

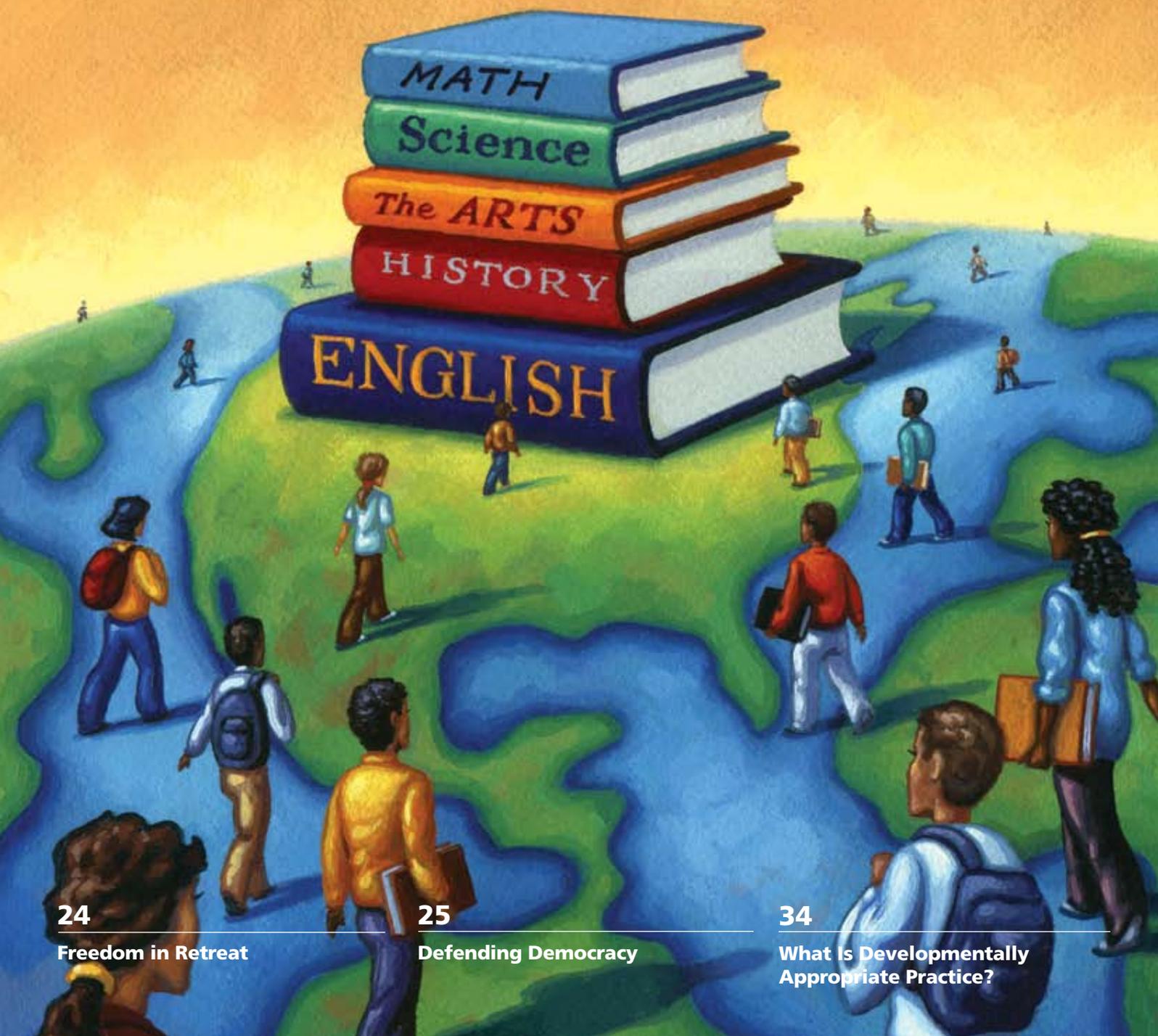


# AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS

## Teaching English Language Learners

WITH 5 MILLION ENGLISH LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, IT'S IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHAT THE RESEARCH DOES—AND DOES NOT—SAY



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### *What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say*

BY CLAUDE GOLDENBERG

One in nine students is an English language learner. What's the best way to help these students become fluent in English and master the academic content? Existing research cannot fully answer that question, but it can offer teachers some guidelines. Focusing on two recent reviews of that research, Claude Goldenberg highlights the most promising instructional approaches and discusses important questions that the research has yet to answer.

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## Supporting the Spread of Freedom

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### The Shameful State of Standards

I read your recent issue of *American Educator* with much interest, as the subject of state standards and curriculum content (especially in the sciences) is an important one to me and to most other teachers.

In E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s, article, "Plugging the Hole in State Standards," he correctly states that not only do schools need standards and assessments, they need adequate teacher training and adequate supplies. The first two may not be easy to do, but compared to the latter two, they are cheap and quick. Teacher training requires that universities be committed to supporting students pursuing degrees in education, and training them in best practices by having them work with the best teachers the profession has to offer. All too often, this doesn't happen. Adequate supplies and equipment are costly, and in the current economic situation, districts are cutting back rather than fighting for higher taxes and watching levies get voted down—meaning most teachers, myself included, make do on shoestring budgets with the bare minimum of supplies and equipment (often supplemented out of the teachers' own pockets).

—GORDON BONNET  
Charles O. Dickerson High School  
Trumansburg, N.Y.

You hit the nail on the head: since I started teaching 10 years ago, I have been saying the Illinois standards make no sense.

The way state tests are written you have to almost out-think the test writers. You may teach a standard all year and teach it the way the text does only to find out that it was asked another way completely on the state test.

I once taught at a school that used the Core Knowledge Sequence, and I thought it was a practical, straightforward approach. Can you imagine how much money could be saved by states if it were adopted? The *nerve* of *American Educator* to suggest that a solution could be found in a simple, series of books. Do you not know what bureaucracy is for?

Thanks again for the nice issue.  
—KIRK BASTEK  
Leif Ericson Scholastic Academy  
Chicago, Ill.

Before I retired from the Yonkers Public School System I was the head of the science department, the chemistry mentor for the district, the safety officer for the district, and responsible for attending state educational meetings about the science standards. I taught for 35 years: Regents Chemistry, Local Chemistry, Honors Chemistry, AP Chemistry, Regents Biology, Local Biology, Local Earth Science, Environmental Science, and Physical Science.

This is what I recall about the state standards in science. They were written without any rhyme or reason. Those who wrote the science standards believed that students can process like a com-

puter and that random access memory will allow students to learn science and teachers to teach science without a logical, sequential flow of content or knowledge. The standards are process-driven, not content-driven.

The experienced teachers had trouble with the new standards, the new teachers were lost. I tried in vain to speak out about this gibberish and nonsense but got nowhere.

Thank you for making me feel that the world has finally caught on to the shameful state of educational standards.

—FRANCIS A. GENTILE  
Retired, Yonkers Federation of Teachers  
Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.

I have always been mystified by the unchallenged belief in standards that are written in such general language that they are useless for lesson planning. With the addition of a modifier or two, the same standard applies from kindergarten through eighth grade! Pointless standards provide the shaky groundwork for a curriculum that relies on wishful thinking rather than specific, attainable goals. Our young learners are told to mimic what sophisticated readers and writers do rather than being taught the nuts and bolts of reading and writing.

In many New York City schools, students in every grade are instructed to write "how to" pieces in which they are told to take the equivalent of a snapshot and expand on it by using lots of descriptive language, internal thoughts, and emotions. What was too difficult in the early childhood grades, where students typically lack the vocabulary necessary for the task, becomes drudge work by the end of middle school. Unlike good wine, lessons repeated year after year do not improve with age. Confusion and frustration in the lower grades sets students up for failure in later years. Rather than an illogical curriculum spawned by meaningless standards, instruction in the elementary school should seek mastery of concrete, specific material that translates directly into real world reading and writing skills. Standards that cannot inform instruction need to be jettisoned so that teachers



## Kids' Well-Being on the Rise

POSITIVE TRENDS IN education partially account for the recent improvements in children's overall well-being, according to a report by the Foundation for Child Development.

Unlike the Foundation's annual Child and Youth Well-Being Index, which tracks children's quality of life from birth to age 17, its latest study breaks out trends in early childhood (ages 0 to 5), middle childhood (ages 6 to 11), and adolescence (ages 12 to 17), and emphasizes the early years. The findings are based on a composite of 25 key indicators grouped into six quality-of-

life domains: health, family economic well-being, educational attainment, safety/behavioral concerns, social relationships with family and peers, and community connectedness. The trends were analyzed over a 12-year period, from 1994 to 2006.

Progress in education was largely driven by enrollment growth in preschool and kindergarten: preschool enrollment increased by 14 percent and kindergarten enrollment jumped by 26 percent. Furthermore, the report notes that improvements in reading and mathematics among 9-year-olds, which

began after 1999, may be related to the increase in children attending preschool and kindergarten in the 1990s.

Other positive indicators include greater participation in extracurricular lessons and declining rates of sixth-graders who fear being harmed in school or on the way to or from school. The study also found that more parents are reading to their children daily and setting rules for television watching.

Among the study's most troubling findings were a dramatic rise in obesity and a more modest, but important increase in low birth weight babies.

## Studying the Art of American History

IN HIS PAINTING titled *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* (right), which hangs in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Grant Wood portrays the famous scene as a child might imagine it, with a birds-eye view of a simple, toy-like village awakened by an unassuming hero riding through the night. Most children, though, have never seen Wood's painting. If they did, their interest in American history—and art—would surely grow.

Such is the premise behind Picturing America, a program created by the National Endowment for the Humanities that aims to strengthen the teaching of American history and culture by bringing classic works of art into thousands of classrooms and libraries throughout the country.

Thanks to the program, institutions that successfully apply will receive 40 large (24" x 36") laminated works of art, including Wood's painting, along with a teachers' resource book. The book, which is also available online, features relevant background information about the artists and their works and suggests activities for elementary-, middle-, and high-school students. While the resource book helps educators use the images to enhance lessons in a wide variety of subjects, the connections to American history and literature are particularly strong. For example:

- George Caleb Bingham's *The County Election* (far right) could enhance discussions of civics or the Civil War;
- N.C. Wyeth's cover illustration for a 1919 edition of *The Last of the Mohicans* (center right) could enable students to analyze romanticized images of Native Americans;

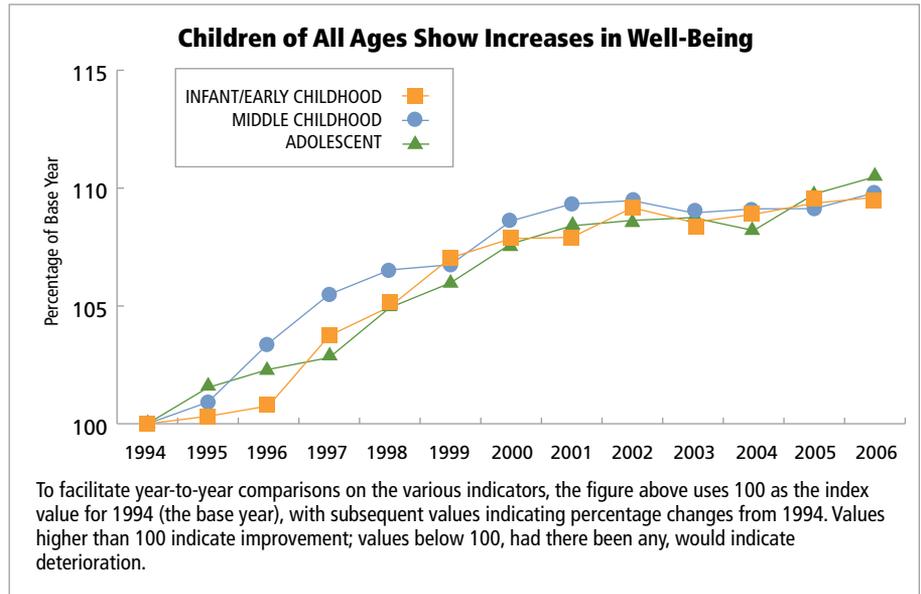
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- Charles Sheeler's cleverly titled *American Landscape* (right) could inspire debate on the costs and benefits of industrialization; and
- James Karales' *Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965* (above right) could convey the determination of civil rights activists.

Applications must be submitted between August 4 and October 31, 2008. Detailed instructions for submitting an application can be found in the "Apply Now" section of [www.PicturingAmerica.neh.gov](http://www.PicturingAmerica.neh.gov). Selected institutions will receive their materials in the spring of 2009.

Obesity among children ages 6 to 11 is nearly four times more common than it was in the 1960s, and for children ages 2 to 5, it's three times more common. Low birth weight babies, which increased by 12.3 percent from 1994 to 2005, appear to be rising because of an increase in mothers using fertility drugs to have children later in life. Fertility drugs make multiple births with lower birth weights per child more likely.

The Foundation for Child Development's full results are available at [www.fcd-us.org/usr\\_doc/EarlyChildhoodWell-BeingReport.pdf](http://www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/EarlyChildhoodWell-BeingReport.pdf).



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Credits: Far left: Grant Wood, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, 1931. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1950. Photograph © 1988 The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Art © Estate of Grant Wood/Licensed by VAGA, N.Y. Below center: N.C. Wyeth, *The Last of the Mohicans*, cover illustration, 1919. Reprinted with permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division from *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper, illustrated by N.C. Wyeth. Illustrations © 1919 Charles Scribner's Sons; © renewed 1947 Carolyn B. Wyeth. Below: George Caleb Bingham, *The County Election*, 1852. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo., Gift of Bank of America. Below left: Charles Sheeler, *American Landscape*, 1930. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, N.Y. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y. U.S.A. Left: James Karales, *Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965*, 1965. James Karales Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University. Photograph © Estate of James Karales.

