Innovative Practices

General Education and Special Education Teachers Collaborate to Support English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities

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Introduction

The Census 2000 Brief (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004b) indicates that English is not the heritage language of approximately one in five Americans, and the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students, also known as English language learners (ELLs), grew about 50 percent in the last decade. It is estimated that nearly 400,000 ELL students in grades K-12 were identified as needing special education services in the school year 2001-2002 (McCardle, McCarthy-Mele, Cutting, Leos, & D'Emilio (2005). Paradoxically, there is an over-representation, and also an under-representation, of students in special education programs (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Klingner et al., 2006; Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997). More research needs to be conducted to decipher whether ELLs struggle to develop literacy because of their limited English proficiency or because they have a learning disability (Klingner, et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, general education (GE) teachers hesitate to refer students to special education because they are unsure if the challenges these ELLs face relate to a second language acquisition or a learning disability (LD) issue (U.S. Department of Education, USDOE, & National Institute of Health and

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Human Development, NICHD, 2003). According to Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda (2005), the pattern of over-representation of students in special education programs often occur in districts with a sizable ELL population, especially among older students with limited proficiency in both their first language and English. It is not known how districts determine placement of students in these programs; their decision may be based on students' lack of proficiency in the first language, family poverty, assessment procedures, or referral bias (Artiles & Klingner, 2006). Hence, the task of identifying ELLs for eligibility in special education becomes complex for educators who must still carry it out this task in their local contexts. Who are ELLs? Who are ELLs with LD? Who are GE teachers of these students? What type of professional development do all teachers need to work with all students?

Methodology

This article is not a review of all empirical research about ELLs and ELLs with LD who experience a variety of reading difficulties or a synthesis of all available studies based on this broad spectrum. It is beyond the scale of this article to address every single range, type, and severity (mild, moderate, severe), and scope (intensity, duration, frequency) of learning disabilities across the disciplines (e.g., math, science, social studies, English composition). Rather, the author acknowledges that, while researchers have yet to assert with confidence that the difficulties ELLs face in school are attributed to a language acquisition issue, a learning disability, or both, all teachers are expected to address the complex needs of students under their care. This article suggests collaboration between GE and special education (SE) teachers, other specialists (ESL/ELD, speech, reading), and/or staff to work together to design appropriate learning experiences for ELLs and ELLs with LD. The author also suggests research-based methods and strategies that all teachers can use in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to provide sheltered instruction within the context of culturally responsive pedagogy.

In order for teachers to provide sheltered instruction to ELL students, they must have knowledge of these students' English proficiency levels, as determined by the California English Language Development Test or CEDLT (beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, advanced), to plan relevant activities and pose language appropriate questions. Results from the CELDT test also inform a school as to the appropriate class in which the student must be placed. The classes range from ELD I (beginning), ELD II (early intermediate), ELD III (intermediate), to a content-specific Sheltered Instruction or *Specially Designed Academic*

Instruction in English or SDAIE class (see California Department of Education, English Language Development Standards, K-12, 2002).

With regard to culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers may consider enriching their curriculum by selecting literature written by authors whose diverse backgrounds and lived experiences may mirror those of their students, in addition to the school-adopted material that teachers are expected to teach. In selecting authors who represent multiple perspectives and literature from different genres, teachers acknowledge that the cultural heritages of ethnic groups are legitimate and worthy content to integrate in the school's official curriculum (Gay, 2000). When teachers affirm students' identity and knowledge, they build home-school bridges linking "academic abstractions" to students' "lived socio-cultural realities" (Gay, p. 29).

In terms of methodology, the author conducted computer searches of databases by topic (Education) using "Academic Search Complete" and "PsycInfo" to determine appropriate descriptors for ELLs. Many terms have been used to refer to this population. For example, U.S. government federal and state agencies continue to use the term *limited English proficient* (LEP) or *language minority students* in their official documents while *English language learners* (ELLs) or *English learners* (ELs) are generally adopted in the current research literature and by practitioners. The author used sets of descriptors for searches, which included: "English language learners *and* learning disabilities," "learning disabilities *and* English learner," "limited English proficient *and* learning disability," and "English learner *and* learning disabilities." The author also examined lists of citations from relevant studies to consider articles or book chapters cited for inclusion in the review of literature. Finally, the author consulted with researchers who have published articles or books on ELLs, ELLs with LD, and with teacher educators in SE for their individual and collective insights. Who are ELLs? Who are ELLs with LD? What are some of the challenges these students face in the GE classes?

Background

English Language Learners

In their report to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008) noted that there are over five million students limited in English in the U.S., a 57% increase over the past 10 years. Nearly six in 10 of these ELLs are recipients of free or reduced price lunch, which indicates that their families are from low economic status backgrounds. It is safe to say that all teachers will, at some point in their careers, have at least one ELL under their

tutelage. Do ELLs represent a homogeneous group? Not so. In fact, ELLs are heterogeneous in race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic background, immigration status, generation in the U.S., proficiency in their native language (or L1) and in English (or L2), and their parents' level of education (August & Shanahan, 2006; Wright, 2010).

English Language Learners with Learning Disabilities

In the re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), a learning disability is defined as:

> A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in under-standing or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. (as cited in Garcia & Tyler, 2010, p. 115)

Approximately 50% of all students, ranging from 16 to 21 in age, receive SE services under the LD category; half of them have disabilities related to speech-language impairment (U.S. DOE & NICHD, 2003). Nearly 80% of this heterogeneous group experience reading difficulties (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Garcia & Tyler, 2010). However, exact numbers of ELLs with LD are unknown because many districts across the U.S. do not classify these students as a distinct subgroup. Educators have difficulty distinguishing language differences from disability when explaining the academic struggles these students encounter, and school officials report lacking tools, procedures, or qualified staff to adequately identify these students and their needs (U.S. DOE, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2003; Zehler, et al., 2003). Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2008), for example, offered an explanation for distinguishing language differences from language learning disabilities. For students with language differences (e.g., ELLs), their language performance may not be comparable to that of their peers; they may lack cultural and linguistic experiences, limited vocabulary from little exposure to hearing and using English, and few English role models (Olsen, 2010). When communicating, these ELLs shift from one language to another within an utterance; an accent or dialect may be the impediment. Their non-verbal skills (gestures, facial expressions, physical proximity), however, are age appropriate. Students with language learning disabilities (ELLs with LD), however, have a unique language pattern which is unlike others in their cultural community. They have limited vocabulary (even in their native tongue), struggle with finding words and use substitute ones in another language. They exhibit deficits in expressive and receptive language, and demonstrate

difficulty with interpreting non-verbal language, which can often lead to social problems (Echevarria et al., 2008, p. 195).

