

Best Practices in the English Learners' Classroom:
Planning, Instruction, and Assessment, A Focus on Primary Grades

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Chapters	
I. Best Practices in the English Learner’s Classroom, Introduction	5
II. Planning	6
a. Understanding by Design.....	6
b. Differentiated Instruction, a Planning Tool.....	7
c. What Really Matters in Planning for Student Success?.....	7
d. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol.....	8
i. SIOP and Lesson Preparation.....	8
ii. SIOP and Building Background.....	11
III. Instruction	13
a. Content-based ESL Instruction.....	13
b. Sheltered Instruction.....	14
c. SIOP and Instructional Best Practices.....	14
i. Comprehensible Input.....	14
ii. Learning Strategies.....	17
iii. Scaffolding.....	18
iv. Higher Order Thinking.....	18
v. Interaction.....	18
vi. Practice and Application.....	19
vii. Lesson Delivery.....	20
d. Expanding a Repertoire of Instructional Strategies.....	22

i. Explicit Teaching.....	22
ii. Instructional Supports.....	23
iii. Opportunities to Practice.....	23
iv. Routines.....	24
v. Instructional Language.....	25
IV. Assessment	26
a. Review and Assessment (SIOP)	26
i. Authentic Assessment.....	27
b. Importance of Feedback.....	27
c. Response to Intervention	28
V. Best Practices in the English Learner’s Classroom, Conclusion	29
VI. Appendices	30
VII. References	42

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers effectively integrate best practices in planning, instruction, and assessment into primary level classroom instruction. This study follows a “project study” research process where the outcome is a synthesis of best practices on the topic that should be relevant and applicable to my future as a professional educator.

In this study, best practices from the literature regarding *planning*, *instruction*, and *assessment* in primary English Learner's (EL's) classrooms are discussed. The study is fashioned from my St. Olaf integrative major, “English Language Learners in the Elementary Classroom.” In my undergraduate research, I studied EL's early education and I sought to discover what factors contribute to a successful engagement of an ESL student in a classroom. From my years of study I found two important contributors to a holistic English Learner's early education. 1) Teachers influence learning by first discovering what leads to successful engagement in a classroom, and 2) a teacher must discover what motivates a student to pursue learning. Engagement and motivation are two key practices teachers should apply to their teaching practice because the factors highly impact an EL's early education.

“Best Practices the English Learner's Classroom” contributes to the current research in the ESL field through a synthesis of best practices on the topic that could be relevant and applicable to the profession. The results may or may not be effectively replicated in other learning environments. Nationwide, increased ESL research is emerging because of the rising EL population. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics*, the percentage of ELL public school students in the United States was higher in 2012-2013 (4.4 million students) than in 2002-2003 (4.1 million students).” While facing increasing numbers of EL students, educators are searching for ways to improve and strengthen language learning. Best practice classroom activities actively encourage participation and engagement. This study identifies the best practices for engaging and motivational instruction—in addition to best practices for planning and assessment. The research based, unique, and effective tools described in this paper will inspire EL teachers to engage and motivate English Learners to think improve their ability to think critically and problem solve, and learn how to self-direct their own learning.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE ENGLISH LEARNERS' CLASSROOM: PLANNING, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT, A FOCUS ON PRIMARY GRADES

Effective teaching is more vital to EL success than ever before in the history of United States' education system. Successful and meaningful education for English learners (ELs) develops from the teachers' knowledge of best practice teaching in key areas of teaching: planning, instruction, and assessment. Hargreaves and Fullan discuss a definition of 'best practice' in their book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, "[Best practices are] existing practices that already possess a high level of widely-agreed effectiveness" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 51).

The number of ELs in US schools increases each year. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the percentage of EL public school students was higher in the school year 2012-2013 at 9.2% than in 2011, 9.1%. According to Goldenberg's research, "[EL] numbers have grown drastically just in the past 15 years. In 1990, 1 in 20 public school students in grades K-12 were English language learners [...] Today the figure is 1 in 9." Furthermore, demographers estimate that in 2028 the ratio might be 1 in 4 (Goldenberg, Summer 2008, p. 10). Goldenberg also suggests a growing achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs (Goldenberg, Summer 2008). Increasing numbers of ELs with lack of informed teaching leads to poor school outcomes for this population. The 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that fourth grade English learners scored 37 points below non-English learners in reading and 25 points below non-English learners in math (NCES, 2015). These numbers highlight how educators must improve EL language acquisition.

Existing research, while limited, is needed to decrease this achievement gap. With the EL population falling behind, educators need research to guide their instruction to ELs in order to decrease the growing achievement gap. The growing EL population creates a stressful environment with growing pressure for teachers to increase EL language acquisition. Students, parents, administration, and many others rely on teachers to implement best practices into their practice in order to produce successful outcomes and reduce the achievement gap. Best practices can be adapted to different ages. In this paper I discuss examples and illustrations using the younger EL population. The research existing today is only a starting effort toward decreasing the EL achievement gap; more exploration of EL best practice is needed. Nonetheless, we must start somewhere and "as long as we are moving towards this goal, then we are doing the best we can for kids" (Teacher1, 2016, p. 6). Through this paper I discuss best practices techniques for the primary EL teacher (Pre-Kindergarten to third grade) in planning, instruction, and assessment.

Planning

Planning is critical to teacher success and an essential piece of the learning process for students. When teachers plan with the student in mind, lessons become more relevant, and the English learner (EL) begins to show increased achievement. Learning becomes meaningful to students when teachers dedicate energy and time to their lesson planning. Their effort results in relevant and meaningful material, motivating activities, and fosters real-life application of concepts studied (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013). Respected teachers dedicate time to planning powerful and purposeful lessons. Through my research I found two specific planning designs that support the mission of incorporating best practice into teaching practice: “Understanding by Design” (UbD), and “Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol” (SIOP).

This planning section highlights the key ideas behind UbD and examines how “differentiated instruction” works along side of UbD as a planning model. Finally, I emphasize the best practices of the SIOP planning model.

Understanding by Design

There are two core ideas of Understanding by Design (UbD). The first is to focus on teaching and assessing students for understanding, and learning transfer. The second focus is designing the unit and/or lesson backwards (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Teachers follow this research based planning design during unit and lesson planning. To pursue this design framework, teachers first address the question, what do we want students to *know* and *do* at the end of the unit/lesson? With this question in mind, teachers review curriculum and standard expectations and make choices about content.

Additionally, the first step of UbD sets goals related to: “transfer learning” “meaning making” and “acquisition of knowledge.” (For a detailed understanding of these three goals see Appendix 1.1). Goldenberg strongly believes in learning transfer, “If you learn something in one language, you either already know it in (i.e., transfer it to) another language or can more easily learn it in another language” (Goldenberg, Summer 2008, p. 15). In order to complete stage one and achieve the goals of transfer learning, Tomlinson and Wiggins provide examples of sample transfer goals (Appendix 1.2) and sample understandings and essential questions (Appendix 1.3).

Stage two of UbD highlights backward design. Teachers who incorporate backward design into their planning are aware of end goals. In this stage teachers are considering the question, how will we know if students have achieved the desired results? Desired results, or the end goals of the lesson/unit are demonstrated in the assessment. Stage two of UbD guides teachers to plan these assessments and to decide how they will evaluate the student performance in fair and consistent ways (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012).

In the final stage of UbD, teachers plan learning activities for students and ask the question, how will we plan learning experiences and instructional strategies to help students achieve the desired goals? Thus, the activities must provide opportunities for all students to prove they met the goals identified in stage one: transfer, meaning making, and acquisition. Moreover, this assessment-driven design emphasizes the teacher’s role in planning for student achievement. Teacher 1 affirms the constructive research of UbD; however training UbD teachers is another story. To train teachers and account for their dedication to using UbD is time consuming. Teacher 1 explains how their school’s ELL department works together to create a unique template for lesson planning, “it is based off of UbD” (Teacher1, 2016, p. 6).

Understanding by Design works in tandem with differentiated instruction, together they provide

EL teachers with a structure for classrooms that is both powerful in knowledge and that is adapted for each student.

Differentiated Instruction, a Planning Tool

Along with UbD, differentiated instruction (DI) underlines the importance of planning ahead for diverse needs in a classroom. EL classrooms give teachers opportunities to break learning barriers. English learners are diverse in unique ways that make planning vital to success. In my experience, ELs have unique backgrounds and stories to tell. To illustrate the diverse stories EL students have, read these student backgrounds as examples. One student just moved to America thousands of miles away from their home. Another student takes care of his siblings after school each day, rather than playing at the park with his friends. And another student may not have opportunities to practice English because they speak their first language at home.

