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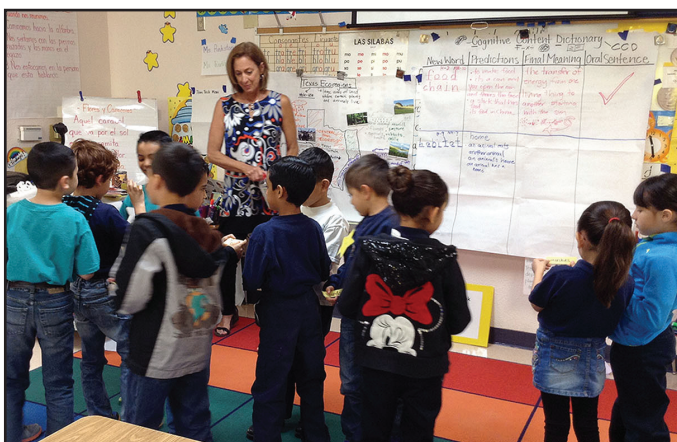
# Soleado

Promising Practices from the Field

## *Sheltered Instruction Revisited: Ensuring Access to Language, Content, and Community*

by Ruth Kritekman and Edward Tabet-Cubero—Dual Language Education of New Mexico

In the early 2000s, several local Albuquerque Public School ESL teachers got together to systematize the teaching strategies needed to support English learners in acquiring academic language skills as they access content area knowledge and skills. After studying the large quantity of information on sheltered instruction, five components were identified that we believed were key to learning in a second language. Since that time, the educational landscape has changed in very significant ways. For teachers, the move to



*Simple interactive strategies such as “read, pair, share” provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning.*

Common Core State Standards, the adoption of English language development standards, and the aligned accountability systems that have

been developed have brought significant changes. Students are bringing a greater diversity in the languages, the experiences, and the strengths they bring to school. Teaching and learning have responded to this changed landscape, as has our notion of sheltered instruction.

Sheltered instruction was first envisioned as an approach used by content area teachers to better serve the needs of English language learning students with a relatively strong grasp of oral skills but lacking in reading and writing abilities. Students would

be enrolled in ESL classes where the focus was on developing the four domains of language development—listening, speaking, reading and writing. They would also be enrolled

in required content area classes—science, mathematics, social studies/history—where the challenge was providing access to students with differing English language proficiency while maintaining the adherence to appropriate content standards and rigor.

Many content area teachers stuck by the belief that good teaching is good teaching and that the strategies and approaches they had used to great success in prior years and with other diverse groups of students would yield the same positive results. But, the continued achievement gap among linguistically and culturally diverse students and their English-speaking counterparts point to a very different reality. Despite our growing awareness of the presence of English language learners, their experience as learners of both content and language is significantly less successful than their English-speaking peers.

Language learners have very specific needs that are not shared by others. Like all students, they have the shared challenge of learning specific content and the thinking and doing skills related to that content. They must also learn the language that allows them

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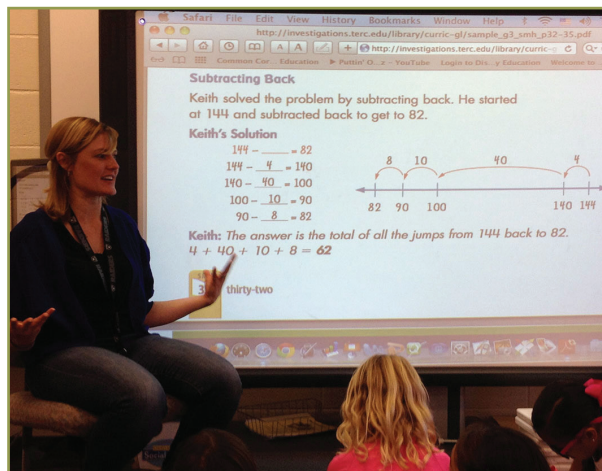
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access to the content and the ability to articulate what they are thinking and what they can do. These skills are multidimensional and complex and require that the students have meaningful interactions with the learning materials, as well as with their teachers and fellow students.