Data from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2008) indicate that teachers who work with ELLs are those "…who specialize in teaching students who are not yet fully proficient in English…teachers with certifications in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English as a Second Language (ESL), or bilingual education (p. 3). This definition encompasses a host of teachers responsible for the education of ELLs (some of whom have a diagnosed/undiagnosed LD), but personnel assignments may vary from district to district, state to state. In terms of qualifications, only 29.5% of U.S. teachers with ELLs in their classes are prepared to work with these students. Only 20 states (e.g., Arizona, California, Florida, New York) require that all teachers have training to work with ELLs; only 26% of teachers have benefited from ELL-related professional development (PD) programs, 57% believe they need additional training to teach ELLs effectively. This type of PD requires that teachers receive specialized training in order to be effective with struggling learners who tend to have less qualified teachers, limited resources, few opportunities for intellectually challenging curricula, and placed in crowded classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2004, 2006). What do teachers need to know and be able to do to provide their students with language and developmentally appropriate learning experiences? Training for all pre-service and in-service teachers has lagged behind the realities of the classroom in the U.S. given the rapid increase of ELLs with LD.

Teacher Preparation

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation has placed greater focus on *all* teachers to address the needs of all students in their classrooms. School districts across the U.S. must ensure that in-service teachers are able and ready to work with all students. Schools of education must also shoulder part of the responsibility for preparing their pre-service teachers for the realities of today's urban classrooms to:

> …understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students; in addition, if prospective teachers are to succeed at this task, schools of education must design programs that transform the kinds of settings in which novices learn and later become teachers. (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 302)

To transform the types of settings in which pre-service teachers learn, teacher educators need to provide candidates with opportunities to collaborate with peers (e.g., intra- and inter-disciplinary projects, multi-

media presentations, leading discussions of textbook chapters or articles, community service projects). Additionally, coursework must be linked to field-based experiences to help candidates connect theoretical knowledge they had learned in their college courses to practical applications they would be observing in "real" classrooms, implemented by "real" teachers with "real" students, including those with disabilities.

Classroom management is one of the domains that candidates and beginning teachers often report feeling under-prepared. An effective tool to address this topic is a PBS-produced workshop for parents and teachers of students with LD called "How Difficult Can It be? The FAT (Fear, Anxiety, Tension) City Worskhop." This production was presented by Richard Lavoie, a nationally-known expert on LD who has worked in special education since 1972 as a teacher, administrator, author, consultant, and owner of Eagle Hill School (a residential school for young adolescents with LD). One of the strategies Lavoie suggested is for teachers to adopt preventive rather than corrective discipline, and be pro-active instead of reactive in addressing behavioral issues with this student population. Another technique Lavoie recommended is for teachers to follow the same routines, use familiar procedures, and list the agenda for the day on the board to provide ELLs with LD with external predictability and reduce the anxiety factor because these students are "environmentally dependent" and possess little internal structure. Incidentally, Lavoie's recommendation has also been found to be an effective approach for use with students who are in the process of acquiring English (Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

When candidates have a chance to observe teachers implement strategies such as the above, they are better able to connect theoretical knowledge of management theories they had been exposed to in their college courses to practical applications in the classroom. Finally, to inspire prospective teachers to sustain the pursuit of professional growth and become future collaborators, they need to be observing their own professors in collaborative roles such as, conducting a research project with colleagues or with others, team teaching a co-planned course, participating in a grant, co-presenting a session at a conference, or fulfilling service at the university, college, department, community, or school site levels.

From Pre-Service to In-service Teaching

Generally, candidates enrolled in traditional programs must successfully fulfill their student teaching practicum or mini-apprenticeship (Lortie, 1975) toward the end of their program before they may be considered for employment. The transitions from college student to student teacher to in-service teacher require some adjustment for most

prospective teachers; collaborative support from more experienced colleagues throughout the learning process ensures successful advancement into the workplace (Nguyen, 2009). All teachers (GE, SE, specialists such as speech, reading, ESL/ELD)—novice or seasoned—can benefit from ongoing professional development training to continually reassess whether or not their skills are the most effective methods to maximize their students' success. GE teachers need to be able to: (1) identify the abilities of students with disabilities; (2) understand how these students qualify (or not) for SE services; (3) appropriately facilitate the students meeting the learning objectives based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP); and (4) know what type of support they can reasonably expect from SE teachers (and other specialists, if available). Conversely, SE teachers (and other specialists) must also be cognizant of the daily work of GE teachers to instruct all students while juggling multiple equally demanding duties. Such knowledge helps SE teachers better assist their GE colleagues in providing appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities in the LRE. Through carefully-planned professional development (PD), GE, SE, and other staff can exchange ideas, and support one another. A collaboration model can be adopted as a structure for thinking about the process of designing individualized adaptations or modifications that are appropriate for individual students and feasible within a given classroom situation.