The EL classroom will bring assorted levels of knowledge in myriad home languages, various levels of previous schooling, the representation of several cultural backgrounds, and different scholarly strengths, barriers to learning, and interests. Teachers are responsible for planning lessons to meet the individual needs of the ELs in their classroom. According to research compiled by Tomlinson and McTighe, to plan for instruction in an a differentiated classroom, teachers ask themselves:

- How do I give directions for tasks?
- How will I know what students understand and can do?
- How do I keep their interest?
- How do I know when to start and stop the various segments of a plan?
- How do we transition from one part of a lesson to the next?
- How do I distribute resource materials?
- How do I know when to start and stop the various segments of the plan for the class as a whole and when I might need to extend a segment for particular learners who have deep interest or lingering needs related to that segment?
- How do I help students transition at different times for different purposes so that the class remains focused on the important work at hand?
- How do I give directions for multiple tasks efficiently and effectively?

(Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 89).

Teachers in effectively differentiated classrooms apply both planning and improvisation to their instruction. While the teacher bears in mind the lesson's goals, and planned activities, a teacher who differentiates adjusts the lesson and activities based on how students respond. Tomlinson and McTighe illustrate the following selection to demonstrate how a teacher who uses differentiation is similar to a jazz musician,

A teacher who seeks to answer these questions is something like a jazz musician. The teacher uses many elements and approaches sometimes planned and sometimes improvisational to convey the message of the melody. It takes practice to be a good jazz musician. From the practice grows knowledge of music theory, a good ear for what is going on around the musician, a sense of timing, sensitivity to the meanings of the music, a tolerance for ambiguity, and creativity. The jazz musician never loses the melody but expresses it in many ways (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 89)

As previously stated, differentiated lessons are a necessary element in the primary EL classroom and Appendix 1.4 illuminates background factors that should be considered when planning for increased EL language proficiency (Echevarria et al., 2013).

What Really Matters in Planning for Student Success?

An art of teaching is painted from the teachers' ability to design curriculum appropriate for their students, based on student language proficiency, and individual needs. In the planning stages of teaching, teachers must remember their role; "the essence of our job is making sure that the curriculum serves as a catalyst for powerful learning for students who with our guidance and support become skilled and committed to the process of learning" (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 39). Expert teachers strive to learn more about the content they will be teaching students and their deeper understanding leads to successful curriculum and lesson planning. But, what really matters in planning for student success? For one, the teachers' attitude and skills are an essential component to plan for student success. According to Tomlinson and McTighe (the researchers behind the UbD concept) successful teachers have certain attitudes and skills that contribute to the well being of all learners:

- They establish clarity about curricular needs.
- They accept responsibility for learner success.
- They develop communities of respect.
- They build awareness of what works for each student.
- They develop classroom management routines that contribute to success.
- They help students become effective partners in their own success.
- They develop flexible classroom teaching routines.
- They expand a repertoire of instructional strategies.
- They reflect on individual progress with an eye toward curricular goals and personal growth.

(Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p. 40).

For teachers, goal curriculum planning is to focus on knowledge, understanding, and skill. These key planning principles help the student to grasp full understanding of the subject taught. Without the teacher's full understanding of the lesson content, students will also lack a full understanding of the lesson content. If the teacher's idea of the content is foggy, the students understanding of the content will be foggy. A teacher with these attitudes and skills is on the path leading to differentiated teaching. While differentiated instruction is an instructional design model, teachers plan for a differentiated classroom using the UbD model. Understanding by design and differentiated instruction work together to provide the necessary leadership for planning for student success.

Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model was predominantly designed for English language learners. SIOP encompasses two decades of classroom-based research. SIOP's research supports its effectiveness for the EL student population (Echevarria et al., 2013). The research proves SIOP's value for ELs because the studies show students in SIOP classes performing better than students in control groups (Echevarria, Richards-Tutor, Canges, & Francis, 2011). The research and development of the SIOP model comes from the sheltered instruction approach, and content-based ESL instruction. (For more information about these two instructional approaches turn to pages 13-14 within the instruction section of the paper.) The

SIOP model can be broken down into eight major components. Each component falls under one of the umbrella terms: planning, instruction, or assessment. Two components address planning; five components speak to instruction, and one component tackles assessment. As this section reflects best practices in the area of planning, I will focus on the two planning components of the SIOP model: lesson preparation and building background (Echevarria et al., 2013).

SIOP and Lesson Preparation

To begin implementing SIOP's planning best practices, teachers must follow the lesson preparation model. The lesson preparation model is a way to begin the planning process. EL students benefit from SIOP lesson preparation because teachers aim for maximum learning to occur:

For maximum learning to occur, planning must produce lessons that target specific learning goals, enable students to make connections between their own knowledge and experiences and the new information being taught, give students practice using and applying the new information, and assess student learning to determine whether to move on or reteach the material (Echevarria et al., 2013, pp. 12-13).

For lesson preparation, teachers must consider the following aspects of their lesson plan: language objectives, content objectives, appropriate content concepts, supplementary materials, adaptation of content, and meaningful activities. The following sections describe these lesson components in more detail.

What makes SIOP unique from other planning models is the language objective aspect of a lesson plans. A language objective is a necessary component to the lesson plan because not only does a teacher need to know the content of their lesson, but teachers must know how the students will a) convey the information (i.e., orally or in text) and b) how the student will use and apply the information (i.e., reading, discussion, writing) (Echevarria et al., 2013, pp. 31-33). The following are examples of language functions teachers could use in a language objective:

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| - Describe | - Evaluate |
| - Write | - Summarize |
| - Persuade | - Define |
| - Analyze | - Retell |

One lesson is never enough for teachers to expect proficiency from their students. English learners need time and opportunities to practice using the language function. On top of the language demands, students are also expected to learn grade level content.

A teacher also formulates a content objective during the planning stage. There are two major responsibilities of the content objective: One; it must identify what students know and should be able to do and two; it must guide the teaching and learning (Echevarria et al., 2013). When teachers begin to formulate content objectives, they must consider these principles:

1. Objective must be supported by school, district, or state content standards
2. An objective must be in student friendly and accessible to the learners
3. Objectives must focus on the student and be written in terms of student learning
4. Write clear objectives that lowers the complexity of learning task(s)
5. The objective must be visually available to the students

To follow all of these principles each time a content objective is written is challenging. However, the effort is worth it. SIOP researchers share the success of one sheltered instruction teacher,

The objectives are still going on in my class. They're on the board every day and the students are getting use to seeing them, reading the out loud, and evaluating whether or

not we achieved them at the end of the class. [...] I just wanted to say that defining the objectives each day definitely brings more focus to my planning and thinking, and it helps bring order to my classroom procedures. So far, it has not been too burdensome and the habit is definitely forming (Echevarria et al., 2013, pp. 27-28).

The steps of forming content objectives may seem challenging. Nonetheless, the results prove beneficial for classroom routine and EL achievement.

SIOP teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of preparing lessons that meet the needs of their ELs while still covering the necessary content. In order to follow the required content, teachers capitalize district curriculum and grade-level content standards. Along with these resources, when deciding the lesson's content, a teacher must keep in mind these concepts as they might affect the decision of what content to cover:

- Students' L1 literacy
- Students' English language proficiency
- Students' schooling background
- Students' background knowledge related to content
- Appropriateness of content for cultures and ages represented in the classroom
- Difficulty level of the content materials

These planning considerations allow for meaningful and effective lessons. For English learners, grade level content is also essential for an effective lesson. Teachers give thoughtful consideration to content and in turn, support students in their learning. Education researchers, including those of the SIOP model, address the concerns of keeping content at grade level, "it is inappropriate to use the curriculum materials and books from much earlier grades [...] the teacher should provide the scaffolding needed to understand the content concepts" (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 26). Teachers should support students in connecting with the content. EL teachers plan ways to bridge student background with content. For example, 2nd grade students typically learn the science behind push and pull forces, yet some primary ELs may not have learned about these forces. Instead of diminishing the content, the teacher's responsibility is to make the content comprehensible and relate students' prior knowledge to new learning. Perhaps a teacher could have students play ball with their peers to encourage an understanding of push and pull forces.

Supplementary materials, such as the ball in the illustration above, enhance student understanding of confusing content. To decrease students' misperceptions, effective EL teachers plan for supplementary materials to be incorporated in their instruction. EL students generally do not perform at grade-level. A Teachers' forethought to implement extra materials into lessons will encourage comprehension. Such materials in a primary EL classroom could include:

- Hands-on Manipulatives (for specifics, see Appendix 1.5)
- Realia
- Pictures and Visuals
- Adapted Text
- Demonstrations

As teachers plan ahead for these additional supports, they dedicate more time to finding appropriate and meaningful material.

To adapt content for ELs does not mean to diminish the content. Though, adapting the content to make it more accessible to the student is necessary. ELs cannot be expected to understand all grade-level academic vocabulary. Rather than watering down a text, teachers adapt the reading to make it more accessible to the English learner. Echevarria et al., the

researchers behind SIOP, cite research by Readance, Bean, and Bladwin who provide several ways of adapting a text for students with reading disabilities (Echevarria et al., 2013). These recommendations work equally well with the primary EL population. Two recommendations are as follows,

- Summarize the text to focus on the key points of information
- Elaborate upon the text to add information

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 42)

Grade level content can be difficult for English learners to process because of the level of academic vocabulary within texts. Adapted versions of grade level content are more appropriate for an EL student; they are clearer, and written with simple sentences. These modified texts still require the same grade-level content knowledge as other students.