# We Asked, You Answered

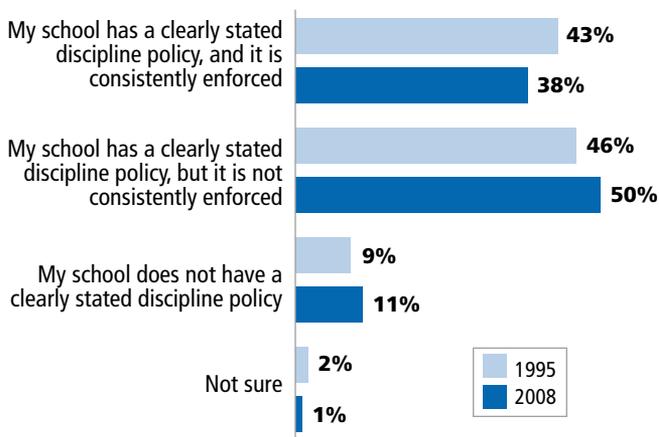
ARE STUDENTS TESTED too much? Are discipline policies consistently implemented? Is No Child Left Behind helping schools improve? These are key questions—and no one can provide more expert answers than teachers. So the AFT has been asking representative samples of its K-12th-grade teachers about these and other important issues for many years. Here we bring you some highlights. Unless otherwise noted, the findings are from early 2008, our most recent survey.

The results confirm that teachers are fed up with too much testing and the effects of No Child Left Behind (NCLB): 71

percent said students in their school are tested too frequently, and 64 percent said NCLB has had a negative effect on public education. Yet there is some good news: the majority of teachers surveyed are satisfied with a couple key aspects of their profession. More than 80 percent reported they were very/fairly satisfied with the quality of teaching in their school. And 71 percent felt very/fairly satisfied with opportunities to update their knowledge of the subject areas they teach and improve their teaching skills. See the charts (below and right) for more noteworthy results.

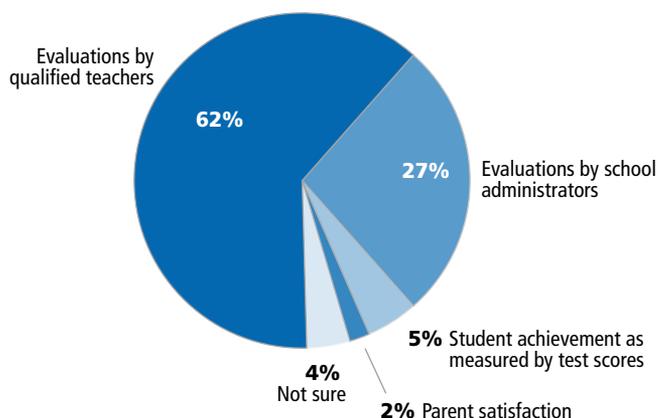
## In Too Many Schools, Discipline Policies Are Not Consistently Enforced

Which one of the following statements best describes your school's current student discipline policy?



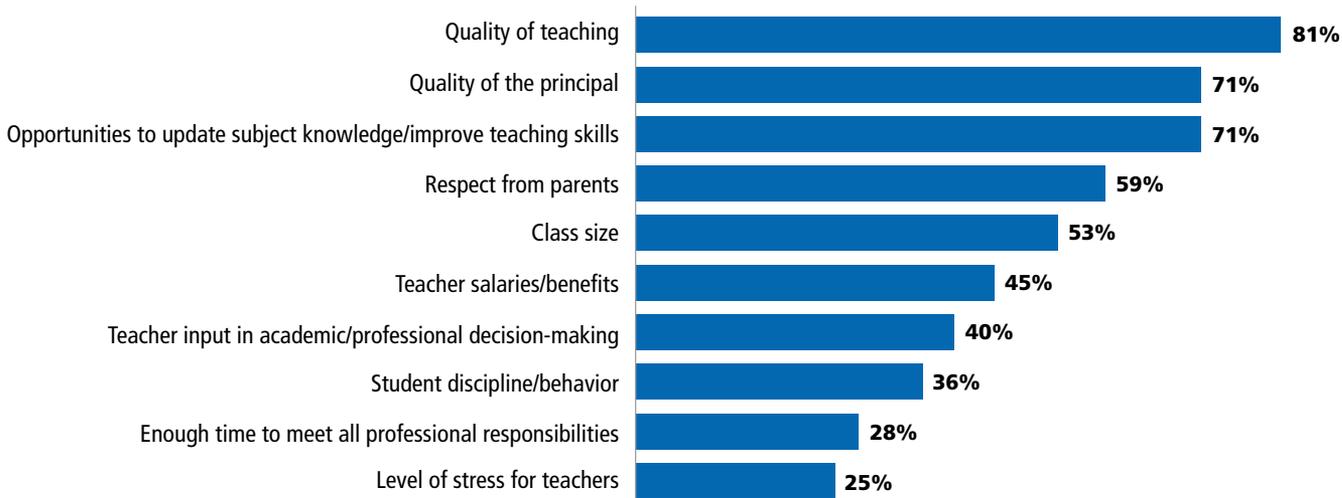
## Teachers Prefer to Be Evaluated by Qualified Peers

Which one of the following do you think is the best way to evaluate which teachers are doing a good job and which ones are not?

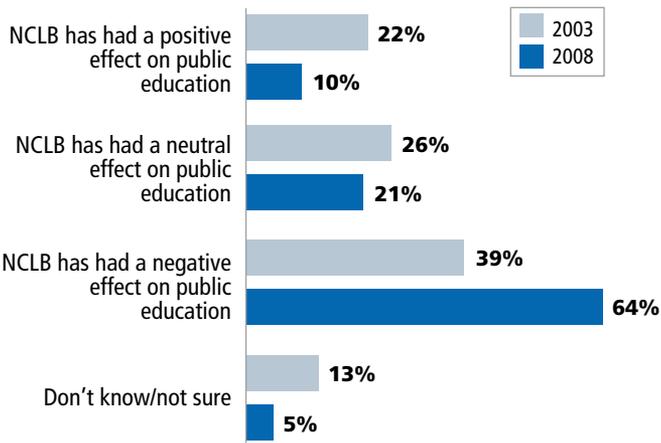


## Teachers Are Satisfied with the Quality of Teaching in Their School, but Not with the Level of Stress

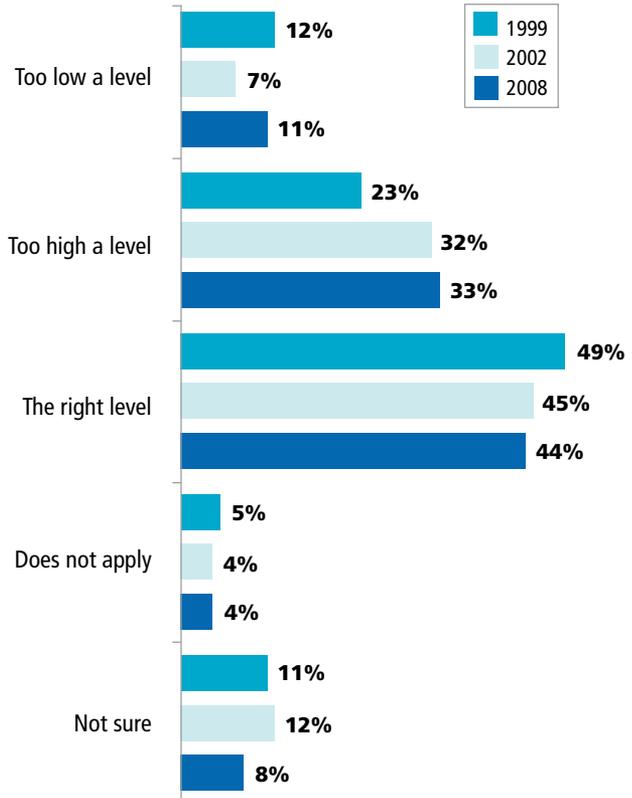
Percentage of teachers very/fairly satisfied with each aspect



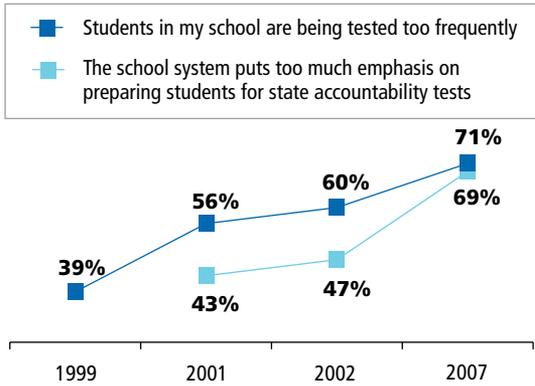
### NCLB: Not for the Better



### Too Many Standards-Based Tests Are Not at the Right Level



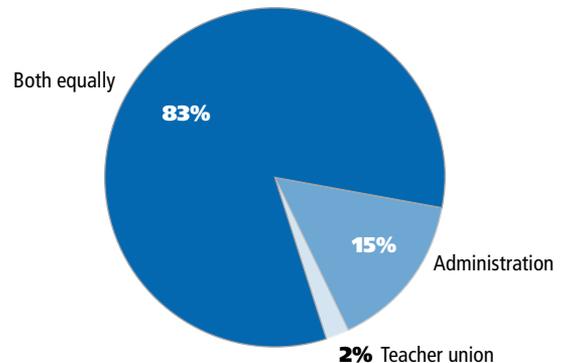
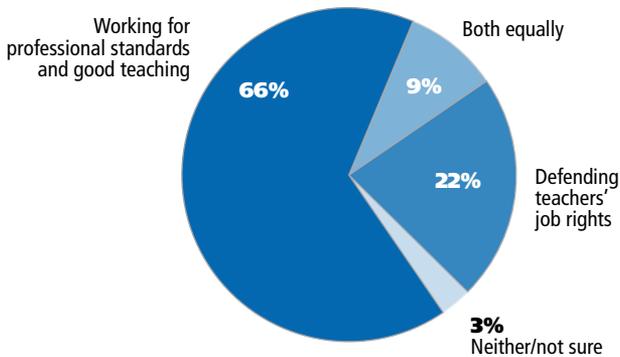
### There's Too Much Testing and Too Much Test Prep



### Professionalism and Quality Teaching Should Be Top Union Priorities

In general, when your union deals with issues that affect both teaching quality and teachers' rights, which should be the higher priority?

Who should have the main responsibility for working to ensure quality teaching in your district?



# Teaching English Language Learners

What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say

*Should students who are learning English spend the school day in classes where only English is spoken? Or should they be taught reading and other academic skills and content in their native language? Or should their classes be primarily in English, but include some explanations or materials in their native language? If their native language is to be used, how much native language instruction should they receive and for what purposes? And aren't there other issues we need to consider, aside from language of instruction? These are important questions, and anyone who can provide a quick answer is surely oversimplifying the issues. Some English language learners (ELLs) do not speak a word of English and are not literate in their native language. Others have some conversational English, but are not yet fluent, and in their native language they are not only literate, but have mastered a great deal of academic content. There will probably never be a formula for educating ELLs, just as there is no formula for educating students who already know English. What we can do is provide guidelines based on our strongest research about effective practices for teaching ELLs.*

*It's time to move beyond charged debates and all-too-certain answers. What students need is for educators and policymakers to take a more in-depth look, starting with what existing research does—and does not—say. In this article, Claude Goldenberg walks us through the major findings of two recent reviews of the research on educating ELLs. Given all the strong opinions one sees in newspaper op-eds, readers may be surprised to discover how little is actually known. What's certain is that if we conducted more research with ELLs, and paid more attention to the research that exists, we would be in a much better position.*

*And so, we bring you this article with four goals in mind. First, we hope that everyone who engages in debates about educating*

*Claude Goldenberg is professor of education at Stanford University. Previously, at California State University, Long Beach, he was associate dean of the College of Education and executive director of the Center for Language Minority Education and Research. He served on the National Research Council's Committee for the Prevention of Early Reading Difficulties in Young Children and on the National Literacy Panel, which synthesized research on literacy development among language minority children and youth. This article is adapted with permission from "Improving Achievement for English Language Learners," a chapter in Educating the Other America: Top Experts Tackle Poverty, Literacy, and Achievement in Our Schools, edited by Susan B. Neuman, forthcoming in August 2008, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. The author wishes to thank Rhoda Coleman, Ronald Gallimore, Patricia Gándara, Fred Genesee, Michael Graves, Peggy McCardle, Patricia Mathes, Michael Kamil, Bill Saunders, Timothy Shanahan, Jessie Sullivan, Robert Rueda, and Sharon Vaughn for their helpful comments.*

*ELLs will become a little more knowledgeable and, therefore, will start taking a little more nuanced positions. Second, we wish to spur more research (and more funding for more research). Third, to keep the snake-oil salesmen at bay, we think it's best for educators to know what existing research cannot support. And fourth, we believe that what has been reasonably well established is worth knowing.*