A Collaboration Model

In their co-authored book, *Teachers' Guides to Inclusive Practices: Modifying Schoolwork*, Janney and Snell (2000) suggest that all teachers and support staff draw on their respective areas of expertise to collaborate while being mindful that the structure and funding of programs/schools may vary from site to site. These authors argue that "[n]o longer is one teacher responsible for planning, teaching, and evaluating instruction for the entire class" (p. 16). They recommend a model for all teachers and staff to consider as a framework for collaboration by: (1) working together to properly identify ELLs for eligibility in special education; (2) recommending placement options in the LRE for ELL students with LD; (3) participating in PD workshops/seminars to gain understanding of intervention techniques for curricular, instructional, and assessment purposes; (4) co-planning lessons and activities to carry out in each other's classrooms; (5) observing each other in the classroom; and (6) critiquing and providing constructive feedback to one another for improvement in subsequent teaching episodes.

To meet the above objectives, Janney and Snell (2000) caution that open communication among members is critical. That is, the team must

agree on steps to carry out their work, responsibilities to be divided, arising challenges to be problem solved, and how decisions are to be made. Team members will need the support of their school administrators to ensure that time is built into their respective schedules to meet and think critically about tangible ways to work together in the general education classroom to support this population.

What Does the Research Tell Us about Approaches for Educating ELLs?

Key findings from two research reviews conducted by the National Literacy Panel (NLP) and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) on the education of ELLs came to the following conclusions: First, teaching students to read in their first language promotes increased levels of reading achievement in English. Bilingual students who have some proficiency in their heritage language must be encouraged to use it, especially when it helps to clarify abstract concepts in English and supports their sense of self as bilingual learners. Furthermore, educators can be biased about the societal status of a language other than English since, "[l]anguages in different sociocultural contexts are afforded different values. This differential evaluation alters motivation to speak and use the language, which will impact its development" (Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005, p.13). In other words, speakers of Spanish, for instance, may be less inclined to develop their heritage language having been made aware, throughout their educational experience, that English is the language of school and becoming proficient in English is what counts.

An example of success in serving a diverse student population is that of Stone Creek Elementary (K-6), located in an upper middle class community in the Irvine Unified School District, Irvine, California. Its campus opened in 1978 and was named a California Distinguished School in 1998. According to the school's website for the 2009-10 academic year, Stone Creek enrolled: 1.68% Black or African American, 46.64% White; 0.19% American Indian or Alaska Native; 13.64% Two or More Races; 29.85% Asia; 2.43% Filipino; 6.54% socioeconomically disadvantaged; 14.21% English Learners; 8.02% Hispanic or Latino 8.02; 6.92% students with disabilities; and .56% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. In November, 2011, the school was featured in the Register (an Orange County newspaper) for having significantly raised test scores of ELL students. Writer Scott Martindale characterized the school as "full spirit" where everyone works "smarter not harder." In principal's Michael Shackelford's words,

We had kids who were at the same level for three or four years; the

> staff wasn't sure what to do with them…Then they realized that they didn't really know what the child's level was. We studied the data and saw that even though they are proficient orally and auditorily, they were not proficient in reading and writing.

Based on the above data analysis, Stone Creek teachers received intensive training in techniques and strategies for working with ELLs, including cultural sensitivity. The school uses a highly fluid, multi-tiered intervention system to ensure that students receive appropriate academic assistance, and offers daily after school tutorial sessions.

Successful schools (e.g., Stone Creek) recognize that ELLs with LD face a multi-dimensional set of challenges in learning content and skills while developing proficiency in English. Second, such schools acknowledge that good instruction and curriculum, in general, holds true for ELLs, but teachers can support students' acquisition of English by introducing vocabulary within a specific context, model oral speech and written language (e.g., sentence frames), and promote a natural progression of language development over time. This process is also known as the *Natural Approach* (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) rather than focusing primarily on "drill-and-kill" exercises and error correcting. Moreover, teachers must use comprehensible input (Krashen, 1995) to help students gain access to vocabulary and concepts embedded in each lesson and activity. This comprehensible input consists of, but is not limited to: gestures, body language, and facial expressions through the *Total Physical Response* strategy (Asher, 1966), high frequency vocabulary, word walls, simpler syntax, fewer pronouns and idioms, less slang and increased repetition, clear enunciation, longer natural pauses, and quality visuals (Krashen, 1995). Factors such as a welcoming environment, a low affective filter, positive reinforcement, and teacher modeling of expected learning outcomes are also key elements to this process, particularly for ELLs at the beginning stages of English acquisition (Krashen, 1995). School administrators and teachers often report feeling pressured to push their ELLs to gain speedy English acquisition. These educators must be reminded that it is expected to take three to five years to develop oral proficiency and four to seven years for academic proficiency (Cummins, 2000).

Furthermore, students do better academically in instructional settings geared specifically toward their needs (ESL/ELD, bilingual, etc.) than in mainstream English-only settings (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). Second language acquisition has been found to be comparable, but not identical, to first language (L1) acquisition (Cummins, 2008; Goldenberg, 2008). It is, therefore, potentially harmful for teachers to assume that "good teaching" is good for all students because of the tendency to overlook the unique linguistic and cultural needs of

these learners, which may contribute to their delay in L2 and academic content in L2 (deJong & Harper, 2008). This position presumes that the prior knowledge, cultural experiences, and educational needs of native English speakers are no different than those of their non-native peers. Secondly, this presumption leads to classroom practices that are less optimal for helping students achieve their personal goals. ELLs with LD have a neurological disorder that makes processing and recalling information and performing school tasks challenging (Santamaria, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002). How can teachers facilitate this learning process and support students?