Meaningful activities are the last consideration during the SIOP planning process. English learners demonstrate success when they are able to make connections between the content and their personal lives. As teachers construct lessons, they should consider the experiences and backgrounds of their students. This knowledge and understanding will support teachers to plan applicable activities and their students will have meaningful opportunities to connect the content to their personal lives. Research suggests that students who are involved in meaningful learning show greater success meeting lesson objectives. As cited by researchers Herrera and Murry, Caine's 1991 findings prove that learning in meaningful contexts allow for students to put the information into long term memory with less time required to rehearse the information for recall (Echevarria et al., 2013).

SIOP and Building Background

EL teachers work with students of diverse backgrounds. The students in an ESL classroom each embrace their own understandings of the world through experiences they have faced. One's schema acts like a ball of knowledge that decides how an individual understands a given piece of information. For example, the popular story by Leo Lionni, "Fish is Fish" illustrates a prime example of how one's schema impacts understanding. The fish only knows life underwater and his friend, the frog, brings the fish information about life on land. The frog shares everything he sees on land: cows, humans, birds, etc. However, when the fish imagines these creatures he only pictures them with the body of a fish. The fish's schema is playing a huge role in his ability to visualize new thoughts (Lionni, 1970). The students' schema impacts learning because it provides a basis for understanding, learning, and remembering facts and ideas found in texts (Echevarria et al., 2013). SIOP researchers identify three essential ways for increased comprehension and achievement: connecting students' experiences to a text, developing background knowledge, and teaching key vocabulary. Within the theme of planning, teachers support students in developing background knowledge by:

- Utilizing chapter previews, anticipation guides
- Utilizing visuals when introducing a new concept to provide context
- Teaching from a culturally responsive perspective

Hollie dedicated his life work to culturally responsive teaching. According to Hollie, culturally responsive teaching is "the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academia and mainstream society" (Hollie, 2011, p. 23). (Hollie's *VABB* model—How to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in a classroom... See Appendix 1.6).

Who can recall three things that plants need to grow? This question exemplifies an example of what a teacher could ask to link past learning to new concepts. The explicit link between what plants need to grow can bridge a student's understanding to a unit on the human body. For ELs it is important for teachers to connect past learning to new information because "the explicit, brief review of a prior lesson focuses on key information and vocabulary they should remember" (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 65). According to Vaughn and Linan-Thompson, explicit teaching can be effective when teachers make relationships obvious for the student. Whether teachers are connecting student background to content, or linking prior learning to new learning, teachers are making that bridge apparent for the students (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Association for, & Curriculum, 2007).

In SIOP lessons, teachers plan ahead by identifying key vocabulary for instruction. This forethought is important to EL success because vocabulary understanding is central to comprehension. Primary English learners have a lower vocabulary than mainstreamed students simply because of their amount of English language exposure. Generally, it is expected for the English learner to acquire a strong BICS vocabulary prior to CALPS vocabulary. BICS stands for basic interpersonal communication skills. Students use BICS vocabulary on a daily basis. BICS vocabulary is the social language students use to converse. Contrariwise, CALPS—cognitive academic language proficiency skills—is considered academic vocabulary. Many ELs need extra support with CALPS because "academic vocabulary is one important facet of academic language, and it is of critical importance to content classrooms" (Echevarria et al., 2013, pp. 69-70). The Common Core Standards for vocabulary state that ELs must learn content vocabulary as well as other types of academic vocabulary. To understand the supplementary academic vocabulary that teachers are expected to teach, see Appendix 1.7.

Instruction

Instruction begins the process of learning for students. It is considered one of the most important parts for researched-based teaching practices. Students need effective instruction to become successful learners. English learners (ELs) enter the classroom with ranges of language background; experience with home language (L1), amount of previous formal schooling, and quality and/or quantity of English language instruction. Thus, ELs must have instructional support to encourage further English language growth. Goldenberg agrees that instructional support encourages language growth. He also believes that additional supports must be meaningful and productive (Goldenberg, Summer 2013).

Through this instructional section, I identify two models: Content-based ESL instruction and Sheltered Instruction. These instructional models are the foundation of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. The SIOP model is broken down into eight major components. To learn more about SIOP's first two components, which address "planning," can be found on pages 8 and 11. The SIOP model recognizes five major components for effective instruction: comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, and lesson delivery. First, I will review the basics of Content-based ESL instruction and Sheltered Instruction. Last, I discuss these major components of the SIOP model and highlight research-based strategies to expand one's repertoire of instructional strategies.

Content-based ESL instruction

The first best practice instruction model I address, content-based ESL instruction, benefits English learners as it provides ELs with content knowledge and access to academic English. Teachers of content-based ESL classrooms must keep two important goals in mind. First, address English language development by meeting English language proficiency (ELP) standards. Two, when teachers introduce the lesson, highlight the academic vocabulary needed to meet content standards (Echevarria et al., 2013). For example, a primary EL teacher in a content-based ESL classroom might study about the life cycle of butterflies. In order to maintain these goals, the teacher will address the necessary content standards, but also emphasize key academic vocabulary. Such vocabulary might include: Cycle, metamorphosis, larva, shedding, chrysalis, etc.

Research proves that teaching vocabulary thematically increases the students' ability to learn and remember the terms (Farstrup & Samuels, 2008). If students were taught words like: cycle, metamorphosis, or larva, outside of a life cycle unit, students would struggle memorizing meaningless terminology. Vocabulary instruction seems overwhelming, but explicit teaching supports teachers' instruction and increases student comprehension. In order to explicitly teach, a teacher must contextualize new vocabulary and content concepts. This can be done using visual aides (i.e., pictures, charts, word organizers, graphic organizers). Research suggests that visuals support EL learning tremendously, especially with younger EL students (Herrera & Murry, 2005). While researchers show that Content-based ESL instruction benefits EL language acquisition, one caveat exists.

Students' may lack adequate background knowledge to comprehend the content. Students learning English demonstrate difficulties in comprehending text of our Western culture, as they are not familiar with the settings and the indigenous literary genres. However, with effective teaching, content-based ESL instruction provides ELs access to core content coursework and successfully support their development of academic language.

Sheltered instruction

The SIOP model embraces content-based ESL instruction, as well as sheltered instruction. The sheltered instruction model is popular for EL teaching because “it is a method for combining philosophies, strategies, and techniques that appropriately recognize the many challenges that [EL] students confront” (Herrera & Murry, 2005, p. 271). The list below values the teaching practices of sheltered instruction teachers:

- Teachers ensure students have sufficient background knowledge for new curriculum
- Teachers modify their speech
- Teachers teach learning strategies
- Teachers provide ample opportunities for students to interact in the target language
- Teachers create meaningful and purposeful tasks

(Echevarria et al., 2013).

Sheltered instruction encourages EL language development because sheltered instruction teachers deliver comprehensible information. Sheltered instruction gives the EL student extra language support needed to comprehend the content. As discussed earlier, ELs need extra help learning academic vocabulary, or what EL teachers refer to as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALPS). Academic language is the center of content learning. For example, an ESL Intermediate Literature class will continue learning skills and standards already set in place for literature classes. Nonetheless, teachers will scaffold their instruction in order to deliver clear language input and a customized grade-level curriculum.

There are two major responsibilities of a sheltered instruction teacher. The first, teach grade-level, standards-based content, and knowledge of specific subjects. The second, support academic language development as it pertains to each specific content area (Echevarria et al., 2013). Herrera and Murry provide an appropriate summary of sheltered instruction classrooms, as seen in Appendix 2.1.

SIOP and Instructional Best Practices

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol reflects the combined efforts of sheltered instruction and content-based ESL instruction. The following discusses five unique components of the SIOP model. As previously mentioned, SIOP's eight components reflect best practice teaching to become an effective SIOP teacher. These components are the instructional piece to the model and guide the EL teacher's instructional practice: Comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, and lesson delivery.

Comprehensible Input

Comprehensible input considers how teachers should adjust their speech, model academic tasks, and use multimodal techniques to enhance comprehension (Echevarria et al., 2013). In order for an EL teacher to instruct comprehensible information, the teacher must recognize these three considerations: appropriate speech, clear explanation of academic tasks, and effective teaching techniques (Echevarria et al., 2013).

Teachers require strategies to provide comprehensible information to students. One way teachers provide comprehensible information is through visual aids. Visual support gives students information they understand with their eyes if they cannot understand with their ears. Yet, comprehensible input is more than using pictures. There are a number of strategies for teachers to provide comprehensible input beyond visuals, but orally and in text. Teachers cannot

only rely on visual support because not only do EL students need to learn the subject matter; they are also required to meet standards associated with reading and speaking. The following section illustrates how teachers apply comprehensible teaching into their classrooms.

