Classroom Practices for English Learner Instruction

*Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development.*

—Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education*

**In this chapter,** we describe effective classroom practices for English learners, addressing the following questions:

1. How are curriculum standards used in classrooms serving English learners?
2. What is differentiated instruction, and why is it important for English learners?
3. What is content-based instruction (CBI), and how is it related to sheltered instruction or specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE)?
4. What goes into planning sheltered instruction or SDAIE?
5. How can group work, theme study, and scaffolding facilitate language and literacy development?
6. How are English learners assessed?
Recently we walked into Jamie Green’s ninth-grade sheltered history class where a unit on ancient Egypt was underway. Her classroom was like the inside of an ancient pyramid: Brick walls and ceilings had been created from butcher paper, hieroglyphics were posted on the paper walls, and Egyptian scenes adorned the bulletin boards. We were literally transported to a different time and place!

Earlier that week Jamie had asked her students, mostly intermediate English learners, to share what they already knew about Egypt. As students brainstormed words such as pyramids, tombs, and desert, Jamie created a cluster (see Figure 3.1), drawing a picture next to each word. She then gave students ten minutes to share in small groups all they knew about Egypt. When they reported their ideas back to the class, she added the new information to the cluster. Next she shared a short film on ancient Egypt, after which she invited students to add any new ideas to the cluster.

Jamie then handed out a K-W-L worksheet (see Figure 3.2) and asked the groups to list in the “K” column everything they now knew about Egypt and in the “W” column what they wanted to learn. She explained that they would be creating a study question from the “want to know” column, so it was important to decide on something they really wanted to explore. The “L” column would be used later for summarizing what they had learned about their topics. In subsequent weeks, students worked in their groups researching and reporting their findings to the class. As they made their reports, students helped one another by suggesting additional resources. For example, when one group reported on mummies, another student told them about a cool book she had seen about mummies in the library.
Thus students served as resources for one another. Later, groups prepared exhibits for an upcoming family night, when students would act as docents, explaining their projects and displays to their visitors.

In this complex unit, Jamie implemented a number of practices that are recommended for effective English learner instruction. First, she assessed what students knew about the topic before instruction by creating a cluster of ideas and by having them work in groups to fill out the K-W-L sheet. Next, she involved students in collaborative groups in which they chose and carried out their own research projects. At every step, she supported student comprehension and learning by accompanying verbal explanations with pictures, graphs, gestures, and careful use of language. Finally, by asking them to serve as docents on family night, she motivated them to higher levels of content learning and communicative performance.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of components of effective English learner instruction that experienced teachers like Jamie use with their English learners to promote English language and academic literacy development, content area learning, and positive social cultural development. We begin with a discussion of curriculum standards because these will guide you in choosing content and assessing student learning. Thereafter we address: (1) differentiated instruction; (2) content-based language instruction, including sheltered English instruction; (3) group work; (4) and scaffolding. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of English learner assessment. Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the components of effective English learner instruction.

### Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment

In Chapter 1 we introduced you to standards-based reform efforts of the last decade or so. These reforms have resulted in the development and widespread use of standards in every curriculum area including English language development (ELD). In this section, we discuss how teachers use curriculum standards to help them plan instruction and assess learning. As noted previously, standards consist of three components: (1) content standards that delineate what students should know and be able to do; (2) benchmarks that specify expected knowledge and skills for each content standard at different grade levels; and (3) performance standards or
Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment

progress indicators that describe how students will show they have met the standard (Laturnau, 2003). Assessment criteria are thus built in to teach each standard.

Ideally, standards-based instruction will help you focus on high expectations for all students, while motivating you to tailor instruction to meet individual student needs. It also encourages multiple modes of assessing learning, including careful observation as students carry out particular tasks, such as writing an essay or conducting an experiment. Finally, standards-based instruction and assessment potentially will permit students to attain and demonstrate their knowledge and skill in a variety of ways. These are all worthy goals for effective English learner instruction.

If you are new to curriculum standards, you might find them a bit daunting at first, especially if you have to contend with various sets of standards in several curriculum areas. If you are an experienced teacher at your grade level or subject, the content is likely to be familiar but perhaps stated in more detail or from a different point of view than what you are used to. Also, don’t be surprised to find a variety of formats and wording across different sets of standards: Standards documents are not yet standardized!

Your first task, then, is to study the standards you are expected to use for your grade level and subject, and align them with your state’s English language development standards. It is helpful to meet with other teachers to deepen your understanding and to share ways to teach and assess your English learners according to the standards. Some schools provide staff development days for this purpose. As you gain experience in using the standards, you may discover new ways to meet them or perhaps the need to modify them. If so, you will want to discuss your ideas with your teaching colleagues and principal.

For promoting your students’ English language acquisition, many states use the PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages [TESOL], 2006), a revision of the 1997 TESOL standards. Building on work by the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment

FIGURE 3.3

Effective EL Instruction
The WIDA (World Language) consortium discussed in Chapter 1, TESOL’s new version presents five standards elaborated by grade level for English learners in preK through grade 12. Standard 1 addresses the kind of English needed for social, intercultural and instructional purposes, whereas Standards 2 through 5 address the academic language needed for success in four core content areas: language arts, math, science, and social studies, respectively. The TESOL standards are not intended to replace your district’s content area standards. Rather, they show you how to address the needs of English learners to help them meet those standards, as required of all students.

The TESOL standards’ focus on academic language development through content area instruction represents a long-standing emphasis in English learner education (e.g., Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1993). Moreover, the integrated language and content area focus responds to federal legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2001) requiring states to develop English language proficiency standards that (1) are grounded in state academic content standards, and (2) address the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The new standards also provide sample performance indicators, that is, examples of “observable, measurable language behaviors” expected for each standard across different grades and English language proficiency levels. The concrete wording of the performance indicators illustrates what to look for to assess whether a student has met the standard. Figure 3.4 provides an example for you of a TESOL standard matrix.

For ease of use, the sample performance indicators for each of the five standards are grouped together by grade level cluster, that is, PreK–K, 1–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12. Thus, for example, all performance indicators for all five standards pertaining to grades 1–3 are presented in one section. The sample performance indicators for each standard are presented in matrix charts broken down by (1) language domain, that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing; (2) content topic, based on state and national standards for English language education.

### Figure 3.4
**Example of TESOL Standard and Performance Expectations**

Source: PreK-12 English language proficiency standards by TESOL, 2006. Reprinted with permission of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE LEVEL 6–8</th>
<th>STANDARD 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of SCIENCE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>LEVEL 1</th>
<th>LEVEL 2</th>
<th>LEVEL 3</th>
<th>LEVEL 4</th>
<th>LEVEL 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPEAKING</td>
<td>Atoms</td>
<td>Identify elements within models or diagrams according to oral directions</td>
<td>Match oral descriptions of functions of various elements with models or diagrams</td>
<td>Arrange models or diagrams based on sequential oral directions (e.g., stages of meiosis or fission)</td>
<td>Reproduce models or diagrams based on visually supported tapes, CDs, videos, or lectures</td>
<td>Design or construct models or diagrams from decontextualized oral discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cells</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molecules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISTENING</td>
<td>Solar System</td>
<td>Repeat definitions of key objects in the solar system (e.g., planets, asteroids) with a partner</td>
<td>Describe appearance and composition of objects in the solar system with a partner</td>
<td>Compare appearance and composition of objects in the galaxy with a partner</td>
<td>Present or discuss illustrated processes involving planetary objects (e.g., measuring distance or timespans)</td>
<td>Explain, using technical terms, the structure of the universe using examples of planetary components (e.g., stars and galaxies)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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development, language arts, science, math, and social studies; and (3) language proficiency level, using a 1–5 scale, representing a continuum with the descriptors starting, emerging, developing, expanding, and bridging for levels 1–5 respectively. To present all the information in an easily readable format, the performance indicators for listening and speaking are presented on one page, with those for reading and writing on the next.

As you read the performance indicators across the page, you will get an idea of how student performance expectations require greater English language proficiency as you move from level 1 to level 5. Notice that the performance behaviors for listening require students to do something based on oral directions of gradually greater complexity, thereby demonstrating their comprehension of English. On the other hand, the speaking performance indicators require students to say something, with complexity increasing gradually across the five language proficiency levels, from merely repeating at level 1 to explaining in technical terms at level 5. At the bottom of the matrix chart, you will see the phrase, native languages and cultures, which serves as a reminder that English learners bring their own linguistic and cultural resources to the task of English language acquisition. For example, newcomers educated in their home country bring substantial knowledge and experience that can be applied to academic learning in English. Thus it is helpful, whenever possible, to use the primary language to tap into that knowledge base.

In summary, the new TESOL standards help teachers (1) facilitate English language acquisition for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes; and (2) conceptualize grade-appropriate curriculum and assessment in the major content areas in ways that address varying English language proficiency levels. Content-based instruction is thus implicit in the standards. Performance indicators across English proficiency levels illustrate how to tailor instruction and assess learning according to students’ various English proficiency levels, including ideas for building in supports such as pair work, the use of visuals, and opportunities to use the primary language when appropriate. It is important to reiterate that the TESOL standards do not replace your state’s curriculum standards. Rather, they are to be used alongside your other standards documents as examples of how to build in “differentiated” support for English learners in various content areas across the language proficiency continuum. In the next two sections, we elaborate on two important instructional cornerstones inherent in the TESOL standards: differentiated instruction and content-based instruction.
language proficiency, teachers consider each student’s prior knowledge and experience relevant to the topic or procedure to be taught, using the primary language as a resource when possible. They also look for each student’s strengths and preferences for taking in, processing, and showing their understanding of ideas and information, whether through linguistic means, such as talk and print; non-linguistic means, such as pictures, diagrams, charts, and figures; or physical and kinesthetic means, such as demonstration, drama, and pantomime. Teachers also consider student preferences for social or solitary learning experiences and strive to provide a balance of both cooperative and independent learning opportunities. To capitalize on student differences, teachers first need to learn what those differences are. Differentiating instruction thus calls for ongoing assessment relative to the curriculum and constant and careful observation of students as they engage in a variety of learning activities. Through such assessment and observation, teachers can begin to determine the best starting points for each student and plan optimal learning experiences for all.