Teachers can assist these students' learning in English-only settings through: predictable and consistent classroom management routines (diagrams, lists, easy-to-read schedules, etc.); graphic organizers; additional time and opportunities for practice; repetition of major concepts using visual cues, pictures, physical gestures; identifying, highlighting, and clarifying difficult words and passages within texts to facilitate comprehension; emphasizing key vocabulary; and helping students consolidate text knowledge by having the teacher, their peers, and ELs themselves summarize and paraphrase (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 20). For example, some students find mathematics highly challenging because they have trouble understanding a traditional presentation often devoid of visuals and relevance to real-life examples. Instead, when teaching ratios, math teachers could use problems (such as the ones below) to relate to students' prior knowledge by systematically showing step by step, guiding students to draw shapes (or other objects or animals) to do comparisons, and having them work in pairs to solve word problems. The following is an example of a math lesson on ratios. The teacher instructs the class, "Let's compare shapes. There are three rectangles on the left and four triangles to the right." The teacher proceeds to show visuals of the stated objects, and states:

> So, there are more triangles than rectangles. Watch as I count one by one. All right, one rectangle, two…Now I count one triangle, two… On your paper, I want you to follow me and count with me. Start on the left with the rectangles and let's count. One rectangle, two…Now, let's go to the right, and count. One triangle, two…
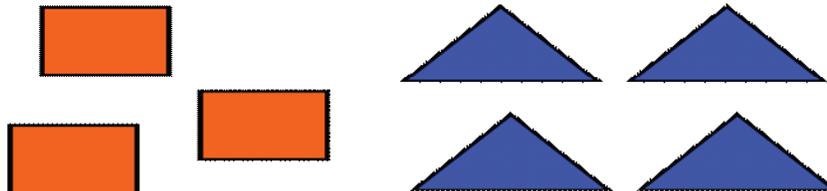
The teacher poses a question, "What is the ratio of rectangles to triangles?"

The teacher waits for responses, then says:

> All right, there are more triangles than rectangles. The ratio of rectangles to triangles can be written in three different ways. Since I am asking the ratio of rectangles (which I said first) to triangles (which I said second), here are three ways I can represent the ratio. Watch me. Notice that I write number 3 first, then number 4 second.

> 3 to 4   3/4   3:4

The teacher then provides ample opportunities for students to use ratios during guided practice and check for understanding throughout the lesson. The teacher continues with "Now, let's try another problem. There are three sharks on the left and five lions to the right. Are there more sharks or more lions?" The teacher waits for a response, and confirms, "Yes, there are more lions than sharks."
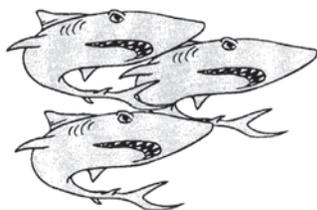
> With a partner, discuss how to write a ratio of lions to sharks. Remember, you hear me say lions *first*, and sharks *second*. What are three different ways to represent this ratio? I will give you _____ minutes. When I say "ready?" you will hold up your white board and show me your response. All right, go!

> 5 to 3   5/3   5:3

During this independent practice exercise, the teacher needs to circulate around the room to make certain that students are on task, offer needed assistance, and identify parts of the lesson to be re-taught. The above math examples can be also be taught using realia (real objects) or manipulatives (beans, beads, sticks, straws, shapes, etc.) as part of sheltered instruction, which has been found to support the academic success of students with diverse abilities and needs (Echevarria & Graves,

2007; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Genesee et al., 2005; Goldenberg, 2008). By using realia or manipulatives that are familiar to students, the math exercise can be fun and relevant to students' lives.

GE teachers, SE teachers, and other specialists can adopt a sheltered instruction mode of teaching in co-planning lessons and activities, carrying them out in one each other's classrooms, and critiquing and providing constructive feedback to one another for improvement in subsequent teaching episodes. This debriefing period is critical for practitioners because it affords them a chance to step back and reflect upon the lesson and accompanying activities as well as hearing each professional's rationale and perspective about student accessibility to and comprehensibility of content and language (Nguyen, 2009). In their collaboration, GE and SE teachers and other specialists can adopt a sheltered mode of instruction to co-plan lessons and accompanying activities, team teach, and give one another feedback about areas of improvements.

Sheltered Instruction

Sheltered instruction, also referred to as *Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English* (SDAIE), is an approach that emphasizes the development of grade-level academic competencies (Echevarria & Graves, 2007) in content area classrooms where secondary teachers usually have mastery of their own subject area. To successfully implement SDAIE, teachers also need to demonstrate enthusiasm in teaching, love of learning, and a fundamental belief that all students have the capacity for learning (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). To make the content comprehensible for ELLs and ELLs with LD, Echevarria et al. suggest the *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol* (SIOP) to be used as a tool for operationalizing sheltered instruction by offering pre- and in-service teachers of all students a model for lesson planning and implementation that provides them with access to grade-level content standards. Its eight components include: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, review and assessment (see Echevarria et al. for details). According to the authors, the SIOP model began as a research project through CREDE, has been field tested with sheltered instruction teachers, and is currently implemented throughout all 50 states in the U.S. and several other countries.

A prerequisite to planning relevant activities and posing language appropriate questions, and engaging students using the SIOP model (or any other model), is for teachers to have knowledge of self (who they are influences how they teach), a teaching philosophy (how they perceive students' potential and capacity for learning, or not), and students' back-

grounds (ethnic, cultural, and linguistic) and needs (academic, social, emotional). Another prerequisite of effective instruction is teachers' knowledge of ELLs' proficiency in L2 (beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, advanced), as measured by the California ELD Test (CELDT), and what can be expected of these students in their process of acquiring content and language. For an e-copy of the California Department of Education, English Language Development Standards, visit: http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fd/documents/englangdev-stnd.pdf.

When teacher input is comprehensible, the likelihood of desirable student output will be increased (Genesee et al, 2005); students need to understand the words their teachers are speaking. Teacher input is critical in SDAIE because teachers are modeling how academic language is used, grammar, syntax, correct pronunciation, and natural speech flow. Some structures for interaction that promote speaking include: cooperative learning, peer tutoring, discovery learning, using white boards to record responses, think-pair-share, jigsaw, post-it notes, gallery walk, raising hand, thumbs-up thumbs-down, partner/buddy reading, line up, inside-outside circles, number heads (Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Echevarria, et al., 2008; Parkay, 2006; Vogt & Echevarria, 2008). When using a numbered heads activity, for instance, students number off from one to four (small groups are easier to manage). The teacher poses a question or a topic for discussion. In turn, the students put their heads together, discuss the correct answer, and make sure that everyone knows it. The teacher then calls a number (by rolling a dice) and those students raise their hand to respond. The above structures are examples of active participation approaches to promote student talk. A feature that sheltered instruction shares with culturally responsive pedagogy is its focus on learner-centered teaching.