—EDITORS

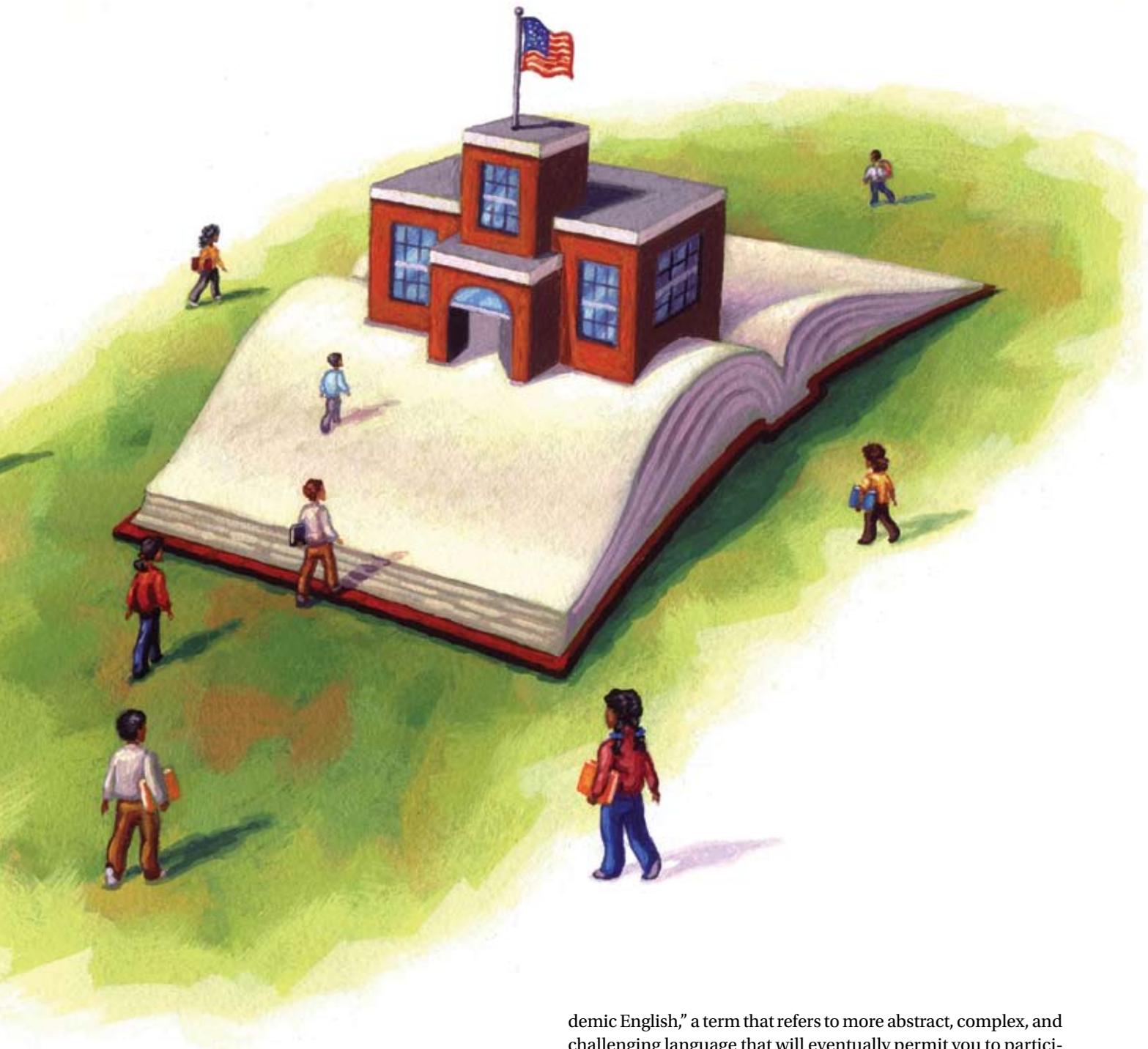
BY CLAUDE GOLDENBERG

**I**magine you are in second grade. Throughout the year you might be expected to learn irregular spelling patterns, diphthongs, syllabication rules, regular and irregular plurals, common prefixes and suffixes, antonyms and synonyms; how to follow written instructions, interpret words with multiple meanings, locate information in expository texts, use comprehension strategies and background knowledge to understand what you read, understand cause and effect, identify alliteration and rhyme, understand structural features of texts such as theme, plot, and setting; read fluently and correctly at least 80 words per minute, add approximately 3,000 words to your vocabulary, read tens if not hundreds of thousands of words from different types of texts; and write narratives and friendly letters using appropriate forms, organization, critical elements, capitalization, and punctuation, revising as needed.

And that's just before recess.

After recess you will have a similar list for math. And if you are fortunate enough to attend a school where all instruction has not been completely eclipsed by reading and math, after lunch you'll be tackling such things as motion, magnetism, life cycles, environments, weather, and fuel; interpreting information from diagrams, graphs, and charts; comparing and contrasting objects using their physical attributes; tracing your family history, comparing the lives of your parents and grandparents to your life; putting important events in a timeline; labeling the countries, the state where you live, mountain ranges, major rivers, and lakes on a map of North America; and learning how important historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Einstein, Abra-





ham Lincoln, Cesar Chavez, and Sally Ride made a difference in the lives of others. The expectations created by state and district academic standards can be a bit overwhelming—for students and for teachers.<sup>1</sup>

Now, imagine that you don't speak English very well. Your job is to learn what everyone else is learning, plus learn English. And it's not sufficient to learn English so you can talk with your friends and teacher about classroom routines, what you are having for lunch, where you went over the weekend, or who was mean to whom on the playground. You have to learn what is called "aca-

ademic English," a term that refers to more abstract, complex, and challenging language that will eventually permit you to participate successfully in mainstream classroom instruction. Academic English involves such things as relating an event or a series of events to someone who was not present, being able to make comparisons between alternatives and justify a choice, knowing different forms and inflections of words and their appropriate use, and possessing and using content-specific vocabulary and modes of expression in different academic disciplines such as mathematics and social studies. As if this were not enough, you eventually need to be able to understand and produce academic English both orally and in writing.<sup>2</sup> If you don't, there is a real chance of falling behind your classmates, making poorer grades, getting discouraged, falling further behind, and having fewer

educational and occupational choices.

Sound intimidating?

This is the situation faced by millions of students in U.S. schools who do not speak English fluently. Their number has grown dramatically just in the past 15 years. In 1990, one in 20 public school students in grades K-12 was an English language learner (ELL), that is, a student who speaks English either not at all or with enough limitations that he or she cannot fully participate in mainstream English instruction. Today the figure is 1 in 9. Demographers estimate that in 20 years it might be 1 in 4. The ELL population has grown from 2 million to 5 million since 1990, a period when the overall school population increased only 20 percent.<sup>3</sup> States not typically associated with non-English speakers—Indiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—each saw an increase in the ELL population of at least 300 percent between 1994-95 and 2004-05.<sup>4</sup>

ELL students in the U.S. come from over 400 different language backgrounds. What may come as a surprise to many readers is that most ELLs were born in the United States. Among elementary-age ELLs, 76 percent were born in the U.S. Among middle- and high-school students, 56 percent were born in this country. However, about 80 percent of ELLs' parents were born outside of the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

By far, the majority of ELLs—80 percent—are Spanish speakers. This is an important fact to bear in mind, since Spanish speakers in the U.S. tend to come from lower economic and educational backgrounds than either the general population or other immigrants and language minority populations.<sup>6</sup> For example, nearly 24 percent of immigrants from Mexico and Central America are below the poverty level, compared with 9 to 14 percent of immigrants from other regions of the world (and 11.5 percent of the U.S. native-born population). Fewer than 40 percent of immigrants from Mexico and Central America have the equivalent of a high school diploma, in contrast to between 80 and 90 percent of other immigrants (and 87.5 percent of U.S.-born residents). Consequently, most ELLs are at risk for poor school outcomes not only because of language, but also because of socioeconomic factors.

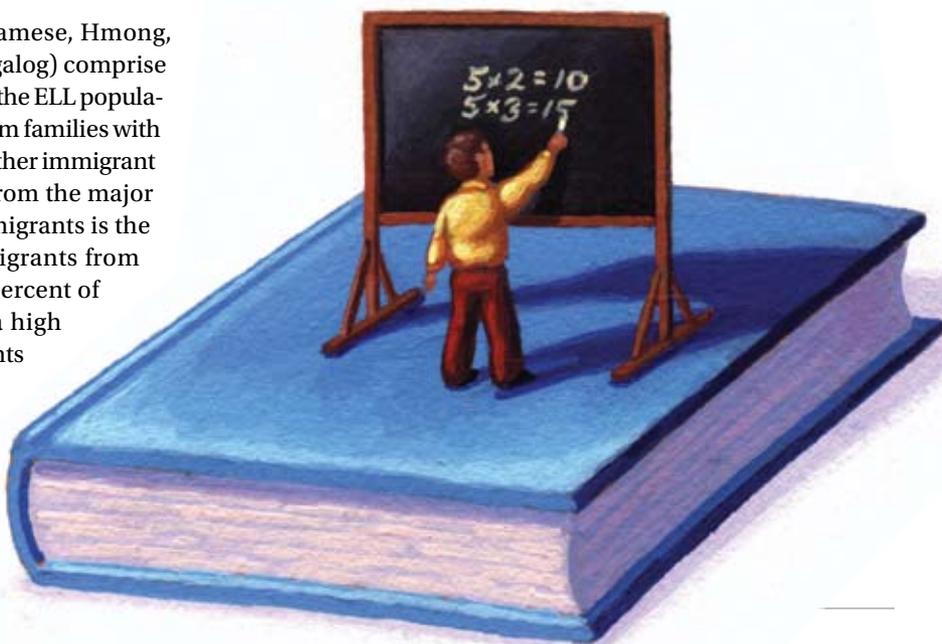
Speakers of Asian languages (e.g., Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Korean, Khmer, Laotian, Hindi, Tagalog) comprise the next largest group—about eight percent of the ELL population. Students of Asian origin tend to come from families with higher income and education levels than do other immigrant families. For example, among immigrants from the major world regions, the poverty rate of Asian immigrants is the second lowest (at 11.1 percent); only immigrants from Europe have a lower poverty rate. Over 87 percent of Asian immigrants have the equivalent of a high school diploma, the highest among immigrants from major world regions.<sup>7</sup> But these figures hide the tremendous diversity within the Asian populations in the U.S. For example, 50 percent or fewer Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong adults in the U.S. have completed the equivalent of high school and fewer than 10 percent have

a college degree. In contrast, Filipinos, Indians, and Japanese in the U.S. have high school completion rates around 90 percent. Over 60 percent of Taiwanese and Indians in the U.S. have college degrees.<sup>8</sup>

What sort of instructional environments are ELLs in? This question is difficult to answer, partly because of definitional and reporting inconsistencies from state to state.<sup>9</sup> The most recent national data come from a 2001-02 school year survey.<sup>10</sup> To the extent the portrait is still accurate six years later, a majority of

## On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, fourth-grade ELLs scored 36 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math. The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger—42 points in reading and 37 points in math.

English learners—approximately 60 percent—are in essentially all-English instruction: one-fifth of these students—about 12 percent of all ELLs—apparently receive no services or support at all related to their limited English proficiency;\* the other four-fifths—nearly 50 percent of all ELLs—receive all-English instruction, but with some amount of “LEP services.” (ELLs were formerly called “LEP” or limited English proficient; the term is sometimes still used.) “LEP services” can include aides or resource teachers specifically for ELLs, instruction in English as a second language (ESL), and/or content instruction specially designed for students with limited English proficiency. The remaining ELLs—about 40 percent—are in programs that make some use of their home language, but it is impossible to say what is typical. In some cases, students receive one of several forms



of bilingual education, a term that describes any instructional approach that teaches at least some academic content (e.g., reading or science) in the native language in addition to teaching students academic content in English. Sometimes teaching academic content, such as reading, is just for a year or two as students transition to all-English instruction; sometimes it is for several years (e.g., through the end of elementary school or into middle school) to develop bilingualism and biliteracy. In other cases, students are taught academic content in English, but their primary language is used for “support,” such as translations by an aide, explanations during or after class, or to preview material prior to an all-English lesson.<sup>11</sup> Currently, there is no way to know the amount of support students receive or, most critically, the quality of the instruction and whether or not it is helpful for student achievement.

What we do know is that on average, ELLs’ academic achievement tends to be low. On the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fourth-grade ELLs scored 36 points below non-ELLs in reading and 25 points below non-ELLs in math. The gaps among eighth-graders were even larger—42 points in reading and 37 points in math. Those are very large gaps. In fact, the gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs are 3 to 18 points larger than the gaps between students who are and are not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>12</sup>

These discrepancies should be no surprise since ELLs are limited in their English proficiency, and the tests cited here are in English. But there is no way to know whether ELLs tested in English score low because of lagging content knowledge and skills, or because of limited English proficiency, or because of other factors that interfere with their test performance—or some combination. Whatever the explanation for these achievement gaps, they bode ill for English learners’ future educational and vocational options. They also bode ill for society as a whole, since the costs of large-scale underachievement are very high.<sup>13</sup> Teachers of ELLs are thus under tremendous pressure. It is imperative that they, as well as administrators and other school staff, understand the state of our knowledge regarding how to improve the achievement of these students. Unfortunately, the state of our knowledge is modest. But what is known offers some useful guidance for educators to improve the academic success of English language learners.

**M**y aim in this article is to summarize key findings of two major reviews of the research on educating English learners that were completed in 2006—one by the National Literacy Panel, or NLP,<sup>14</sup> the other by researchers associated with the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, or CREDE.<sup>15</sup> These reviews represent the most concerted efforts to date to identify the best knowledge available and set the stage for renewed efforts to find effective approaches to help English learners succeed in school. As needed, I will also reference additional research that appeared after the

\* This figure might be an underestimate. It comes from school and district officials who could be reluctant to report that ELLs receive “no services,” which is likely to be a violation of the 1974 Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. No. 72-6520, p. 563-572) requiring schools to teach ELLs so that they have “a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program” (p. 563).

years covered by the NLP and CREDE reviews.

As companions to this article on what we do know about educating ELLs, sidebars explore critical questions that have yet to be answered (see p. 12) and possible instructional modifications that might help ELLs achieve at levels more comparable to that of their English-speaking peers (see p. 18). I encourage educators to read these sidebars as carefully as they read this article—especially before adopting programs that promise extraordinary results.

**Whatever the explanation for these achievement gaps, they bode ill for English learners’ future educational and vocational options. They also bode ill for society as a whole, since the costs of large-scale underachievement are very high.**

The NLP comprised 18 researchers with expertise in literacy, language development, the education of language minority students, assessment, and quantitative and qualitative research methods. The NLP, whose work took nearly three years, identified over 3,000 reports, documents, dissertations, and publications produced from approximately 1980 to 2002 as candidates for inclusion in its review. Fewer than 300 met the criteria for inclusion: they were empirical (that is, they collected, analyzed, and reported data, rather than stated opinions, advocated positions, or reviewed previous research), dealt with clearly identified language minority populations, and studied children and youth ages 3-18.

The CREDE report was produced over two years by a core group of four researchers (and three co-authors), all of whom had been engaged in language minority and language research for many years. As did the NLP, the CREDE panel conducted literature searches to identify candidate empirical research reports on language minority students from preschool to high school, but their searches were not as extensive as the NLP’s. Approximately 200 articles and reports comprised the final group of studies the CREDE panel reviewed and upon which they based their conclusions. The studies the CREDE panel reviewed were published during approximately the same period as the studies the NLP reviewed.

Although they covered a lot of the same terrain, the CREDE and NLP reports differed in some ways. For example, the CREDE report only examined research conducted in the U.S. and only took into consideration outcomes in English; the NLP included studies conducted anywhere in the world (as long as they were published in English) and took into consideration outcomes in children’s first or second language. The CREDE panelists included quantitative studies (experiments or correlational research) almost exclusively, whereas the NLP also included a

*(Continued on page 14)*

# Critical Questions

## *What the Research Does Not Say—Yet*

As discussed throughout the main article, current research offers some solid information that should help educators increase English learners' achievement. But many critical questions remain unanswered. What follows is in no way an exhaustive list. Rather, it is a brief look at three groups of questions that educators and others frequently ask, and that need to be answered.