As you can see, differentiated instruction (DI) highlights the importance of ongoing assessment during all phases of instruction, including a renewed emphasis on various ways to assess students before instruction, as well as during and after. In addition, differentiated instruction calls for a classroom climate that actively promotes mutual respect and caring among students and teacher, a climate in which each student is valued for his or her particular talents, a climate that provides each one the support needed to learn, grow, and thrive. Finally, differentiated instruction calls for variety and flexibility in classroom organization, learning materials, and grouping. Every one of these statements applies equally to effective English learner instruction. Because DI addresses individual differences, and because English learners bring a multiplicity of such differences, DI is both natural and necessary for effective English learner instruction. DI emphasizes accommodating a wide array of student traits, talents, and special needs. Effective English learner education must do the same but with added depth in addressing English language proficiency levels; primary language knowledge; cultural differences; and varied prior knowledge students bring from their diverse cultures and life experiences. One approach that addresses linguistic and cultural differences among ELs is sheltered instruction, also referred to as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Sheltered instruction represents one type of content-based instruction, which we define next, followed by a detailed discussion of sheltered instruction.
Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

Content instruction, whether it relates to a piece of literature, a science experiment, or the study of ancient civilizations, can promote oral and written academic learning and second language acquisition. Using the target language as a medium of instruction to teach language and content simultaneously is known as **content-based instruction (CBI)** (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1993; Snow, 2005; Snow & Brinton, 1997; Stoller, 2002). CBI is used to teach a second or foreign language in a variety of programs from kindergarten to college. Programs vary considerably in staffing formats, students served, and the extent to which teachers are responsible for content learning, language learning, or both. For example, CBI may be found in university foreign language classes, such as Japanese, in which all students are at the same level, and language development is the main goal with content serving as the vehicle. The French immersion programs in Canada serving native English speakers in elementary school provide another example of CBI. In these programs, French language acquisition and content learning are major goals, with French/English bilingualism and biliteracy the eventual, desired outcome. A third example can be seen in sheltered English programs K-12, in which both academic content and English language development are goals for ELs. Essential to all CBI programs is the modification of teacher language and instruction in ways that permit students to understand, participate, and learn in a new language. In other words, instructional language is made usable as “comprehensible input” by pairing it with visuals, concrete objects, and other cues to convey meaning. In addition, opportunities may be created for students to use the new language through small group activities involving content-oriented tasks. (You may wish to look back at our discussion of comprehensible input and social interaction in Chapter 2.)

Research has shown that the rich linguistic exposure provided by content instruction is excellent for second language learning, but not sufficient for attaining native-like proficiency (Swain, 1985; Harley, et al., 1990). Therefore, in addition to addressing language outcomes through content teaching, CBI makes room for **explicit instruction** on particular skills and strategies that will help students attain greater proficiency in the new language across a wide spectrum of activity. For example, such instruction might focus on vocabulary, grammar, or discourse strategies appropriate to particular social situations. Similarly, such instruction might highlight strategies for learning from academic texts or for writing in formats and discourse styles used in a particular academic discipline (Met, n.d.; 1998). The purpose of explicit instruction, then, is to address specific aspects of oral and written language use that do not emerge on their own during the natural course of content instruction. Teachers gauge specific language learning needs through ongoing classroom assessments, providing instruction to those who need it, often in small groups that meet on a short-term basis. In this way, teachers differentiate instruction according to student needs.

Reflecting back, you can see that CBI supports ELs’ achievement of the TESOL standards (1) by integrating language and content learning; (2) by addressing the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and (3) by providing support for various English language proficiency levels. Our
approach to effective English learner instruction is content based. Therefore, throughout this book, we show you how to promote oral language and literacy development through content area instruction. The particular approach to CBI that we recommend and discuss next is sheltered instruction, sometimes referred to as specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE).

### Sheltered Instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)

Sheltered instruction or specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) has evolved over the last several decades as an effective means of helping English learners succeed in school (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2008; Northcutt & Watson, 1986; Schifini, 1985). As a content-based approach, sheltered instruction or SDAIE uses the target language for instruction, with special modifications to ensure student comprehension and learning. Sheltered instruction addresses three main goals: (1) grade-appropriate content area learning, (2) English language and literacy development, and (3) positive social and affective adjustment.

Sheltered instruction is implemented with various staffing patterns depending on school organization and student needs. For example, in self-contained classrooms typical at the elementary school level, one teacher may be responsible for meeting all three goals. In high school, where classes are usually departmentalized, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher may be responsible for English language and literacy goals, with the content teacher responsible for subject matter attainment. Yet both ESL and content teachers use sheltering strategies, integrating language, and content instruction, preferably with ongoing co-planning and coordination. In addition to language and content learning, social and affective adjustment is another important piece of effective English learner instruction. To the extent that you establish positive relationships to form a community of learners, you also promote social development and self-esteem among your students (Gibbs, 1994). The social-emotional climate you establish also provides ELs opportunities to see themselves as worthy, capable, and contributing members of the classroom community, both socially and academically (Cummins, 2001; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007).

Now let’s look at some snapshots of sheltered instruction in action. We suggest that you first examine the Sheltered Instruction (SDAIE) checklist in Figure 3.6. Then, as you read the following examples, tick off the strategies teachers use.

### A Science Example with Fourth Graders

Ms. Bloom’s fourth grade consists of a mixture of ELs and native English speakers. They have been studying raptors and have recently visited the local natural history museum.

Ms. Bloom greeted her fourth-graders, who stood lined up at the door after mid-morning recess. She put her finger to her lips and quietly announced that today was the special day they had been waiting for. Then she asked them to tiptoe to their seats at their cooperative group tables. They took their seats, but not too quietly, because their curiosity was piqued by what they found at the
FIGURE 3.6

EFFECTIVE ENGLISH LEARNER INSTRUCTION CHECKLIST

Source: Adapted from Schifini, 1985.

1. The teacher organizes instruction around grade-appropriate content, often theme based (e.g., literature, math, science, integrated themes, social studies).
   a. Instruction provides access to the core curriculum
   b. Content is academically demanding
   c. Language objectives are established according to students’ English language proficiency in relation to language demands of lesson
   d. Language and content learning are integrated
   e. Content is presented from multicultural perspectives

2. The teacher designs appropriate learning sequences.
   a. Assesses and builds upon students’ interests and prior knowledge, including cultural knowledge
   b. Explains purpose of activity
   c. Helps students develop learning strategies for reading, writing, thinking, problem solving
   d. Provides multiple opportunities for students to process information verbally and nonverbally (draw, dramatize, discuss, review, question, rehearse, read, write about)

3. The teacher modifies language used during instruction.
   a. May use slightly slower speech rate
   b. Speaks clearly, repeating if needed
   c. Defines new words in meaningful context
   d. Paraphrases in simple terms when using more sophisticated forms of expression
   e. Limits use of idiomatic speech

4. The teacher supports verbal explanations with nonverbal cues.
   a. Gestures, facial expressions, action to dramatize meaning
   b. Props, concrete materials
   c. Graphs, pictures, visuals, maps
   d. Films, videotapes, overhead projector, bulletin board displays

5. The teacher plans ways to ensure participation of all students, keeping in mind English proficiency of each student.
   a. Monitors lesson comprehension and clarifies concepts as needed
   b. Reviews main ideas and key vocabulary
   c. Plans for students to actively participate in learning activities verbally and nonverbally according to functional English abilities
   d. Provides opportunities for students to contribute based on their modalities of strength: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, oral, written, pictorial

6. The teacher provides a variety of flexible grouping formats to provide opportunities for social, linguistic, and academic development.
   a. Heterogeneous groups
   b. Pair work
   c. Short-term skill groups
   d. Teacher-student conferencing

7. The teacher provides a variety of assessment methods that permit students to display learning through their modalities of strength (e.g., oral, written, visual, kinesthetic, auditory, pictorial).
   a. Performance-based assessment
   b. Portfolio assessment
   c. Learner self-assessment
   d. If used, standardized tests are modified to accommodate English learners (e.g., extra time to complete)

center of each table: a small oval object wrapped in aluminum foil, a slender, five-inch probing instrument, and a graphing sheet depicting what turned out to be different kinds of rodent bones. Ms. Bloom waited for all to be seated and quiet. Then she proceeded to give her instructions:

“Yesterday we visited the Natural History Museum, and we saw a diorama of the life cycle of owls. Who remembers what Table Three wanted to know more about after visiting the museum? (Students at Table Three answer: ‘We wanted to know more about what owls eat.’) OK, so I promised you I would give you a chance to investigate, or find out for yourselves. At your
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table, you have something wrapped in foil. (Ms. Bloom holds up an example.)

This is called an owl pellet. After an owl finishes eating, it *regurgitates* the pellet,
or throws it up out of its mouth. (Teacher dramatizes with a hand gesture.)

After everyone understands what to do, I want you to take the pellet apart,
examine it carefully, and together decide what information you can figure out
about what owls eat. I want you to look, to talk together, and to write down
your ideas. Then each group will share back with the whole class. Take a look
at the instruction card at your table and raise your hand when you are sure
you know what to do.”

Students went ahead, and with some assistance from the teacher, they got
started. Because the groups included more advanced and less advanced English
speakers, they were able to help each other understand what to do. After sharing
their findings with the rest of the class, each group graphed the kinds of bones they
found and then discussed the original question further in light of their findings.

Even in this short example, you probably noticed how Ms. Bloom made use of
many techniques to facilitate English learner comprehension, participation, and
learning, including the following: (1) organization of instruction around cognitively
demanding content, in this case, science; (2) explanation of the lesson’s purpose,
with attention to understanding what was to be done; (3) building background for
lesson content by visiting a museum; (4) careful use of instructional language,
including definition and repetition of key words like *owl pellet* in context, develop-
ing meaning through direct experience with the actual object; (5) acting out or par-
aphrasing the meaning of words like *regurgitated*; (6) use of direct experience when
examining the owl pellets; and (7) opportunities for students to help each other
through cooperative group work. Perhaps you have found that you already include
many of these sheltering techniques in your teaching. If so, keep up the good work.
Now let’s look at a sheltered lesson with kindergarteners.

**A Literature Example with Kindergarteners**

Last week we were in Roberto Heredia’s kindergarten classroom of beginning
and intermediate English language learners. Roberto was reading the predictable
book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1986), part of a literature study on the
author, Eric Carle. You may remember this simple pattern story about the little
caterpillar who eats through page after page of luscious fruits and fattening foods
until he turns into a chrysalis and then emerges as a beautiful butterfly. As you
read about Roberto’s presentation of the book, you may wish to refer to
Figure 3.6 to tick off the sheltering strategies he uses.

Roberto features the story by posting a picture of a caterpillar next to the
large class calendar. Next to the caterpillar, you see labeled pictures of the cater-
pillar’s food as depicted in the story: one apple, two pears, three plums, four
strawberries, five oranges, and the many rich foods that the caterpillar surfeited
himself with that Saturday. Roberto also had paper cutouts on popsicle sticks of
the caterpillar and all of the different foods he ate.

After the calendar routine focusing on the days of the week, Roberto read the
story from the book. When the children asked to hear it again, he reread the story
using the popsicle stick props of the caterpillar and foods. As Roberto read the
first sentence, “On Monday the very hungry caterpillar ate one apple,” the chil-
dren chimed in eagerly: “But he was still hungry.” As he read “Monday,” he
pointed to the word Monday on the calendar; when he read “hungry caterpillar,”
he waved the caterpillar cutout; and when he read what the caterpillar ate, he mimicked the caterpillar eating the paper cutout of the apple. The children begged for another reading, so Roberto read it one more time, holding up the caterpillar and food cutouts while the children chimed in.