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) considers students' prior knowledge, helps them make connections between the "known" and "unknown"; assists them in organizing new knowledge (concepts) within a cognitive structure; ties in cultural, geographical, emotional experiences to the new learning; and allows students to share their heritage background and knowledge with others. For instance, *El Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) is a national holiday in Mexico, annually observed on November 1 (All Saints' Day) and November 2 (All Souls' Day). Families take this opportunity to remember loved ones that have passed away, honor the dead in private, and share family celebrations and reunions. Students learn that *Day of the Dead* has its roots in Spanish and indigenous cultures (Aztecs), is observed in Mexico, other Latin

American countries (though to a lesser extent), Asia, Mexican-American communities throughout the U.S., and in the Philippines. Incidentally, Mexico's Day of the Dead was the theme of a 2008 Rose Parade float in Pasadena, California, built by Tim Estes, president of Fiesta Parade Floats; he has captured the coveted Sweepstakes Award for the past 17 years (*Los Angeles Times*, Parade section, December 26, 2010).

Teachers can use this holiday to help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Students can read selected books on this subject and discuss a cross-cultural tradition of honoring the departed. Others can read parts of the book, depending on the students' readability levels, or have the option of reading an easier text or a large-print book. Teachers can take advantage of the diversity in their students' backgrounds by having students from Mexico, Latin America (e.g., Cuba and Puerto Rico), and Asia (e.g., Japan, Korea, and China) collaborate on a group project by interviewing their parents/relatives about their family rituals and celebrations, and presenting their findings to the class. The following photographs depict how a group of Spanish-speaking students represented an altar (#1) with an *ofrenda* (offering) to the deceased, and their tradition of paying a visit to the cemetery. In contrast, their group members made up of Asian American students of the Buddhist faith, prepared Altar #2 as a symbol of how friends and family remember and show gratitude to the deceased and talk about their good deeds. Rice, fruits (mandarins, oranges), and sweets are typical offerings.
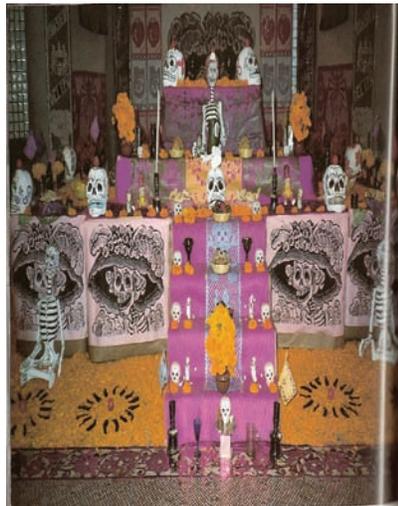

Altar #1
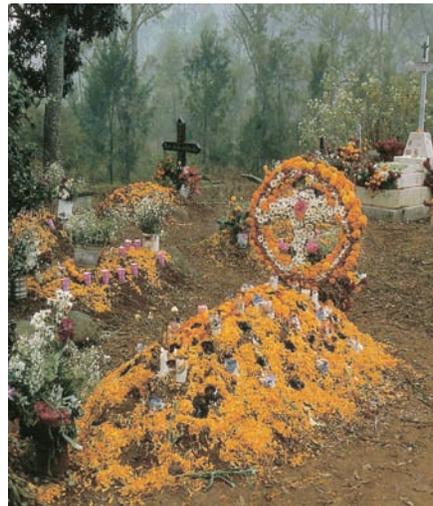
Cemetery
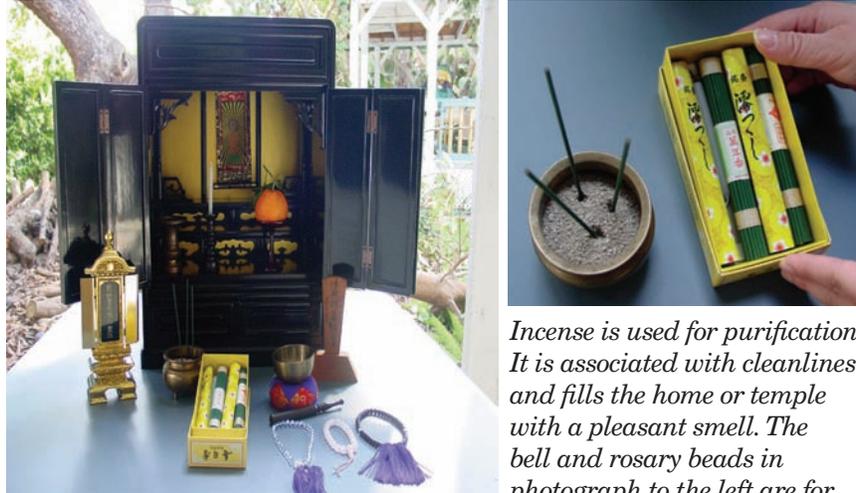
Altar #2

Incense is used for purification. It is associated with cleanliness and fills the home or temple with a pleasant smell. The bell and rosary beads in photograph to the left are for prayer and chanting.

Photographs are courtesy of Cindy Maeda
and Kristina Koehler, used with permission.

