**Practice 1: Provide Explicit Instruction in Literacy Components**

Research focused on developing literacy in ELs builds on literacy research conducted with English-proficient students. This research indicates that it is helpful to teach young children explicitly to hear the individual English sounds or phonemes within words (phonemic awareness); to use the letters and spelling patterns within words to decode the words’ pronunciations (phonics); to read text aloud with appropriate speed, accuracy, and expression (oral reading fluency); to know the meanings of words and affixes (vocabulary); to think about what they are reading (reading comprehension); and to write with the organization, development, substance, and style appropriate to the task and audience.

A review of effective literacy instruction75 for ELs found 12 studies published between 1997 and 2002 (see Shanahan and Beck, 2006, pp. 421-423, for a table of these studies) indicating that the general pattern found with English-proficient students appears to hold for ELs. Explicit classroom instruction focused on developing key aspects of literacy—phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, and reading vocabulary—provides clear learning benefits for elementary school-aged ELs. More recent studies report similar findings (e.g., Llosa et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2014). However, because ELs are developing language proficiency while they are acquiring content area knowledge in a second language, research indicates that there are important considerations to keep in mind regarding instruction, as described below.

**Practice 2: Develop Academic Language During Content Area Instruction**

Academic language is the language used in school, in written communications, in public presentations, and in formal settings (Snow and Uccelli, 2009). Bailey (2007, pp. 10-11) defines being academically proficient as “knowing and being able to use general and academic vocabulary, specialized or complex grammatical structures, and multifarious language functions and discourse structures—all for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills, interacting

74The sources for this section are experimental research studies referenced in two practice guides published by the U.S. Department of Education (Baker et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2007). The discussion also draws on experimental studies cited in a synthesis of the research on effective instruction for ELs (Shanahan and Beck, 2006) and studies published between 2014 and 2016 that met What Works Clearinghouse standards (Crevecour et al., 2014; Llosa et al., 2016; Tong et al., 2014). In all these studies, ELs performed better than control students on study outcome measures as a result of the instructional approaches that were implemented. The discussion also references qualitative studies of classroom and school practices published during the same years.

75The studies included those that used experimental, quasi-experimental, or single-subject research designs and resulted in significant differences in outcomes for treated groups.

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about a topic, imparting information to others.” A series of experimental studies76 developed academic language in the context of teaching content (e.g., Brown et al., 2010; Carlo et al., 2004; Llosa et al., 2016; Ryoo, 2009; Silverman and Hines, 2009; Tong et al., 2014;). The majority of these studies developed language during science instruction; one did so during language arts instruction. All the studies used multifaceted instructional approaches that combined professional development for teachers with enhanced instructional routines that focused concurrently on teaching content and the associated academic language.

In one study (Tong et al., 2014), implemented with 5th-grade Hispanic ELs, the instructional approach consisted of ongoing professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals, an academic science approach that used the 5-E model of science instruction (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate), and the infusion of reading and writing activities into instruction (e.g., leveled questions using such verbs as “identify,” “describe,” “explain,” and “analyze” to help ELs understand text). A second study (Llosa et al., 2016), implemented with 5th-grade ELs from a variety of first language (L1) backgrounds, also included teacher and student components. Teacher components comprised a teacher guide and professional development workshops, while student components consisted of a stand-alone, year- long, 5th-grade curriculum aligned with state science standards and using an inquiry-based approach. Language development included providing opportunities for students to discuss science in small and whole groups and engage in language development activities posted on a project website.

**Practice 3: Provide Visual and Verbal Supports to Make Core Content Comprehensible**

A third practice linked to positive outcomes in the development of content area knowledge in ELs is using methods that help make core content in English comprehensible. One set of methods includes the strategic use of such instructional tools as short videos, visuals, and graphic organizers. In a study conducted with 5th graders (Llosa et al., 2016), for example, scaffolding consisted of providing ELs with science terms in their L1 and using multiple modes of representation in textual and graphic formats. In another study (Silverman and Hines, 2009), kindergarten ELs who watched short videos on the habitats they had learned about during storybook reading outperformed children who had heard the same books read aloud but did not see the videos. In this study, the multimedia addition did not have a positive effect on English- proficient students, highlighting the value of additional supports for ELs. A second way to make core content comprehensible is though verbal interactions that clarify content, such as defining words in context; asking right-there questions; coaching; and conducting whole-class, small- group, and partner discussions (e.g., Carlo et al., 2004; Tong et al., 2014).

Qualitative research (August and Erickson, 2006; O’Day, 2009) also suggests the need for supports. For instance, O’Day (2009) found that the use of literacy practices that included higher-level questioning/discussion about the meaning of text, writing instruction, and accountable talk77 had a strong relationship to improved reading comprehension for English- proficient students, but had little discernable benefit for ELs. The author hypothesizes that these activities may have been at too high a linguistic level for ELs to benefit from them without

76Academic language includes oral as well as written language.