1.) Appropriate Speech: Imagine you are a first grade student who just moved to the United States from the Philippines. The first day in Ms. Franklin's classroom proved how your limited English language exposure is hurting your ability to understand Ms. Franklin from the start of the school day. Today is day two and you and your peers are sitting in a circle for the morning message. Ms. Franklin begins to read the message aloud:

Good morning first graders,

Did you find four people to read your books to? If you did, that's fantastic!

*From,
Ms. Franklin*

This morning Ms. Franklin's voice changed from what you remember from yesterday. Her clear and enunciated discourse replaces her fast paced speaking from day one. Yesterday, Ms. Franklin read the morning message only once, but today she pointed to the words as she reread the message two times!

This experience with Ms. Franklin illustrates the importance of comprehensible input to the English learner. Teachers can easily adjust their instruction to meet the needs of English learners through comprehensible input. Even simply changing the pace of the lecture and repeating information can be necessary for the student's success.

2.) Clear Explanation of Academic Tasks: This imaginary scenario above further explains how a teacher clearly explains academic tasks to ELs.

Good morning first graders,

Did you find four people to read your books to? If you did, that's fantastic!

*From,
Ms. Franklin*

Ms. Franklin just finished rereading the morning message and presents the class with the first task of the day. Now, as Ms. Franklin shares her expectation for the following task, she must be

clear. Especially for English learners, unclear directions lead to confusion and an unsuccessful lessons. Nevertheless, Ms. Franklin does give her students clear directions for the first task. “To begin this morning I need a volunteer to come up to the board and circle all of the words that start with the letter F. Here, I will circle the first one for you.”

Good morning First graders,

Did you find four people to read your books to? If you did, that's fantastic!

*From,
Ms. Franklin*

Ms. Franklin is using a strong instructional technique to provide clear instructions for her students. By beginning with a model of what she is asking the volunteer to do, she is helping students—regardless of their language abilities—comprehend the directions. According to SIOP researchers, ELs show increased achievement when teachers continually speak with clear discourse, “English learners at all levels perform better in academic situations when the teacher gives clear instructions for assignments and activities” (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 99).

3.) Teaching techniques: The techniques listed below are used to make content clear for the English learner. The SIOP model shares the following techniques to make content accessible to English learners. These techniques include:

- Use gestures, body language, pictures, and objects to accompany speech. These simple additions to instruction assist ELs in organizing the information.
- Model the process, task, or assignment. This eliminates uncertainty and gives the message in more than one way.
- Preview material. This focuses students' attention on the specific material they will be responsible for learning.
- Allow students to produce tasks in alternate forms for expressing their understanding of the information. Often ELs understand the information but struggle relaying this understanding in English.
- Use technology in instruction. This acts as a supplemental form of information for the students to access.
- Provide repeated exposure to words, concepts, and skills. The repetition of content is helpful to EL students who may not understand the content the first time it is taught.
- Use graphic organizers effectively. This can make information accessible because of how the key points are organized.
- Audiotape texts for greater comprehension. Students learning English show improvements in acquisition when the information is delivered both orally and in text for them to follow along.

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 101).

Any information delivered orally must be comprehensible for the student. Many English learners adapt to the classroom environment by pretending they know, when, in fact, they may not understand (Echevarria et al., 2013). Teachers who apply these techniques into their teaching practice will see a surge in EL comprehension and their language proficiency.

Learning Strategies

Learning Strategies: Here, SIOP emphasizes the importance of teaching learning strategies to students, scaffolding instruction, and promoting higher-order thinking skills (Echevarria et al., 2013). Teachers explicitly teach students how to apply learning strategies independently. Students, who apply learning strategies to their individual learning, show improved learning and reading. SIOP classifies these learning strategies into three categories: cognitive learning strategies, metacognitive learning strategies, and language learning strategies.

1.) Cognitive learning strategies: As students work by themselves, they capitalize on these learning strategies to help organize information. Such strategies identified by SIOP researchers, which apply to primary classrooms are as follows:

- Previewing a story before reading
- Reading aloud for clarification
- Mapping information or using a graphic organizer

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 117).

2) Metacognitive learning strategies: Metacognitive learning strategies help students become aware of information, reflect on their learning, and interact with the content taught. When the following strategies are explicitly taught, students show improved reading comprehension:

- Predict and infer
- Ask questions to guide comprehension
- Monitor learning
- Evaluate information
- Summarize and synthesize information
- Visualize information

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 118).

3) Language learning strategies: The list of language learning strategies below support increased student speaking skills and language comprehension. Such strategies include:

- Preview, skim, scan, review (basic reading skills)
- Use contextual information to make predictions
- Imitate behaviors native English speakers to successfully complete tasks

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 118).

While teaching learning strategies will help ELs become self-sufficient learners, teachers cannot rely on students to learn all the information themselves. Scaffolding is an instructional technique used frequently by effective teachers.

Scaffolding

Through scaffolding, students receive successive levels of temporary support. Scaffolding fosters student independence. Slowly, as students begin to show growth, the teacher gradually releases responsibility. The idea behind “gradual release of responsibility” originated

with Person and Gallagher (1983), “the gradual release of responsibility is manifested when teachers consciously include the following practices” (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 120).

- Emphasize the role of personal choice, effort, and persistence in enacting learning strategies
- Motivate students’ strategy use by showing how applying strategies improves comprehension and learning
- Mentally model to make thinking transparent to students
- Provide guided and independent practice so that students learn to use strategies when cued by a diverse array of goals, needs, task demands, and texts.
- Promote independent strategy use by gradually shifting responsibility for strategy application to students

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 121).

Teachers who scaffold their instruction help students maximize their potential. EL teachers are responsible for challenging students. Scaffolding techniques call for teachers to provide students with support, and then slowly remove themselves when support is no longer needed. Thus, scaffolding allows teachers to challenge their students. Effective SIOP teachers also challenge their students by helping them develop critical thinking and higher order thinking skills.

Higher Order Thinking

In 1956, Bloom and his colleagues built a six-level taxonomy identifying levels of higher order thinking. The levels include: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. How a teacher uses the taxonomy is critical. Teachers benefit from the taxonomy because it helps them deliver appropriate and stimulating instruction. The taxonomy also assists teachers to craft higher-level questions and activities for a lesson. This taxonomy supports teacher’s lesson planning, but it also impacts instruction. Students need to be challenged. Bloom’s taxonomy, shaped like a triangle, suggests higher levels of thinking towards the top of the triangle. (See appendix 2.2 for a copy of Bloom’s taxonomy.)

Rather than simply asking lower level questions towards the beginning of the taxonomy scale (i.e., *remember*: “What does letter F sound like?”), teachers should develop higher order questions, these are developed by going further up on the taxonomy (i.e., *apply*: “The letter F sounds like /f/. Can you tell me a word that starts with the letter F?”). SIOP teachers plan higher-order questions because effective and stimulating questions are difficult to cultivate during instruction.

Interaction

Interaction: Interaction prompts teachers to encourage students to elaborate their speech and to group students appropriately for language and content development. The goal of ESL classes is to improve English language proficiency so students adjust smoothly into the world. To meet this goal, effective SIOP teachers continually provide opportunities for interaction during their instruction. Classroom interactions increase student opportunities to practice and use language, which strengthens language acquisition. SIOP highlights ways to encourage EL interaction during instruction, two of which include: quantity of interactions and group configurations.

1.) Frequent opportunities for interaction: Primary EL students need regular opportunities to use the English language. ELs who use the English language on a consistent basis show tremendous improvement in oral language proficiency (Echevarria et al., 2013). According to research by August and Shanahan (2006), oral language skills link with reading and writing proficiency. Thus, as students are provided with opportunities to use the oral language, their other language skills increase. SIOP researchers illustrate a typical class period that allows for sufficient student to student and teacher to student interaction:

1. Teacher facilitates
2. Many different ideas encouraged
3. Oral language practice opportunities using natural language
4. Extensive discussion and student involvement
5. Draw from prior background knowledge
6. Student level of understanding transparent
7. Fewer black and white responses
8. Mostly higher level thinking and language use

(Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 150).

Furthermore, this illustration incorporates meaningful involvement of content based on student experience. Jacob et al., (1996) found that paper-pencil cooperative learning groups (a specific technique used to spur interaction) actually minimized interaction and language-learning opportunities, "ELs tended to cut short their interactions in order to complete assigned paper and pencil tasks in the allotted time" (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 144). In my experience working with primary EL students, I saw similar results. Especially in classrooms with low risk environments, students who are uncomfortable contributing to discussions will shy away from oral conversation.

2.) Grouping configurations: Students between the ages of six and nine (primary age students) cannot be expected to sit still for the entirety of a lesson. Movement during a lesson allows the student a change of pace; keeps their brains sharp and ready to learn. SIOP teachers effectively maximize movement during their instruction through the use of grouping for activities. Compared with a lecture, EL students display more on-task behavior and greater language practice during a small group environment. It is vital for the primary EL classroom to move students into different learning environments to keep their brains' stimulated and engaged in the language and content learning. SIOP teachers continually incorporate group activities into their lessons (Echevarria et al., 2013). Whether changing from whole class to small group, to partners, or to individual assignments, these changes of environment benefit the students' physical, socio-emotional, language, and cognitive needs.