As a follow-up activity, the class can complete a Venn diagram (see below) noting similarities (part C) and unique features of each cultural practice (parts A and B) between the traditional practices of the two groups. Students who are limited in L2 but more proficient in L1 can record responses in their L1 or both.
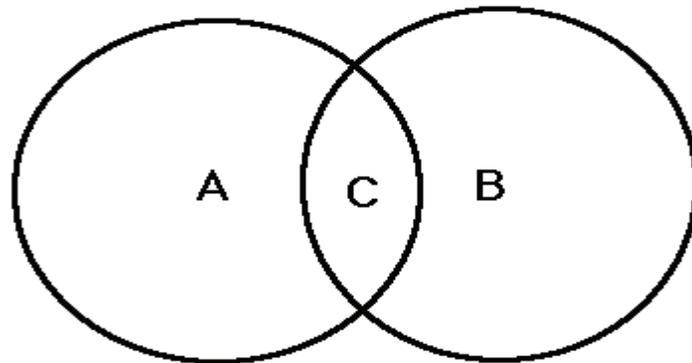
The above *Day of the Dead* lesson and group activity illustrates how teachers can build on the diversity of their students by tapping on what they know, validate their individuality and familial resources, and enrich their cross-cultural learning experiences. This assignment

exemplifies a culturally responsive way of teaching whereby the curriculum is "filtered through students' frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master" (Gay, 2000, p. 24) because it actively and interactively engages students with their own cultural identity and that of others. Moreover, this type of pedagogy "acknowledges the legitimacy of cultural heritages of different ethnic groups as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum…[and] builds bridges between home and school experiences" (Gay, 2000, p. 29) by not expecting students to shed their heritage language and culture while acquiring English and U.S. ways. Students with LD may need specific adaptations or modifications to fully grasp lesson concepts.

Adaptations and Modifications

Along with culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers must ensure accessibility and comprehensibility to content and language by making specific adaptations or modifications for individual students. Adaptations for ELLs with a LD, are "…changes to learning task requirements, such as changes to the instructional content, teaching methods and materials, or physical environment" (Janney & Snell, 2000, p. 16). Teaching a student to use a calculator rather than do mathematical calculations with paper and pencil or dictating an experience rather than writing the essay that other students may be expected to be writing are examples of adaptations. Third, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students' language limitations when instructing ELLs in English.

Modifications for ELLs with LD are considered "a change in the course, test preparation, location, timing, scheduling, and so on, which provides access for students with disabilities but does not fundamentally alter the standard or expectation" (Janney & Snell, 2000, p. 16). Giving a student the option to take a quiz or a test in the privacy of the school counselor's office or another designated area with an extended period of time for task completion is an example of a modification. Teachers can also modify reading groups based on students' readability levels by selecting an easier book, using a large-print book, having fewer students in a group, assign shorter passages to read, or schedule a shorter reading time period (Echevarria & Graves, 2007; Echevarria, et al., 2008).

Scaffolding

Another method found to be effective with both ELLs and ELLs with LD is scaffolding. Teachers need to identify students' *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) to determine how much assistance or scaffolding these students need from them, other adults, or capable peers to accomplish their school tasks successfully. The students' ZPD will be

"stretched" from their current level of understanding to their potential state of development. Once these students are capable of carrying out their work independently, help can be removed gradually (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolds are fluid, dynamic and interactive in nature offering students a temporary structure to help them make cognitive connections (Santamaria, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002).

In the least restrictive general education classroom, general education, special education teachers, and other specialists can collaborate on scaffolding strategies, such as *mediated* scaffolds (gradual removal of adult or peer assistance and transfer of learning responsibility to student's independent practice), *task* scaffolds (systematic modification of task and work load reduction, as discussed earlier), and *material* scaffolds (usage of story maps, paragraph frames, and sentence starters), as suggested by Santamaria et al. (2002). Below is an example of a graphic organizer students can complete, individually or in pairs, after having read a passage or part of it. An intermediate level ELL can fill out words/short phrases but may have difficulty with the why and how questions whereas his/her counterpart at the early advanced level may be writing longer and complex sentences for all items. An ELL with LD may need an easier text, more time to complete this assignment or may be given fewer items at a time.

Who	Name _____
What	Information _____
When	Time, day, week, month, year _____
Where	Place _____
Why	Explanation _____
How	Explanation or information _____

Verbal scaffolding, for example, when consistently used during lesson delivery and checking for understanding, helps to support student understanding, which includes paraphrasing, using "think alouds," providing correct pronunciation by repeating students' responses, slowing speech, increasing pauses, and speaking in phrases (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

Wait and Think Time

Additional "wait and think time" lowers students' anxiety and offers

them another opportunity to process information and make sense of it (Echevarria et al., 2008; Rowe, 1996). Sometimes the best gift a teacher can give any student is the gift of time. For ELLs with LD, processing information is a dual cognitive task: (1) processing the question the teacher poses in English and mentally translate it into their first language; and (2) processing the answer to that question in their first language and translating it into English. A technique that teachers can use is to quietly count to five after posing a question (Nguyen, 2007; Rowe, 1996); five seconds or more of "wait and think time" can make a world of difference to struggling learners. Teachers can also "buy" time for struggling learners by developing a secret signal with them (e.g., direct eye contact, teacher standing next to or behind the students, or teacher gently placing hand the students' desk) to give them advance notice that they will be called upon next. This simple technique can help to minimize student discomfort and nervousness as well as to slow the pace of instruction, which is particularly helpful to students who are in the process of acquiring English and content presented in English (Nguyen, 2007).

Pace of Instruction

Non-native learners of English and ELLs with LD often characterize the pace of their teachers' instruction as "a-mile-a-minute race," leaving them inundated with information and overwhelmed with English "noise." How about verbally communicating key concepts and terminology and write these ideas on the board? What about guiding students in taking notes of essential concepts and important ideas, stopping at frequent intervals to "scan" the room for any signs of needed help (Nguyen, 2007)? For instance, content standards are written in such a way that even teachers find them confounding and ambiguous. Therefore, break content standards into smaller chunks, step-by-step, and delineate what teachers are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn.

