, and current research findings. Many are examples taken from both novice and veteran classroom teacher practices, and the author's teaching experiences. Woven throughout the chapters are teaching suggestions that help English language learners develop the competencies required by the Common Core State Standards.

## How This Book Is Organized

The chapter topics follow a logical flow. Chapters 1 and 2 provide essential background information. Chapter 3 outlines classroom-based assessment strategies for English language learners. Chapters 4 through 7 focus on specific aspects of the language arts. Chapter 8 provides a lesson and unit design model. You may read the chapters in sequence, or you may read according to your particular needs and interests. The chapters address the following topics:

- Chapter 1, “Teaching English Language Learners: 21st Century Contexts,” describes the many current influences on English learners.
- Chapter 2, “Understanding Language,” addresses language and language learning fundamentals.
- Chapter 3, “Assessing Language,” examines classroom-based language assessments.
- Chapter 4, “Developing Listening and Speaking Abilities,” presents listening and speaking strategies.
- Chapter 5, “Building Vocabulary,” looks at vocabulary development.
- Chapter 6, “Helping English Learners Who Are Reading to Learn,” discusses reading for comprehension.
- Chapter 7, “Teaching Writing,” addresses writing development for English language learners.
- Chapter 8, “Thinking through and Organizing for Instruction,” offers guidance in planning curriculum for mixed groups of English learners and fluent English speakers. It is based on the idea of backward planning and demonstrates how a teacher might prepare for teaching a thematic unit.

At the beginning of each chapter is an Anticipatory Quiz to activate thinking about the chapter’s content. At the end of each chapter is a set of Apply, Reflect, and Extend questions that encourage thinking about and applying the chapter’s content to your own teaching circumstances.

Substantial additions and modifications have been made to this edition of *Helping English Language Learners Succeed*. These include new chapters on developing vocabulary, teaching reading comprehension, developing

listening and speaking abilities, and thinking through, and organizing for, instruction. Modifications and additions have been made to the chapters on language and language learning, assessment, and teaching writing. Teaching considerations guided by the Common Core are incorporated throughout.

## Terminology Used in This Book

Educational terms abound when describing English language learners, their English language progress, types of educational settings, and suitable lesson design. The following list serves to clarify terms used in this book:

- ELD refers to *English language development*. ESL refers to *English as a second language*. They appear as ELD/ESL in this book because they both refer to the complete scope and sequence of curricular programs that help students develop specific English language skills, or they refer to this type of focused English language instruction.
- There is no agreement across states and agencies about what to call the stages of English language development. Because ELD/ESL occurs along a continuum, it is possible to set demarcation lines and labels at any point. Some states use three categories to describe the stages (e.g., in California: *emerging*, *expanding*, and *bridging*). Other states use four categories (e.g., in Texas: *beginning*, *intermediate*, *advanced*, and *high advanced*). World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) and the state of New York use five stages of development (*entering*, *emerging*, *developing*, *expanding*, and *bridging*). For the sake of neutrality and simplicity, the categories used in this book are *beginning*, *intermediate*, and *advanced*.

# Chapter 4

## Developing Listening and Speaking Abilities

### Anticipatory Quiz

Are the following statements true or false?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. English learners who receive sufficient meaningful input through everyday exposure to English do not need ELD/ESL instruction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Literacy development is based on proficient listening and speaking abilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Learning language patterns and structures is helpful, but meaningful language input is more beneficial.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Narrow reading, rather than broad reading, is beneficial in promoting listening and speaking for English learners.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Promoting academic thinking and conversation should be addressed at the later stages of English language development.

Imagine waiting for a phone call concerning an important matter. The phone finally rings. However, the reception is bad, so only certain phrases come through. It starts to sound something like "... told me that ..."  
"... have to do is ..." "... in the ..." "... you can't ..." "... by tomorrow ..."

The frustration the listener would experience during this phone conversation mirrors the feelings an English learner can experience. Comprehension during face-to-face conversations can be facilitated by hand gestures and facial expressions. Aspects of language that facilitate understanding can include salient and emphasized words and phrases in a flow of speech, those that are frequently repeated, those that carry clear meanings, or a combination of these. Common language patterns can be another important source to promote listening comprehension. Two examples of language patterns that speakers learn early on are using *no* to indicate negation, and adding *-ing* or *-ed* to verbs to mark ongoing or past action. To continue the phone analogy, as the reception gets clearer, more words and phrases become comprehensible, and increasingly larger “pieces” of language begin to make sense.

