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Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does - And Does Not - Say

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Teaching English Learners the SIOP Way

By Susan Hanson and Canisius Filibert

Teaching English learners (ELs) is not an easy task for regular classroom teachers who have not received training in how to instruct ELs. In fact, teaching ELs has become such a highly specialized field, there are professionals who devote their whole careers to researching and perfecting strategies for EL instruction. In addition, ELs also face a formidable task when they attend mainstream classrooms where English is the medium of instruction. Although there are programs that assist these students, it is



they leave feeling confused and discouraged. What is needed to bridge this gap between teachers and ELs is a framework that fully supports content instruction, while utilizing proven methods of language teaching that incorporate reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Such a framework exists in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. Years of research have proven that students in classrooms implementing the SIOP model understand what is being taught and have experienced success in learning grade-level content while developing their ability in English language skills.

Sheltered Instruction (SI) is not a newly developed instructional technique. In fact, SI has been around for more than 20 years, but never had the research background to support claims of reliability and validity. It was not until 1993 that the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), which was a national research center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's (U.S. ED's) Office of Educational Research and Improvement (since replaced by the Institute of Education Sciences [IES]), conducted a 7-year research project to study the impact of SI on ELs. As a result of this study, the SIOP model was developed. The model was initially designed as a research observation instrument called a protocol, created by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short in 2000, to determine if teachers were including effective sheltered instruction in their lessons. Sheltered instruction means that the students receive help in developing academic English while they are learning grade-level content material. Students are provided extra support by including instructional techniques that make learning com-

prehensible to students.

Although the model began as an observational tool called the SIOP, through the work of Echevarria, Vogt, and Short collaborating with middle school teachers, it evolved into a framework that includes eight major components and 30 features that guide lesson plan development and instructional delivery. The eight components are:

- Preparation.
- Building background.
- Comprehensible input.
- Strategies.
- Interaction.
- Practice and application.
- Lesson delivery.
- Review and assessment.

Let us take a closer look at each component and its implications for teaching.

1. **Preparation:** Teachers state the content objectives that are taken from the state or national standards. They plan meaningful activities to meet the objectives. In addition, they select language objectives for each lesson that are drawn from language arts standards or ESL standards. The selected standards for the content and language arts are posted so both the students and teachers are clear on the focus of the lesson with the ultimate goal of the students mastering the content while growing in academic English.
2. **Building Background:** Teachers connect the students' background and past experiences with the new learning. They help students comprehend by teaching the vocabulary that is key to understanding of the material. They explicitly teach the content vocabulary in areas such as ecosystems, coastal nations, and exploitation. In addition,

not enough to simply pull ELs out of classes for English as a second language (ESL) instruction for an hour out of the whole school day. Regular classroom teachers need to be able to teach content effectively, while at the same time supporting full language development of ELs. In some classrooms, ELs comprehend fully what is being taught, while in other classes

Photo by Susan Hanson

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Photo by Susan Hanson

tion, emphasis is placed on teaching the students the academic vocabulary that is so essential to understanding the content. Examples of academic vocabulary include such words and phrases as “calculate,” “predict,” “in comparison,” and “as a result.” According to Saville-Troike, “Vocabulary development is critical for English learners because we know that there is a strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge in English and academic achievement” (as quoted in Echevarria, Vogt, and Short’s 2004 book *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* [2nd Ed.], p. 49). Through the SIOP model, teachers utilize techniques to provide active involvement, personalize word learning, immerse students in words, and provide repeated exposure to words in more than one context. As a result of the in-depth teaching of the vocabulary, the students are better able to comprehend the content and further the development of their academic English.

3. **Comprehensible Input:** Teachers make lessons comprehensible by using vocabulary that the students understand, stating directions orally and in writing, and demonstrating what the students are expected to do. In addition, the students are given guided practice and are involved in a variety of techniques that provide hands-on practice. The students are provided with support such as prediction guides, visual aides, and other supplemental materials. The information is shared at an appropriate pace and enunciated clearly. According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (p. 78), “Effective sheltered teachers provide explanations of academic tasks in ways that make clear what students are expected to accomplish and that promote student success.”
4. **Strategies:** Teachers use explicit instructional strategies, such as questioning techniques, to support higher-level thinking that involves predicting, summarizing, problem solving, organizing, evaluating, and self-monitoring. The instructional strategies also involve the students in scaffolding
5. **Interaction:** The teacher provides the students with continual opportunities to interact with peers through flexible grouping. Sometimes the students are in small groups, triads, or pairs where every student has an opportunity to speak and work on projects together. Through the various group activities, students are encouraged to interact with each other and have time for extended academic conversations with their peers. Teacher talk is reduced and the students are encouraged to talk more with such questions as, *Tell me more about that,* or *Can you tell us why you think that?* Students are given adequate wait time so they can communicate their answers.
6. **Practice and Application:** This component of the SIOP model reinforces the importance of using hands-on material and manipulatives. Teachers plan small-group activities involving hands-on experiences that provide students with relevant information about the

