



ELL Instruction That Works for All

SUMMARY

While Sheltered Instruction was developed for use with English language learners, a recent action research project on Long Island reminds us that it has the potential to improve achievement for all students.

This article addresses recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 of the “Reading Next” and recommendations 1, 4, 5, and 7 of the “Writing Next” reports of the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. (See pages 95-96 and 98)

It is the first day

of school and you are faced with a classroom full of questioning minds. Your students are sizing you up and wondering if this teacher will in fact make a difference in their lives. You are the one taking the first test. Will you pass or fail? Do you think about how you can empower them even if they do not speak English well? Do you know how to engage them despite their struggles with comprehension? Can you respond to their learning needs, especially if they had limited formal schooling? Will all of your students — including English Language Learners — be engaged and empowered? The goal of this article is to document how the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model and effective multilevel literacy strategies were used to engage

and empower struggling ELLs in a Long Island high school.

Background: The Instructional Context

Freeport Public Schools on Long Island includes eight buildings (five elementary, two middle schools, and one high school). The overall district enrollment is more than 6,500, consisting of approximately 10% white, 39% African-American, 49% Hispanic, and less than 2% of other racial groups such as Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American. Twelve languages are spoken by roughly 18% of the school population. Given these essential statistics, this action research project was designed to address the following questions: Who are our struggling students? How can we get to know them and really know what they

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understand about how language works? What do they already know and how can their knowledge base help determine the appropriate level of instruction?

Theoretical and Research-Based Context

Sheltered Instruction

The SIOP Model is organized around eight components essential for making grade-level content accessible for ELLs and for helping them develop academic and language skills: preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. These are further divided into a total of 30 strategies. The purpose of the original SIOP project described in this article was to establish specific guidelines for professional development to support the implementation of Sheltered Instruction (see www.siopinstitute.net). The SIOP Model has been used for observation, self-assessment, and lesson planning purposes in Freeport since 2004.

The SIOP instructional model is an all-inclusive lesson planning and delivery model that is ideal for every student, not just for ELLs. The use of this comprehensive model results in effective content-based ESL teaching practices that, when implemented systematically, ensure success for all learners.

Three Rules to Engagement

To ensure that all students are fully engaged in the reading, writing, or listening process they need to understand the Three Rules to Engagement: “Before, During, and After.” Building student background knowledge and establishing the expectations for active involvement are essential when presenting new material. Each step of the Three Rules to Engagement process requires that students do something physical; read, write, move, act out, or express in some capacity to demonstrate that they understand the objectives of the lesson. Being mentally engaged in a lesson is not sufficient; being actively engaged is the primary goal. We believe that in addition to activating students’ background knowledge, it is

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What is Sheltered Instruction?

More and more teachers in New York state are turning to the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008) for research-based best instructional practices for English Language Learners. The goal of Sheltered Instruction is “to teach content to students learning English through a developmental language approach” (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010, p. 15). Sheltered Instruction offers the adaptations and modifications of the mainstream, grade-appropriate curriculum that makes learning achievable for ELLs. The SIOP model was a result of a 7-year research project (1996-2003) conducted for the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) (Echevarria et al., 2008). But the SIOP Model is not just a reinvention of the wheel. It is a model of best practices designed with ELLs in mind, but relevant for all students!

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The Eight Components of SIOP

1. Preparation
2. Building Background
3. Comprehensible Input
4. Strategies
5. Interaction
6. Practice & Application
7. Lesson Delivery
8. Review & Assessment

essential to consider their learning styles and to adjust one's teaching style to the needs of the students (Dunn & Honigfeld, 2009). We ask ourselves, "What do my students need to achieve the goal of the lesson?" Since we believe that one size of a lesson does not fit all students, the SIOP project teachers provided differentiated lessons to meet the needs of all of our students.

SIOP Implementation Through Multilevel Literacy Activities

During the summer of 2009, two teachers joined one of the authors in a collaborative effort to implement key SIOP components and to study the effectiveness of using the SIOP model for instruction with ELLs, general education and special education students in high school English language arts. Among the educators involved in the project were an ESL teacher (Laurie Trujillo), a reading/English teacher (Ellen Okin) and a reading/ESL teacher (Maryclaire Dumas-Landisi). The project involved 48 students enrolled in an English language arts summer enrichment class, whose goal was to expand the students' literacy knowledge base and skills.