77Accountable talk was defined as talk focused on ideas accurate and appropriate to the topic and flow of discussion, included a press for evidence from the text, involved students responding to and elaborating on each other’s contributions, and reflected a more facilitative rather than directive role on the part of the teacher.

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appropriate supports. Differences also emerged with respect to teacher-student interactions. “Telling,” defined as the teacher providing students with information rather than engaging them in the creation of information through coaching, recitation, or other forms of interaction, had a statistically significant positive effect on ELs’ reading comprehension but a negative effect on the comprehension of English-proficient students. The difference in coefficients for this variable was larger than that for any of the many other variables in the study. The author posits that literacy practices (e.g., higher-level questioning) may have been at too high a level for ELs to benefit from them without the appropriate supports, while in the case of “telling,” ELs benefited because they were provided with more support for engaging with core content in English, but this was not necessary for English-proficient students.

**Practice 4: Encourage Peer-Assisted Learning Opportunities**

Studies conducted with elementary school-aged ELs (e.g. Calderón et al., 1998; Calhoun et al., 2007; McMaster et al., 2008; Ryoo, 2009; Sáenz et al., 200578) that were effective in developing their literacy implemented peer-assisted learning in pairs or cooperative groups of four to six students. For example, Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) was implemented in 1st-grade classrooms in a dual language program (Calhoun et al., 2007). PALs consisted of a structured routine in which a teacher modeled the code-focused activities of the day; students practiced the code-focused activities in pairs for 15 minutes while the teacher supervised; and students then turned to story sharing, a partner reading activity that lasted for another 15 minutes. Teachers paired students so that one was a high-performing reader and the other was low- performing, and then taught the students to use PALS procedures. During each segment of the session, the high-performing student performed the role of coach first, and the low-performing student followed. On average, PALS students demonstrated significantly greater growth than control students on phoneme segmentation, nonsense word fluency, and oral reading fluency. Both ELs and English-proficient students responded positively to PALS, but the ELs responded with differential effects depending on the outcome measure.

A feature of all these studies is that they enabled students to talk about course content in pairs or small groups. An important principle related to second language learning is that students benefit from opportunities to interact (via speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in the second language (L2). Speaking is important to generate feedback, force syntactic processing, and challenge students to engage at higher proficiency levels (Johnson and Swain, 1998).

**Practice 5: Capitalize on Students’ Home Language, Knowledge, and Cultural Assets**

In studies of schooling, such socioeconomic variables as race/ethnic group, immigration status, parental education level, parental employment status and income, family composition, and marital status of parents are considered if not examined (e.g., National Research Council, 1984). Cultural factors, while mentioned, are seldom examined. Yet in schools that serve as diverse a student population as those in the United States do, a sociocultural perspective on teaching and learning is arguably a necessity (John-Steiner and Mahn, 2012) if the goal is to interpret the relationship between instructional practices and learning outcomes. Analyses of the effectiveness of instructional practices requires, in addition to evidence of learning outcomes, examination of how children respond to those practices.

78Students in this study were in grades 3-6, so there is some overlap with the middle grades.

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Children’s learning behaviors and responses to instruction, especially in the early years of schooling, are culturally influenced by the socialization practices of the home and family. Ethnographic studies of socialization for learning, for example, have found that learning through observation is promoted in diverse indigenous communities around the world (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). An experimental study by Silva and colleagues (2010), building on that ethnographic work, found that Mexican-heritage children paid close attention to and were able to learn complex tasks just by attending to instructions directed at their siblings, and the practice of learning by keen observation and intent participation documented among indigenous peoples in Mexico is one that appears to carry over in immigrant groups, even after they leave their places of origin. In considering sociocultural influences, it is important to keep in mind that a view of home-school relationships as either match or mismatch is a nuanced one, and that there are practices that are similar in some ways and different in others. Relationships shift over time as the practices in the two domains interact (Rueda et al., 2006: Volk and Acosta, 2001).

Some school districts across the nation have been experimenting with departmentalization, or “platooning,” of instruction (see, e.g., Gewertz, 2014; Hood, 2009). This practice appears to be driven by policy changes, increased testing pressures, and spending cuts in education that have placed teachers at risk for burnout and emotional distress, leading ultimately to high teacher turnover rates in many districts. The argument for departmentalization in elementary schools is that teachers can be specialists in such subjects as math or science instead of having to meet the full gamut of student needs. In addition, departmentalization could help alleviate the shortage of teachers who are able to speak the home languages of ELs. One teacher could provide subject matter instruction in a language such as Spanish or Haitian Creole for five or six groups of students each day.