Practice and Application

Practice and application: Practice and application provides activities to practice and extend language and content learning. Teachers must nurture students when working with new material and allow ELs opportunities to extend their language and content learning. Each lesson for ELs must involve the language demands: writing, listening, speaking, and reading. An EL teacher needs to carefully choose lesson activities that allow opportunities for students to use each language domain. SIOP teachers are guided by these two features in order to create meaningful opportunities within their lessons: hands-on practice with new knowledge, and integration of all language skills (Echevarria et al., 2013).

1.) Hands-on practice with new knowledge: When a teacher gives students opportunities for hands-on practice the student is more in tuned with the learning. Incorporating manipulatives in lessons further strengthens the EL's ability to learn in deeper and more meaningful respects. For example, second grade students typically study topics relating to nature. A SIOP teacher will bring in nature manipulatives (i.e., different types of leaves, ground worms, minnows, etc.) to strengthen content understanding. Especially for ELs, students unfamiliar with the academic vocabulary associated with the lessons, hands-on activities will further broaden their schema. Hands-on learning is another way teachers provide environmental changes to keep students' minds engaged. Students in the primary grades benefit from movement because of their limited attention span. Hands-on activities give students opportunities to move around while still learning.

2) Integration of all language skills: Every lesson needs to have opportunities for the EL to write, listen, speak, and read. These language demands are mutually supportive. Meaning, "practice in one [language modality] promotes development in the others" (Hinkel, 2006, p. 113). The more teachers incorporate language demands into activities; the better off students will be supported to further strengthen their language proficiencies. For example, during a math unit on missing partners (i.e., $3 + \square = 8$... Fill in the missing number.) A teacher incorporates each language demand using unique activities.

- Reading: Provide students with a missing partner story problem and ask them to read it out loud together. Research by Rosenblatt (1978) states that reading out loud together promotes increased student autonomy (Rosenblatt, 1978).
 - o Example story problem: *Ms. Mason ate three apples. Ms. Wood ate seven apples. How many apples did they eat all together?*
- Writing: Work together to write student created story problems with a missing partner.
- Speaking: After each EL solved a problem you provided ask each student to explain how he or she solved the problem.
- Listening: Orally tell the students a story problem using missing partners.

Lesson Delivery

Lesson Delivery: Lesson Delivery ensures teachers present a lesson that meets the planned objectives and promotes student engagement. According to the SIOP model, there are three features to lesson delivery that ensures effectiveness: promote student engagement, support objectives during the lesson, and pace lesson appropriately (Echevarria et al., 2013). However, effective lesson delivery is only possible if the teacher plans for a well-organized lesson. To read more about how to write an effective lesson plan according to the SIOP model, see page 14.

1.) Promote student engagement: ELs learn through participation. Especially at the primary age, students must participate in classes to gain the foundational education needed to continue learning. The SIOP model calls for teachers to engage students 90% to 100% of the lesson (Echevarria et al., 2013). Motivation entices students to participate throughout the entire lesson. Experience has shown me that when younger learners are actively participating in the lesson, they are working on challenging puzzles, moving around in a game, and working with unique learning materials (i.e., learning tools the students have not worked with before, something new). It is highly important for ELs to actively participate in the entirety of a lesson because this is

where they are getting the most English exposure. For many ELs, school is the only place where they practice English.

2.) Clear information presented: One aspect that determines an effectively delivered SIOP lesson is based on how clear language objectives are supported by the lesson delivery (Echevarria et al., 2013). Meaning, objectives must be explicitly stated to the primary EL student. By explicitly stating these objectives, students become aware of what they will be required to learn and produce. One EL teacher expresses how using learning targets helps her students review and focus:

When I have 7 different groups each day, the last thing I want to do is to write the objective out for 7 different groups, every day. Instead, I use a template for each group to highlight our learning target for the day. I looked at each group and asked myself, "What are the basic skills we are working on every single week?" For example, in my kindergarten groups, the only thing that really changes every week is the letters, sounds and the sight words. "How can I make a blanket template to use? Write it on a post it note, stick it on the template. It's easy to change out; I don't have to write it onto a sentence strip everyday. But I will say, now that I have been doing it for a couple months. It has really been a great way to get them focused in before they even walk in the room. We stop at the classroom entrance; the students find their colored paper and read their learning target for the day. It gives you a way to review what you have already done and what's new. Then, they are already getting their brains into gear before they even sit down. The minute they are in the room, they are on point and ready to go (Teacher2, 2016).

For an example of the learning targets discussed above, see Appendix 2.3. Objectives must be observable, measurable and assessed (Echevarria et al., 2013). For example, in the following objective we answer, "Is it observable?" "Is it measurable?" "Can it be assessed?"

Students will be able to identify all of the upper and lowercase "d's" in a color by letter activity page—using guided practice of identifying the letter "D/d" prior to the activity. Is the objective observable? Yes. We will be able to visually watch the students coloring the correct letters. Is the objective measurable? Yes. Students must identify the entire upper and lower case letter "d's" on the activity page. To answer the last question, "Is it assessed?" we would need to see the classroom in progress. SIOP researchers explain that the objectives must be reviewed at the end of the lesson and the class will determine if they were met (Echevarria et al., 2013).

3.) Pace lessons appropriately: SIOP researchers define "pacing" as "the rate at which information is presented during a lesson" (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 196). For EL students, instruction must be aptly presented. Students easily become disengaged with material not at their current level of language proficiency. Teachers need to find a balance in their teaching to keep students interested and challenged. The WIDA can-do descriptors are a necessary document for teachers to refer to when planning. These descriptors give descriptions of what the EL student can produce at each level of their language proficiency and will help teachers appropriately challenge their ELs. An example of the first grade EL WIDA can-do descriptors is found in Appendix 2.4. Another way teachers pace lessons properly is by implementing daily routine into lessons. Routine is the foundation for a successful class period because it saves time from

confusion and disorganized learning. For one EL teacher, routine is vital to her classroom organization,

At the forefront, setting up routines takes a long time, especially when you have kids for a half hour. Getting that in place is a headache and takes along time. But when its in place it really allows you more freedom to do things with the kids who are struggling or even for the kids who aren't struggle but are flying. You say, "Okay I want you to work on..." It's still allowing you time for intervention and extension (Teacher2, 2016, p. 3).

Routine allows for individualized support. Individualized support allows for students to receive extra attention and provides teachers with opportunities to see where the student needs additional attention. English learners time in classrooms is precious. As previously stated, for many English learners, their time at school is the only time they have to practice English. This SIOP strategy—pacing lessons, will give students the necessary support and challenge needed to strengthen their language proficiency.

Expanding a Repertoire of Instructional Strategies

EL teachers are responsible for using appropriate best practice techniques in their teaching practice. Appropriate teaching practices are those that support the needs of the English learners in their classroom. SIOP teachers are effective teachers because they continually expand their repertoire of instructional strategies. Other instructional techniques not overtly discussed in the SIOP model are important for teachers to learn and apply to their teaching practice. These best practice instructional techniques are drawn from various research-based models of effective teaching for EL students. Such instructional strategies include: explicit teaching, instructional supports, opportunities to practice, routine, and instructional language.

Explicit Teaching

Explicit teaching is making learning obvious for the student, so whether teachers are connecting student background to the content, the teacher makes the connection apparent. Explicit teaching is an effective strategy for teaching EL students. Though, one teacher identifies one risk of explicit teaching:

The danger in explicit teaching that I am finding with my EL students is, "sage on the stage and guide on the side." And what I mean by that is, the tendency for explicit teaching is 'I'm just going to tell you things. I am going to stand up and I am going to tell you what you need to know because you need to know it and I am explicitly telling you this. Rather than them processing it and rather than them using it and talking with their peers about it, and figuring out how it is going to work for them and where the pit falls are. Guide on the side is, "here are some tools to help you, I'm going to show you how to use them, but not completely— and you are going to have to struggle a little." And struggle sometimes is okay. "I am not going to leave you alone." There is always a danger in explicit teaching about too much sage on stage and not enough interaction among the students part. If they don't speak they wont get it. Learning is a social process, particularly in this generation. If they aren't doing it that way, the retention of the information is low (Teacher1, 2016, p. 5)

Teachers must be aware of these potential explicit teaching risks in order to use explicit teaching effectively. Researchers Graves et al., (2004) observed twenty classrooms serving EL students. The researchers identified instructional practices used by effective classroom EL teachers.

Graves et al. identified explicit teaching as an instructional best practice (Vaughn et al., 2007). EL teachers *model* as a way use explicitly teaching.

Modeling supports students' comprehension because it illustrates how to perform the task and complete the activity. For example, third grade social studies classrooms learn about timelines. An appropriate activity for these EL students could be the hands-on creation of a timeline. EL teachers model a completed timeline or walk the students step by step through the process (i.e., gather information, research appropriate pictures, organize the dates in chronological order, etc.). Modeling must be deliberate and present clear guidelines. Additionally, modeling must incorporate visuals, graphics, and realia. EL students rely on these visual supports because their lower language proficiencies cause them to get lost in the wordiness of oral directions.