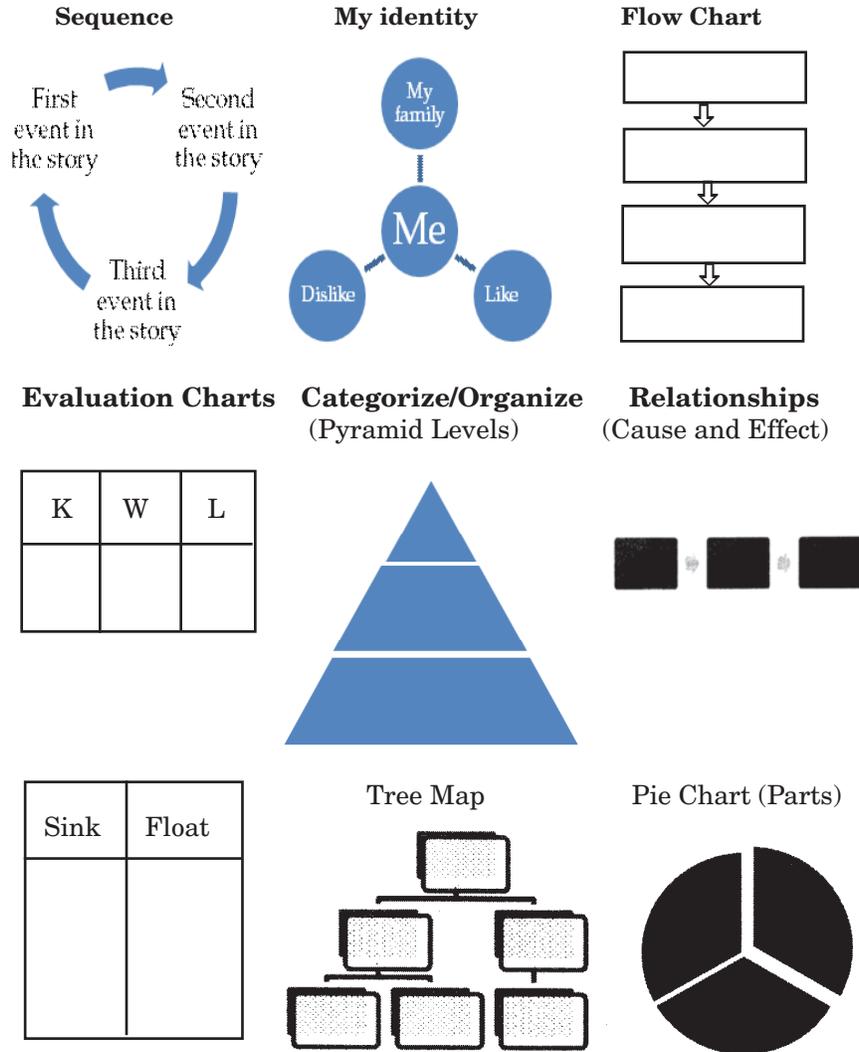### *Reviewing Note Taking and Organization Skills*

Teachers often assume that by the time students reach middle school, they must have known how to take proper notes from class lectures and organize them into folders/binders from one class period to the next (Nguyen, 2007). However, some may not have mastered these skills, especially when English and LD are part of their daily challenge. When teachers review note-taking skills, students learn to focus their attention on specific key concepts and ideas from which to study, and to demonstrate their understanding of the material in course assignments, discussions, and examinations. For ELLs with LD, this process may take some time and practice. Teachers can encourage these students

to take notes in the large, right hand column, in any format they desire (outline, narrative, bullets), and notes can be taken from any resource (lecture, textbooks, video). Teachers can also remind students to leave spaces between major topics, leave spaces when they miss information during the session, highlight main ideas and critical information, and use abbreviations and symbols. Another way to build classroom community and to help these students with notetaking is to partner them with others to compare notes, talk about what they wrote and why, and look for gaps and missed information. Both partners should feel free to make adjustments (add, change, delete) to their notes. Teachers may consider rewarding students' efforts by assigning a percentage of the total course grade to note taking and organization skills. By examining students' notes, teachers learn more about their students by the way in notes are organized (e.g., sequence order, text only, or with illustrations, or with graphic organizers), and any help they may need (Nguyen, 2007).

Constructivist Approaches

Constructivist approaches to learning blend art and science into active teaching and help to stimulate students' minds and awaken their creativity. Dewey's (1938) notion of embedding learning in real-life experience challenges teachers to provide their students with relevant lessons and hands-on activities (e.g., civic projects, community service, simulations, field trips) that go beyond the classroom walls. Piaget's (1970) discovery learning is an effective method for engaging all participants and promoting critical thinking because of the collective role teachers and students play in making sense of learning content and concepts. For example, using Cuisenaire rods (or other types of manipulatives) can help students learn mathematical concepts such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and fractions.

Another example of discovery learning occurs when students hypothesize whether various objects will float or sink, followed by an actual experiment of placing each object, one by one, into a water container. This exercise can help students construct meaning based on their observation, interpretation, and recording of the data they collect. Moreover, this hands-on approach makes it easier for ELLs and ELLs with LD to grasp abstract concepts. Other teaching strategies are: guided reading, process writing, cooperative learning with the support of graphic organizers as a tool for visually recording and representing concepts (see next page, and visit http://www.readingquest.org/ for more ideas).