Prior to the summer project Dumas-Landisi experienced success with her high school age ELLs utilizing the SIOP Model. She hypothesized that

all of the students taking ELA enrichment class in summer school would benefit from the use of the SIOP model. When she asked Okin and Trujillo to become involved in the research project, both of the teachers were willing to administer the pre-test, mid-term and post-test and to focus their instruction using appropriate SIOP strategies.

What SIOP Strategies Were Used?

Critical elements of the eight SIOP components were implemented throughout the summer school program. However, the key to the success of the participating students was the use of multilevel activities. The application of scaffolded multilevel lessons provided the students with the support they needed at the appropriate proficiency level to complete their literacy tasks successfully.

At the beginning of the summer program, the three collaborating teachers systematically focused on activating the students' prior knowledge through a range of brainstorming activities on familiar topics such as family, friends, and school. To generate extensive vocabulary lists and subtopics for further exploration, PowerPoint slides were shared with pictures, Smart Board technology was used to facilitate student interaction, and activities were recorded on large chart papers to actively engage the students in comprehension-building

activities. The basis for the students' future writing assignments was formed at this juncture. The primary purpose of the instruction, established with the students, was to engage them in writing about topics that elicited personal connections. These background-building activities were essential in developing further lessons and establishing the vocabulary baseline of the participating students.

One specific SIOP-inspired strategy which led to student writing success is the Touchdown Method — T3DC, which helps students refine their writing skills. Developed by Dumas-Landisi, T3DC stands for (T)opic sentence, (3)3 detail sentences, and (C)onclusion sentence. The students worked with a variety of leveled, scaffolded, graphic organizers that were instrumental in using this strategy to develop their writing skills.

Throughout the summer school project the students most in need of support frequently worked together using the Touchdown Method in cooperative learning groups to develop an introductory paragraph that supported the topic chosen. This collaborative approach responded to students' needs at varying stages of literacy development. Teachers provided some students with elaborate sentence starters and pre-taught key vocabulary words to assist them in

their writing. Other students independently created a topic sentence, three detail sentences and a conclusion sentence using scaffolded outlines. The groups completed their graphic organizers, used the Smart Board, or wrote on large chart paper and then presented their paragraphs to the class.

Students at a higher readiness level received a graphic organizer with sentence starters and fill-in-the-blanks passages using the Touchdown Method format. These students worked in pairs or independently to complete the graphic organizers as a tool to create an essay on a topic of interest. At the most advanced level, the students worked with a blank Touchdown graphic organizer template, which required them to fill in the blanks without the use of teacher-provided or collaboratively developed sentence starters.

These multi-level, scaffolded activities were repeated often until it was evident that the teachers could relinquish some of the responsibility to the students and have the students write independently without the use of a graphic organizer or template.

Once the students developed their knowledge of the format of writing they were introduced to another scaffolding strategy, the SLAMS rules

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The Touchdown Method — T3DC

I. Introduction Paragraph

T - Topic Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
C - Conclusion Sentence

II. Body Paragraphs

Body #1
T - Topic Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
C - Conclusion Sentence

Body #2
T - Topic Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
C - Conclusion Sentence

Body #3
T - Topic Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
C - Conclusion Sentence

III. Conclusion Paragraph

T - Topic Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
D - Detail Sentence
C - Conclusion Sentence

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SLAMS

Sentences

Write in complete sentences

Lines

Fill in all of the lines

Answer

Answer all of the questions

Mechanics

Correct all writing mechanics:

Spelling

Punctuation

Capitalization

Grammar

Support

Support with details

rubric (Crowell & Kolba, 1998). This acronym is a strategy used to develop writing skills, by reminding students to:

Write in complete **Sentences**, Fill in all of the **Lines**, **Answer** the question, Attend to **Mechanics** (spelling, punctuation, capitalization & grammar), and **Support** with details.

Students were provided with a writing sample and a rubric that clearly defined the expectations of a proficient writer using the SLAMS rules. To introduce this activity, the Smart Board was used to display a paragraph written by a group of students from another class. Each student had a copy of the paragraph and a SLAMS rubric template. They were asked to work in cooperative learning groups, refer to the rubric and check off each of the rules to see if the objectives were being met. Students took turns presenting their findings and interacted with the Smart Board to show their understanding of the rules and objectives of the lesson. Subsequent activities involved students working on their own writing, in pairs as well as individually, using the SLAMS rubric.