techniques that provide the right amount of support and help move the students to the next level. The students are given the time to practice the strategies with support from their peers and the teacher, as well as opportunities to implement the strategies independently. An example of a strategy encouraged in the SIOP model is the use of graphic organizers to assist students with visually organizing their learning. According to Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (who cite Fisher, Frey, & Williams, 2002; Pressley, 2000; Shearer, Ruddell, & Vogt; and Slater & Horstman, 2002), “There is considerable evidence that teaching students a variety of self-regulating strategies improves student learning and reading.”

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content and an opportunity to practice what they are learning. Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (p. 118) state that, “Manipulating learning materials is important for ELs because it helps them connect abstract concepts with concrete experiences.” The students are provided opportunities to discuss and apply what they are learning through integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. By integrating all of the language arts areas, the ELs grow in their English language ability as well as learn the content.

7. **Lesson Delivery:** The teacher focuses on the content and language objectives of the lesson and involves the students actively in meeting the objectives. Lessons are delivered at the appropriate pace so that the students can learn the material and not be bored. Students are engaged in the lesson 90% to 100% of the time through well-planned lessons that are understandable to the students, create opportunities for students to talk about the concepts, and include hands-on activities that reinforce each lesson.
8. **Review/Assessment:** The teachers provide the appropriate feedback so that the students can continue to grow, review the key concepts to ensure long-lasting learning, and provide assessment to track student progress. The teachers are involved in the “Effective Teaching Cycle for ELs,” which includes the following steps: teach a lesson, assess, review key concepts and vocabulary, make adjustments to improve student comprehension, and reteach as needed. This process is a cycle that is recursive in that each of the steps can be repeated as needed.

Each of the above components are woven into an SIOP lesson that may span approximately 1 to 3 days, depending on the lesson design (see

the lesson plan accompanying this article for an explanation of an SIOP lesson with the integration of the eight components).

According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, in 1997–1998: Researchers compared English language learning students in classes whose teachers had been trained in implementing the SIOP to a high degree to a control group (taught by teachers not trained in the SIOP Model) using a prompt that required narrative writing. They scored the prompt using the writing rubric of the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) Test. The English learners in classes whose teachers had been trained in implementing the SIOP to a high degree demonstrated significantly higher writing scores than the control group. (p. 217)

In addition, in 1998–1999, during a writing assessment requiring expository writing, “the English learners in classes whose teachers had been trained in implementing the SIOP to a high degree demonstrated significantly higher writing scores than the control group and made greater gains from the pre-test to the post-test” (Echevarria, Vogt, Short, p. 217).

The SIOP model includes an observation tool called a protocol, which is used to measure the implementation of the eight SIOP components. Each component has three or more features that outline what must be included in an effective lesson. The observer assigns anywhere from 0 to 4 points, with a 0 meaning the feature was not implemented and 4 meaning the feature was fully implemented.

The protocol allows for rating the SIOP lesson, as well as space for writing comments that will help with the instruction of ELs. The protocol can be used by administrators to provide teachers with feedback; college profes-

sors can use it to coach preservice teachers; teachers can use it to self-evaluate after reviewing a videotape of their lesson, or they can use it as a lesson plan checklist; and it can be used to determine fidelity of implementation of the model. Findings by Guarino, Echevarria, Short, Schick, Forbes, and Rueda indicate that the SIOP is a highly reliable and valid measure of sheltered instruction (as cited in Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005).

If teachers want their students, including the ELs, to grow in their academic content knowledge and English ability and leave the classroom feeling successful and excited about what they are learning, the SIOP model is a framework to consider implementing. For more information regarding implementation of SIOP, see the resources listed in the sidebar.