The next day Roberto read the story using sentence strips in a pocket chart, pointing to each word as he did so. By this time, the children were completely familiar with the story and its predictable pattern. Roberto now prepared the children to write their own story using a caterpillar or one of the other animals in the wall dictionary and following the pattern in the original story. Children worked in groups to write their first story together, which they published in a booklet made by folding a piece of paper in a special way previously demonstrated. When the groups finished their books, they read them aloud to the class. A part of one group's story, “The Very Hungry Dinosaur,” begins as follows:

On Monday, the very hungry dinosaur ate a green horse.
On Tuesday, the very hungry dinosaur ate two red cars.
On Wednesday, the very hungry dinosaur ate three brown houses.
On Thursday, the very hungry dinosaur ate four purple elephants.

Finally, because the children enjoyed the stories so much, Roberto had the children make the books into big books to be kept in the classroom library. On the next day, children made small individual stories, which they took home to read to their parents. Roberto’s goal was to allow each of the beginning students to participate in English at his or her own level in an enjoyable manner with no pressures to perform. However, he found that almost all of the students, both beginners and intermediates, already saw themselves as successful English speakers, readers, and writers through the lesson.

A Social Science Example with High School Students

Ed Broach, a social studies teacher in an inner-city high school, has long been highly effective in teaching first and second language learners. An excellent teacher, he always made sure his students were, in his words, “getting it.” How
did he do this, and how did the concept of sheltered instruction improve his teaching?

One social science curriculum standard requires students to understand and explain how a bill in Congress becomes a law. To begin the unit on this topic, Ed asks his students to consider the word *law*, giving them a few minutes to share with a partner any experiences they’ve had with laws in this country or elsewhere. He then creates a cluster on the chalkboard that categorizes aspects of the laws that students have experienced. In the process, Ed engages students in a discussion of the need for good, fair laws. Ed explains that they should keep this discussion in mind because they are going to have a chance in class to create a new law or change an old one, following procedures used by the U.S. Congress. In this way, Ed provides a practical purpose up front for motivating student interest in the topic.

Next, Ed provides each student with a list of important vocabulary words for the unit, such as *legislature, Congress, House of Representatives, Senate,* and *bill.* Then, using an overhead projector, he shows students pictures of Congress and explains a flowchart that illustrates how an idea becomes a bill and how a bill becomes law. As he does so, he emphasizes terms on the vocabulary list. Next, he has students work in groups to check their levels of knowledge and understanding of these terms. For each term, students discuss whether they recognize the word, whether they can use it in a sentence, and whether they can explain its meaning to others. Ed uses this information to determine additional concept and vocabulary development that might be needed. At this point, students read a selection from the textbook on the legislative process using a study guide Ed devised for them.

With this preparation, students are ready for a short film on the topic, which furthers student learning. Ed continues to check for student comprehension during and after the film. Next, he sets up a mini-congress. Students work as congressional committee members to write up a bill and take it through all the steps required to enact it as a law. For example, one group decided to pass a law to change school disciplinary procedures. During group work, Ed circulates through the classroom, making notes as he checks for student involvement and understanding. Afterward, Ed reviews and clarifies essential concepts by summarizing the legislative processes his students have just experienced.

Let’s look at how Ed has modified his teaching to make it more effective for English learners. Originally he assigned the reading first and did the simulation game last, followed by the multiple-choice test with essay questions. Now he does several things differently. First, he spends more time before students read the text to set the purpose for the unit, key into their prior experiences and knowledge of the topic, and provide an overview of concepts and vocabulary using visual aids. Second, he has become more conscious of modifying instruction according to student needs, including the pace and complexity of his own instructional talk. Third, he checks carefully for student understanding at every step. Fourth, he watches to be sure that groups are functioning smoothly and that everyone has a chance to participate. Fifth, he assesses student learning in a variety of ways: through checklists while students are in groups and through individual portfolio conferences and by more traditional means. These modifications have worked well. In fact, Ed recently told us that he has to make his tests a little tougher these days because students were all passing his old ones so easily. Through sheltered instruction, Ed has taken excellence to yet a higher level, improving learning opportunities for all his students.
Sheltered Instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)

We have just seen three teachers using sheltered instruction. Next let’s look at what goes into their planning.

Planning for Differentiated, Sheltered English Instruction or SDAIE

As you sit down to plan instruction, you need to keep two things in mind at once: (1) your students in all their diversity and (2) the curriculum you are required to teach. Your job is to bring the two together, meeting each student at his or her level to facilitate learning. When you tailor your instruction to your ELs’ language proficiency levels and prior knowledge, you are sheltering instruction. When you further modify instruction based on your students’ varied talents, strengths, and learning needs, you are differentiating instruction. Your planning requires you to address four questions: what, who, how, and how well?

**What:** Content you will teach based on curriculum standards

**Who:** Your students; their English language proficiency levels; primary language and cultural backgrounds/experiences; learning strengths and needs

**How:** Instructional strategies and materials tailored to student strengths and needs; individual, small group, or whole-class activities; modifications for language proficiency levels and other special needs

**How well:** Performance expectations and assessment procedures

As noted previously, sheltered instruction or SDAIE integrates content, language, and social/affective development. We therefore suggest that you establish objectives for each category. Figure 3.7 shows one planning format that addresses the topics of the foregoing discussion.

You establish **content objectives** based on your district’s curriculum standards. Bear in mind that you may need to adjust the amount of material you cover for some students, particularly those in the earlier stages of English language development. To do so, you carefully review and evaluate your curriculum to identify those concepts most essential for continued academic development and success. By honing curriculum concepts in this way, you adjust the cognitive load for those who need it but not the grade level of the material (Meyer, 2000b; Tomlinson, 1999). Similarly, you may need to think of ways for more advanced students to extend their learning beyond your lesson objectives. In this way you provide everyone access to the same curriculum while differentiating instruction based on your students’ particular strengths and needs.

Next you establish **language objectives**, varying them according to your students’ language proficiency levels, using the TESOL standards or your state’s ESL/ELD standards as a guide. One way to identify language objectives is to review the learning tasks you are planning and analyze the **language demands** and **language learning opportunities** they offer for students at different levels. For students new to English, for example, your objectives may focus on comprehension rather than production. If the lesson requires specific vocabulary or grammatical structures, such as the past tense, these may become the basis of your lesson’s English language objectives. You need only a few language objectives, aspects that
you will focus on and assess, drawing from the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In addition to language objectives, you need to plan _language-related lesson modifications_, particularly how you will modify your instructional delivery to support English learners’ comprehension. First, you will want to plan ways to accompany your instructional talk with visuals, concrete objects, direct experience, and other nonverbal means to convey lesson content. Second, you need to plan what to say to get your point across, including particular phrasing and vocabulary. Third, you will want to think of ways to rephrase information and define new words in context if needed. This detailed attention to your own language use may be difficult at first. With practice, however, it will become a natural part of your instructional planning process. During lesson delivery, you need to check to be sure all students understand and follow your ideas and explanations. If some do not, you might take them aside for further help. This process is part of ongoing assessment of student learning and differentiation of instruction.

Finally, you need to examine your individual, whole-class, and small-group activities to identify social interaction opportunities that serve as the basis for your _social/affective objectives_. Social/affective objectives concern social-cultural adjustment, interpersonal relationships, empathy, self-esteem, and respect for others. For example, social/affective objectives might refer to students cooperating on a task, responding sensitively to each other’s ideas, accepting opinions divergent from their own, and respecting the home languages and traditions of others. Social/affective objectives will reflect what you value in student learning.
behavior. Your values will, of course, reflect your particular cultural point of view, and that is fine. In reality, you create your own classroom culture, which will be somewhat different from anyone’s home culture, including your own. It is important to be conscious of what you value so that you can explicitly state the social/affective behaviors you wish students to display.

Because social interaction is conducive to both language acquisition and subject matter learning, classroom organization for English learners includes frequent opportunities for students to work together in pairs or groups. When you organize groups, it is important to vary group membership according to your particular academic, language, and social/affective objectives. Heterogeneous groups are usually preferable for language, social, and academic development. At times, however, you may call together a small group of students who need explicit instruction on a particular skill or topic, usually on a short-term basis. However, be careful to avoid inflexible, long-term ability grouping, which has been shown to have negative effects on student learning and self-esteem (Eder, 1982).

The last step in the instructional sequence is assessment of student learning. Basing your assessment on the standards, goals, and objectives you outlined previously, you need to provide students a variety of opportunities to display their learning. Assessment outcomes permit you to document student progress and decide on your next steps in instruction. In this way, you differentiate assessment and instruction to facilitate optimal student performance and continued growth.

This short section has described basic planning procedures for sheltered instruction. In the next three sections, we elaborate on three important instructional strategies to incorporate into your teaching: group work, theme studies, and scaffolding. Lastly, we discuss English learner assessment.

Group work is an important element of sheltered instruction or SDAIE. When you provide opportunities for English learners to interact with their English-speaking peers, receptive and productive language learning opportunities abound (Wong Fillmore, 1982). Imagine, for example, a group of three or four students working together to create a mural. Language will be used naturally to accomplish the task at hand. In addition, the language that is used will be context embedded (Cummins, 1981), that is, directly related to concrete objects at hand. The mural, the paints, the children themselves, and their actions support comprehension of task-based talk. Moreover, if words are used that are not understood, collaborative group work permits learners to ask for repetition and clarification if needed. Thus, learners themselves have some control over fine-tuning the input generated in carrying out the collaborative project. English learners are also challenged to speak during group work, thereby providing excellent practice in articulating their ideas in English. Collaborative group work therefore provides opportunities for both social and academic language development, with proficient English-speaking peers providing good models for English learners. For these reasons, collaborative projects generate particularly rich language learning
contexts, especially when groups include advanced or native English speakers. Because group work provides opportunities for individuals to display their talents and to procure assistance from peers, it is an important component of differentiated instruction. Of course, the teacher continues to be an important language model and source of input as well. Table 3.1 depicts several different kinds of collaborative groups. Writing and literature response groups will be described in subsequent chapters; cooperative groups are discussed next.