Instructional Supports

Classroom instructional supports give ELs another way to comprehend information. Goldenberg agrees the EL students need modifications in the classroom and he pinpoints some of the proposed modifications for an EL classroom. Here are his identified modifications that are appropriate for a primary EL classroom:

- Connecting information to student background and familiar content
- Incorporating graphic organizers (i.e., Venn diagrams)
- Using pictures and real-life objects
- Instructing with interactive activities
- Providing redundant information (i.e., gestures, visual cues)

(Vaughn et al., 2007, p. 142).

Modifications and instructional supports are important for a primary teacher to include in one's instruction. Primary students, especially EL primary students, do not have large vocabularies to understand a lesson simply from a lecture. One EL primary teacher explains how instructional supports are used in her classroom:

Try to incorporate learning into games as much as possible. Even if its memory, you can play memory with so many different things! Its still learning, but not letting them realize they are learning when they actually are. [...] Paragraph writing, for example, can be a difficult task for my third grade ELs. However, I have to remind myself if they aren't doing it the way I want them to be doing it, it's probably because they have had a lack of examples to look at and use. Just by nature of being ELL kids, they have this vocabulary deficit in English that I can't even fathom. Giving them these tasks without supports is setting them up to fail. So, if it's ever a question of "Why can't they do this?" It's all about you. What have you done? Or what have you not done for them to be unsuccessful in this area? (Teacher2, 2016, p. 7)

EL students cannot be expected to understand academic content simply from oral lecture. English learners need variety in their education. The benefit of incorporating instructional supports allows the EL to learn language in novel, clear, and comprehensible ways. Students benefit from comprehensible instruction, but they will never improve if they do not have opportunities to use the language.

Opportunities to Practice

Researchers Graves et al., (2004) observed twenty classrooms serving EL students and identified certain teaching techniques that promote language acquisition. Graves et al., identify

“opportunities to practice” as a strong indicator of EL success. Opportunities to practice the language are important for language learners because for many students, the classroom is the only place where they interact with the English language. Thus, each activity should incorporate opportunities for the ELs to listen, speak, read, and write. One primary EL teacher agrees and sees the importance of incorporating all language domains into each lesson, “Finding ways to incorporate multiple language domains into the same activity is fantastic. The more you can do that the better off you will be” (Teacher2, 2016, p. 3). However, there are many ways teachers provide opportunities for ELs to work with the language. For example, for kindergartener or first graders, a scavenger hunt activity provides opportunities to practice all language domains. The students could search for sight words (each on a different colored card) hidden around the classroom. This movement-based activity has the potential to incorporate all language domains into the activity.

Listening: At the beginning of the activity the students will listen to clear oral directions describing the goals of the activity.

Speaking and reading: Once the student finds a sight word, they need to orally use the word out loud (i.e., simply pronouncing it, or using it in a sentence, etc.) There are multiple ways to modify this activity to challenge and meet the needs of the learners.

Writing: Student will record which word they found. There are many ways teachers alter this lesson to meet the needs of the EL levels represented in their class (i.e., student will copy the sight word onto a worksheet, student will fill in the blank on a worksheet with the correct color and sign word name, student will write down the sentence they developed, etc.).

No matter the activity, it is important for teachers to incorporate many opportunities to practice using language. The more students use the language the more opportunities for improvement. During these opportunities to use language, teachers need to be consistent and use routines. Consistent routines support increased learning.

Routines

August and Hakuta's (1997) research discovered effective schooling practices for ELs and identified seven classroom characteristics associated with positive student outcomes. One instructional practice these researchers found is the use of routines. Routine is especially important for students in the primary grades. A child's cognitive growth—during the primary grades—indicates a need for routine (Wood, 2007). Routines in the classroom could include: how students enter the classroom, where they turn in homework, how transitions between activities occur, etc. Each of these set routines will help the classroom run smoothly and utilize learning time. English learners cannot afford to waste class time from unnecessary off-task behaviors:

One important fact to remember is this: If a teacher wastes five minutes of a class period daily, perhaps by starting the lesson late or finishing early, over the course of 180 days, 15 hours of instructional time will be lost (Echevarria et al., 2013, p. 144)

To maximize classroom time with English learners, teachers implement classroom routines to avoid off-task behaviors. In primary EL classrooms, often, the teachers need to pull individual students aside for assessments. However, it is a teacher's job to make sure each student in the

classroom is learning, thus what do the other students do when you are with another student? A simple routine solves the problem. Prepare an activity for the students to work on while you are with another student. Set up a routine so the students know how to handle these situations and know what is expected of them:

For the next 10 minutes the students are working in their wordbooks. I put a red sticky note on the page where they need to stop and that is their stop sign. If they get that far the next thing to do is to read some of their books in their book bags. Once you have those routines set up, that gives you the freedom to say, "While you are doing this, I am going to be back here working with this child" (Teacher2, 2016, p. 3)

Proactive teaching occurs when teachers invest time to set up classroom procedures. Proactive teachers are able to think ahead and plan for the unexpected, benefiting both the teacher and the student. Another benefit to an EL's learning is how the teacher presents information—the teacher's instructional language.

Instructional Language

The academic language teachers' use must be clear, concise, and meaningful. The instructional language also needs to be at the students' language proficiency level. However, information that may seem clear, concise, and meaningful to the teacher—may not be received the same to the English learner. In order for information to reach the student, they need to understand the content. According to a study by Graves et al., (2004) researchers clarify how teachers make information available to the student. Effective teachers adjust their level of English based on the proficiency levels of their students. Graves et al., (as quoted by Vaughn et al., 2007) identify how teachers adjust their level of vocabulary:

- Use clear, explicit language when you introduce a new concept
- Use student friendly terminology and language when giving directions
- Use discourse markers (i.e., first, second, finally) to help students organize information

(Vaughn et al., 2007, p. 4).

These are simple strategies that teachers incorporate into their daily instruction. The changes will bring strong student language development and impact the students' ability to understand the content presented.

While the language teachers' use is important, they also help make content accessible to students using non-verbals. English learners benefit from non-verbal communication, in addition to verbal communication. Non-verbal communication supports a deeper understanding of content knowledge. When an EL teacher gives directions about the coming activity, the teacher supports the students by pointing to materials they need, gesturing to board information, or even using visual indicators (i.e., magnetic arrows, pictures of materials—glue stick, scissors, pencil—to show students what they need to do first/second/last). Student success relies on teachers' ability to present information to the student. Thus, it is imperative that teachers' language is clear, concise, meaningful, and appropriate based on the student's language proficiency.

Assessment

Assessments provide teachers with evidence of students' learning. One purpose for assessments is that teachers review assessment data to make informed decisions about the direction of future instruction. Assessments should be a daily aspect in EL classrooms because teachers need continued feedback to improve instruction. There are a variety of methods that allow students to demonstrate evidence of learning; yet, some assessments are more appropriate for primary English learners.

Another purpose of for assessments is to identify and place ELs in the ESL program. EL students must be identified as an "English Language Learner" before they participate in their school's ESL program. The Home Language Survey is a form filled out during the initial school registration process and provides information regarding the placement of the child into ESL services. (For an example of the home language survey see Appendix 3.1). Other purposes of assessments include: monitoring progress of English language proficiency and academic achievement, transitioning students to more appropriate support services, and evaluating an ESL program's effectiveness through student achievement (Gottlieb, 2006).

Within the following section, I discuss SIOP's best practices for assessment—entitled, "review and assessment." Furthermore, I elaborate on an EL assessment model, "Response to Intervention," which supports students who struggle to meet grade level standards.

Review and Assessment (SIOP)

Effective SIOP teachers let assessment data guide their lesson planning and instruction. Routine assessments tell teachers the students' areas for growth and areas of strength. Effective teachers review assessments and seek guidance for supporting single students or finding trends and patterns within the results to support the whole classroom. However, before teachers assess their students, they must decide which assessment is appropriate for the given situation, formal or informal assessments?

Formal assessments provide instructional guidance and identify student learning over time. These assessments are preplanned tests that allow teachers to measure students' understanding of the content. Formal assessments are given during the lesson or unit plan (formative), and can also be used as a standardized measure (summative). Formative and summative assessments give teachers ways to analyze data against data across their classroom, district, state, and country. These assessments are data driven. Informal assessments are content and performance driven.

EL teachers use informal assessments to assess the EL's abilities. It is a common instrument and occurs throughout lessons. Primary EL teachers use informal assessments in the following ways:

- Teacher observations
- Student to teacher conference
- Group activities
- Projects
- Presentations

Informal assessments provide teachers detailed information about student learning in a non-threatening, anxiety-producing manner. An informal assessment guides a lesson and informs the teacher as to which aspect of the lesson will be most important to review. For example, a teacher

who observes multiple students not comprehending an assignment will adjust their instruction as needed. One popular best practice for assessing primary EL students is authentic assessment.