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Resources

English-Language Development Standards for California Public Schools Kindergarten through Grade Twelve
www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/documents/eldgrd.pdf

Overview of English Language Development (ELD) Standards
www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fd/documents/englangdevstnd.pdf

SIOP Institute
www.siopinstitute.net
The SIOP books can be ordered from this website. In addition, you can download lesson plans at this website.



SIOP Lesson Plan Outline with Guidelines

STANDARDS: *Select standards from your standards and benchmarks document.*

THEME: Think of the broad understanding that the lesson includes, such as cooperation, courage, environment, justice, perseverance, or diversity.

LESSON TOPIC: What is the lesson about? For example, protecting coral reefs.

CONTENT OBJECTIVES: What will the students know and be able to do as a result of this lesson? For example, Students will:

- *Understand the fragility of coral reefs.*
- *Form an opinion as to how to protect the reefs.*

LANGUAGE OBJECTIVES: How will listening, speaking, reading, and writing be included in the lesson? For example, students will:

- *Read information about the coral reefs.*
- *Orally state one or more ways coral reefs can be preserved.*
- *Summarize their opinion in writing.*

LEARNING STRATEGIES: Select a strategy or strategies that will assist and support student understanding. For example, teach the students to use the “gist” method (Muth & Alvermann, 1999), which assists students in summarizing. Steps for this strategy include the following:

- *The teacher and students read a section of the text together.*
- *Together, they select 10 or more words that are most important to understanding the text.*
- *Together, they use as many of the 10 words as possible to write a summary sentence.*
- *The process is repeated with the remainder of the text.*
- *At the conclusion, a main idea or topic sentence is added to the beginning of the summary sentences.*
- *The students now have a summary paragraph.*

KEY VOCABULARY: Select a few vocabulary words that are essential to the understanding of the material to be taught as well as the academic words needed to process the concepts, such as the word summarize. Provide user-friendly definitions, examples of the words from different contexts, multiple exposures, and active involvement with the words.

MATERIALS: List what you will need in order to teach the lesson. For example, paper, pencil, chart paper, pictures.

LESSON SEQUENCE

MOTIVATION (Building background; links to background and to past learning)

- *What activities, pictures, experience, and vocabulary development do you need to provide the students to build the background needed?*
- *How can you link the new material to something the students are familiar with?*
- *What have you taught them in the past that will help them learn the new material? Connect past learning with the new learning by referring to a chart, a book, or a lesson that the students have done previously.*
- *How can you get them excited about the new learning?*

PRESENTATION (Content and language objectives, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, feedback; modeling)

- *Place the content and language objectives on the board for the students to see as well as state them orally or have them read aloud.*
- *Comprehensible input:*
 - *Use speech appropriate to the language level of the students.*
 - *Enunciate clearly and speak slowly.*
 - *Provide repetition.*
 - *Avoid jargon, such as, “It’s like the pot calling the kettle black.”*
 - *Provide hands-on experiences.*
 - *Teach vocabulary so they can learn and retain the words.*
 - *Use gestures, body language, pictures, and real objects when possible.*
 - *Model what you want them to do.*
 - *Provide step-by-step directions both orally and in writing.*
- **Strategies:** *Model the strategies you want the students to use.*
- **Interaction:** *Provide a variety of grouping patterns where students have an opportunity to talk with each other and learn from each other. For example, small groups, pairs, individuals.*

PRACTICE/APPLICATION (Meaningful activities, interaction, strategies, practice/application [guided and independent practice], feedback)

- *Provide guided practice where the teacher helps lead the students before they are expected to independently apply the new learning.*
- *Some examples of meaningful activities are:*
 - *Writing in a journal.*
 - *Participating in discussion circles.*
 - *Partner sharing using new vocabulary.*
 - *Solving problems in cooperative groups.*
 - *Using graphic organizers to scaffold learning.*
 - *Conducting science experiments.*

REVIEW/ASSESSMENT (Review objectives and vocabulary, assess learning [individual, group, written, oral])

- *Review the objectives on the board and ask the class if they were met.*
- *Use Outcome Sentences (complete orally or in journal writing).*
 - *I wonder . . .*
 - *I discovered . . .*
 - *I still want to know . . .*
 - *I learned . . .*
 - *I still don’t understand . . .*

EXTENSION (this part of the lesson is optional)

- *Assign “big idea” questions that relate to the topic for homework, such as, “Why do you think . . . ?”*

Adapted from Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners*, 2004, Pearson.