**Organizing Group Work**

There are many ways to organize group work to suit the purpose at hand; some are informal and student centered, whereas others are more structured and require students to learn the cooperative processes before academic work can actually begin. For the purposes of second language acquisition and differentiated learning opportunities, the specific structure of collaborative groups is less important than the quality of the opportunities they provide for interaction. To organize informal group work, for example, you might provide activity centers

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### Table 3.1 • A Few Types of Collaborative Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddy system</td>
<td>Pair students; one more capable is paired with a student less proficient in English. The buddy helps the student in and out of the class until the second language learner becomes proficient and knowledgeable about class and school routines.</td>
<td>Helps the new second language learner become a member of the classroom society. Helps the student become comfortable in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing response groups</td>
<td>Students share their writing with one another, concentrate on what is good in the papers, and help one another improve their writing. The teacher begins by modeling good response partners and giving students specific strategies for improving their papers.</td>
<td>Writing response groups have several purposes: making students independent; helping students improve their writing; and giving students an audience and immediate response to their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature response groups</td>
<td>Teacher first models response to literature, emphasizing the variety of acceptable responses. Students learn to value individual responses and support responses with what they have read. Students focus on individual feelings first and later on structure and form of literature.</td>
<td>To help students use their own background knowledge to respond to literature, to value students’ individual responses and to help them become independent readers of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative groups</td>
<td>Students are given specific roles and responsibilities for group work. Students become responsible for the success of one another and they teach and learn from one another, creating success for all members of the group.</td>
<td>Build individual and group responsibility for learning. Build success for all members of the group. Develop creative, active learners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as a free choice in the afternoon, with three to six students permitted at each center. By offering games, manipulatives, and problem-solving activities aimed at different levels of language and content knowledge, you differentiate instruction while encouraging informal collaboration among students. Another possibility for collaboration is to create specific tasks for small groups to work on together. For example, to introduce a unit on animals, you might divide the class into groups of three or four students and provide each group with a set of photographs of different animals. One task would be to categorize the photos and then to explain and justify the criteria for their groupings. The task is rich in natural opportunities for the use of academic language related to higher-level thinking, such as comparing, contrasting, categorizing, explaining, and justifying. Furthermore, because students carry out the task in small groups, everyone gets a chance to contribute in a low-risk, low-anxiety atmosphere. The relaxed atmosphere, or low-anxiety environment, is considered conducive to content learning and language acquisition (Dulay et al., 1982; Krashen, 1981a).

To the extent that the target language, English, is used during group work, students practice their new language and gain context-embedded input for further acquisition. In some situations, you may explicitly encourage the use of English for group activities. For example, if most students in the class speak the same native language and varying levels of English, students may tend to use the home language instead of English. If so, you may choose to encourage English explicitly as the designated language for activity centers. In multilingual classrooms, English becomes the one language common to all students, the lingua franca, and students consequently choose it as a matter of course. The ideal learning situation occurs when the class includes advanced and native English
speakers with whom English learners may interact during group work. However, research suggests that students who are quite new to English have difficulty understanding and learning during group work conducted in English only (Saunders & O’Brien, 2006). For these students, access to lesson content through their first language (L1) may help, either from the teacher or from a peer. In summary, informal collaboration can promote English learners’ language, content and social development when implemented with careful attention to students’ language abilities, and other individual strengths and needs. Next we discuss more structured approaches to cooperative learning.

**Cooperative Learning Methods**

In addition to informal group collaboration, a great deal of work has been carried out on more structured cooperative learning methods (Cohen, 1986; Dishon & O’Leary, 1984; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986; Kagan, 1986). Cooperative learning may be defined as an instructional organization strategy in which students work collaboratively in small groups to achieve academic and social learning goals. In cooperative learning, you establish heterogeneous groups. That is, members are either randomly assigned, or else you set up membership to ensure that each group includes a variety of students in terms of gender, ethnicity, language proficiency, and academic achievement (Cohen, 1986). You may also balance groups in terms of personality characteristics: shy/outgoing, quiet/talkative, and so forth. In addition to heterogeneous grouping, procedural roles are assigned to students in each group, such as recorder, observer, encourager, or reporter. These roles are rotated so that all group members have a chance to experience them. In this way, leadership and other roles are distributed among all students, rather than falling on certain ones all the time.

In addition to heterogeneous grouping and role distribution, cooperative learning procedures are set up to build positive interdependence among group members. That is, students come to share and support each other’s learning in socially appropriate ways. This occurs because members of a cooperative group succeed only if every member succeeds. Thus, to be successful, all students must care about the work of all the other group members. To build positive interdependence,
You may find that many of your students have had little or no experience in group interactions. In addition, some students may not consider group work academically appropriate based on the values and assumptions of their home cultures. Therefore, we recommend that you gradually implement group work in your classroom. A first step is to place students in partnerships in which they can work together on specific tasks, such as buddy reading or cleanup duties. Next, you may place students in groups of three as they become comfortable working in groups. Finally, you may create cooperative/collaborative groups of four or five students.

Even this gradual and careful grouping will not guarantee effective group work. You still need to provide feedback to help students listen, take turns, stay on task, and work together effectively as a group (Cohen, 1986, 1994). Some teachers have groups evaluate themselves on the mechanics of cooperation addressing questions such as (1) Did we stay on task? (2) Were we courteous and respectful to one another even when we didn’t agree? (3) How can we be more successful next time? Such checklists help students develop an awareness of their group dynamics, increasing their chances for success.

Whether homogeneous or heterogeneous in membership, groups will go through phases on their way to working autonomously. In the first phase, let’s call it the get-along phase, you may find students need a lot of help. They may not know how to get along or how to resolve conflicts. They need to know that they are responsible for the behavior of others in the group and themselves (Cohen, 1986). You will need to work closely with them to help them move to the next phase, developing relationships, in which students determine one another’s strengths and decide who is best suited for various aspects of group work. During this phase, you may need to help groups that are dominated by one or two individuals, especially if the groups include native and non-native English speakers. To meet individual needs and thus differentiate instruction, we recommend that you have a multiplicity of ways students can display their knowledge, such as drawing a picture, creating a graph, demonstrating a procedure, or completing a scientific experiment. When groups are asked to perform a variety of tasks, it’s more likely that all students in a group will be involved.

Once students have developed a successful pattern of relationships, they can move to the phase of production, in which they begin to become efficient group workers who can bring their task to completion. Sometimes groups will reach a final phase of autonomy, in which they require minimal help from the teacher,
develop many of their own topics, and seem to move from one task to another without any help. Whatever phase your students are in, you will need to work with them closely to help them advance to more productive phases of group work, always working toward group autonomy. To do this you may have to resolve conflicts and clarify directions groups are taking in their work. Finally, help students self-monitor by using checklists or by having successful groups role play for others how they work together. Successful group work is accompanied by a teacher who gives clear directions and works with students to help them grow as group members (Cohen, 1986; 1994).

Jigsaw

In one cooperative technique, called jigsaw (Aaronson, 1978), one segment of a learning task is assigned to each group member, who then works to become an “expert” in that area. After researching their special areas, the experts from each group meet to compare notes and extend their learning. Finally, the original groups meet again, and the experts report back to their original groups. For example, Mary Ann Smith created “base groups” consisting of three students each to help her students learn about spiders. She then assigned each member in the base group different pages from a selection on spiders. One student in each base group was responsible for pages 1 to 3, another for pages 4 to 6, and the third student was responsible for the final three pages. When students had read the assigned pages, Mary Ann met with the specialists on each section. These students became experts on the information they read, discussing and sharing their understanding of the reading with their expert peers and planning how they would teach the information to members in their base groups. All experts returned to their base groups and shared their special expertise with their peers. In this way, all group members were availed of the whole spectrum of information on spiders. In jigsaw processes such as this, students may then apply their knowledge to a group task or to an individual task, assuring individual accountability for all information.

A final aspect of the jigsaw process is the development of group autonomy: Groups become responsible for their own learning and smooth functioning. Thus, the teacher needs to step back at times to let students solve their own procedural and conceptual conflicts. In this way, students use their critical thinking abilities and social skills to work things out on their own.

To summarize our discussion thus far, we have seen that ELs, by virtue of their immersion in a new language and culture, have the benefit of natural exposure to the new language both in and out of school. In addition, they have real and immediate life needs that motivate them to learn. They also bring to the learning task a variety of talents, skills, and prior knowledge for the teacher to build upon. At the same time, they must reach high levels of proficiency in order to succeed. In order to learn their new language, they need comprehensible input and opportunities to use the new language in day-to-day social interactions. Teachers can provide high-quality comprehensible input for both social and academic language use in the classroom by using sheltering techniques, by differentiating instruction, and by creating opportunities for collaborative group work in which English will be used with peers. Another excellent strategy to use with English language learners is thematic instruction. The next section explains why and how.
Thematic Instruction

For many years, teachers have used themes or topics as focal points for organizing curriculum content (Enright & McCloskey, 1988; Pappas, Kiefer, & Levstik, 1990). One teacher we know, Reina Saucedo, uses corn as the central topic for a unit that integrates math, social studies, science, and language arts. She begins the unit with a feast of quesadillas, which are toasted corn tortillas filled with melted cheese. Next comes a discussion about corn as the basic ingredient for tortillas. From there, the class embarks on a study of corn, a native American plant originally cultivated by indigenous peoples in North, Central, and South America. Reina’s students read, illustrate, and dramatize corn legends; sprout corn seeds and record their growth; and create a world map, citing locations where corn is grown and eaten today. Some students choose to research how corn is prepared in different countries, creating an illustrated international corn cookbook. The class learns about the nutritive value of corn, finding out, for example, that it combines with beans to form a complete protein. They also learn how to dye corn kernels and string them into necklaces to wear or to give as gifts. As a culminating activity they create a menu based on corn and prepare a nutritionally balanced meal for the class.

Though more prevalent in the primary grades, thematic instruction lends itself to virtually any content and any grade level. For example, an extensive cooperative theme project, “Building Toothpick Bridges” (Pollard, 1985), would be appropriate for upper-elementary grades through high school. In this integrated science-math-building project, students work in groups of six, forming “construction companies,” to design and build a bridge out of toothpicks. The unit begins with readings on the history of bridge development, analysis of bridge designs, and information about how bridges work. Students may visit local bridges to examine their architecture and consider how they are structured to bear weight and constant use. Each construction company member assumes a role, selecting from project director, architect, carpenter, transportation chief, and accountant. The goal is to design and build the strongest bridge possible, staying within the company’s projected budget. In the planning stage, companies design their bridges, estimating the quantity and cost of necessary materials. On certain days, the “warehouse” is open for purchase of materials, paid for by check. At the end of the project, the strength of the bridges is tested to the breaking point, and the strongest bridge wins a prize. The bridge breaking is an exciting media event, described by students in an article for the local newspaper. This collaborative project is a highly involving, fun project that integrates the use of oral and written language with a wide variety of science and math concepts. The theme-based collaborative project serves many purposes: to teach science and math concepts and applications, promote the use of library resources, provide students with a chance to work together cooperatively, and help them become better readers and writers as they negotiate meanings for themselves and others. Finally, the purposes in a unit, such as this one are met seamlessly as the students engage in activities that are involving and meaningful.

In summary, we recommend the use of thematic instruction for English language learners for several reasons. First, thematic instruction creates a meaningful conceptual framework within which students are invited to use both oral and written language for learning content. The meaningful context
established by the theme supports the comprehensibility of instruction, thereby increasing both content learning and second language acquisition. In addition, theme-based collaborative projects create student interest, motivation, involvement, and purpose. Moreover, as students work together on their projects, they naturally use both oral and written language to question, inform, problem solve, negotiate, and interact with their peers. Through such engagement, both social and academic language and literacy development are challenged and promoted. But keep in mind that most students, whether English learners or native English speakers, need time and assistance to be integrated into project-oriented, collaborative classrooms. Nevertheless, when combined with opportunities for thematic instruction, it creates optimal content, language, and literacy learning opportunities for both native and non-native English speakers.