### **Bilingual Reading Instruction Helps, but in What Settings? With Which Students? For How Long?**

Beyond the finding that primary language reading instruction promotes reading achievement in English (and in the primary language), there are more questions than answers. The NLP and CREDE syntheses should be catalysts to untangling the role of primary language instruction in ELLs' education and serve as the platform from which to ask important questions. Is primary language instruction more beneficial for some learners than for others? For example, those with weaker or stronger primary language skills? Weaker or stronger English skills? Is it more effective in some settings and with certain ELL populations than others? What should be the relative emphasis between promoting knowledge and skills in the primary language and developing English language proficiency? What level of skill in the students' primary language does the teacher need to possess in order to be effective? In an English immersion situation, what is the most effective way to use the primary language to support children's learning? We presently cannot answer these questions with confidence. Individual studies might point in certain directions, but we lack a body of solid studies that permits us to go beyond the general finding about the positive effects of primary language instruction on reading achievement in English.

We also cannot say with confidence how long students should receive instruction in their primary language. This is a key difference between the NLP and CREDE reports. The CREDE synthesis concluded that more primary language instruction over more years leads to higher levels of ELL achievement in English. This conclusion was strongly influenced by studies and evaluations of "two-way bilingual education," in which

children from two language groups (e.g., Spanish and English) participate in a program designed to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in *both* groups. There are different two-way models, but they all involve some combination of first and second language instruction throughout elementary school; some go through middle and high school. Evaluations have been very positive, and ELLs in these programs seem to do very well, possibly better than students in shorter-term bilingual programs (three or fewer years).<sup>1</sup> Thus, CREDE researchers concluded that the longer ELLs received instruction in a mix of their first language and English, the better their achievement in English.

The NLP, however, did not include these longer term studies because they did not have adequate experimental controls. The problem is that these studies did not make sure that the achievement of children in contrasting programs (e.g., two-way bilingual, transitional bilingual education, or English immersion) was equivalent at the start of the study or that children in different programs had the same demographic characteristics (e.g., parental education and level of English use in the home). Pre-existing differences could create the false impression that one program is better than another. For this reason, the NLP only included well-controlled studies in its meta-analysis; and because the well-controlled studies were relatively short term, the NLP reached no conclusions about the impact of length of time students are in primary language instruction.

### **Can ELLs' Oral English Development Be Accelerated? How?**

The NLP and CREDE reports reached similar conclusions regarding effective instructional practices for ELLs. This is good news. We need to find points of agreement in this complex and contentious field. But there is still a great deal that we do not know. There is one area in particular in which more research is desperately needed: oral English development, and specifically, whether and how it can be accelerated. It should be apparent that providing ELLs with English language development instruction is critically important. There are some studies that have looked at promoting various aspects

of oral language, such as vocabulary or listening comprehension (both of which can be enhanced through instruction), but the CREDE review did not find any studies that addressed how or even whether progress in the acquisition of English can be accelerated. (The NLP did not address this issue.)

ELLs are thought to progress through a series of levels of English proficiency. The exact nature of this progression has not been fully mapped out, but generally we think of four or five levels of English language development (ELD), from total lack of English to native-like proficiency. In one influential conceptualization, there are three phases in the beginner to early intermediate period: preproduction (sometimes called the "silent period"), early production (students can say one- or two-word utterances), and speech emergence (longer phrases and sentences). In the scheme used by California and other states, there are five levels—beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, and advanced.

Progress from the beginning (or preproduction) stage to the point where students are approaching native-like proficiency seems to take at least six years for most students (e.g., from kindergarten to grade 5 or later; there is variability from one person to the next, so these numbers represent general trends). ELLs seem to progress from beginning to intermediate levels more rapidly (in roughly two to three years) than they do from intermediate to full proficiency, which can take an additional three, four, or more years. In other words, students beginning to learn the language can make what appears to be fairly rapid progress, but then slow down once they reach intermediate proficiency. According to the CREDE report, even students who are in all-English instruction do not begin to show higher intermediate levels of English proficiency for at least four years (i.e., grade 3 or later). The idea that children (at least those represented by studies done to date) will quickly become fluent in English if immersed in all-English instruction is contradicted by the research literature, yet some states' language policies (for example, California's and Arizona's) require that students enter mainstream English instruction after a year of school. Certainly individual

exceptions can be found, but fluency within a year of English immersion in school is not the norm.

Why does gaining full proficiency take so much longer than intermediate proficiency? There are probably two reasons. First, the vocabulary and sentence patterns required to be an intermediate speaker of English are simpler than those required for advanced proficiency levels. Second, intermediate speakers can rely on the immediate context of a conversation where gestures, pointing, intonation, and other nonlinguistic cues assist communication. Intermediate proficiency likely means that the student has sufficient command of the language to engage effectively in familiar situations, such as play, daily activities, and normal conversations with friends. Such language situations are highly contextualized, fairly recurrent and familiar, and supported by gestures, intonation, and shared references. They therefore require less precise vocabulary and sentence structures.

Full proficiency likely means that a student has sufficient command of the language to engage effectively in more complex interactions that involve abstract concepts and references to things that are not in the immediate vicinity. In these situations, the vocabulary and sentence structures required for adequate communication will be more challenging. In addition, pointing and gesturing will help much less, if at all. Linguistic demands are, therefore, far greater once a speaker tries to get beyond an intermediate proficiency level. The speaker and listener must know the meaning of the words and understand the sentence structures and other nuances that communicate the intended message. Academic situations (e.g., lectures, discussions, and group work) are often like

this, but so are many conversations about movies, political events, or a complex personal situation. Such language situations tend to be less contextualized by the social and pragmatic circumstances and more focused on abstract ideas and concepts that we are less likely to come across in our everyday affairs.

Students must learn and study many of these concepts, and the *language* needed to talk about them, in school. Academic English—the type of language that is essential for school success—is particularly difficult to master because it is generally not used outside of the classroom and it draws on new vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and rhetorical forms not typically encountered in nonacademic settings. Knowing conversational English undoubtedly helps in learning academic English, but the latter is clearly a more challenging task that requires more time.

### What Is the Best Way to Teach English Language Development?

This is another area about which there is little agreement. In fact, until fairly recently, researchers were divided on the question of whether a second language could even be taught directly, as opposed to being acquired through meaningful interactions with other speakers. However, we now are pretty confident that teaching the language directly helps learners learn the language, but learners also need to be in situations where they can use the language for genuine communication. Several publications have appeared since the CREDE report was completed that support this perspective.<sup>2</sup> Effective second language instruction provides a combination of a) explicit teaching that helps students directly and efficiently

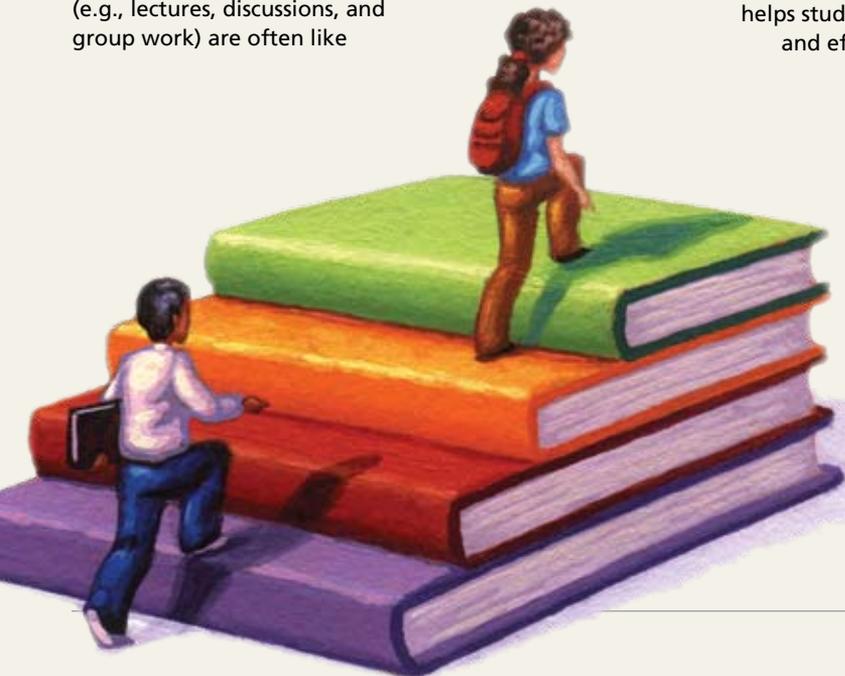
learn features of the second language such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage and b) ample opportunities to use the second language in meaningful and motivating situations. We do not know whether there is an “optimal” balance, much less what it might be. But there is every reason to believe that successful second language instruction comprises elements of both. What we need is a new generation of second language research that examines the nature of this balance and addresses whether, and what kind of, instruction can shorten the time required for ELLs to gain native or near-native English proficiency.

A final point. Educators often wonder whether English language development (ELD) should be taught as a separate subject at a distinct time in the day or if it should be “integrated” throughout the day, taught alongside the regular curriculum. A recent study suggests that ELD probably benefits from a separate period.<sup>3</sup> Researchers found that when a separate ELD block was used, students scored higher on a standardized measure of English oral language. Teachers spent more time on oral English and were more efficient and focused in their use of time. The ELD block was, by design, targeted at oral English language development, and teachers taught accordingly. In contrast, when there was no ELD block, less time was spent focusing on English per se and more on other language arts activities such as reading. This study was limited to kindergarten, and the effect was small. But if the findings are accurate, the cumulative effect of a separate block of ELD instruction over many years could be substantial. At the moment, however, this is speculation.

ELLs’ language needs are complex, and while they benefit from ELD instruction per se, they also need instruction in the use of English in the content areas (math, history, science, etc.). Teaching both content and language is a challenge for teachers; this is currently also an area of active research.<sup>4</sup> But whether we isolate and teach explicitly the language and vocabulary of academic subject areas in ELD instruction or integrate the teaching of language within content lessons, we should recognize that doing either or both requires very careful planning and effective instructional practices in order to achieve the desired language and content objectives.

—C.G.

(Endnotes on page 44)



(Continued from page 11)

large number of qualitative studies.\* The CREDE panel reviewed research that addressed children's English language development, literacy development, and achievement in the content areas (science, social studies, and mathematics). In contrast, the NLP only looked at influences on literacy development (and aspects of oral language that are closely related to literacy, such as phonological awareness and vocabulary). A final and very important difference between the two reports was the criteria used to determine which studies of bilingual education to include. The NLP used more stringent criteria, resulting in a difference in the two reports' findings regarding the effects of different lengths of time in bilingual education on ELLs' academic achievement. I describe this difference in the "Critical Questions" sidebar (p. 12).

In doing their reviews, both sets of panelists paid particular attention to the quality of the studies and the degree to which reported findings were adequately supported by the research undertaken. The goal of both reviews was to synthesize the research and draw conclusions that would be helpful to educators and that would also identify areas for additional future study. Readers should be aware of the dramatic discrepancy between the research base for English speakers and English learners. For example, eight years ago the National Reading Panel (which excluded studies of language learners) synthesized findings from over 400 experimental studies of instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the NLP could identify only 17 experimental studies of instructional procedures, even though the NLP considered more topics and used looser inclusion criteria. The amount of research with ELLs has increased greatly, even in the two years since these reports were published. However, more research on educating ELLs is clearly needed.

It would be impossible to fully summarize the reports here, and educators are encouraged to obtain and study them. But their key conclusions can help us forge a new foundation for improving the education of children from non-English-speaking homes. The findings can be summarized in three major points:

- Teaching students to read in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement *in English*;
- What we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for English learners as well; but
- When instructing English learners in English, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students' language limitations.

Let's take a closer look at each point.

\* Experimental studies are considered the "gold standard" if one wants to determine the effect of a particular program or type of instruction. Experiments use treatment and comparison groups, as well as other controls designed to ensure that any impacts found can be attributed to the treatment (as opposed to differences, for example, between two groups of students). Correlational studies can establish that there is a relationship between two things (like an instructional method and student achievement), but they cannot be used to demonstrate that one thing caused another. Qualitative studies generally attempt to describe and analyze rather than measure and count. Precise and highly detailed qualitative studies can establish causation (e.g., a part of a lesson that led to student learning), but because the number of subjects in a qualitative study is typically low, they are not good for establishing generalizability.

## I. Teaching students to read in their first language promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English.

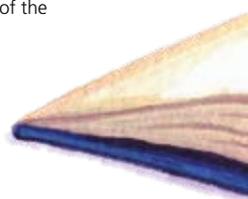
Whether English learners should be instructed exclusively in English or in their native language and English has been, without question, the single most controversial issue in this area.<sup>17</sup> Dozens of studies and evaluations have been conducted and reported over the past 35 years comparing reading instruction that uses students' first and second languages with second lan-

The NLP was the latest of five meta-analyses that reached the same conclusion: learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language.

guage immersion (which in the U.S. would, of course, be English). The NLP conducted a meta-analysis<sup>†</sup> with 17 of these studies—the others did not meet the panel's stringent methodological criteria. The analysis concluded that teaching ELLs to read in their first language and then in their second language, or in their first and second languages simultaneously<sup>18</sup> (at different times during the day), compared with teaching them to read in their second language only, boosts their reading achievement *in the second language*. And the higher-quality, more rigorous studies showed the strongest effects.

For example, five of the most rigorous studies the NLP reviewed involved random assignment of Spanish-speaking students either to English-only instruction or to instruction that was in both English and Spanish. The five studies were varied in terms of students who participated and the use of Spanish for academic instruction. Of these five studies, three were with elementary-age students (including one study with special education ELLs), one was with middle-school students, and one was with high-school students. In one of the elementary studies, students in grades one through three received all their academic instruction (reading, math, writing, science, social studies) in Spanish until they knew enough English to "transition" to Eng-

† A meta-analysis is a statistical technique that allows researchers to combine data from many studies and calculate the average effect of an instructional procedure. It is useful because studies often come to conflicting conclusions. Some find positive effects of a program, others find negative effects of the same type of program, and yet others find no effects. Even among studies that report positive findings, the effects can be small or large. The questions a meta-analysis addresses are these: Taking into account all the relevant studies on a topic, overall, is the effect positive, negative, or zero? And if it is overall positive or negative, what is the magnitude of the effect—large, and therefore meaningful; small, and therefore of little consequence; or something in between? Are there additional factors, e.g., student characteristics, that influence whether effects are large or small?



lish instruction. Students in the control condition received no instruction or support in Spanish. In the study with special education students, second- and third-graders received reading instruction either in English only or in Spanish combined with English as a second language instruction for one year, followed by gradually more instruction in English and less in Spanish over the next two years. The middle-school study included two groups of low-achieving seventh-graders who received equivalent English instruction, but one group received additional instruction in Spanish that focused on reading skills. And the high-school study involved students with low reading achievement who received either English-only instruction or instruction in English and Spanish. All five studies found positive effects of bilingual education on students' reading achievement on various measures of reading in English.