Elementary school teachers of self-contained classes are, by definition, generalists—they cover all or most academic subjects for their students for a school year. The most compelling argument for this traditional arrangement derives from the “whole child” movement, in which the child is the focus of education rather than curricular subjects, and the school itself is viewed as an ecological system in which students learn more than is taught (Eisner, 2005). Students also are influenced by their close and stable relationships with teachers and classmates, and teachers are able to know their students’ needs and issues. For ELs, some departmentalization is inevitable. Instruction in English as a second language (ESL)/English language development (ELD) is usually provided by specialists, and whether they push in to classes or students are pulled out of their regular classes for instruction, ELs are taught these subjects by a teacher different from their principal teacher. At present, little research is available on the effects of these different instructional arrangements on ELs.

With this complexity in mind, the experimental studies reviewed (e.g., Carlo et al., 2004; Liang et al., 2005; Llosa et al., 2016, Saunders and Goldenberg, 1999) suggest that instructional routines that draw on students’ home language, knowledge, and cultural assets support literacy development in English. Examples of the instructional routines in these studies include previewing and reviewing material in children’s L1, storybook reading in students’ L1 (Liang et al., 2005), providing opportunities for students to engage in conversational exchanges during instruction that permit some interpretation to take place in the L1 (Saunders and Goldenberg, 1999), providing L1 definitions for the targeted vocabulary (Carlo et al., 2004; Llosa et al., 2016), providing instruction in word-learning strategies that help ELs uncover the meanings of cognates when encountered in English texts (Carlo et al., 2004), and introducing key concepts by

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connecting them with children’s prior knowledge or experiences in the home and community contexts (Llosa et al., 2016).

Findings from correlational and evaluation studies also provide support for these methods. Studies on cross-language transfer (Dressler and Kamil, 2006) indicate significant relationships between performance in ELs’ L1 and L2 in word reading, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading strategies. Findings from evaluation studies comparing bilingual programs with mostly English-only programs (see Chapter 7) indicate that ELs instructed bilingually either perform on par with or outperform ELs instructed only in English over time.

**Practice 6: Screen for Language and Literacy Challenges and Monitor Progress**

Findings from numerous studies cited in previous reviews of promising and effective instructional practices for ELs (Baker et al., 2014; Gersten et al., 2007) suggest that “districts establish procedures for and provide training for schools to screen ELs for reading problems; consider collecting progress monitoring data more than three times a year for ELs at risk of reading problems; and use data from screening and progress monitoring assessments to make decisions about the instructional support ELs need to learn to read” (Gersten et al., 2007, p. 5). Further, these studies suggest “using currently available measures, such as standardized tests, district benchmark tests, or English language assessments to screen and identify students in need of additional instructional support” (Baker et al., 2014, p. 60).

The studies specify the types of assessments that are useful at different grade spans for determining whether ELs are in need of additional instructional support. For kindergarten and 1st grade, measures include those that assess phonological awareness, familiarity with the alphabet and alphabetic principle, ability to read single words, and knowledge of basic phonics rules. For children at the end of 1st grade and in the next few grades, assessments include those that measure reading connected texts accurately and fluently. For students in grades 2-5, oral reading fluency measures are valid screening measures.

Two other recommendations are that “districts with performance benchmarks use the same standards for ELs and English-proficient students in the early grades, but make adjustments in instruction when EL progress is not sufficient, and that teachers be trained to use formative data to guide instruction” (Gersten et al., 2007, pp. 6-7). With regard to formative data, Black and Wiliam (1998) suggest that students’ writing samples be used on an ongoing basis to determine areas for improvement. Students’ writing samples are excellent sources for formative assessment because they shed light on language challenges that are common to all children, as well as on challenges and opportunities related to primary language influence on English (Kim et al., 2011).

**Practice 7: Provide Small-Group Support in Literacy and English Language Development for English Learners Who Need Additional Support**

Many of the studies of ELs in grades 1-5 support the use of small-group academic support for ELs who require more time to develop pre-reading and reading skills, as well as in other areas of literacy and language development (e.g. Burns, 2011; Denton et al., 2004; Gunn et al., 2002; Nelson et al., 2011; Ransford-Kaldon et al., 2010; Solari and Gerber, 2008; Vaughn et

79A list of these studies appears in Gersten et al. (2007, p. 31, footnote 22). Only studies conducted between 1997 and 2016 are included.

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al., 2006a, 2006b). Recommendations related to these studies (Gersten et al., 2007, pp. 10-11) call for “ensuring the programs are implemented for at least 30 minutes in small homogeneous groups and providing training and ongoing support for teachers, interventionists, and other school personnel on how to deliver small group instruction effectively, as well how to use effective teaching techniques that can be used outside of small group instruction.” An additional important recommendation related to the studies (Baker et al., 2014) is that additional supports 80 address language and literacy skills, such as vocabulary, listening, and reading comprehension.