Organizing Thematic Instruction

We offer six criteria for organizing thematic instruction to promote language development, critical thinking, independence, and interpersonal collaboration for English language learners. Our criteria represent basic learning principles that we have adapted from Enright and McCloskey (1988).

Meaning and Purpose. The content of the theme study is interesting and relevant to the students. One way to ensure interest and relevance is to provide opportunities for students themselves to guide the choice of topics, activities, and projects within the theme study. As students make choices, they invest themselves in their own learning, thereby creating self-direction and purpose.

Building on Prior Knowledge. The theme study builds on students’ prior knowledge, including that gained from life experiences and the home culture. In this way, students’ varied cultural experiences can be incorporated into their schoolwork, providing understanding of themselves and others.

Integrated Opportunities to Use Oral and Written Language for Learning Purposes. The teacher is conscious of creating opportunities for oral language and literacy to be used for learning purposes established in concert with students. The teacher broadens the students’ experiences with different forms and functions of print suited to student interests and goals.

Scaffolding for Support. Thematic instruction is provided in a classroom atmosphere that respects each student, builds on their strengths, supports their efforts, and values their accomplishments. One way to support students is to use sheltering techniques and various kinds of scaffolds, discussed later, to assist students in participating successfully, even if their English language/literacy proficiency is limited. Another way is to give students varied opportunities to display and share their learning.

Collaboration. Students are given many opportunities to work together on theme-related projects and activities. Collaboration in pairs and small groups
Thematic Instruction

provides students with opportunities to process complex information actively in a low-risk, low-anxiety situation. In this way, language and content learning is productive, and positive social relationships can be promoted. At the same time, language and literacy are used purposefully, promoting acquisition of both.

**Variety.** Variety permeates the learning process—in topics of study, in the ways that learning is shared with others, in the functions of oral and written language used, in roles and responsibilities, and in task difficulty. Variety and flexibility characterize learning groups—pairs, small groups, and the whole class. Thus interest remains high.

The process of developing thematic instruction is dynamic, ideally involving input from the students themselves at all levels of decision making. The first step is to choose the topic or theme that will serve as the focus of interest. There are many sources for themes and topics, including state and local curriculum guidelines and personal interests and curiosities expressed by the students. Not least, your own special interests provide an excellent source of topics and themes, and you are likely to have or know of resources and materials to share with your students. Enthusiasm is contagious, and when you bring your own curiosity and joy for learning into the classroom, you reveal your personal self, thereby deepening your relationship with your students and modeling lifelong learning. Likewise, when you build on your students’ interests and curiosities, you can catch their wave of enthusiasm and embark on exciting new learning adventures yourself.

Once a theme is chosen, the next step is to brainstorm ideas related to the theme. One way to conduct the brainstorming is to create a cluster or word web on the chalkboard as you and your students generate ideas around the theme. During brainstorming, it is important to accept and write down every idea contributed by your students. Based on the words generated during brainstorming, related ideas can be grouped together, resulting in a map of the major subtopics to be investigated. Under each subtopic, activities and projects are listed together, as shown in the map in Figure 3.8. It is helpful to post the thematic map in the classroom to keep the organization and planning available at a glance.

Another way to generate and organize learning activities and projects around a theme is to write the chosen theme or topic on a large piece of butcher paper and invite students to list “what we know already” and “what we wonder about,” as Jamie Green did with her theme cycle on Egypt. Students may then form interest groups around the “wonder topic” of their preference, and together with the teacher, establish a plan to find out more. In this approach, groups conduct research with teacher guidance as needed, each group presenting its findings to the class in some form: oral, written, pictorial/graphic, or dramatic. Students are encouraged to combine at least two or three of the presentational modes so as to “shelter” their presentations for their classmates. For example, an oral presentation to the class might explain a mural. Finally, the butcher paper list is reviewed and revised with a new category: “What We Know Now.” This theme study (Altwerger & Flores, 1991) may then be repeated by adding “What We Wonder Now,” as students pose new questions and choose new areas of investigation. The thematic instruction provide students with opportunities for functional and purposeful language use in the classroom, which we discuss in more detail next.
Functional and Academic Literacy Uses in Thematic Instruction

From the standpoint of second language learning, one of the teacher’s major responsibilities is to make sure to incorporate a variety of functional and academic literacy uses into the projects and activities undertaken by the students (Heath & Mangiola, 1991). The following list describes different forms and uses of reading and writing to consider as you expand your students’ repertoires.

In addition to exposing students to a variety of literacy forms and functions, you will want to make sure that scaffolding supports, described in the next section, are available to facilitate student participation, even if English language proficiency is limited. Therefore, as the final step in developing a theme study, you will want to examine the project and activity plans while considering the special strengths and needs of your students. Using questions such as the following may help you differentiate instruction and guide your students’ involvement:

1. Which aspects of the project can be carried out by students with minimal English proficiency (e.g., painting, coloring, short answers, use of the student’s native language)?
2. How can I build on special talents or prior knowledge of the theme topics?
3. Which aspects of the project involve literacy uses that may be supported by literacy scaffolds and/or by peer assistance (e.g., writing a story based on the repeated pattern of a predictable book such as Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? [Martin, 1967] or Fortunately [Charlip, 1997]; writing a letter in cooperative pairs; paired reading)?
4. What special resources might be of help to a particular group (e.g., books, encyclopedias, films, community members, school personnel)? What resources can I provide to address special talents and needs of particular students in my class (e.g., simpler texts, more advanced texts, primary language material)?
5. How might this project lead to particular kinds of language and literacy uses (e.g., a letter to a company protesting its use of laboratory animals, the contribution of an article to the school newspaper, oral reading of the poems discovered in researching the theme, the use of a log to record plant growth). For more teaching ideas to use with thematic instruction, check out Chapter 6 on vocabulary and Chapters 9 and 10 on content area reading and writing.

Creating Variety in Language and Literacy Uses

Your role in generating a variety of oral and written language uses is crucial for optimal language and literacy development through thematic instruction. To
support students’ successful involvement, you will want to consider the students’ performance levels and find ways to stretch them. As you consider how to assist your students with their projects, two questions should be kept in mind: (1) How can I assure successful participation by each student? and (2) How can I encourage each student to perform at his or her best?

We believe that both participation and motivation are promoted by encouraging students to make choices. For example, if your curriculum requires the study of your state’s history, you might start with local history by posing the questions: Has our town always been here? What do you suppose it was like here 100 years ago? Your discussion may lead students to other questions, such as: What and who was here? How did people live, work, and learn? How did they dress? What did they use for transportation? What did they do for fun? Students may form interest groups by choosing which questions they want to work on. Further choices may be made as to the books and materials they will use to answer their questions. Perhaps some students will choose to interview long time local residents. Finally, students may choose the format they wish to use for presenting their findings—publishing a factual book on local history, creating a mural to depict the town as it was 100 years ago, or creating a series of letters that might have been written to a cousin in another state. Your job is to be on hand to listen to students and make suggestions as needed. By offering students choices, you broaden their horizons, while allowing them to invest more fully in their own learning, thus sparking interest and involvement as well.

Active participation is also enhanced when students work in groups to accomplish self-selected tasks. Groups provide support and motivation to get things done. Furthermore, your English learners may prove more capable than anticipated when allowed to work in a small group. In any case, you will want to move from group to group to observe students’ progress and interaction. If necessary, you may suggest ways to involve new English language learners. For example, if a student speaks virtually no English, you might pair him or her with another student to illustrate the group’s book or to copy captions for the illustrations. You need to be observant, intuitive, and imaginative when making such suggestions for newcomers and others with limited English proficiency. Therein lies the art of teaching: knowing when to encourage and when to stand back!

Finally, as students reflect on their new knowledge, they are in a position to evaluate their own learning. Through the process of posing their own questions, researching to find possible answers, and presenting their findings to their classmates, they can see for themselves how much they have learned. At the same time, they may wish to note those areas still open to question, thereby generating questions for their next theme study. The theme study thus replicates the knowledge generation process used in formal research. In our approach to theme studies, we emphasize the use of scaffolding, a concept we now discuss in detail.

**Scaffolding**

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) introduced a useful concept about learning and development when he pointed out that what the learner can do with assistance today, he or she can do alone tomorrow. Teaching, he urged, must aim not at today’s but at tomorrow’s development, or, as he called it, the
zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1962). Learners need to be challenged, but with support and assistance that permit them to perform at the next level. The support and assistance that permits this performance is called scaffolding. The idea of the ZPD is similar to Krashen’s notion of $i + 1$, discussed in Chapter 2, which suggests that input in second language acquisition should be just a little beyond the learner’s current language proficiency. Vygotsky’s idea refers to learning in general, whereas Krashen is concerned specifically with second language acquisition. The sheltering techniques discussed previously that make language comprehensible are a form of scaffolding.

Scaffolding refers to temporary structures used to facilitate construction of a building. In learning and development, students are constructing the ability to carry out complex processes, such as talking, reading, writing, thinking, and understanding the social and physical worlds around them. We define scaffolds as temporary supports, provided by more capable people, that permit learners to perform a complex process before they are able to do so unassisted. Assisted participation offers practice and development of a skill as an integrated whole, rather than drill on smaller aspects of the skill one at a time. Once proficiency is achieved, the scaffold is no longer needed and may be dropped.

For a concrete example, consider a 12-month-old child who is just beginning to walk but still has a tendency to fall flat on her well-padded bottom. Her father offers his hand to help her make it across the room. She succeeds with pride and delight. For a while, she needs the hand-holding support from more capable others to scaffold this complex process of coordinated psychomotor activity. Before long, though, she is able to walk by herself, and the scaffold is no longer needed. If some day she chooses to do more “advanced walking,” such as walking on a balance beam, the same hand-holding scaffold may assist her. Thus, a similar scaffold may be applied later as more sophisticated versions of the complex process are attempted. In the sections that follow, we examine scaffolding as it applies to school learning.

SCAFFOLDING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION. Research in first and second language acquisition has shown how adults and more proficient language users may take a simple cue from a novice language learner, and restate the meaning in a more elaborated form. For example, a toddler might say, “Mommy, birdie” to which the mother might reply, “Yes, there’s a pretty blue bird on the fence, isn’t there?” The reply serves to acknowledge and elaborate the child’s topic. At the same time, the mother’s response provides linguistic input that is directly geared to the child’s interest and language development level, thereby providing a scaffold for language acquisition. Similar kinds of scaffolding have been observed in classrooms serving second language learners, as teachers and more proficient peers repeat and elaborate on English learners’ communicative efforts (Peregoy & Boyle, 1990a).