## The Importance of Listening and Speaking Skills

Listening and speaking are fundamental life skills that we use every day. They are the essence of daily communication. The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts Speaking and Listening (2010) require students to go beyond casual conversations and even common verbal classroom engagement techniques such as think-pair-share or heads-together activities. The standards require students to

- hold thoughtful, reflective, sustained academic conversations that may require advance preparation;
- come to class appropriately prepared to participate in such conversations;
- build on existing conversation by adding comments, and asking and responding to questions;
- evaluate a speaker’s point of view;
- match speech to the circumstance by using the appropriate register;
- evaluate and synthesize information; and
- make multimedia presentations sourced and synthesized from a variety of materials.

Listening and speaking abilities form the very basis of literacy development, as research supports:

- “Listening and speaking are key foundations of second-language acquisition” (Snow and Katz 2010, 113).
- “Language proficiency is a precursor for effective reading comprehension” (Echevarría, Vogt, and Short 2012, 149).
- “Oral proficiency in English is associated with English reading comprehension and writing skills.... Extensive oral English development must be incorporated into successful literacy instruction” (August and Shanahan 2006, 4).

Interestingly, and unfortunately, listening and particularly speaking are also the very domains of language that are often not given sufficient developmental support or instruction (August and Shanahan 2006). Many studies show that teachers do significant amounts of talking: “on average, 80 percent of all the talking across various activities” (Wasik and Iannone-Campbell 2012, 323). Another study reported that only five minutes of instructional time per day was devoted to activities that develop oral language skills (Cunningham et al. 2009). Students need to have conversations and opportunities to discuss, express ideas, and use vocabulary in academic conversational settings. Along with this goes wait time—sufficient time to develop one’s thoughts, and for English learners, to figure out how to express those thoughts in another language.

The following sections describe four established concepts about teaching listening and speaking abilities to English learners.

## **Abundant and High-Quality Verbal Interactions**

Abundant and high-quality experiences in language-rich classrooms with frequent opportunities to hear meaningful language, and engaging in producing language for real communication purposes, provide students with opportunities to hear language models. Through focused give and take, conversation creates the need to formulate responses and negotiate meaning. Hearing English in the classroom exposes students to words and concepts they would not be able to read on their own or hear in casual conversations with friends. English learners need opportunities for discussion based on activities like sorting, ordering, classifying, and organizing, accompanied

## Plays, Skits, and Read-Arounds

These types of activities are not about producing on-the-spot speech—rather, they produce rehearsed speech. Nonetheless, repeated reads and memorization are powerful tools to help anchor language in memory that becomes available for future use in conversations. Further, spoken language fluency supports reading fluency, and it also helps students learn the natural rhythms and cadences of spoken English. An added benefit of brief plays and skits is that adding movement to words and phrases is another modality that further helps embed language in memory.

The Stories to Grow By with Whootie Owl website ([www.storiestogrowby.com/script\\_body.html](http://www.storiestogrowby.com/script_body.html)) offers simple reader's theater scripts for groups of students ranging from four to fourteen in number. They are simplified folktales from countries around the world and are based on themes such as loyalty and resourcefulness. Another benefit is that the reader-level range of these reader's theater plays is appropriate for early to intermediate English learners.

## Targeted Language Objectives

An important way for teachers to build student awareness, exposure, and repeated use of language is to include a language objective, in addition to a content objective, as part of the daily content curriculum (Echevarría, Vogt, and Short 2012). Here are two examples:

- Count how many transitional words the author uses (e.g., *however*, *otherwise*, *besides*, *conversely*, and *therefore*); use at least one in individual speaking or writing today.
- Record at least five prepositional phrases encountered in today's science reading (e.g., *across Earth*, *next to rivers*, and *deep inside the cave*).

## Promote Academic Thinking

Academic language is embedded in the cognitive processes—reasoning, perception, logical thinking, decision making, problem solving, and language—used to express understanding. The challenge for English learners is that academic language can be abstract, and therefore difficult to put into words. For beginning English language learners, the need resides in making abstract thinking concrete enough to be able to express it simply. Here are some strategies to help teachers implement this construct.

## Analogies

Analogies are powerful ways of getting students to engage in thinking about relationships. Asking English learners to identify relationships among basic vocabulary words provides students with simple and concrete ways to express their thinking without the need for extended dialogue.