Authentic Assessments

Authentic assessments are a way to connect learning to real life situations. These assessments provide stress free environments to express learning. EL students typically struggle to demonstrate their true language and content knowledge on high-stake tests. This fact is especially true with strong language-based assessments (i.e., multiple choice tests, essays, etc.) (Giouroukakis & Honigsfeld, 2010). Authentic assessments allow ELs to show content knowledge rather than struggle through a strongly worded paper-pencil assessment. The possibilities of authentic assessments are endless: role-playing, interviews, projects, journal dialogues, experiments, portfolios, cooperative group activities, etc. Daily assessments of student language and content knowledge impacts EL teacher abilities to modify instruction and scaffold as needed. However, daily assessment is a huge indicator of EL language achievement and “when teachers recognize the power of ongoing classroom assessment to document student progress, they are embracing one of the richest methods for gathering meaningful assessment information” (Herrera, Cabral, & Murry, 2013, p. 29).

Importance of Feedback

Another key component of assessment rests in how a teacher communicates data to the students. All students' benefit from teacher feedback and in particular, English learners need the feedback in order to improve their language proficiencies. Feedback entails oral and written forms of teacher to student communication. However, for the primary EL population, written feedback is not comprehensible to the student. Oral feedback also has its challenges. It can be hard to go back and revisit this oral feedback with students. In an interview with a primary EL teacher, Teacher 2 discusses a way around this challenge,

I found that rubrics support any form of feedback you give students, especially when it comes to oral feedback. We use a rubric to assess the student work together, I have students pick a colored marker and we walk through the rubric and they circle how well they think they did. Then I go through it with my colored marker and share with them how I believe they performed. Finally, we can identify a goal for the student to work on throughout the week. I make sure to keep the rubrics in safekeeping so I have something to reference when we talk about the goals we set together, “Okay last week we talked about the goal ‘using periods at the ends of all our sentences. Let’s look, did you do that this week?’” (Teacher2, 2016, p. 3)

Students do not have the memories to recall oral feedback, but visual cues trigger memory and help students recall the feedback and goals discussed formerly. Teachers must find forms of feedback that reach their students. EL teachers communicate with feedback that influences ELs. According to Echevarria et al., feedback that influences an EL must: support and validate, be academically oriented and specific, focus on content and language, and includes encouraging facial expressions and body language (Echevarria et al., 2013). However, a teacher cannot provide effective feedback without knowing how the student performed. Teachers interpret student performance to identify areas for feedback. One specific intervention that highlights the importance of interpreting student results is, RTI or “Response to Intervention.”

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an assessment tool used for ELs. It serves students by providing supplementary classroom support. The National Center on Response to Intervention provides a fitting definition of RTI:

Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities (Intervention, March 2010, p. 2).

RTI proactively supports capable students who are not meeting the requirements of core curriculum. Many talented EL students do not perform to standard in the classroom. RTI affords these students the high quality instruction they deserve. This two-fold intervention system works with best practice instruction and best practice assessment for ELs. In the classroom, RTI delivers students research-based, high-quality instruction. The assessment component of RTI uses universal screenings and data from the classroom instruction to assess under what conditions students do learn. Teachers use the results of the intervention to benefit student learning within the classroom walls.

Generally, response to intervention is a triangular intervention system with three tiers of support. Each tier of RTI is uniquely different from the other tiers and provides greater intervention towards the top triangle tier.

Tier 1

- Core program
- 100% of students
- Research-based instruction
 - Focus on language to support English language development
- Culturally responsive instruction building on background knowledge
- Identifiable instructional techniques: Sheltered instruction, peer learning, visual aides, explicit instruction
- Progress monitoring to identify students who need further intervention
 - Informed interpretation of student performance

Tier 2

- Small group of students (3 to 5)
- 20-30 minutes of additional support (added onto core support)
 - Instructional support based on student data
 - Research-based curriculum
- Build on background knowledge with culturally responsive teaching
 - Explicit instruction targeting skill building and skill transfer
 - Progress monitoring to identify student performance

Tier 3

- Few students
- 45-60 minutes of additional support (added onto core support)
- Delivered by educators who can determine specific learning needs
 - Data driven

- Build on background knowledge with culturally responsive teaching
 - Special education support, as necessary

(Herrera et al., 2013, p. 57).

To prevent school failure, RTI teachers need to dedicate time to understand the holistic needs of the students in their class. RTI can be a beneficial form of intervention for EL students because it gives a critical focus on the importance of informed planning, instruction, and assessment. For English learners, an informed teaching practice can be the difference between an unsuccessful learning experience and greater language achievements.

Best Practices in the English Learner's Classroom, Conclusion

English learners are in desperate need for effective teachers to take control of their education. ELs need leaders who provide effective instruction to support their English language learning. The research emphasized in this paper supports the teacher's demand for best practice teaching tools. While the English learner population continues to rise, teachers must become prepared and trained to successfully teach the growing population. Best practice instruction stems from research proving the competence of certain planning, instruction, and assessment techniques. With best practice planning, instruction, and assessment, primary EL teachers will be equipped with the necessary research based support to positively encourage the EL population. The long-term goal for EL education is evident. With continued best practice research and training, teachers will hold the necessary tools to be effective EL teachers.

APPENDIX 1.1

Interrelated Learning Goals		
Acquire	Make Meaning	Transfer
This goal seeks to help learners acquire factual information and basic skills.	This goal seeks to help students construct meaning (i.e., come to an understanding) of important ideas and processes.	This goal seeks to support the learner's ability to transfer their learning autonomously and effectively in new situations.
Teacher Role/Instructional Strategies		
<p><u>Direct Instruction</u> In this role, the teacher's primary role is to inform the learners through explicit instruction in targeted knowledge and skills; differentiating as needed.</p> <p><u>Strategies include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diagnostic assessment - Lecture - Advanced organizers - Graphic organizers - Questioning (convergent) - Demonstration/modeling - Process guides - Guided practice - Feedback, corrections - Differentiation 	<p><u>Facilitative Teaching</u> Teachers in this role engage the learners in actively processing information and guide their inquiry into complex problems, texts, projects, cased, or simulations; differentiating as needed.</p> <p><u>Strategies include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diagnostic assessment - Using analogies - Graphic Organizers - Questioning (divergent) & probing - Concept attainment - Inquiry-oriented approaches - Problem-Based Learning - Socratic Seminar - Reciprocal Teaching - Formative (on-going) assessments - Understanding notebook - Feedback/corrections - Rethinking and reflection prompts - Differentiated instruction 	<p><u>Coaching</u> In a coaching role, teachers establish clear performance goals, supervise on-going opportunities to perform (independent practice) in increasingly complex situations, provide models and give on-going feedback (as personalized as possible). They also provide "just in time teaching" (direct instruction) when needed.</p> <p><u>Strategies include:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On-going assessment - Providing specific feedback in the context of authentic application - Conferencing - Prompting self assessment and reflection

(Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

APPENDIX 1.2

Sample Transfer Goals	
Discipline/Subject/Skill	Transfer Goals
Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply mathematical knowledge, skill, and reasoning to solve real-world problems.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectively write for various audiences to explain (narrative, expository), entertain (creative), persuade (persuasive), and help others perform a task (technical).
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply lessons of the past (historical patterns) to current and future events and issues. - Critically appraise historical claims.
Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create and perform an original work in a selected medium to express ideas or evoke mood and emotion.

(McTighe & Wiggins, 2012, p. 3).

APPENDIX 1.3

Sample Understandings and Essential Questions	
Understandings	Essential Questions
Great literature explores universal themes of human existence and can reveal truths through fiction.	How can stories from other places and times relate to our current lives?
Quantitative data can be collected, organized, and displayed in a variety of ways. Mathematical ideas can be represented numerically, graphically, or symbolically.	What's the best way of showing (or representing) _____? In what other way(s) can this be represented?
The geography, climate, and natural resources of a region influence the culture, economy, and lifestyle of its inhabitants.	How does where we live influence how we live?
The relationship between the arts and culture is mutually dependent; culture affects the arts, and the arts reflect the preserve culture.	In what ways do the arts reflect as well as shape culture?

(McTighe & Wiggins, 2012, p. 4).

APPENDIX 1.4

Factors Contributing to English Learner Diversity
<i>English Knowledge</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to English - Familiarity with Roman alphabet and numbers - Proficiency in spoken English - Proficiency in written English - English begin learned as a third or fourth language
<i>First Language (L1) Knowledge</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proficiency in spoken L1 - Literacy in the first language
<i>Educational Background</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On-grade level schooling in home country - On-grade level schooling in U.S schools (in L1 or English) - Partial schooling in L1 - No schooling in L1 - Partial schooling in English - No schooling in English - Long-term English learner
<i>Sociocultural, Emotional, and Economic Factors</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty level - Mobility - Exposure to trauma, violence, abuse, and other serious stressors - Refugee or asylee statues - Parents' educational background
<i>Other Educational Categories</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special education - Tier 2 or Tier 3 (Response to Intervention) - Migrant - Reclassified English Learner

(Echevarria et al., 2013).

