

# Teaching Bilingual Students Successfully

In Sheltered English classrooms, teachers help Limited English Proficient and Fluent English Proficient students through the difficult task of learning academic content while mastering a second language.

By the year 2000, Hispanics are expected to account for 10 percent of all Americans; in many southwestern states they will be the majority of the population (Casas and Furlong 1986). Growth in the Hispanic population is seen in almost every state. Between 1970 and 1980, 13 diverse states, including Oregon, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Alaska, experienced growth rates of more than 100 percent in their Hispanic populations. In addition:

- Within the current Hispanic population, one in nine is a child under the age of five. This is the largest proportion of school-age youth of all ethnic groups in the U.S.
- Of school-age children in the U.S., 3.6 million are Hispanic, and the number is growing daily.
- Of all Latinos in America, 36 percent are under the age of 18 (Orum 1985, Arias 1986).

Why all the statistics? Because with the second greatest wave of immigration to the U.S. continuing, the fact that students of Hispanic origin have a 50-50 chance of dropping out of school means we have an impending national crisis (National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics 1984).

Soaring dropout rates (averaging between 40 and 50 percent since the 1950s) coupled with high percentages of functional illiteracy indicate that current educational practices have not had the intended academic benefits (Ford Foundation 1984). The reason, according to Professor Alberto Ochoa at San Diego State University, is that

traditional teaching strategies do not provide youth who have limited English proficiency the opportunities to master English and learn the academic content of the lesson. How can we help these students succeed in school?

## **Sheltered English**

*Sheltered English* is one approach that

*Photograph by Laura Rydell*



appears effective for teaching academic courses to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and Fluent English Proficient (FEP) students. (LEP students are those who have not attained minimal proficiency in academics and oral language in English, while FEP students have attained minimal proficiency.) In "sheltering" lessons, teachers incorporate second language acquisition principles with traditional teaching methodology to increase the *comprehensibility* of the lesson for students (Krashen 1982). They also adjust the language demands of the lesson by modifying speech rate and tone, using context clues and models extensively, and relating instruction to students' experiences (Northcutt and Watson 1986, Parker 1987). In addition, teachers try to use as many analogies as possible and avoid idiomatic expressions like "clear as a bell" or "up a creek without a paddle."

Although LEP and FEP students may be able to carry on a conversation about the latest fad, they don't have the sophisticated vocabulary to master subject matter lessons. Therefore, teachers in Sheltered English classrooms attempt to bridge the gap between their own language abilities and the listening skills of their students. They do this by preteaching *two* vocabulary sets: (1) the words necessary to understand the content of the lesson, and (2) the words used to explain the lesson. In teaching these sets of words, teachers use visuals, manipulatives, and models to make the words come alive for their students.

Extensive planning by teachers is an essential aspect of instruction for LEP or FEP students. Since these students are concurrently learning both English vocabulary and academic content, it is very easy for them to miss the point of a lesson. Teachers need to plan carefully what they will teach during the year, what materials (movies, videos, pictures, handouts) are necessary to teach these concepts, and what should be mastered by the students.

#### Mastering New Concepts

Since LEP students often lack the background information for content and

1. **Preplanning the year by developing themes**
  - Decide what the students need to master
  - Organize content around themes
2. **The diagnosis**
  - Develop objectives for content and language

**Think of ways to bring lessons to life**

  - Identify visuals and manipulatives
  - Identify concrete models to illustrate ideas
3. **Setting the stage**
  - Present a broad overview of the unit/lesson content
4. **Preteaching two vocabulary sets:**
  - learning vocabulary
  - content vocabulary
5. **The instruction**
  - Use consistent lesson plans
  - Find ways to animate the direct instruction (realia, role-plays, and models for learning)
6. **Guided practice**
  - More examples and tryouts
7. **Independent practice**
  - Student interaction maximized (dyads, groups, and cooperative learning)
  - Evaluation (student-developed products and tests)

Fig. 1. Seven-Step Plan for Sheltered English Instruction

may have parents who have limited schooling, teachers in sheltered classrooms start by using the same lesson format repeatedly. Such a strategy reduces the time necessary for the students to decipher how the teacher is presenting new information.

However, to ensure that they master new concepts, teachers also strive to engage students through the use of visuals and manipulatives that powerfully illustrate the concepts. For example, to show the length of time between the formation of Pangeia (the solitary continent described in geography books) and the seven continents of today, one teacher wrapped 40 feet of cashier's tape around the classroom. At the end of the tape, she identified today, then put a mark about one inch away to show when the U.S.

Constitution was signed, and another two inches away to note the birth of Christ. Those items took up less than three inches on the tape. At the very beginning of the tape, she denoted the existence of Pangeia, 10 feet away from the start of the tape, she indicated the formation of the seven continents. This simple model gave the LEP and FEP students a much better idea of how much time had passed during the formation of the continents.

Experiments, plays, realia, overheads, and other ways of animating lessons are effective tools for teachers of Sheltered English. For example, after reading sections of *A Tale of Two Cities* to his students, one teacher had them role-play the major characters in the book. Each day prior to the lesson, he had them predict what each character would do next. To enhance her students' comprehension, a geometry teacher had them use straws to build geometric forms to model the third dimension.