This consistent finding might surprise some readers. But the NLP was the latest of five meta-analyses that reached the same conclusion: learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language.<sup>19</sup> Readers should understand how unusual it is to have five meta-analyses on the same issue conducted by five independent researchers or groups of researchers with diverse perspectives. The fact that they all reached essentially the same conclusion is worth noting. No other area in educational research with which I am familiar can claim five independent meta-analyses based on experimental studies—much less five that converge on the same basic finding.

To some people this finding might seem counterintuitive. A few years ago a fair-minded colleague expressed disbelief: "Doesn't it just make sense," she asked, "that the earlier and more intensively children are placed in all-English instruction at school the better their English achievement will eventually be?" That's when it hit me: when the goal is English proficiency, delivering any instruction in the first language probably does *not* make sense to some people. But this is why we do scientific research: common sense does not always turn out to be the truth. If we only relied on common sense, we would still think the sun revolves around a flat earth.

How does learning reading skills in their first language help

students read in their second language? Although several explanations are possible, a likely one is based on what educational psychologists and cognitive scientists call "transfer." Transfer is one of the most venerable and important concepts in education. With respect to English learners, a substantial body of research reviewed by both CREDE and NLP researchers suggests that literacy and other skills and knowledge transfer across languages. That is, if you learn something in one language—such as decoding, comprehension strategies, or a concept such as democ-

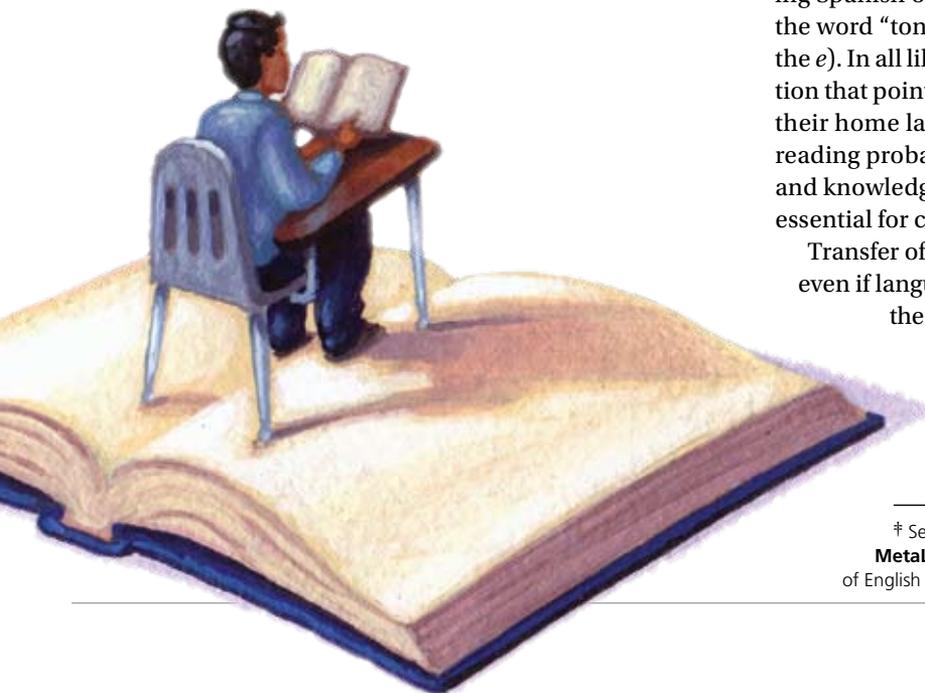
**A substantial body of research suggests that literacy and other skills and knowledge transfer across languages. That is, if you learn something in one language, you either already know it in (i.e., transfer it to) another language or can more easily learn it in another language.**

racy—you either already know it in (i.e., transfer it to) another language or can more easily learn it in another language.

We do not have a very precise understanding of exactly what transfers across languages, but there are numerous candidates. Phonological awareness might transfer—once you know that words are made up of smaller constituent sounds, you can probably apply that understanding to any language. Decoding skills, as well as knowledge of specific letters and sounds, probably transfer also. The letter *m*, for example, represents the same sound in many languages. But while the concept of decoding probably transfers across alphabetic languages, students will need to learn which rules should transfer and which should not. Spanish, for instance, has no final silent *e* that makes a preceding vowel long. Thus, a Spanish speaker applying Spanish orthographic rules to English words would think the word "tone" has two syllables (since he would pronounce the *e*). In all likelihood, English learners are helped by instruction that points out both what does and does not transfer from their home language to English.<sup>‡</sup> Numerous other aspects of reading probably transfer, for example, comprehension skills and knowledge of concepts (background knowledge) that are essential for comprehension.

Transfer of reading skills across languages appears to occur even if languages use different alphabetic systems, although the different alphabets probably diminish the degree of transfer. For example, studies of transfer between English and Spanish find relatively high correlations on measures of word reading, phonological awareness, and spelling. Some studies of English and non-

<sup>‡</sup> See <http://coe.sdsu.edu/people/jmora/MoraModules/MetaLingResearch.htm> for a helpful document identifying elements of English and Spanish spelling that do and do not transfer.



Roman alphabets (e.g., Arabic), in contrast, find much lower correlations. However, comprehension skills appear to transfer readily between languages with different alphabets, such as English and Korean.

Teachers cannot assume that transfer is automatic. Students sometimes do not realize that what they know in their first language (e.g., cognates such as *elefante* and *elephant*, or *ejemplo* and *example*; or spelling and comprehension skills) can be applied in their second. One researcher puts it this way: “Less successful bilingual readers view their two languages as separate and unrelated, and they often see their non-English language backgrounds as detrimental.”<sup>20</sup> Ideally, teachers should be aware of what students know and can do in their primary language so they can help them apply it to tasks in English.

Let’s be clear: the effects of primary language instruction are modest—but they are real. Researchers gauge the effect of a program or an instructional practice in terms of an “effect size” that tells us how much improvement can be expected from using the program or practice. The average effect size of primary language reading instruction over two to three years (the typical length of

time children in the studies were followed) is around .35 to .40; estimates range from about .2 to about .6, depending on how the calculation is done. What this means is that after two to three years of first and second language reading instruction, the average student can expect to score about 12 to 15 percentile points higher than the average student who only receives second language reading instruction. That’s not huge, but it’s not trivial either. These effects are reliable and, as mentioned previously, have been found with secondary as well as elementary students, and special education as well as general education students. Primary language reading instruction is clearly no panacea, but relatively speaking, it makes a meaningful contribution to reading achievement *in English*. We are less clear, however, on the effects of different lengths of time in bilingual education; that is, do more years of bilingual education produce higher levels of English achievement? (See the “Critical Questions” sidebar, p. 12, for more on this.)

In addition, the meta-analyses found that bilingual education helps ELLs become bilingual and biliterate. The NLP, whose criteria for including studies were very strict, concluded that “chil-

## Colorín Colorado

### A Research-Based Web Site for ELLs’ Teachers and Parents

Remember the warm feeling you had as a child when you reached the end of a favorite story and read “and they lived happily ever after”? That’s where the name of this informative Web site comes from, “Y colorín, colorado, este cuento se ha acabado.” There’s no direct translation from Spanish, but in concept it’s similar—and fitting. This site is about ELLs’ academic careers having happy endings. Its primary objective is to deliver research-based information, for teachers and parents, on teaching ELLs to read.

Currently, the site contains extensive information in both English and Spanish, but the developers are beginning to add information in other languages. So far,

they’ve created literacy tip sheets for parents in nine additional languages:

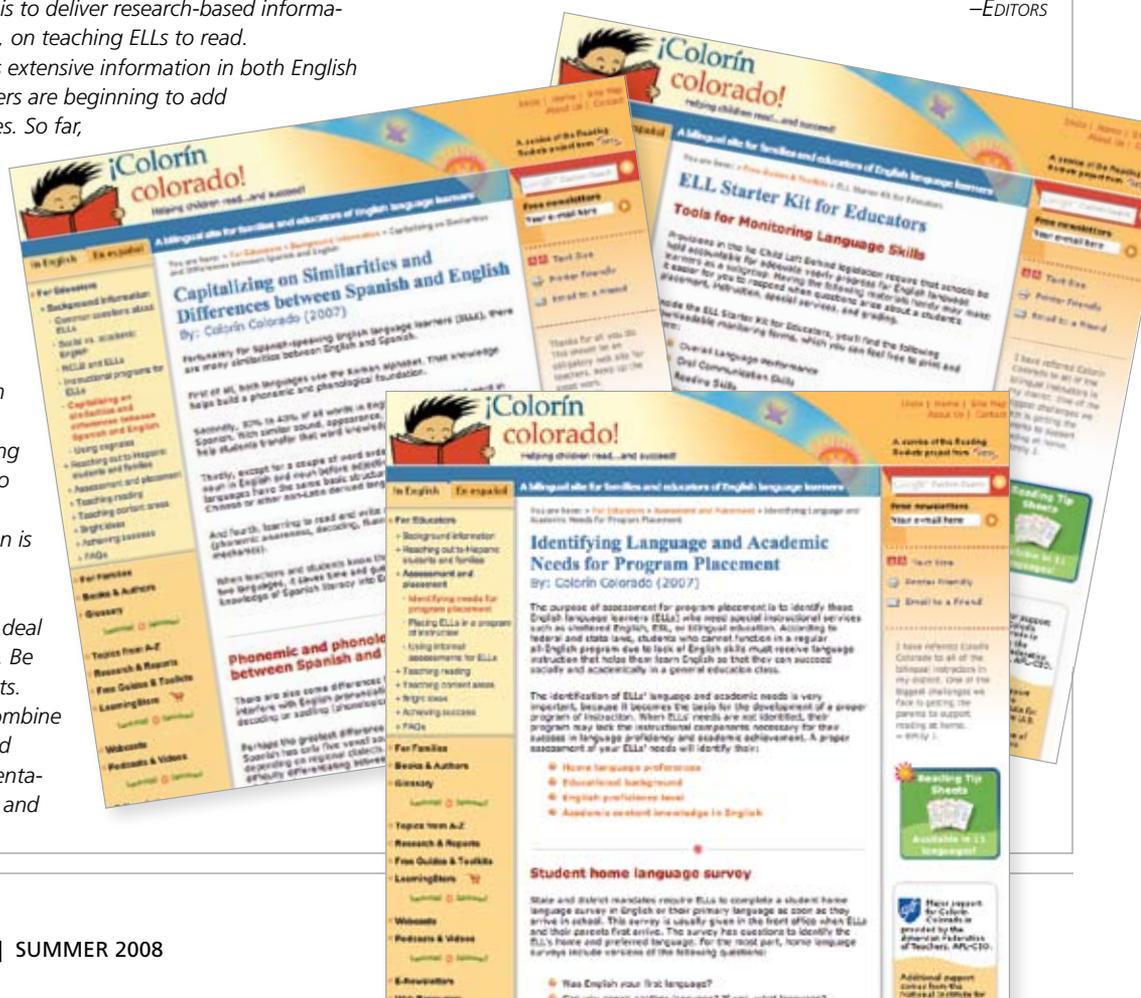
Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, Hmong, Korean, Navajo, Russian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

The educators’ portion of the site offers everything from basic information on the ELL population to practical teaching and assessment suggestions to summaries of recent research. While much of the information is on early reading, teachers of other subjects and of older students will also find a great deal they can use in the classroom. Be sure to check out the Webcasts. These 45-minute programs combine videos of nationally recognized experts with PowerPoint presentations, recommended reading, and

discussion questions; they offer an in-depth look at important issues such as ELLs with learning disabilities and assessing ELLs. All of these resources are free, and teachers are welcome to share them in professional development sessions.

The three sample pages below offer a glimpse of the site. For the real thing, go to [www.ColorinColorado.org](http://www.ColorinColorado.org).

—EDITORS



dren in the bilingual programs studied ... also developed literacy skills in their native language. Thus, they achieved the advantage of being bilingual and biliterate.”<sup>21</sup> Knowing two languages confers numerous obvious advantages—cultural, intellectual, cognitive,<sup>22</sup> vocational, and economic (some studies have found increased earnings for bilingual individuals<sup>23</sup>).

**I**n many schools, instruction in the primary language is not feasible, because there is no qualified staff or because students come from numerous language backgrounds or, sadly, because of uninformed policy choices or political decisions. English learners can still be helped to achieve at higher levels. Although the research here is not as solid as the research on primary language instruction in reading, educators have two other important principles, supported by research to varying degrees, on which to base their practice. We turn to them now.

## II. What we know about good instruction and curriculum in general holds true for ELLs.

Both the CREDE and NLP reports conclude that ELLs learn in much the same way as non-ELLs (although instructional modifications and enhancements are almost certainly necessary, as discussed in the next section). Good instruction for students in general tends to be good instruction for ELLs in particular. If instructed in the primary language, the application of effective instructional models to English learners is transparent; all that differs is the language of instruction. But even when instructed in English, effective instruction is similar in important respects to effective instruction for non-ELLs.

As a general rule, all students tend to benefit from clear goals and learning objectives; meaningful, challenging, and motivating contexts; a curriculum rich with content; well-designed, clearly structured, and appropriately paced instruction; active engagement and participation; opportunities to practice, apply, and transfer new learning; feedback on correct and incorrect responses; periodic review and practice; frequent assessments to gauge progress, with reteaching as needed; and opportunities to interact with other students in motivating and appropriately structured contexts. Although these instructional variables have not been studied with ELLs to the degree they have been with English speakers, existing studies suggest that what is known about effective instruction in general ought to be the foundation of effective teaching for English learners. There are, of course, individual or group differences: some students might benefit from more or less structure, practice, review, autonomy, challenge, or any other dimension of teaching and learning. This is as likely to be true for English learners as it is for English speakers.