Sequence

First event in the story → Second event in the story → Third event in the story

My identity

My family

Me

Dislike   Like

Flow Chart

Evaluation Charts

K	W	L

Categorize/Organize
(Pyramid Levels)

Relationships
(Cause and Effect)

Sink	Float

Tree Map

Pie Chart (Parts)

In addition to real-life experiences and discovery learning, text-rich instructional environments are very important. Teachers must be examples of good readers by demonstrating what good readers do. Students benefit from being read to and to read books at their level of difficulty and content to which they can relate. Kinsella (2002) suggested that teachers teach students a cognitive strategy for pre-reading an expository text. That is, teachers can guide students in reading the title of the

article, the author's name and background information provided about the author, and the publication source of the article. Next, students read the first two paragraphs, each boldface subheading, and the first sentence of each paragraph. Also, teachers can guide students to look over any typographical aids such as <u>underlining</u> and **boldface** or *italic* print, any other visual aids such as photographs, graphs, or maps. Finally, students read the conclusion or last two paragraphs, and read quickly any end-of-article material such as footnotes, vocabulary or questions.

To reinforce reading skills, parents can also support their children's education at home by reading to their children, having their children read to them, checking their children's homework, projects, and reminding them of assignment deadlines. With the assistance of teachers, parents can provide scaffolds for their children by using any of the graphic organizers discussed above when helping students conceptualize ideas and organize their thoughts in a visual manner. Such assistance can be conducted in L1, if necessary, which contributes to the family preserving their home language and culture. Parents can also reinforce their children's L1 by having informal conversations at home, reading to children in L1, or checking books out from the public library. When teachers and parents provide scaffolds (mediated, task, or material) for students based on their ZPD, it reduces the element of fear, anxiety, and frustration, enhances students' confidence level, encourages risk taking, and reinforces their language competence in L1 and/or L2.

Parent Participation

Parents are their child's first teacher. It is inconceivable for them not to be integral part of the teaching-learning equation. It is equally critical for educators to forge a healthy partnership with parents to maximize student academic success and social-emotional adjustment in school. These collective efforts will help close the achievement gap between haves and have-nots, English-only and English-learner students, general education and special education needs youngsters. Culturally responsive pedagogues value the crucial role parents play in their child's education and future success. Ideally, parents reinforce skills and provide an environment with consistent expectations and standards; they instill a value system, orientation toward learning, and view of the world (Banks, 2010) in raising their child.

Teachers can establish a two-way communication between the school and home by having an open-door policy that lets parents know that they are welcome. Some parents may feel intimidated to approach their child's teacher because they do not believe they possess the educational background or credentials to be involved in their child's school. Others

may hesitate to enter the school campus or talk to the office staff because they lack communication skills in English and are unable to seek the help they need. This reluctance on behalf of parents is especially true in middle and high schools where students have move from class to class and where rules and expectations vary greatly from teacher to teacher, period to period. Another source of parent ambivalence may relate to a negative experience some may have had in their own schooling (Banks, 2010).

To help bridge this home-school gap, teachers can encourage parents to call or send notes if they have questions or concerns, keep parents abreast of their child's progress, and offer suggestions as to how the child can improve. Some parents may be limited in English and will need assistance from a bilingual interpreter. Schools need to do their best to accommodate such parents whether it be with the office staff, at an IEP meeting, or during a parent-teacher conference. When working with culturally diverse families, teachers need to acknowledge different characteristics in culturally diverse families (e.g., structure, child-rearing practices, modes of discipline, behavioral expectations for their children, verbal and non-verbal communication) in order to build trust and forge positive relationships with the parents (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009). Culturally competent teachers make connections between their classroom practices to their interactions with families/parents.

Second, parents appreciate teachers who demonstrate a genuine interest in their child, community, and culture. There are other ways for teachers to support parent participation in their own children's education. Simply telling parents that they need to work with their children may not be adequate; parents appreciate specific recommendations. If teachers expect their students to complete projects at home, provide parents with resources or materials to use. It is important to keep in mind that not all homes have internet access (digital divide). Some families may not financially be able to purchase materials for home projects or have the time to develop them. Additionally, teachers can ask parents to sign their child's homework papers, and reward students with extra points when their parents sign their report cards, read to them, attend school-sponsored events (Back-to-School Night, Open House, parent-teacher conferences). Reading is a crucial part of learning and is the focus of many schools' initiatives. To emphasize the importance of reading, teachers can send home information and a suggested reading list. Reading aloud (in L1 and/or L2) is a great way for parents and children to bond, discuss the stories, meaning of words, relate to text and connect to their own experiences. Finally, some parents may be willing to play a more active role at school: solicit volunteers to present a lesson; share a school-related lived

experience; participate in a cause or philanthropic project; help in the playground, lunch room, classroom, office; and lead parent meetings or contact parents for conferences (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009).

Conclusion

Given that nearly 400,000 ELL students in grades K-12 were identified as needing special education services (2001-2002), and an increase of 72 percent of this population (1992 to 2002) in U.S. schools, educators must lend one another a hand to work on behalf of these students. With increasing demands placed on the teaching profession by federal, state, and local agencies in an era of school reform and accountability, educators can no longer afford to carry out their work in isolation. Collaboration between all teachers responsible for the education of all students seems inevitable since there is "a pressing need…for teachers at all stages in their careers…to prepare or upgrade [their] knowledge and skills in order to close the achievement gap between linguistic minority students and their native English speaking peers" (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008, p.10), especially those with a LD.

Collaborators need to be mindful of the importance of open communication among members, agree on steps to carry out their work, divide responsibilities, problem solve arising challenges to be problem solved, and be aware of how decisions are to be made (Janney & Snell, 2000). Additionally, the success of such collaboration is contingent upon the support of administrators to ensure that time is built into these educators' respective schedules throughout the school year to co-plan and team teach. Educators must also be encouraged to take advantage of district-sponsored or school-designed PD opportunities (attending conferences, seminars, presenting workshops, accessing professional literature and technology) for them to enhance their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge of current research on the education of students with diverse abilities and needs on a sustained basis as lifelong adult learners. To fully include English language learners with a disability in the least restrictive general education classroom, all teachers must use especially emerging research specific to ELLs and ELLs with LD as discussed above, to properly identify, place, and ensure quality instruction for these students. Finally, educators must not forget to forge partnerships with parents who play a pivotal role in their child's life, success, and future of our nation.

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