ROUTINES AS SCAFFOLDS. As a teacher, you no doubt spend considerable time at the beginning of the year getting your students used to your daily routines, including roll call, group work schedules, transitions, behavior expectations, and the like. That time pays off later in creating a smoothly functioning classroom. You may not have thought of it, but those routines also serve to scaffold language and literacy acquisition. For example, as the routine repeats, so does the language used. That repeated language is readily learned by novice English learners. At a more sophisticated level, process writing and guided reading also represent scaffolding routines.
Consider for a moment the words of Catherine Snow (1977), “We think of routines as simple and unsophisticated... but their simplicity allows for the introduction, into slots created by the routine, of fillers considerably more complex in structure and/or content than could possibly be dealt with elsewhere” (p. 49). In process writing, for example, students get used to working a piece over until it is deemed publishable. Through the built-in routines of response and feedback, with corresponding revision and editing, students are scaffolded to a much higher level of performance than they could have achieved otherwise. Process writing, in fact, is an overarching scaffolding routine that incorporates multiple, embedded scaffolds (Peregoy, 1991; Peregoy & Boyle, 1990a, 1999a, 1999b) in each of the phases of the writing process: topic generation, writing, revising, editing and publishing. Figure 3.10 illustrates how teachers gradually relinquish responsibility to students through scaffolding.

A KEEP Example

One educational program that incorporates Vygotsky’s ideas about scaffolding is the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in Honolulu, Hawaii. KEEP was established in the late 1970’s as a research and development center to meet the educational needs of native Hawaiian children descended from the original Polynesian inhabitants of the island chain (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). These children, ethnic minority group speakers of Hawaiian Creole English, were not achieving well in school, particularly in reading (Au & Jordan, 1981). Through the concerted efforts of a team of psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, and educators, an innovative educational program was established, which became a laboratory and demonstration school.

Two especially interesting innovations were made. First, a communication feature of the children’s home culture was incorporated into reading lessons. That is, discussion of stories was carried out through co-narration, or the joint narration of a story by two people. Co-narration, or “talk story,” the researchers had
found, was a feature of the native Hawaiian storytelling tradition to which the children were accustomed. In their home culture, co-narration of a story not only conveyed information, but it also served to reaffirm the relationship between the co-narrators. With this familiar communication style incorporated into reading lessons, children were more inclined to participate in lessons. In time, reading achievement scores increased and remained at national-norm levels for over a decade (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 116).

The second KEEP innovation over the decades has been the implementation of a teaching model based on the Vygotskian notion of assisted performance in the child's zone of proximal development. The teaching model emphasizes the teacher's ability to respond to the child's developmental level and to stretch the child's performance accordingly through modeling, feeding back, instructing, questioning, and other processes (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The teacher thereby “scaffolds” the child's development to the next level.

To illustrate the complex nature of scaffolding, as carried out in a KEEP kindergarten, Tharp and Gallimore (1988, pp. 138–146) provide a detailed description of an activity in which the teacher leads a group of six children in making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The experience later serves as the basis of a dictated story, or in this case a dictated recipe, using the traditional language experience approach (Allen, 1976; Stauffer, 1970). The “instructional conversation” between the teacher and children during the sandwich-making creates natural opportunities for the teacher to model, question, and instruct, thereby scaffolding children's linguistic and cognitive performance.

Gathering the children at a small table, the teacher begins with an improvised chant about making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Placing the peanut butter and jelly jars on the table with a loaf of sliced bread, she introduces the activity with a statement and a question (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988):

**TEACHER:** We're gonna make our peanut butter sandwich. What is the first thing I'm going to need? [Produces a jar of peanut butter, a jar of jelly, and a loaf of sliced bread in a bag.]

**J:** Get the bread!

[Child points to bread; reaches across the table and pats the bag of bread.]

**TEACHER:** I need to get a piece of bread. What am I going to do with it? [Reaches into the bag and retrieves a slice. J. nods approval.]

**J:** Put this first . . . and put this second. [Touches peanut butter jar; touches jelly jar.]

**TEACHER:** Put it . . . [Hesitates]

**J:** Oh, no. Put this first . . . and this second. [Touched jelly jar; touches peanut butter jar.]

**R:** Get the knife first, no get the knife in and spread it.

**JK:** Put the jelly on the sandwich, then that on the sandwich. [Points to peanut butter.]

**TEACHER:** I put the jelly on top of the sandwich? [Places jelly jar on top of sandwich.]

**CHILDREN:** (chorus) No! No! No! [Two stand up; another points; they laugh and smile with surprise and amusement.]

**R:** You open it. [Takes jelly jar from teacher and removes lid.]
Then you put it in.

TEACHER: Oh I need to twist the lid off the jar?

CHILDREN: Yes, yes and then you make like that.

R: First you have to do peanut butter . . .

J: No. That!

[ Gestures toward jelly, disagreeing about which ingredient is applied first. ]

R: [ Shakes head in disagreement. ]

TEACHER: I have to spread the peanut butter first? Are you sure?

R: Yeah, cause I tried it, that’s [ the truth ] everybody’s [ looking at it ].

TEACHER: How do I spread it? Do I take my finger, stick it in, and rub it all over the bread?

J: No this! You stick that in . . .

[ Picks up knife; makes spreading motion with knife over bread. ]

At this point, the children get the idea that they are going to have to tell their teacher methodically, sequentially, and step-by-step exactly how to make this sandwich. The instructional conversation continues, with questioning, modeling, and feedback from the teacher. By requiring the children to organize the procedure logically and to provide explicit directions through language, not gesture, she is inviting them to perform in their zone of proximal development both cognitively and linguistically. Making language clear enough to stand on its own without gestures or reference to objects in the environment is a cognitive-academic skill required for school literacy. In fact, in the next phase of this activity children will produce a written recipe by dictating the procedure to the teacher. This language experience activity guided children’s thinking and language toward forms acceptable for schoolwork and academic literacy, an important transition for all students, and especially for those whose ways of using language differ from those of the school (Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1979).

**Scaffolds for First and Second Language**

**Reading and Writing**

Building upon scaffolding research, we have applied the metaphor to reading and writing, creating what we call literacy scaffolds (Boyle & Peregoy, 1990; Peregoy & Boyle, 1990b). Literacy scaffolds are reading and writing activities that provide built-in teacher or peer assistance, permitting students to participate fully at a level that would not be possible without the assistance. In other words, literacy scaffolds make it possible for students to work in their zones of proximal development in reading and writing, thereby challenging them to reach their next level in literacy development. Criteria defining literacy scaffolds are as follows:

1. Literacy scaffolds are applied to reading and writing activities aimed at functional, meaningful communication found in whole texts, such as stories, poems, reports, or recipes.

2. Literacy scaffolds make use of language and discourse patterns that repeat themselves and are, therefore, predictable.

3. Literacy scaffolds provide a model, offered by the teacher or by peers, for comprehending and producing particular written language patterns.

4. Literacy scaffolds support students in comprehending and producing written language at a level slightly beyond their competence in the absence of the scaffold.

5. Literacy scaffolds are temporary and may be dispensed with when the student is ready to work without them.

Perhaps the clearest example of a literacy scaffold is the interactive dialogue journal, in which student and teacher carry on a written conversation. Dialogue journals have proven useful for English language learners of all ages, from kindergartners to adults (Kreeft, 1984; Peregoy & Boyle, 1990a). Typically, the student makes a written entry in his or her journal, perhaps accompanied by an illustration, and the teacher then responds in writing with a comment or question that furthers the conversation. The dialogue journal thus duplicates, in written form, the scaffolding opportunities we saw earlier in the informal instructional conversations between adults and young children at home and at school. In their responses, teachers may model written language patterns by incorporating and expanding upon the students’ entry, just as adults sometimes do in conversations with young children. Thus, the dialogue journal affords the teacher regular opportunities for scaffolding through questioning, modeling, and feedback. However, the scaffolding is always embedded in the natural flow of the written conversation between the student and teacher, with the focus on the personal interchange between them. Other examples of literacy scaffolds are described in
the subsequent chapters, including shared reading, patterned writing, mapping, directed reading-thinking activity, and readers theater.

In summary, scaffolding helps students perform at a level somewhat beyond their unassisted capability. As teachers, we are constantly aiming to help students reach their next developmental level in all areas of learning and development. Few classroom teachers have the luxury of a research team to inform them of the nuances of their students’ home cultures. However, classroom teachers have something that research teams generally do not have—the benefit of a deep, ongoing reciprocal relationship with students over time. Through the special teacher-child relationship and through thoughtful and sensitive trial and error, you will be in a position to judge which scaffolding routines work with your students and which do not. In fact, as you systematically observe your students, as you reflect on what you know about their families, and as you interpret their responses to you and your teaching, you will be expanding your role from teacher to teacher-researcher. Another area that requires research skills is assessment of student learning, a topic we turn to next.

Assessment of English Learners

Assessing students has always been a challenge no matter who your students are. Today’s emphasis on standards-based instruction and accountability has increased dramatically the time, effort, and dollars devoted to assessment. In this section we discuss assessment as used for the purposes of: (1) English learner identification and program placement, (2) program evaluation, and (3) documentation of student progress. First, we provide background on basic concepts that underly current assessment procedures, both formal and informal, including discussion of standardized tests and performance-based assessment. We end the chapter with principles for classroom-based assessments. Specific assessment procedures are integrated into all subsequent chapters for oral language, vocabulary, early literacy, reading, writing, and content area literacy.

English Learner Assessment: Definition and Purposes

When we talk about assessment, we are referring to systematic procedures used to gather, analyze, and interpret information on student learning, achievement, or development. Assessment data deliver information, which may be stated, for example, in terms of a percentile, a raw score, or a verbal description. Careful evaluation of assessment data provides the basis for appropriate programmatic and instructional decisions. As teachers of English learners, we are primarily interested in assessing subject matter learning and English oral language, reading, and writing development. Bilingual teachers must also assess primary language and literacy development. Assessment serves three important purposes:

- Identification and program placement of students in need of special language support services
- Program evaluation for reporting to local, state, and federal education agencies
• Documentation of student learning and progress to
  a. inform instructional decisions
  b. communicate progress to parents

Student placement and program evaluation are generally initiated at the district level, whereas documentation of student learning and progress are the teacher’s responsibility. Assessment procedures will depend on the purpose, as we shall discuss.

**Basic Concepts and Terms Used in Assessment**

Whenever we assess students, we have to observe their performance on a particular task in order to infer or estimate their knowledge, skill, or competence in that area. Assessment data may come from a variety of sources, including formal and informal measures. **Formal assessment** measures include standardized tests, such as group-administered standardized achievement tests in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Formal measures also include individually administered tests, such as those used to identify special learning needs. **Informal assessment** measures include such items as teacher-made tests, miscue analysis of oral reading, checklists, anecdotal observations, and student work samples. As a teacher of English learners, you will probably use all of these at different times with each of your students.