For example, the teacher lays out four or more pictures of objects. (More than four makes the cognitive task more challenging.) The teacher selects four picture cards with which to form an analogy. The teacher demonstrates thinking about and selecting them on the basis of relationship and category of the objects. The teacher then models the standard analogy verbal pattern, “*X is to Y as A is to B,*” while showing and talking about the selected pictures. Showing pictures with the words to express them engages the students in comparing and contrasting while providing a specific language pattern. By selecting the related pictures, rather than producing the language to support the selection, the student engages in thinking (in any language), and then he or she uses a standard and simple language pattern to express category and relationship. Basic vocabulary cards with pictures on one side and words on the other allow for independently practicing the words and the analogies.

Here are some analogies using simple words to get started with:

- bird : nest :: person : house
- pencil : paper :: fingers : keyboard
- bird : feathers :: person : clothes
- hair : person :: feathers : bird
- kitten : cat :: puppy : dog
- book : library :: student : classroom
- ear : head :: fingers : hand
- teeth : mouth :: toes : foot
- butterflies : fly :: fish : swim
- feet : walk :: wings : fly
- red : apple :: yellow : sun

## Open Sorts

Another way to express thinking without the need for a great deal of language is by using open sorts. This strategy has students manipulate cards by sorting them into piles for which they themselves have developed their own categories. As with analogy cards, open sorts promote critical thinking while simultaneously employing simple word patterns such as “We use these at lunch” or “We wear these.” The teacher can first model selecting a small number of pictures and provide one sentence describing the category. Modeling language for students provides critical listening opportunities and a bridge to making thinking visible. As with analogy cards, pictures can appear on one side of the card with the printed word on the other. This allows students to independently practice with the vocabulary. The number of cards and categories can be adjusted to the level of students’ language.

Open sorts offer multiple opportunities for language and meaning negotiation. It is quite possible that students may find different categories from the ones the teacher had in mind, which can demonstrate divergent thinking—an important element in thinking critically.

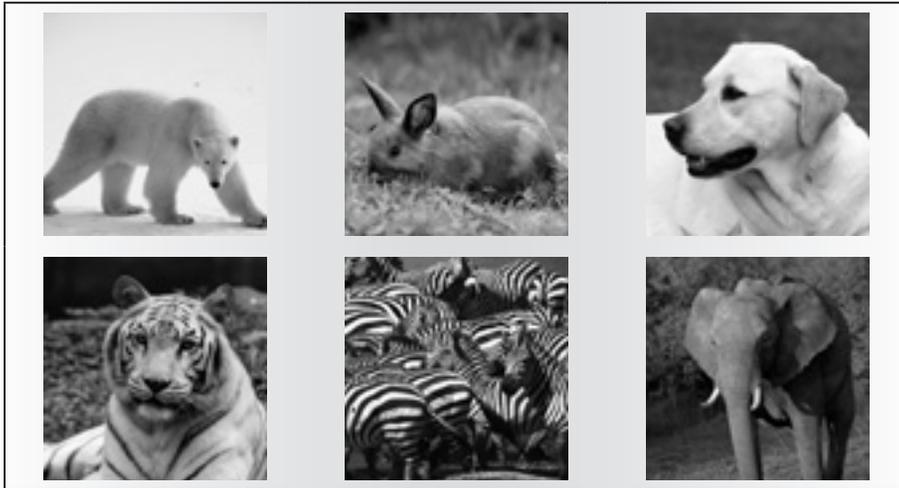
Open sort cards for beginning English language learners can include objects related to the following:

- classroom
- recess
- lunch
- clothing
- girls’ clothing
- boys’ clothing
- mammals
- reptiles
- fish

Pictures of unrelated objects or topics may also be used. The following two sets of pictures could be sorted based on a variety of criteria. Just a few examples are habitat, color, and animal classification for the first set of pictures; and groups of people versus individuals, or the type of activity portrayed for the second set of pictures. Asking students to explain their thinking helps them develop vocabulary as well as critical-thinking abilities.

Sort each set of pictures in two different ways. Explain why you grouped them in these ways.

**Set 1**



**Set 2**



## Semantic Feature Analysis (SFA)

This strategy is another excellent tool for engaging students in critical thinking and academic language. As with analogies and open sorts, SFA provides a structure for students to promote thinking and practice speaking skills. It also provides a pattern or structure that is essential in scaffolding language for English learners. This strategy may be more appropriate for intermediate to advanced English language learners. It requires focused academic student discussion, as emphasized in the Common Core for English Language Arts Speaking and Listening Anchor Standards requiring students to compare and contrast, identify, justify, and support.