They need to hear how the teacher explains the content and the way their English proficient peers talk about it—the questions they ask to further their knowledge and the way they negotiate their use of language and thought to commit their ideas to paper. Language learners are, in fact, establishing a mental grammar: an understanding of how English is used, the structure that allows for clear communication of thoughts, and the vocabulary that explicitly and succinctly conveys ideas. Students need the opportunity to be exposed to that language, but, more importantly, to own it by practicing and using it. It's a huge task and requires very specific support from teachers and classmates to be successful. Sheltered instruction is not just good teaching, but teaching that provides the students with the specific supports necessary for successful content learning and literacy.

Dual Language Education of New Mexico has used information and knowledge from our work with various programs around the country serving emerging bilingual communities to add to the five original components of sheltered instruction. The eight resulting components are important in supporting language learners as they work toward their goal of learning to learn in a second language. These components are described below.

1. **Focus on language**—Every lesson provides an opportunity and a need to teach students the academic language skills (beyond vocabulary lists) that they need in order to (1) comprehend content lessons and (2) communicate (speaking/writing) what they know and are able to do. This focus on language should include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as language structures, functions, semantics, etc. (Snow and Wong Fillmore, 2002).



*Smart Boards provide students and teachers with a common focal point for authentic context.*

2. **Plan for peer interaction**—Language learning is an interactive process. Therefore, teachers must be adept at setting up instructional structures that facilitate students' use of the target language, including risk taking and negotiation of meaning, with the teacher providing for language input and output in an environment that reduces anxiety.
3. **Support meaning with realia**—Key to second language learners' comprehension is the use of language in authentic contexts. Providing real objects and images and using interactive technology to support meaning for students can create the authentic context necessary to comprehend and use language appropriately.
4. **Activate prior knowledge and/or create shared knowledge**—Although the research is clear that tapping students' prior knowledge when introducing a concept is beneficial to all students, it is essential for students learning content in their second language. In order for ELLs to comprehend not only the concept but the language of instruction, teachers must connect new learning to students' prior knowledge, and those connections must be culturally relevant in order for the students to benefit (Echeverria, Vogt, & Short, 2004).
5. **Make text accessible**—In order for second language learners to comprehend and utilize text, teachers must make a variety of modifications. Planning these modifications requires an understanding of text complexity, second language acquisition, and the language proficiency levels of their students.
6. **Develop student-learning strategies**—While it takes a minimum of 5 to 7 years to gain academic proficiency in a second language, ELLs do not have the luxury of waiting to learn academic content until they have mastered English. Therefore, it is critical that teachers provide ELLs direct and explicit instruction in strategies to comprehend and communicate effectively while they are acquiring English (Chamot & O'Mally, 1994). For example, when students practice such strategies as using contextual clues to infer meaning from text within the framework of a content lesson, the strategy is more easily retrieved and applied when needed.

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7. **Bridge the two languages**—Second language learners bring with them a breadth of background knowledge and conceptual understanding in their native language. It is essential that teachers of ELLs identify and build upon the linguistic assets of their students, helping them develop strategies to bridge what they know in one language to the other language (Beeman & Urow, 2012).
8. **Affirm identity**—ELLs face many challenges within the U.S. school context, including being viewed from a deficit perspective. Paramount to their academic success is a strong sense of identity built upon their linguistic and cultural assets (Nieto, 1996). Teachers play a key role in affirming students' positive identity development through the way they design their instruction and the attitudes with which they interact with their students.

Understanding what sheltering is and using the strategies consistently and deeply requires a great deal of practice! Just as students need regular practice and use to own the language, teachers need a deepening understanding of what sheltering strategies look and sound like in their context *and* the opportunity to apply them. To that end, the next four issues of

*Soleado* will include articles that delve deeper into the *Eight Components of Sheltered Instruction*—explaining them further and providing examples. Stay tuned!

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