**Formal assessment** measures are designed according to rigorous testing theory and principles, including field testing to establish **validity** and **reliability**. A test is considered to have **content validity** if its items closely reflect the knowledge or skill it purports to measure. Suppose, for example, that you want to measure the essay-writing ability of all sophomore students. A test that collects an essay sample will be more valid than one that simply consists of multiple-choice items on punctuation, because the essay sample more closely reflects the skill being evaluated. A test is **reliable** if it yields similar results when retaken, usually with the use of two equivalent forms to lessen the possibility of a learning effect between testing and retesting.

Formal and informal assessment measures have different purposes, strengths, and limitations. In general, formal measures are designed to compare individuals or groups with a previously established **norm** or **criterion**. For **norm-referenced tests**, the test publisher determines the norm, that is, the average or mean score achieved by a large group of students broadly representative of those for whom the test is intended. A problem with norm-referenced tests stems from the fact that the norming population usually consists primarily of fluent English speakers, making comparisons with English language learners at best difficult to interpret, if not unfair and misleading. To interpret your English learner’s performance on such a test, you need to bear in mind that you are comparing him or her with a primarily English proficient group. **Criterion-referenced tests** set up cut-off scores to determine the competence level achieved. If you have taken the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST), you have taken a criterion-referenced test for which the cut-off score is meant to indicate the basic level of skill in reading, writing, and mathematics needed to be a teacher. Standards-based assessments are criterion-referenced in that they establish a specific level of performance for determining whether a student has
met the standard. When evaluating English learner performance on such tests, you have to consider whether the criterion is reasonable for your students.

In contrast to formal measures, informal measures compare individuals with themselves and with small groups, such as other students in your class. Informal measures are generally based on student work samples and student interactions during naturally occurring classroom situations, that is, direct measures of student ability. Formal measures are relatively easy for the teacher to administer and score but tend to be anxiety-producing for many students. On the other hand, informal measures are not as anxiety-producing for students, given that data are usually drawn from student performance during day-to-day classroom activities. However, considerable thought must go into collecting, organizing, and storing the information. In addition, analyzing the collection of student products requires time, effort, and thought from both the teacher and the student.

Efforts have been made to combine some of the best features of both formal and informal assessment in what is called performance assessment (cf. Fradd & McGee, 1994). The inclusion of performance indicators or benchmarks in curriculum standards illustrates the impact of this development. Performance assessment involves the direct observation and measurement of the desired behavior. For example, if problem solving using graphing is a curriculum goal, then assessment will consist of observing and evaluating students in the process of problem solving using graphs. Similarly, if the curriculum goal is for students to know how to write an autobiographical narrative, then assessment will elicit an autobiographical narrative to be evaluated. In this regard, performance assessment incorporates an element of informal assessment, that is, direct measure of the desired behavior. When performance assessment is used to compare student performance in different districts in a state, as with writing assessment, it incorporates an element of formal assessment, that is, cross-group comparison. In other words, data are collected in a systematic, standardized fashion so that valid group performance comparisons may be made. Assessment experts continue to struggle to find ways to meet the varying assessment demands for program evaluation and classroom use. This brief discussion has provided an overview of basic issues. Let us now consider how English learners are assessed, formally and informally, for the three purposes: student identification and program placement, program evaluation, and documentation of student learning and progress.

**Identification and Placement of Students Needing Language Education Support Services**

English learners are entitled by law to educational assistance that provides access to the core curriculum and English language development. The first order of business, therefore, is to identify students who need the support of a bilingual, ELD, or other language education support program. An established procedure for such identification involves two steps. First, a home language survey is sent to parents to find out whether a language other than English is spoken in the home. School districts usually have these surveys available in the various home languages of students in their communities. At times, a follow-up phone call may be necessary from an interpreter. If a language other than English is used in the home, the student must be tested for English language proficiency. Commercial, standardized English language proficiency tests are available for this purpose, with subtests for
oral language, reading, and writing. Examples include the Language Assessment Scales published by CTB-McGraw Hill and the IDEA Language Proficiency Tests (IPT) published by Ballard and Tighe. For general information about language proficiency tests, you may visit the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition website (AskNCELA, at http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/) or type in the test names as key words in an Internet search.

In the last decade or so, states have begun to develop their own language proficiency tests. For example, the WIDA Consortium has developed the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) now used in 15 states to determine initial program placement. WIDA has also developed a test to measure annual gains in English language proficiency, ACCESS for ELLS®. For more information on the WIDA Consortium standards and assessments, visit www.wida.us. California uses its own California English Language Development Test (CELDT) for both program placement and for measuring annual progress in English language proficiency. If you are interested in the CELDT, we recommend the CELDT Communications Assistance Packet for Districts/Schools (California State Department of Education, 2003) available on the Internet.

Tests vary considerably in the kind of language elicited and in the methods used to analyze them. However, for a full picture of English language proficiency, and to meet current federal requirements, tests must address listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Oral language samples may be elicited by asking questions or by asking the student to tell a story about a picture or sequence of pictures. Reading tests usually include passages with multiple-choice comprehension questions to answer, whereas writing tests often elicit a writing sample for analysis. Scoring and analysis are usually conducted by the school district or by the test publisher. Test results are finally interpreted to yield a level of second language proficiency. For example, the WIDA framework identifies five language proficiency levels each, for listening, speaking, reading, and writing; the CELDT discriminates five levels as well. Regardless of the number of language proficiency levels, three categories emerge as important for program placement (1) non-English proficient (NEP), (2) limited English proficient (LEP), and (3) fully English proficient (FEP). School districts must provide support services for NEP and LEP students, with redesignation to FEP as the overall goal.

Limitations of Standardized Language Proficiency Tests

Standardized language proficiency tests have certain limitations that can lead to inappropriate program placement. For example, the fact that a student’s score is based on a single performance sample elicited out of the context of routine classroom activity may lead to inaccurate appraisal of language proficiency. In addition, test performance is easily affected by nonlinguistic variables, such as lack of familiarity with the testing procedure, disinterest, and fatigue. Furthermore, to the extent that a student feels the pressure of a testing situation, performance may be affected by anxiety. Finally, different standardized language proficiency tests sometimes yield different levels for the same student. Use of a single test within a given state is helpful in this regard, but the problem persists if students move from one state to another. Because of these limitations, it is important for you to be aware of the possibility that a student has been inappropriately placed in your
classroom based on language proficiency test performance. If you suspect a student has been misassigned to your classroom based on English language proficiency, you should check with your principal concerning procedures for retesting and reconsideration of the placement. Your judgment is extremely important and likely to be more accurate than the student’s test performance.

**Redesignation to FEP**

Just as English learners have a legal right to alternative language support programs, they also have a legal right to exit these programs once they have gained sufficient English proficiency to succeed in the general education program. Redesignation to FEP is thus a critical matter requiring careful assessment of a student’s ability to succeed educationally without special language support (Linguanti, 2001). Such assessment must be multidimensional, that is, based on multiple measures, including formal and informal measures of oral and written English, achievement test scores, and perhaps measures of academic performance in the primary language. In addition, it is important to include the judgment of teachers, parents, and any other resource personnel who have worked with the student.

**Program Evaluation**

School districts must comply with federal and state assessment requirements, which usually include annual standardized achievement testing in reading, language arts, and mathematics. Sensitive and thoughtful teachers have seriously questioned the validity of standardized tests for English learners, and rightfully so. Students must be able to read English if a test written in English is to measure performance accurately. Beginning and intermediate English learners are at a distinct disadvantage in this regard by virtue of English language proficiency alone. Another disadvantage stems from the timed format of standardized testing. Research shows that reading in a second language is slower than native-language reading, even at advanced stages of second language development (Fitzgerald, 1995). Thus second language test takers may score low, not because of a lack of knowledge, but because of the need for more time to finish the test. A final difficulty with standardized achievement tests is interpreting individual English learner performance. For English learners, the test publisher’s norms are not appropriate unless the test was normed on English learners, which is seldom if ever the case. Furthermore, large-scale standardized achievement tests are technically not designed to reflect any individual’s performance accurately, only group performance. Yet individual scores are reported to teachers and parents and are sometimes used to make decisions about a student’s instructional program. In recognition of these problems, some school districts are limiting or modifying the use of standardized testing with English learners. At the least, it is important to consider a student’s English language proficiency when interpreting his or her score.

As a teacher of English learners, you need to be informed about language proficiency and standardized testing instruments and procedures used in your district. In addition, you need to understand the strengths and limitations of these tests. Moreover, it is important that you know how to interpret and
evaluate test results so that you can explain them to parents and consider them in your instructional planning. However, your greatest assessment responsibility will be the documentation of each student’s learning and progress to make future instructional decisions and to communicate student performance and progress to parents.

**Classroom-Based Assessment of Student Learning and Progress**

Classroom-based assessment requires a systematic approach to inform instruction and document student learning. Previously we pointed out how effective teachers make a point of assessing students prior to instruction on a particular topic, skill, or procedure so as to modify or fine-tune their lesson planning to meet the needs of each individual. This type of assessment may include a short question-answer session, brainstorming as part of a K-W-L activity, or an anticipation guide. Another important source of information is student performance on previous assessments related to the current topic, skill, or procedure. Last but not least, you should also consider your own personal knowledge of each student’s special interests, talents, and aspirations as you get ready to teach something new.

As you strive to obtain a clear picture of your students’ progress on curriculum standards, keep your eyes open to allow for students to display breadth and depth of learning beyond the stated performance expectations. Your students might surprise you with what they are able to do during classroom projects and group work when these are relevant and important to their lives and interests. To catch your students at their best, you need to become a careful observer and data collector. The following principles, based on Ruddell and Ruddell (1995), provide guidelines for your classroom-based assessment, often referred to as **authentic assessment**:

1. Assessment should be based on observations of students as they engage in authentic learning tasks.
2. Assessment should be tied directly to your curriculum standards, instructional goals and teaching.
3. Assessment should be continuous, based on observations over a substantial period of time.
4. Assessment should take into consideration the diversity of students’ cultural, linguistic, and special needs.
5. Assessment should be collaborative, providing opportunities for students to evaluate their own work.
6. Assessment should be multidimensional, that is, based on a variety of observations, in a variety of situations, using a variety of instruments.
7. Assessment should be based on current research and theory concerning language, literacy, and knowledge construction.

**Keeping Cultural Considerations in Mind.** We have already mentioned that a student’s English language proficiency can affect test performance if the test is in English. Similarly, a student’s cultural and experiential background
might also interact with your assessment procedures to cloud or clarify the results. Because schooling practices tend to conform more or less to middle-class European American experiences and values, students from other cultural backgrounds may be misassessed by virtue of cultural and other experiential differences. For example, middle-class European American students are often accustomed to telling about events as a routine activity at home. You have probably heard someone say to a child, “Tell Aunt Rosie about your trip to the zoo,” or “Tell me what you did at school today.” In this way, adults prompt what researchers call event casts (Heath, 1983; Schieffelin & Eisenberg, 1984). Narratives of this type are thus familiar discourse routines for many children. However, in some cultures event casts are seldom, if ever, asked of children. Children with event cast experience may be more able to participate when similarly prompted at school, as might occur in retelling an experience orally or in writing, or in retelling a story as part of a reading comprehension assessment. This is but one example of the subtle ways in which students’ prior cultural experiences may prepare them differently for school tasks.