The NLP found that ELLs learning to read in English, just like English speakers learning to read in English, benefit from explicit teaching of the components of literacy, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. The NLP reviewed five studies that as a group showed the benefits of structured, direct instruction for the development of literacy skills among ELLs. A study in England, for example, found that a structured program called Jolly Phonics had a stronger effect on ELLs’ phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge, and their application to reading and writing, than did a Big Books approach.<sup>24</sup> Other studies also showed similar effects of directly

teaching the sounds that make up words, how letters represent those sounds, and how letters combine to form words. More recent studies<sup>25</sup> continue to provide evidence of the benefits of directly teaching phonological and decoding skills to English learners, particularly as part of comprehensive approaches to boost early literacy among children at risk for reading problems.\*

Studies of vocabulary instruction also show that ELLs are more likely to learn words when they are directly taught. Just as

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with English speakers, ELLs learn more words when the words are embedded in meaningful contexts and students are provided with ample opportunities for their repetition and use, as opposed to looking up dictionary definitions or presenting words in single sentences. For example, a study<sup>26</sup> reviewed by the NLP involving fifth-graders showed that explicit vocabulary instruction, using words from texts appropriate for and likely to interest the students, combined with exposure to and use of the words in numerous contexts (reading and hearing stories, discussions, posting target words, and writing words and definitions for homework) led to improvements in word learning and reading comprehension.† These are principles of effective vocabulary instruction that have been found to be effective for English speakers.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, a preschool study too recent to be included in the NLP or CREDE reviews showed that explaining new vocabulary helped Portuguese-speaking children acquire vocabulary from storybook reading.<sup>28</sup> Although children with higher initial English scores learned more words, explaining new words was helpful for all children, regardless of how little English they knew.

Other types of instruction that the NLP review found to be promising with ELLs, especially for increasing their reading comprehension, include cooperative learning (students working interdependently on group instructional tasks and learning goals), encouraging reading in English, discussions to promote comprehension (“instructional conversations”), and mastery learning (which involves precise behavioral objectives permitting students to reach a “mastery” criterion before moving to new learning).‡

\* For more information, see “Enhanced Proactive Reading” at the Web site below.

† For more information, see “Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates, VIP” at the Web site below.

‡ For more information, see “Bilingual Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, BCIRC,” “Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)©,” “Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs,” and “Reading Mastery” at the Web site below.



One mastery learning study reviewed by the NLP was particularly informative because the researchers found this approach more effective in promoting Mexican-American students' reading comprehension than an approach that involved teaching to the students' supposed "cultural learning style." (For more on this topic, see p. 21 of the sidebar that begins below.)

The CREDE report reached similar conclusions, which it summarized this way: "The best recommendation to emerge from our review favors instruction that combines interactive and direct approaches."<sup>29</sup> "Interactive" refers to instruction with give and take between learners and teacher, where the teacher is actively promoting students' progress by encouraging higher levels of thinking, speaking, and reading at their instructional levels. Examples of interactive teaching include structured discussions ("instructional conversations"), brainstorming, and editing/discussing student or teacher writing. "Direct approaches" emphasize explicit and direct teaching of skills or knowledge, for example, letter-sound associations, spelling patterns, vocabulary words, or mathematical algorithms. Typically, direct instruction uses techniques such as modeling, instructional input, corrective feedback, and guided practice to help students acquire knowledge and skills as efficiently as possible. The CREDE report notes that "direct instruction of specific skills" is important in order to help students gain "mastery of literacy-

related skills that are often embedded in complex literacy or academic tasks."<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to interactive and direct teaching, the CREDE report found at best mixed evidence supporting what it termed "process approaches." These are approaches where students are exposed to rich literacy experiences and literacy materials, but receive little direct teaching or structured learning. In one study, for example, students were exposed to alternative reading and writing strategies on wall charts, but this was insufficient to ensure that students would use the strategies. In another study, Spanish-speaking ELLs who received structured writing lessons outperformed students who received extended opportunities to do "free writing." The CREDE report concludes that process approaches are "not sufficient to promote acquisition of the specific skills that comprise reading and writing.... [F]ocused and explicit instruction in particular skills and sub-skills is called for if ELLs are to become efficient and effective readers and writers."<sup>31</sup>

### III. When instructing English learners in English, teachers must modify instruction to take into account students' language limitations.

Although many aspects of effective instruction apply across the board for learners in general, for English learners, instructional

## Instructional Modifications for English Learners

Learning new content in an unfamiliar language is very challenging, so it's important for teachers to make instructional modifications—some of which are aimed at building ELLs' English proficiency and some of which are designed to give them greater access to academic content. Unfortunately, little research exists to indicate what constitutes appropriate or effective instructional modifications. This sidebar contains many possible modifications, but readers should note that they have varying degrees of empirical support.

### Making Text in English More Comprehensible by Using Texts with Content that Is Familiar to Students

Teachers of all subjects need to help ELLs with reading comprehension. Reading about unfamiliar content in a language that is also unfamiliar places an increased cognitive load on learners. So, an effective approach appears to be to take into account ELLs' different experiential bases. The NLP found that when ELLs read texts with more familiar material, for example, stories with themes and content from the students' cultures, their comprehension improves. (ELLs' proficiency in the

language of the text, however, influences comprehension much more than their familiarity with passage content.) This relationship between content familiarity and text comprehension is not unique to any one group. In general, we all comprehend familiar material more readily—that is why having wide-ranging background knowledge is so important for reading comprehension. But given the formidable language challenges English learners face, teachers should be aware of how they can help students experience additional success by providing familiar reading matter. This can be accomplished either by having students read material with content already familiar to them or by making sure students have sufficient exposure to the content in the text prior to reading the material. For example, teachers can teach a unit in which students read about a topic for several days or weeks. Materials can become progressively more challenging as students become more familiar with the content—a strategy that should ease comprehension and build background knowledge simultaneously.

### Building Vocabulary in English

What constitutes effective vocabulary instruction for ELLs and how does it differ



modifications are almost certainly necessary. A very important finding that emerged from the NLP's review was that the impact of instructional practices or interventions tends to be weaker for English learners than for English speakers.

For example, the National Reading Panel identified eight types of reading comprehension strategy instruction that had reliable positive effects on the reading comprehension of English-speaking students, such as comprehension monitoring, question asking, and summarization. The effect sizes of some these were as high as 1.0, meaning that the average student who received this type of instruction scored 34 percentile points higher than the average student who did not receive this instruction. In contrast, the NLP found the effects of comprehension strategy instruction in English with ELLs so weak that there is a real question as to whether there were any effects at all. There was only one study specifically targeted at improving ELLs' reading comprehension that produced statistically reliable results, and it wasn't even a study of comprehension strategies—it was a study of the effects of simplifying a text. But its implications are a bit ambiguous: although using simplified texts can help ELLs access content that they would not otherwise have, clearly we can't (and wouldn't want to) limit ELLs' reading to simplified texts. To be clear: the NLP did find studies that demonstrated effects of reading instruction on reading comprehension among

ELLs, as discussed previously, e.g., cooperative learning, instructional conversations, and mastery learning. But the effects of teaching reading comprehension *strategies* per se was not nearly as strong for ELLs as it has been shown to be for English speakers. In fact, it might have had no effect at all.

Why might this be so? And what are some special considerations for promoting comprehension with ELLs? There are probably many factors that influence the effects of comprehension instruction on English learners, some possibly having to do with these children's out-of-school experiences. But an undoubtedly important factor is the double challenge ELLs face: learning academic content and skills *while* learning the language in which these skills are taught and practiced. Reading comprehension requires not only the skills of reading—accurate and fluent word recognition, understanding how words form texts that carry meaning, and how to derive meanings from these texts—but it also requires fundamental language proficiency—knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and conventions of use that are the essence of “knowing” a language. Learners who have the basic reading skills and know the language can concentrate on the academic content. But learners who do not know the language, or do not know it well enough, must devote part of their attention to learning and understanding the lan-

*(Continued on page 22)*

from effective instruction for English speakers? Fortunately, there are many similarities. ELLs benefit from clear explanations, just as English speakers do. A preschool study (which I mentioned on p. 17 of the main article) found that ELLs acquired more vocabulary when the teacher explained words contained in a storybook read to the children.<sup>1</sup> But this study also found that children who began with lower English scores learned less than children with higher English scores. That is, knowing less English made it harder to learn additional English. What might have helped the children with lower initial English proficiency gain more English vocabulary? Another preschool study found that pictures helped children with low levels of oral English learn story vocabulary (e.g., dentist, mouse, cap).<sup>2</sup> The *visual representation* of concepts, not just a language-based *explanation*, provided children with additional support in learning the vocabulary words. There is scant research on this topic, but I would expect that songs, rhymes, chants, and additional opportunities to use and repeat words would also help build vocabulary among young English learners.

What about older children? Some clues for vocabulary instruction are offered in a study that examined the effects of a vocabulary program on Spanish-speaking ELL and English-speaking fifth-graders.<sup>3</sup>

The instructional approach was based on principles of vocabulary instruction found to be effective for children who speak English, for example, explicit teaching of words, using words from texts likely to interest students, and multiple exposures to and uses of the words in numerous contexts. The researchers included additional elements: activities such as charades that actively involved learners in manipulating and analyzing word meanings; writing and spelling the words numerous times; strategic uses of Spanish (e.g., previewing lessons using Spanish texts, providing teachers with translation equivalents of the target words, and using English-Spanish cognates, such as *supermarket* and *supermercado*); and selection of texts and topics on immigration that were expected to resonate with the Mexican and Dominican immigrant students. Overall, the experimental program produced relatively strong effects in terms of students learning the target vocabulary. It produced much smaller, but still significant, effects on reading comprehension. Particularly noteworthy is that the effects of the program were equivalent for ELLs and English-speaking students. Thus, although the researchers acknowledge that they cannot determine which of the extra ELL supports explain the program's impact on these students, their demonstration that with additional

support, a program can have a similar impact on both ELLs and English speakers is very important.

### Using the Primary Language for Support

Probably the most obvious instructional modification is to use the primary language for clarification and explanation. This can be done by the teacher, a classroom aide, a peer, or a volunteer in the classroom. It is easy to see how explaining or clarifying concepts in the home language can help ELLs access what is going on in the classroom. But it is also not difficult to imagine downsides. For example, if peers provide the explanations, they might not be accurate; or students might become dependent on a “translator” who provides a crutch such that students do not exert themselves to learn English; or if translations or periodic explanations in the primary language are offered throughout lessons, students can “tune out” during the English part.

Another way to use the primary language but keep the focus on English instruction is to introduce new concepts in the primary language prior to the lesson in English, then afterward review the new content, again in the primary language (sometimes called “preview-review”).<sup>4</sup> This is different from clarification and explana-

tion since what this does is “frontload” the new learning in the students’ primary language then review it after the lesson. There is no ongoing explanation or translation. When the real lesson is delivered in English, the students are already somewhat familiar with the content, but they have to concentrate to get the message as it is delivered in English. Because of the previewing, the language used in the lesson should be more comprehensible and, in principle at least, the students will walk away knowing more content and more language (vocabulary, key phrases). Then by reviewing lesson content after the lesson, the teacher checks to see whether students accomplished the lesson objective. The NLP reviewed a study that provided some support for the effectiveness of this approach. Prior to reading a book in English, teachers previewed difficult vocabulary in Spanish (the primary language) then afterward reviewed the material in Spanish. This produced better comprehension and recall than either of the two control conditions: reading the book in English or doing a simultaneous Spanish translation while reading. A study not included in the NLP provides another example. Researchers found that teaching reading comprehension strategies in students’ primary language improved reading comprehension when students read in the second language.<sup>5</sup> (Note that this is quite different than the ineffective comprehension strategy instruction described on p. 19 of the main article, where instruction was delivered in English.)

Teachers can also offer primary language support by focusing on the similarities and differences between English and students’ native language. For example, if using the Roman alphabet, many letters represent the same sounds in English and other languages, but others do not. In addition, as discussed in the main article, languages have cognates, that is words with shared meanings from common etymological roots (*geography* and *geografía*, for instance). Calling students’ attention to these cognates could help extend their vocabularies and improve their comprehension. However, we do not know the effect of cognate instruction per se.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, there are a number of useful sources of Spanish-English cognates that teachers of ELLs can consult.<sup>7</sup> *The Dictionary of Spanish Cognates Thematically Organized*<sup>8</sup> offers an exhaustive, book-length list; but see

also the *Dictionary of Spanish False Cognates*<sup>9</sup> for words that can cause problems, such as (my personal favorite) *embarrassed* and *embarazada*. The latter means pregnant. When put in the masculine form—*embarazado*—it can really light up a classroom of Spanish-speaking adolescents.

### Supporting ELLs in English-Only Settings

In addition to accommodations that make use of students’ primary language, a number have been suggested that only make use of English. All of the following appear to be “generic” scaffolds and supports, that is, there is little obviously tailored to ELLs. They might, in fact, be effective strategies for many students—particularly those who need more learning support than is typically provided in teaching/learning situations where verbal exchanges of information predominate.

- Predictable and consistent classroom management routines, aided by diagrams, lists, and easy-to-read schedules on the board or on charts, to which the teacher refers frequently;
- Graphic organizers that make content and the relationships among concepts and different lesson elements visually explicit;
- Additional time and opportunities for practice, either during the school day, after school, or for homework;
- Redundant key information, e.g., visual cues, pictures, and physical gestures about lesson content and classroom procedures;
- Identifying, highlighting, and clarifying difficult words and passages within texts to facilitate comprehension, and more generally greatly emphasizing vocabulary development;
- Helping students consolidate text knowledge by having the teacher, other students, and ELLs themselves summarize and paraphrase;
- Giving students extra practice in reading words, sentences, and stories in order to build automaticity and fluency;
- Providing opportunities for extended interactions with teacher and peers;
- Adjusting instruction (teacher vocabulary, rate of speech, sentence complexity, and expectations for

student language production) according to students’ oral English proficiency; and,

- Targeting both content and English language objectives in every lesson.

This last element is one of the hallmarks of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP, currently one of the most popular instructional models for ELLs in all-English instruction.<sup>10</sup> The SIOP model has made clear and explicit a large number of instructional modifications, such as those listed above, and integrated them into a coherent design for planning, delivering, and assessing instruction. Interested teachers are encouraged to look into this promising approach. To date, however, only one published study has examined the effects of the SIOP on student learning, and its results were very modest.<sup>11</sup> The researchers found a slight improvement in the quality of writing produced by middle-school ELLs whose teachers had received the SIOP training, compared with students of similar backgrounds whose teachers had not received the training.