The primary purpose for utilizing these and other tiered activities was to allow students to work at varying levels to achieve success. Fisher and Frey (2008) suggest that teachers:

“Use scaffolding to provide students with the level of support they need to complete the task or assignment successfully. As students become more proficient, the amount of support provided decreases, until they can work independently. The gradual release of responsibility model explicitly moves instruction from the teacher (‘I do it’), to guided instruction with the whole class (‘We do it’), to students working together with teacher supervision (‘You do it together’), and, finally, to students being responsible for their own work (‘You do it alone’)” (Echevarria & Hasbrouck, 2009).

How Do We Know These Strategies Work?

The summer school SIOP project included three formal modes of assessment: a pre-test, a midterm, and a post-test that were developed by the three teachers. The students were given the pre-test to evaluate what they already knew about reading and writing strategies and formats. This test proved to be a valuable source of information about their entry level of skills and the background knowledge needed to read for information and comprehension as well as to write coherently and fluently. The pre-test data provided an essential guide for the teachers to align instruction with student needs and to identify the most appropriate SIOP strategies.

The pre-test results indicated that only 3 of 48 students received a score higher than 50%; 27 received less than 30%; and 18 out of 48 students received a score between 30% and 49%. It was clear that most students were lacking in basic skills relating to the reading and writing process. To address this problem, a series of lessons was created that follow the SIOP model with lessons scaffolded to address student levels identified in the pre-test.

Halfway through the summer program, the students were given a mid-term exam. The results of this test indicated significant improvement in reading and writing comprehension. In the mid-point test, 31 of the 48 students received a grade of 50% or higher; 12 earned grades between 40% and 50%; and only 5 received less than 40% on the midterm. End-of-summer scores showed further improvement. Forty of the 48 students received grades higher than 80%; 6 students received a score between 70% and 80% and only 2 out of 48 students received a score between 50% and 60%. The effectiveness of SIOP strategies was apparent. The three collaborating teachers collected the data, identified the appropriate SIOP strategies to address the areas of weakness, and provided instruction while continuing to reinforce and build upon the strengths of the students.

The three SIOP project teachers reported that all the participating students were continuously engaged in each of the lessons. There was no significant difference in how the ELLs responded compared to the ELA enrichment students. The lessons focused on background knowledge and connection-making at each student's level, as an integral part of the process. All lessons were tiered to accommodate all levels. Directions were clearly explained and repeated as often as necessary. Based on the stated objectives and the informal observations of the three teachers, the summer school principal, the parents and students, this summer school SIOP project was successful and will continue in the future.

Summary of Results

The results of the eighth-grade New York State ELA assessment indicated that Freeport students demonstrated a need to improve reading comprehension, writing skills, and listening skills. The purpose of this action research was to determine the impact of the use of the SIOP Model and strategies on the students' ability to read with greater understanding, write with fluency, and listen effectively. The conclusion, based on student data and informal observations, is that SIOP strategies had a positive influence on student achievement.

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Definitions

ELA

English Language Arts
Enrichment Class

ELL

English Language Learners

ESL

English as a Second Language

SIOP

Sheltered Instruction
Observation Protocol

SLAMS Rules

Write in complete Sentences,
Fill in all of the Lines, Answer
the Question, Attend to
Mechanics, (Spelling,
Punctuation, Capitalization
& Grammar)

T3DC

The Touchdown Writing
Method - Topic Sentence, 3
Detail Sentences &
Conclusion Sentence

Passing the Baton: A Connection-Making Process

The authors conclude that there are two batons to pass with this project. One baton is the responsibility for learning passing from teacher to student. Once students have clearly developed their basic reading and writing skills, learned via the multi-layered activities embedded within SIOP strategies, they can apply these new strategies across the curriculum in all subject areas. The goal is to encourage, empower, energize and fully engage all students in their own learning. The other baton is to content-area teachers who work with all levels of students. While the SIOP model was developed for use with ELL students, the results of this action research project indicate that the strategies have promise for improving student achievement for all students. The second baton can also be passed from colleague to colleague, in professional learning communities and in future professional development activities.

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