APPENDIX 1.5

Examples of Hands-on Manipulatives



APPENDIX 1.6

VABB: Four Focus Words	
Validate To make legitimate that which the institution and mainstream has made illegitimate (situational appropriateness—"code switching").	Bridge Making the connections between the home culture and language with the school culture and language through instructional strategy and activity.
Affirm To make positive that which the institution and mainstream media have made negative.	Bridge Giving the opportunities for situational appropriateness or utilization of the appropriate culture or linguistic behavior.

(Hollie, 2011).

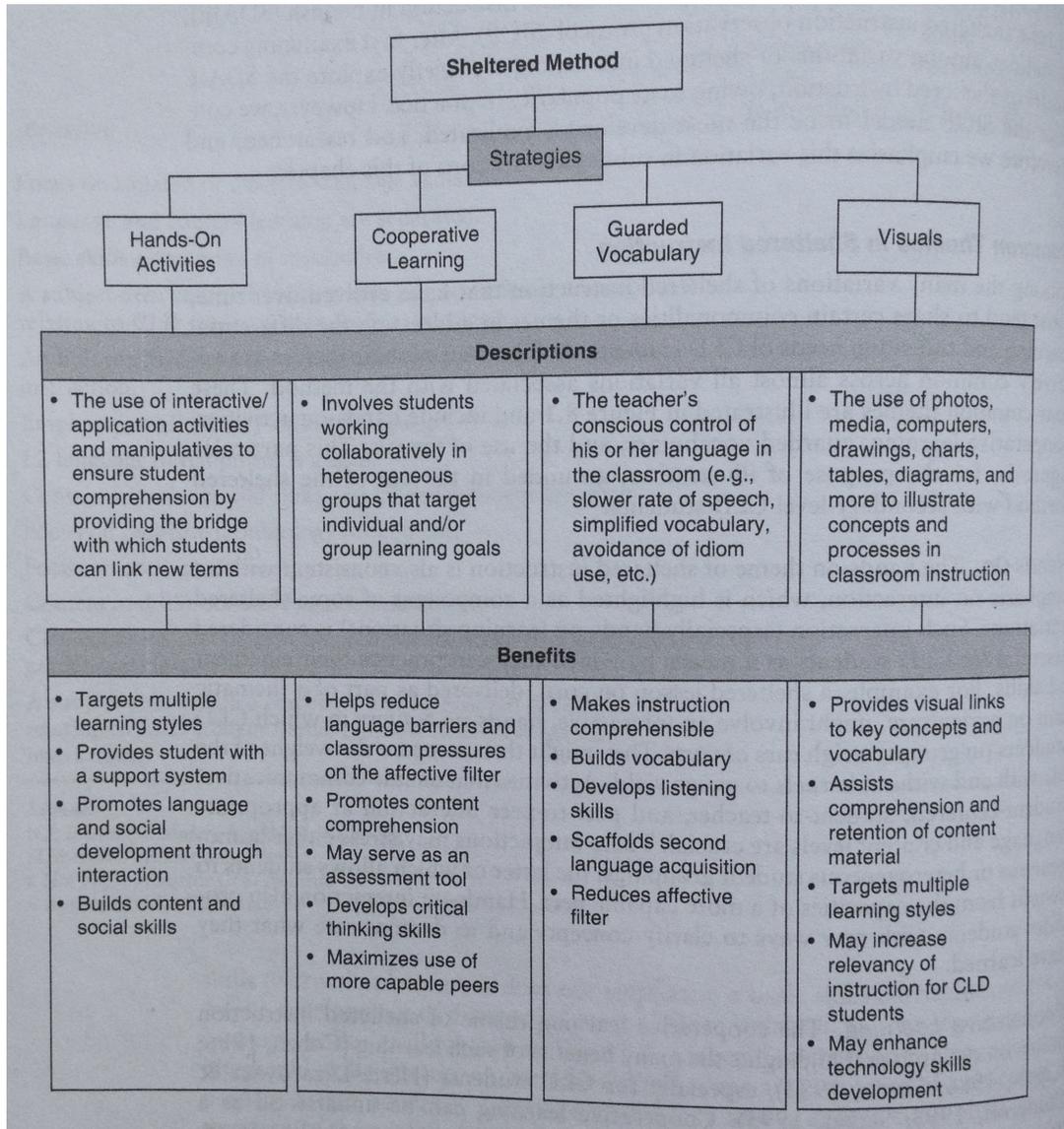
APPENDIX 1.7

Varied Types of Academic Vocabulary that Teachers Must Teach		
<p><i>Content Vocabulary- Subject specific and technical terms:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Words associated with the topic taught - Words are generally found in the informational texts students read <p><i>or</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Words used to talk about a text (i.e. “metaphor” for English language arts). 	<p><i>General Academic Vocabulary- Cross Curricular Terms/Process & Functions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Words used in academic disciplines - Often not explicitly taught - Words with multiple meanings 	<p><i>Word Parts: Roots and Affixes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Word parts that enable a student to learn new vocabulary

(Echevarria et al., 2013).

APPENDIX 2.1

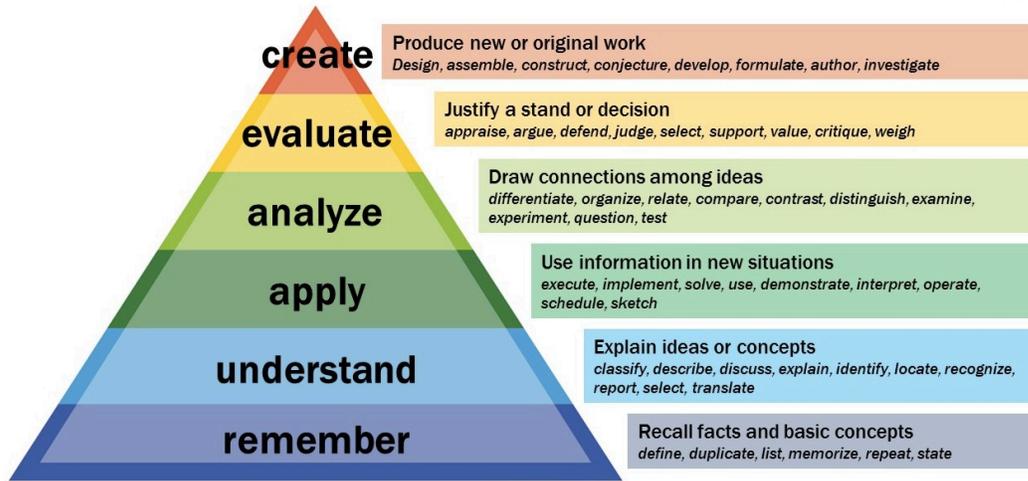
Sheltered Method



(Herrera & Murry, 2005, p. 274).

APPENDIX 2.2

Bloom's Taxonomy



<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/>

APPENDIX 2.3

Examples of Learning Targets in a Primary EL classroom



APPENDIX 2.4

1st Grade WIDA Can Do Descriptors

By the end of each of the given levels of English language proficiency’ English language learners can...

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
READING	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using pictures and illustrations to identify themes or storylines Matching vocabulary to illustrated stories 	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pointing to icons, letters, or illustrated words that represent ideas Identifying repetitive words and phrases in texts 	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying Wh- words in questions (<i>e.g., who, what, when</i>) Recalling content-related information from illustrated texts read aloud 	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying the main topic of the text Ordering illustrations based on sequence of events from texts read aloud 	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distinguishing among characters, settings, and events in narratives Reconstructing texts read orally using with drawings or re-enacting text with performances 	<p>Process recounts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying who is telling the story at various points in texts Matching original text to paraphrased versions
WRITING	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forming words using a variety of strategies Answering Wh- oral questions or using icons to plan stories 	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing information in graphic organizers Presenting content-related information labeling visuals or graphics 	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe feelings or reactions to personal events or situations Recalling information from events or experiences 	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producing a series of related sentences from transition word starters (<i>e.g., first, next, last</i>) Describing observations first-hand or from media 	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Composing stories or narratives using sequential language Editing personal narratives based on criteria for success 	<p>Recount by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Producing narratives with at least two sequential events Producing a narrative sequence from timelines and labeled drawings

*Except for level 6, for which there is no ceiling.

APPENDIX 3.1

Sample Home Language Survey

*A Sample Home Language Survey
to Administer to Newly Enrolled Students*

Help us know about you. Please answer these questions.

Is a language other than English spoken in your home?

YES NO

Which language? _____

Do you speak a language other than English with someone in your home?

YES NO

Which language? _____

Do you speak a language other than English **every day** at home?

YES NO

4. Put an X in the box on the top line to show the grades you went to school here in the United States. Put an X on the bottom line for the grades where you went to school in another country. Put a circle around the year(s) you did not go to school.

		<i>Grade Level</i>												
Schools in the U.S.	Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Schools outside the U.S.	Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

(Gottlieb, 2006, p. xxxii).

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