### Assessing Knowledge and Language Separately

Because language limitations are likely to obscure what children actually know and can do, it is essential that ELLs be assessed in a way that uncouples language proficiency from content knowledge. A good illustration of why this is important comes from a study in which researchers used various instructional strategies to teach preschool ELLs rhyming skills, an important aspect of phonological awareness.<sup>12</sup> To evaluate the intervention, they assessed rhyming by prompting children with a word and asking them to provide a word that rhymed. If the tester said “lake,” the child would be expected to produce, for example, “cake.” As it turned out, regardless of instructional group, *all* of the children did very poorly on the assessment. The average score on the rhyming test was less than one, meaning that a lot of children simply did not respond. Why? Probably because the task was simply beyond the children’s English language abilities; they were unable to produce a rhyming word, since their vocabularies were so limited. Children were, in essence, given a test that measured productive vocabulary as much as rhyming skill.



The study might have obtained different results if the researchers had presented pairs of words and asked children to distinguish between rhyming and nonrhyming pairs or had children select the rhyming word from several possible choices. While teachers should provide children with language-learning and language-use tasks that challenge them and stretch their language development, they should not expect children to produce language beyond their level of English proficiency.

Educators and researchers have been investigating modifications such as simplifying test items and providing bilingual dictionaries, which could permit ELLs to demonstrate content knowledge in spite of language limitations. The research is hardly definitive, but one review concluded that simplifying test items (e.g., using basic vocabulary and simple syntax), but keeping the content the same, was an effective accommodation that should be used to prevent language limitations from unnecessarily sacrificing ELLs' test performance.<sup>13</sup>

### Effects of "Culturally Accommodated Instruction" Are Uncertain

Some educators and researchers have suggested that because different cultural groups behave and interact differently or might have different learning styles, educators should use instructional approaches that are incompatible with students' cultural characteristics (i.e., that build upon or complement behavioral and interactional patterns students learn at home). Many readers may be surprised to

learn that the NLP concluded there is little evidence to support the proposition that culturally compatible instruction enhances the actual achievement of English learners. In fact, as mentioned in the main article (p. 18), a study reviewed by the NLP found that a mastery learning/direct instruction approach produced better effects on Mexican-American students' reading comprehension than did an approach tailored to aspects of their sociocultural characteristics.<sup>14</sup> Some studies, most of which are methodologically weak, have indicated that culturally accommodated instruction can promote engagement and higher-level participation during lessons. The strongest and most influential of these studies<sup>15</sup> found that when Hawaiian children were able to speak freely and spontaneously without waiting for teacher permission—an interaction pattern similar to that at home—their achievement-related behaviors (defined as academic engagement, topical and correct responses, number of idea units expressed, and logical inferences) all increased during the reading lesson.

This is a meaningful finding, but it is not the same as establishing a connection between culturally accommodated instruction and measured achievement. The hypothesis is certainly plausible, and future research might establish such a connection. But for now, it appears that developing lessons with solid content and clearly structured instruction is more likely to produce gains in terms of student learning. Teachers should, of course, respect and learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students. And it is indeed possible that tailoring instruction to features of students' home culture (for example, interaction styles) might make them feel more connected to their classrooms; this is what the findings about higher engagement levels suggest. But there is little basis at the moment for the proposition that modifying instruction to suit students' cultural characteristics has an impact on achievement.

### Promoting Productive Interaction among ELLs and English Speakers

Another proposition with weak

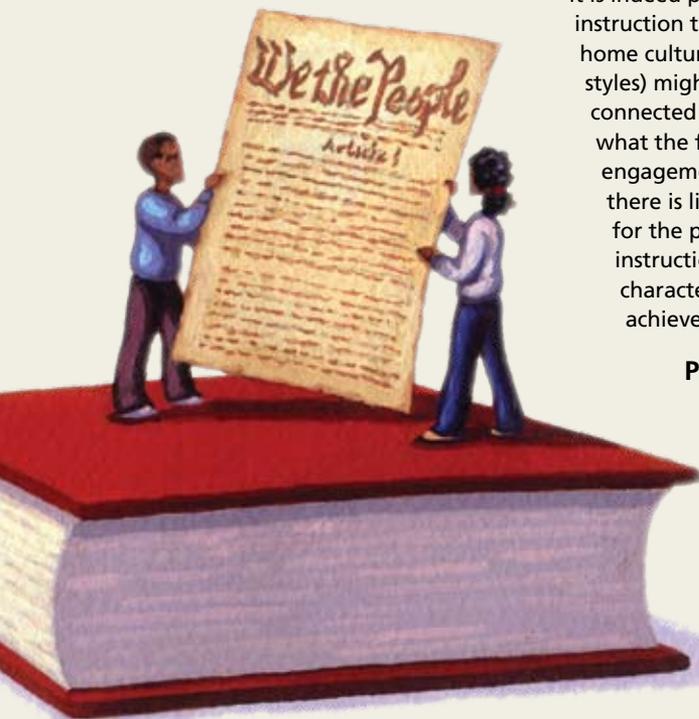
research backing is that grouping ELLs and English speakers during instruction will, in itself, promote ELLs' oral English proficiency. Teachers sometimes assume (not unreasonably) that pairing ELLs and English speakers will provide ELLs with productive language-learning opportunities, but the CREDE synthesis casts doubt on this. One study described the case of an ELL whose teacher relied almost exclusively on classmates to support the student's classroom participation. Because the assignments were far beyond this child's language and academic skills, her peers "were at a loss as to how to assist her."<sup>16</sup> Another study, an examination of cooperative learning in one sixth-grade classroom, found that English-speaking students and ELLs rarely engaged in interactions that we might expect to promote learning. More typically, English speakers cut the interactions short in order to finish the assignment, as did the student who said, "Just write that down. Who cares? Let's finish up."<sup>17</sup> These and other studies reviewed in the CREDE report suggest at least two important points about grouping English speakers with ELLs. First, English speakers must be grouped with ELLs who are not so lacking in English skills that meaningful communication and task engagement become problematic. Second, tasks that students engage in must be carefully designed to be instructionally meaningful and provide suitable opportunities for students to participate at their functional levels. Simply pairing or grouping students together and encouraging them to interact or help each other is not sufficient.

### Adding Time

Given that ELLs have more to learn—the regular curriculum that everyone must learn, plus English—it makes sense to consider ways to provide them with extra time for learning. Extended day, after school, extended year, summer school, and extra years to earn a diploma are all possibilities. A recent article in *Education Week* makes a very compelling case for after-school programs that provide ELLs with additional time and supports to help promote English language development and learning academic content.<sup>18</sup> I know of no research that has examined the effects of extra time for English learners, but these are clearly possibilities that educators, policymakers, and researchers should consider.

—C.G.

(Endnotes on page 44)



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guage in which that content is taught. It's an enormous challenge that most ELLs probably have difficulty meeting without additional instructional supports.

In the earliest stages of learning to read, however, when the focus is on sounds, letters, and how they combine to form words that can be read, English learners can make progress in English that is comparable to that of English speakers, provided the instruction is clear, focused, and systematic. In other words, when the language requirements are relatively low—as they are for learning phonological skills (the sounds of the language and how words are made up of smaller constituent sounds), letter-sound combinations, decoding, and word recognition—ELLs are more likely to make adequate progress, as judged by the sort of progress we would expect of English speakers. They still probably require some additional support due to language limitations.

As content gets more challenging and language demands increase, more and more complex vocabulary and syntax are

required, and the need for instructional modifications to make the content more accessible and comprehensible will probably increase accordingly. The NLP concluded that high-quality reading instruction alone will be “insufficient to support equal academic success” for ELLs, and that “simultaneous efforts to increase the scope and sophistication of these students’ oral language proficiency” is also required.<sup>32</sup> Our knowledge of how to accelerate this development of oral English proficiency, however, is unfortunately quite limited (see “Critical Questions” sidebar p. 12).

Nonetheless, it is evident that improving oral English proficiency is a must. ELLs’ language limitations begin to impede their progress most noticeably as they move beyond the early stages of reading, and vocabulary and content knowledge become increasingly relevant for continued reading (and general academic) success—usually around third grade. This is why it is critical that teachers work to develop ELLs’ oral English, particularly vocabulary, and their content knowledge from the time they start school, even as they are learning the reading

## Two Classroom Views

*Since there's no one best way to educate English language learners (ELLs), schools have adopted a wide variety of models. Early exit, late exit, transitional, developmental, sheltered—the sea of programs and terminology is murky at best. To bring some clarity, turn to CREDE's Program Alternatives for Linguistically Diverse Students (<http://crede.berkeley.edu/pdf/epr01.pdf>), which includes descriptions of various approaches and the resources needed to implement them, as well as short case studies of schools.*

*At the extremes, the options range from sheltered instruction, in which English-only teaching and texts are modified to make them more comprehensible as ELLs learn academic English and content, to dual immersion, in which instruction is in two languages with the goal of bilingualism for all (not just ELLs). We talked to teachers in both types of programs.*

*Richard Quinones, a second-grade teacher at Oyster Bilingual School in Washington, D.C., co-teaches a class of 26 students with Vanesa Gracia. Richard is a native English speaker and Vanesa is a native Spanish speaker. Oyster uses dual immersion to teach its pre-K through seventh-grade students academic content in Spanish and English. Roughly one-half the student body is comprised of native Spanish speakers, while the other half consists of English speakers.*

*At the other end of the spectrum, Katie Kurjakovic provides sheltered instruction to small groups of ELLs at P.S. 11, the Kathryn M. Phelan School, in Queens. The students in*

*this K-6 school speak 20 different languages. In each grade, there is at least one classroom that consists entirely of ELLs and that is taught by a certified English as a second language (ESL) teacher. In addition, the school has three ESL teachers, including Katie, who provide extra support—often in English language development and literacy—to ELLs, both those in the ESL classrooms and those who have been mainstreamed.*

—EDITORS

### Richard Quinones, Oyster Bilingual School, Washington, D.C.

The whole idea of the Oyster model is that you have two teachers in the classroom—one native Spanish speaker and one native English speaker. The students receive instruction half the time in Spanish and half the time in English.

To do a science unit on plants, for example, my partner and I start off by looking at the standards; we make sure we both have the same understanding of what the child needs to know and be able to do. Then we identify key words from the vocabulary and plan how we are going to include them in the lessons and homework. (On Mondays and Wednesdays I give out homework in English; on Tuesdays and Thursdays my partner gives out homework in Spanish.)

In second grade, students need to know not only the components of a plant, but how those components

work—the purpose of the leaves, the roots, and the stems. We have the kids grow plants, use the vocabulary, and read about plants (so as to integrate what they are learning into the reading block). We keep written logs of the plants’ growth and have students draw illustrations with labels.

They learn about plants in both English and Spanish. If I take the lead in the first week’s lesson, my partner will then touch on that lesson in Spanish while she’s doing reading or writing. But she’s not going to redo the same lesson, and vice versa. When my partner does a lesson in Spanish having to do with animals, I’m not going to teach that lesson again. I’m just going to provide the English words that go along with the Spanish words students learned. I might also do something to reinforce the lesson in reading and writing.

We also talk to our art and music teachers to let them know what we’re doing. Currently, my partner and I are focusing on biographies, and the art teacher is creating books with our students on the biographies they’ve been working on in our classroom.

Despite the extensive collaboration at our school, we do face challenges with dual immersion. As much as my partner and I coordinate and try to plan so that we’re not

“basics.” Vocabulary development is, of course, important for all students, but it is particularly critical for ELLs. There can be little doubt that explicit attention to vocabulary development—everyday words as well as more specialized academic words—needs to be part of English learners’ school programs.

So, how should instruction be modified to help ELLs develop oral English proficiency? And how should it be modified to take into account their language limitations and ensure that they have access to the academic content? Several instructional modifications for ELLs have been proposed. Some have support from research; others seem like common sense but have not yet been validated empirically. These are discussed in the sidebar, “Instructional Modifications for English Learners,” p. 18.

**T**he instructional modifications students need will probably change as children develop English proficiency and in relation to what they are being expected to learn. Students who are beginning English speakers will need a great deal of support, sometimes known as “scaffolding,” for

learning tasks that require knowledge of English. For example, at the very beginning levels, teachers will have to speak slowly and somewhat deliberately, with clear vocabulary and diction, and use pictures, other objects, and movements to illustrate the content being taught. They should also expect students to respond either nonverbally (e.g., pointing or signaling) or in one- or two-word utterances. As they gain in proficiency, students will need fewer modifications—for example, teachers can use more complex vocabulary and sentence structures and expect students to respond with longer utterances; when possible, information can be presented both in pictures and in writing. On the other hand, even fairly advanced ELLs might require modifications when completely new or particularly difficult topics are taught. It might also be that some students in some contexts will require more modifications than others. We are utterly lacking the data necessary to offer such guidelines. But it is likely that ELLs will need some additional instructional support for much of their schooling. Conversational English can be learned to a  
*(Continued on page 42)*

duplicating things, it still seems like we’re trying to teach a year’s worth of curriculum in half the time. The biggest challenge is making sure that we’re giving the support that young readers need.

**Katie Kurjakovic, Kathryn M. Phelan School—P.S. 11, Queens**

Of the many languages our students speak, the top two are Bengali and Spanish. To meet the needs of our students, we have a two-tiered setup for ESL instruction. In each grade we have at least one all-ELL classroom staffed by a certified ESL teacher who teaches all of the main subjects using extra visuals, hands-on activities, and other supports, and also emphasizes building up knowledge and vocabulary. In addition, we have certified ESL teachers who,

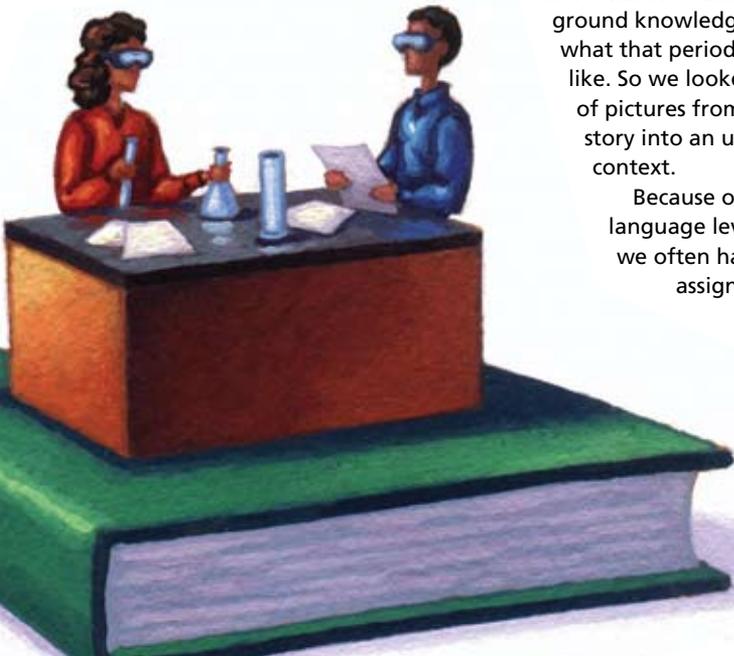
instead of being assigned to a classroom, work with small groups of students. For example, I have a group of fifth- and sixth-graders who have been here for a number of years, but they still can’t pass the state’s ESL test. I pull them out during their reading period to concentrate on decoding, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

One of the great things about our school is we’re very collaborative. If a classroom teacher says to me, “We’ve been doing this unit in social studies and the kids just aren’t getting it. Can you give some support?” I will craft a lesson to give students background knowledge or work on the other skills in the content area. For example, there was a fifth-grade class reading the novel *Sarah Plain and Tall*. The book takes place during pioneer times in the Midwest. There were kids who did not have background knowledge to understand what that period in history looked like. So we looked at maps and a lot of pictures from that time to put the story into an understandable context.