#### Interactive Learning

Teachers in sheltered classrooms increase student interaction with content by using small-group cooperative learning and by minimizing lectures. Lectures, while very important, need to be well organized and to the point; LEP and FEP students typically cannot follow sudden shifts in information. Lectures, following the seven-step lesson plan (see fig. 1), must also lead to activities and student work that can be completed in dyads or cooperative groups.

**In "sheltering" lessons, the teacher incorporates second language acquisition principles with traditional teaching methodology to increase the *comprehensibility* of the lesson for students.**

In recitation sessions, teachers should increase wait-time to allow students sufficient time to formulate their replies. Bilingual students may have difficulty answering typical content-based questions—for example, "Who were the primary settlers in the Northeast?"—because they lack familiarity with the vocabulary or because of the speed at which the question is asked. LEP students, however, often understand the content of a lecture or discussion. Having them generate *prediction questions* leads to higher levels of interaction with the content; for example, "How did the Indians feel about the westward movement?"; for the novel *The Pearl*, "How would I change if I won the lottery?"; and "What would Los Angeles be like if there were an 8.5 earthquake there?"

When students *think* about content—by predicting what will happen next and creating models for understanding ideas and outcomes—rather than just responding to questions, they become more engaged in their learning and, as a result, enjoy it more.

### Study Skills

Students experience the highest levels of interaction with subject matter during guided and independent practice and while doing homework. While the teacher can control the amount of interaction occurring in guided practice, the student controls the amount of interaction during independent practice and homework.

To increase students' learning during independent practice and homework, teachers in sheltered classrooms instruct students in study skills. According to David Alvarez, Superintendent of Coachella Valley Unified (Thermal, California), all students, but LEP and FEP students in particular, benefit from learning effective study skills, such as how to listen to directions and lectures, take notes, outline, and prepare for tests (Northcutt and Watson 1986). By mastering note-taking through hierarchical approaches or mind-maps, students learn to make good use of the information given to them. By teaching students to outline a chapter, predict

## The teacher also adjusts the language demands of the lesson by modifying speech rate and tone, using context clues and models extensively, and relating instruction to students' experiences.

what questions will be asked on the test, or how to relate concepts, teachers ensure that their students have high levels of interaction with the subject matter.

### A Promising Approach

While Sheltered English is relatively new, there have been some studies of its impact in the classroom. For example, in the Desert Sands Unified School District (Indio, California), Wright (1987) compared the on-task rates of students in sheltered classes, in classes taught by teachers implementing a Madeline Hunter model, and in a control group. The sheltered classes averaged 68 percent on-task behaviors compared to 61 percent for the classes using the Hunter model and 52 percent for the control group.

Another study, conducted in the Ocean View School District in Orange County, California, documents the effectiveness of Sheltered English for Asian and Hispanic students (Rydell 1987). The results indicated that students in the sheltered classes performed significantly better than the control group in reading and language arts.

Too often, programs for LEP or FEP students stress mastery of the basics. Everyone, including the teacher, finds these "basics" classes boring. Even worse, these classes often teach stu-

dents that education means learning information and then repeating it. This process of "teach and repeat" does little to motivate students to want to learn. Now at last, with the number of Hispanic students in the schools increasing daily, there is an instructional approach that shows promise with LEP and FEP students: Sheltered English. □

### References

- Arias, M. B. (1986). "The Context of Education for Hispanics: An Overview." *American Journal of Education* 95, 1.
- Casas, J., and M. Furlong. (1986). "In Search of an Understanding and a Responsible Resolution to the Mexican-American Educational Dropout Problem." *California Public Schools Forum* 1: 45-63.
- Ford Foundation (1984). *Hispanics: Challenges and Opportunities*. New York: Ford Foundation.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Hayward, Calif.: Alemany Press.
- National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics. (1984). *Make Something Happen: Hispanics and Urban High School Reform*, Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Hispanic Policy Development Project.
- Northcutt, L., and D. Watson. (1986). *Implementing Sheltered English Effectively*. Carlsbad, Calif.: BINET.
- Orum, L. (1985). *The Education of Hispanics, Selected Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: Council of La Raza.
- Parker, D. (1987). *How to Support LEP Students' English Language Development and Academic Success in Spite of a Lack of Primary Language Resources*. Sacramento: California State Department of Education.
- Rydell, C. (1987). *Project Voyages, 1986-87 Evaluation Report*. Huntington Beach: Ocean View Elementary School District.
- Wright, M. (1987). "Staff Development on Teachers and Their Students." Doctoral diss., University of San Francisco.

**Daniel L. Watson** is Coordinator, Student Well-Being, San Diego County Office of Education, 6401 Linda Vista Rd., San Diego, CA 92111-7399. **Linda Northcutt** is Assistant Superintendent, Coachella Valley Unified School District, Thermal, CA 92236. **Laura Rydell** is Program Director, Project Voyages, Ocean View School District, Huntington Beach, CA 92646.

Copyright © 1989 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.