There are many ways in which cultural differences might affect student performance in your class, as discussed in Chapter 1. As the teacher, you can optimize your students’ chances for success by offering a variety of formats in which to display knowledge, including individual, small-group, and whole-class instructional formats. In addition, you will want to provide students a variety of opportunities to display knowledge through their modalities of strength: for example, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, oral, written, or pictorial. Finally, it is important to offer private knowledge display opportunities, such as journal entries or individual conferencing, given that some students may be uncomfortable with public knowledge displays. As we mentioned previously when discussing scaffolding, you will not always know which of your classroom routines are best suited to the cultural and personal experiences of each student. However, by providing a variety of routines, by observing how individual students respond, and by modifying your procedures accordingly, you become a culturally responsive teacher, increasing student comfort and success in your classroom. In so doing, you become a better evaluator of student learning as well.

**Planning Systematic, Classroom-based Assessment.** Most of your classroom-based assessment will make use of informal assessment methods. These methods include direct observation, teacher–student conferences, student journals or learning logs, writing samples, running records of oral reading, and teacher-made tests. To be systematic, it is important that you decide which of these methods you will use and when. In addition, you will need to decide how to record, interpret, and store the assessment results for each student.

One way to compile assessment results is the **portfolio.** A portfolio is a folder that contains a variety of samples of student work related to a particular curriculum area. Students and teachers together decide which pieces of work to include in the portfolio, to display the student’s best work. In writing, for example, students may keep a **working folder** of drafts and rewrites. Periodically, perhaps every four to six weeks, they select their best piece or pieces from their working folder to be placed in the portfolio. By the end of the semester, students have a set of writing samples that will show their progress over time. If students
include all drafts for one of their portfolio entries, a picture of the work involved in arriving at publication is illustrated. Other items that may be included in a portfolio include interest inventories, lists of topics written or read about, running records of oral reading, unit tests, titles of books read, and any other classroom-based measurements that you believe will provide a rich and representative picture of your students’ academic performance. Be sure to involve your students, not only in choosing items for inclusion in the portfolio, but also in devising ways to organize the contents that will make them easy for parents and others to read. For example, you may wish to include a table of contents and tabs to separate categories.

We have discussed many ways you can assess student learning. As you do so, you may also want to find ways to assess your own teaching. One useful resource is the *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol* or the SIOP model (Echevarria, et al., 2008), a 30-item list of observable teacher behaviors that comprise effective planning, delivery, and assessment of sheltered instruction or SDAIE. The protocol includes a 0- to 4-point rubric to mark each item, covering a range from highly evident to not evident. Figure 3.11 outlines components of SIOP content with corresponding examples. Over the last decade, the SIOP model has been carefully researched and refined. Large-scale evaluation studies have shown it to be a valid and reliable way to assess effective implementation of sheltered instruction. It can be used informally for self and peer evaluation or more formally as part of program evaluation.

In summary, English learner assessment is vitally important for student placement, program evaluation, and documentation of student learning and progress. In Chapter 11, we provide indepth discussion of individual literacy assessment. In addition, details on portfolios and other classroom-based assessments are provided in subsequent chapters as we discuss oral language, early literacy, writing, reading and literature, and content instruction. As always, it is important to consider the effects of English language proficiency and cultural differences in assessing English learners and interpreting their performance in classroom activities.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>EXAMPLE FEATURES</th>
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<td>Building Background</td>
<td>Explicit links to prior experience and past learning; Instruction on key vocabulary</td>
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<td>Comprehensible Input</td>
<td>Speech modified to learner needs; Clear explanation of tasks; Variety of cues to support meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Scaffolding; Variety of question types with sufficient wait time; Grouping; Social interaction opportunities; Clarify concepts in L1</td>
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<td>Practice Application</td>
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<td>Lesson Delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of concepts and vocabulary; Feedback; Ongoing assessment of comprehension and learning</td>
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Summary

In this chapter, we have described and illustrated three interrelated instructional approaches: sheltered instruction, SDAIE; collaborative group work; and theme studies. We provided a detailed checklist of sheltering, or SDAIE, strategies and discussed how collaborative group work provides rich language and content learning opportunities as students discuss, debate, review, and otherwise negotiate meaning in their groups. Finally, we showed how thematic instruction gradually builds learners’ background knowledge each day, providing children with maximum opportunities for becoming proficient communicators, readers, writers, and learners in their non-native language. We also discussed the concept of scaffolding as an important metaphor to help us identify teaching strategies that promote language and literacy development. Finally, we discussed important issues in English learner assessment. The following chapters build on this instructional framework and provide over one hundred specific strategies for language, literacy, and content learning.

Suggestions for Further Reading


This edited text, in its third edition, is thoroughly comprehensive, with sections on teaching methodology, language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), integrated approaches, “focus on the learner,” and skills for teachers. We’ve relied on this excellent text for many years, and this edition adds nine new articles. Every teacher should have this one.


This highly readable volume addresses literacy, pedagogy, assessment, and technology for promoting achievement and empowering minority and low-income students. Taking a critical approach, the authors analyze education policy and its impact on students and offer various specific program efforts to promote access and use of technology and promote student engagement in literacy, social studies, and mathematics.


This book presents a systematic, research-based checklist for observing and evaluating how well sheltered instruction is implemented in any given lesson. The book provides theoretical background and classroom examples to help readers understand sheltered instruction and the model for evaluating its implementation. The complete observation protocol and an abbreviated version are provided in the appendix. The book also comes with a CD-ROM. Every teacher should have this book.


Don’t let the date of this excellent article on thematic units deter you. The author describes in some detail how she set up a thematic unit and its effect on her English learners. The results of using a thematic unit were that her students both improved their language abilities in addition to gaining knowledge in all areas of the school curriculum.


This practical book contains fifty strategies you can integrate into your classroom. At the beginning of the text each strategy is categorized according to its function: supports comprehensible input, encour-
activities verbal interaction, supports contextualizing language, reduces anxiety, encourages active involvement, and provides assessment information.


This volume offers a comprehensive, highly readable, hands-on guide to assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students. Step-by-step procedures and guidelines and a number of reproducible checklists and worksheets for immediate use by teachers and other educational personnel are offered. Topics include a detailed description of linguistically diverse populations in the United States, legal and ethical requirements in assessing diverse students, types of educational programs serving them, guidelines for using interpreters, cultural issues in assessment, language proficiency assessment in English and the native language, and guidelines for cognitive and academic assessment of diverse students. Highly recommended reading.


This textbook introduces a variety of approaches and classroom strategies for teaching English as a second language to students of any age. Examples of classrooms in different types of programs are provided.


This valuable resource provides English language proficiency standards with sample performance indicators for social and instructional language and for academic language use in language arts, social studies, science, and math.


If you have read about critical pedagogy but wondered how to turn its theoretical ideals into day-by-day practice in your classroom, this book is for you. Joan Wink invites us on a lively and engaging journey as she defines critical pedagogy succinctly and clearly, explains its origins, and then offers numerous examples of how theory can come alive through such classroom activities as problem posing, dialogue journals, and a useful problem-solving activity she calls “the mess.” Finally, she wraps up with a discussion of why such pedagogy matters in the twenty-first century. This is a book that speaks to the heart and the mind with a vision for a better future for all.

### Activities

1. Reread the vignette on *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Using the information in this chapter, discuss all of the things Roberto did to help his young, beginning English learners comprehend the story and write their own book. Do you find any strategies that have not been discussed in this chapter? Can you think of some strategies that Roberto should have used but didn’t? How would you improve the lesson?

2. With a partner discuss the following ways of learning and rank each one from most to least helpful: learning from direct experience (including movies, pictures, and simulation games), learning from writing, learning from reading, learning in a large class lecture (in which there is little opportunity for questions and interaction), and learning in a small collaborative group (in which students can share their knowledge and help one another define terms). After you’ve ranked yours, share with your partner and discuss how each approach might be better depending on the situation. See how others in your class ranked the activities.

3. Think back to a memorable learning experience you had in elementary school. Jot down the experience as you remember it, making note of what you were learning about and what you were doing in the process of learning. Now
CHAPTER 3 • Classroom Practices for English Learner Instruction

analyze the lesson to see how many, if any, sheltering techniques were used. Were any techniques used that we now define as sheltering techniques? If sheltering techniques were not used, to what do you attribute the strength of your memory? What made the situation memorable to you? What implications can you draw for your own teaching?

4. Take a lesson plan from a published source or one you have written yourself. Critically review the plan to analyze its comprehensibility for English learners. What modifications or additions could you make to ensure comprehension and participation by English learners? Is the lesson thematically oriented? Does the lesson involve collaborative group work? Does the lesson shelter information for students in a variety of ways? How would you change the lesson based on the information you now have concerning some of the ways teachers provide instruction of English learners?

5. Try a theme study with a small group of children. Begin by brainstorming the question, “What are some things we would like to know more about?” Next, as a group, choose one topic to focus on. Write the topic on a piece of butcher paper and create two columns for listing “what we know” and “what we want to know.” With the children, decide which question to investigate and how. With student input, create a list of books, people, and places to obtain the needed information. Students may choose to work alone or in pairs to present the final product of their learning to the rest of the group. When finished, make a new butcher paper list of “what we know now” and “new questions we have now.” Discuss the pros and cons of working with children within a theme study.

Video Homework Exercise

Teaching to Diverse Learning Styles

In the video we learn about strategies teachers may use to address the varied learning strengths and needs among students in their class, such as scaffolding; opportunities for social interaction; and offering a variety of ways to comprehend ideas and demonstrate learning through varied modalities (e.g., kinesthetic, auditory, visual). We then see a reading lesson which illustrates these strategies. Working with the whole group, the teacher reads a flip book about the character’s feelings when preparing to make a speech to the class. During the reading, the teacher asks one student, Amber, to role play the character’s actions and feelings. After reading, the teacher asks students to use Amber’s actions and their personal experience to describe how the character felt.

Go to MyEducationLab, select the topic “Differentiating Instruction,” and watch the video entitled “Teaching to Diverse Learning Styles.”

1. Compare the strategies suggested in the video with the components of effective English learner instruction depicted in Chapter 3, Figure 3.3. Why is “teaching to diverse learning styles” an essential aspect of English learner instruction?

2. Looking closely at the flip book lesson, what does the teacher do that would be especially effective with English language learners? What additional modifications would be needed to accommodate students who are beginners in English language acquisition?

3. Consider Amber’s performance as she role-plays the story while the teacher reads. What language skills does Amber need to role play successfully? How easy or difficult would the task be for a beginning English language learner? Why?