This strategy is typically used in conjunction with a unit of study, and it offers opportunities for students to talk about and clarify understanding. The first step is for the teacher to select the most important words and decide on qualities or characteristics they may or may not share. These are placed on a grid: vocabulary words along the side and qualities or characteristics along the top. The teacher and students together decide which features are true or false and indicate this with a plus sign (+) or a minus sign (-), a process that requires focus and discussion. Figure 4.2 shows an example of such a grid, for the story *The Three Little Pigs*.

Figure 4.2 *The Three Little Pigs* Example

	impatient	hardworking	playful	wise	lazy
wolf	+	-	-	-	+
1st pig	+	-	+	-	+
2nd pig	+	-	+	-	+
3rd pig	-	+	-	+	-

“Can you give me an example from the story that shows why the first pig was lazy?” and “What makes you think the third pig was wise?” are just two examples of questions that can prompt discussion and student reference back to the text.

The example shown in Figure 4.3 demonstrates that it is possible to use this strategy for more sophisticated concepts and evaluation of characteristics or qualities. Instead of + and -, here A = Always, N = Never, and S = Sometimes are used.

**Figure 4.3** Polygons Example

	plane figure	straight sides	4 sides 4 vertices	4 sides 4 right angles
triangle	A	A	N	N
rectangle	A	A	A	A
octagon	A	A	N	N
parallelogram	A	A	A	S
quadrilateral	A	A	A	S

## Summary

Speaking and listening abilities are the fundamental language components that provide the basis for literacy development. Additionally, the Common Core State Standards lay out specific listening and speaking requirements. Therefore, they are necessary language domains to incorporate into the curriculum. Offering abundant opportunities to engage in high-quality listening and speaking activities, providing explicit and direct instruction on grammar and usage, teaching patterns and structures, and incorporating construct-based instruction are essential for promoting and developing oral skills. This chapter outlined many teaching strategies to promote the development of these two important language domains.

# Teacher Resources

This appendix has several useful resources including two word lists that can be helpful when selecting vocabulary words for students to learn: the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Critical Verbs and Nouns List and the Academic Word List (AWL).

Marilee Sprenger established the CCSS Critical Verbs and Nouns by selecting 29 verbs and 21 nouns of “words that are contained within the anchor standards and grade-level standards, and...that are used in the exemplars that are provided by the Common Core authors” (Sprenger 2013, 23). This appendix includes the critical verbs and nouns lists.

The AWL, created by Averil Coxhead, is made up of a total of 570 “head words” grouped into nine sublists (Coxhead 2000). This word list consists of those appearing most frequently in a corpus of 3.5 million words of running text in university textbooks in the arts, commerce, law, and science. This resource shows the first five sublists, in descending order from most frequently appearing to less frequently appearing.

By cross-referencing the words on the Critical Verbs and Nouns List and the AWL, terms common to both can be identified. Surprisingly, many CCSS words are not found on the AWL. Nor do many of the terms on the CCSS Critical Verbs and Nouns List appear on the General Service List (GSL), the 2,284 most commonly appearing words in the English language. That is, they are unique to the CCSS Critical Verbs and Nouns List, and they are identified in bold text in the chart. Given the words’ lack of appearance in other sources and the importance of the CCSS words, teachers should take special care to provide instruction on these words. As a way to further sift relevant and academically important vocabulary words, teachers should become familiar with and teach the CCSS verbs and nouns most commonly used for their particular grade level.

# Retelling Rubric

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Text:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Check one:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Text was read aloud to student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Text was read aloud by student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Text was read silently by student.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Text was read aloud with student partner.

**Other notes or information:**

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# Retelling Rubric *(cont.)*

<b>Text recall of . . .</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Sequence					
Main idea(s)					
Supporting ideas					
Important information					
<b>Language Use</b>					
Vocabulary					
Sentence structure (grammar)					
Capitalization and punctuation					
Spelling					
<b>Text Response or Reaction</b>					
Personal observations					
Creative impressions					
Text extension					
Connections across text					

## Scoring:

0	No evidence
1	Limited evidence
2	Moderate evidence
3	Substantial evidence
4	Excellent