

Introduction

Secondary education is a complex endeavor: fast-paced schedules, specialized courses, rigorous content, high-stakes assessment, and varying instructional methods place a high demand on any student. For English learners, who must tackle the coursework while simultaneously acquiring the English language, the demands intensify significantly.

To successfully engage in standards-based coursework taught in English, secondary English Learners must operate from a competent second language base. Many adolescent English Learners have limited exposure to English or opportunities for interaction outside the classroom. There is general agreement among educators that academic English must be continuously developed and explicitly taught. Instructional strategies to access prior knowledge, scaffold content instruction and assure student motivation and interaction – although critical – are not enough to assure student learning. Without informed and systematic instruction in how English works – vocabulary, word usage, grammatical features, and syntactical structures – older school-age learners are not apt to develop a confident command of English for complex social and academic purposes.

A Rationale for Systematic ELD Instruction

Academic achievement across the secondary curricula will only be accelerated when students are truly proficient in English. This has led many to conclude that, like other complex learning, gaining proficiency in English requires systematic and explicit instruction in a dedicated course of study (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006; Norris & Ortega, 2006; Saunders and Goldenberg, 2009, in press).

We suggest that consistent, explicit and purposeful language instruction with regular structured practice is necessary for secondary English learners to develop a competent command of school-based terms and internalize the forms of academic language.

While there has been increased attention to addressing the instructional needs of culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse students, many educators report a continuing need for detailed information about how to plan, teach and monitor progress in English proficiency.

Acknowledging this, and recognizing that it is our responsibility to provide our English learners with language instruction that supports them in meeting this demand, we developed *A Focused Approach to Systematic ELD Handbook for Secondary Teachers*. It is an attempt to provide a framework for teachers and administrators to use in designing an effective program aimed at teaching adolescent English Learners the language they:

- Did not learn before entering American schools,
- Will not be taught in other subject areas, and
- Need to be able to adroitly navigate every day.