Because of the different language levels among our ELLs, we often have to differentiate assignments while having all of the students work on the

same concept. For example, we recently did a writing activity where the students compared the city and the country, and supported why they wanted to live in either place. Especially for the newcomers, we had to do some preteaching because they knew the word “country” only in the context of a foreign country. They started comparing New York City with Bangladesh or China. To teach the concept, we had students sort pictures of things that are in the city or the country. Once they had that context, they were able to respond to the writing activity, though at varying levels. One fifth-grader enrolled in the school just two weeks before this lesson. There was no way he was going to be able to write a comparison, so we gave him a piece of paper folded in half. He labeled one side city and one country, and he simply drew contrasting pictures. He was dealing with the concept even though he did not have the language yet. Then we started to teach him the names of some of the things he had drawn: building, car, train, etc. The students who are a little more advanced worked with the language pattern: the city has cars, the city has trucks, the city has people. The more fluent students wrote full-fledged essays.

Even with all these supports, the ELLs often need extra time. We offer a lot of after-school classes just for ELLs so they can get even more help than they receive during the day. For instance, one after-school class is English language and vocabulary just for newcomers. □



# Freedom in Retreat

## Global Survey Reveals Pushback Against Democracy

BY ARCH PUDDINGTON

The year 2007 was marked by a notable setback for global freedom. That's the principle finding from the latest edition of *Freedom in the World*, Freedom House's annual survey of global political rights and civil liberties. The decline, which was reflected in reversals in one-fifth of the world's countries, was most pronounced in South Asia, but also reached significant levels in the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa. It affected a substantial number of large and politically important countries—including Russia, Pakistan, Kenya, Egypt, Nigeria, and Venezuela—whose declines have wider regional and global implications. Other countries experienced reversals after a period of progress toward democracy, including pivotal states in the Arab Middle East.

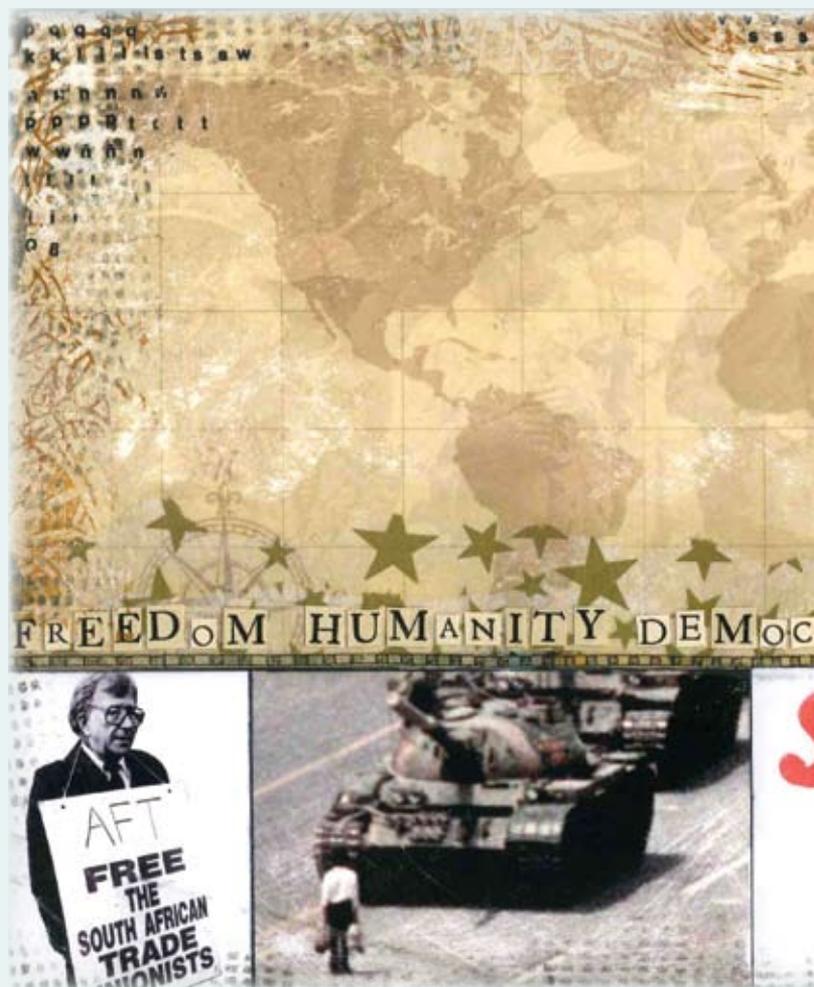
Although the number of countries designated Free, Partly Free, or Not Free changed little during the past year, there were many overwhelmingly negative changes within these broad categories. Furthermore, results for 2007 marked the second consecutive year in which the survey registered a decline in freedom, representing the first two-year setback in the past 15 years. In all, nearly four times as many countries showed significant declines during the year as registered improvements. Many countries that moved backward were already designated Not Free; in other cases, countries with recent records of improved democratic institutions were unable to sustain progress and gave clear signals of backsliding.

Civil conflict was an important contributing factor to this year's negative trajectory in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The year also saw the intensification of an effort by authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power through the suppression of democratic opposition, civil society, and independent media—a process also known as the pushback against democracy. Freedom of association suffered a setback on a global scale, as governments in various regions initiated policies to weaken or neutral-

ize nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights monitoring groups, and trade unions. Especially important in carrying out this assault on civil society were a group of market-oriented autocracies and energy-rich dictatorships that combine elements of a capitalist economy with sophisticated techniques of political repression.

A particularly worrying phenomenon that emerges from the findings is the negative impact of powerful autocracies on smaller, less powerful neighboring countries. Russia provides diplomatic and political support to a number of brutal dictatorships and autocratic regimes on its borders, including Belarus and states in Central Asia, and puts pressure on nearby governments, such as Estonia and Georgia, whose policies or leaders it disapproves of. Iran and, to a lesser extent, Syria have supported antidemocratic forces in Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian

*(Continued on page 31)*



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ILLUSTRATED BY JENNIFER BLACK

# Defending Democracy

Albert Shanker Still Leads the Way

BY HERB MAGIDSON

**R**ichard Kahlenberg has received many accolades for his wonderful biography of Al Shanker, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*. I want to go a step further and thank him for writing his book when he did. I want to thank him for not writing it immediately after Al's death but, rather, a decade later.

And I say this because Al's vision that an international movement for democracy and freedom is indispensable to the health and vitality of America and the free world is currently being challenged as never before.

There was a time when dictators felt compelled to use the words freedom and democracy as their very own. Take, for example, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of North Korea. Even

this most brutal totalitarian state felt compelled to use the word "democratic." But now, with the development of vigorous economic engines expanding incredibly in nondemocratic countries (like China) and countries we might label partly free (like the Philippines), there's a very troubling idea growing on the world stage. There are those who believe the great world struggle is no longer between dictatorships and democracies, but between the efficiency of competing economic models. Freedom may very well become an afterthought—at best an adjunct to economic efficiency.

When Al died in 1997, we were still bathed in the glow of the overthrow of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Freedom was on the march, the so-called end of history had arrived. A biography of Al Shanker at that time may have only engendered a nostalgic look back at freedom's battles won—in Poland, South Africa, Chile, and so many other parts of the world.

But Kahlenberg's book comes out when the vision of an inexorable march toward freedom and democracy is being challenged by what may be a fundamental change in the way people perceive the relationships between political freedom, economic growth, and social justice.

Dictators around the world—as well as business entrepreneurs and social philosophers—are watching very closely the newly emerging economic engines—particularly in China. If the Chinese are able to suppress worker rights while strengthening one-party rule and, as a result, successfully compete economically, then many other countries will feel the Chinese model is the correct model—that economic success based on one-party rule and the subjugation of worker rights is the only way to compete. Dictators will be able to hide their disdain for freedom by cloaking it in the mantra of economic competition and necessity. This model of authoritarian capitalism is a great, new challenge.

So this book, which so clearly articulates Al's vision, is not only timely, it is essential if the march to freedom

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*Herb Magidson is on the board of the Albert Shanker Institute. Previously, he served as a vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, chair of the AFT Executive Council's Democracy Committee, and executive vice president and secretary-treasurer of the New York State United Teachers. This article is adapted from remarks he gave on February 20, 2008, at a forum sponsored by the Albert Shanker Institute, Freedom House, and the Progressive Policy Institute titled "Should Labor and the Democrats Revive the Muscular Liberal Internationalism of Albert Shanker?"*



and democracy is to continue and thrive.

The question before us is not so much, “Should labor and the democrats revive the muscular liberal internationalism of Albert Shanker?” The question is, rather, “In a world where people are questioning the very legitimacy of the democratic imperative, who will champion the notion that there are certain universal values that transcend ethnicity, race, tribe, and culture?” Human-kind strives to be free—men and women strive to think what they wish, to associate freely with others, to speak their minds and challenge orthodoxy. To answer the question before us today, we need to recognize the unique role that organized labor in

general, and Al Shanker in particular, have played in developing what may be called “liberal internationalism.” Al Shanker envisioned democracy as the linchpin for human happiness and fulfillment. For him, it was the lifeblood of a universal yearning for freedom—not a Western phenomenon.

This view, that the great struggle in the world is between dictatorship and democracy, led the U.S. labor movement to a unique position in the great foreign policy debates in the U.S. For so many other groups, battles over foreign policy seemed to be ideological—between those on the political right and those on the political left. Consequently, right-wing ideologues happily

## Albert Shanker’s Tough Liberalism

BY RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

When Albert Shanker was born on September 14, 1928, he emerged from the womb with a large red birthmark on the right side of his neck running over the back of his head. His mother, Mamie Shanker, was beside herself. “What will ever become of him?” she asked.<sup>1</sup> In a childhood that would be marked by many struggles—deprivation and discrimination, the Great Depression and the rise of Adolf Hitler—it was not an auspicious beginning.

Shanker’s father, Morris, had studied in Europe to be a rabbi until his family ran out of money for his education, just short of his ordination.<sup>2</sup> During World War I, he served in the czar’s army then immigrated to the United States, where he went to work for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. As the company was deeply anti-Semitic, life there was intolerable, so after a time, Morris Shanker came to New York, where he later began a grueling job delivering newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Mamie Shanker worked 70-hour weeks at J&J Clothing in lower Manhattan to help supplement her husband’s salary.<sup>4</sup> She would sit at work, sweating, in deep concentration.<sup>5</sup> One time Al went to visit her and was unable to recognize her among the essentially

anonymous group of toiling women. He was horrified.<sup>6</sup> Though a sewing-machine operator, Mamie Shanker was an intellectual who liked to read poetry and discuss Yiddish books and literature.

If Shanker’s childhood suggested there was abiding unfairness in life—widespread poverty, persistent bigotry—his parents also taught him that certain institutions and ideas could help. One central institution was organized labor. Mamie Shanker had a dark view of human nature and believed employers would do whatever it took to maximize profits. When she first came to the U.S. as a garment worker, she worked very long hours, had no health benefits, and worked in unsafe conditions.<sup>7</sup> She joined the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.<sup>8</sup> The unions made a huge difference in her life, improving her wages and working hours (eventually down to 35 hours a week).<sup>9</sup> Growing up, “unions were just below God,” Al Shanker said.<sup>10</sup>

So was labor’s champion, Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>11</sup> In 1940, when FDR ran for a third term, 12-year-old Al “stood for hours on a subway platform one afternoon arguing with grownups who didn’t intend to vote for FDR,” wrote reporter A.H. Raskin. “A ticket he had bought for the World’s Fair lay forgotten in his pocket.”<sup>12</sup>

Though they voted for Roosevelt, the Shankers were not Democrats. In the New York circles in which Shanker was

raised and schooled in the 1930s and 1940s, the question was not whether one was a Democrat or a Republican, but whether one was a Socialist or a Communist.<sup>13</sup> Many Jewish immigrants had been Socialists in Russia, as part of the resistance to czarist rule.<sup>14</sup>

**Teachers’ unions, Shanker argued, are uniquely positioned to promote democracy abroad. As mass organizations that train people to vote and help create a strong middle class, they are crucial agitators for democracy.**

Shanker was briefly pro-Soviet in high school, but while still a teenager, he read George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* and saw how Orwell, who had signed up to fight the fascists in the Spanish Civil War, became disillusioned with the Communists. Shanker later recalled: “Here was Orwell, this innocent leftist, who wants to fight the fascists, but the Communists will stop at nothing, including wiping out the non-Stalinist opposition, to make sure they alone emerge in control.”<sup>15</sup> The Spanish Civil War was something that stayed with him for years, recalls his friend Mel Lubin, who said Shanker had six or seven books on the topic.<sup>16</sup> Within months of beginning teaching, Shanker joined the New York Teachers Guild, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers that represented all the values Shanker

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and exclusively condemned dictatorships on the left, such as those in the Soviet Union and the countries in Eastern Europe in the post-WWII era, in China after the takeover by the Maoists, in Latin America when Castro took control of Cuba, and in Nicaragua when the Sandinistas took over. Their consistency was to be against all left-wing dictatorships. Similarly, left-wing ideologues condemned right-wing dictatorships, such as those in Chile under Pinochet, during the apartheid government's rule in South Africa, and Somoza's right-wing dictatorship in Nicaragua. But they, too, found it very difficult to condemn left-wing dictatorships.

Right- and left-wing ideologues did not divide the world between dictatorships and democracies. Some divided the world between capitalism and socialism; some between North and South; and others between the developed world and the underdeveloped world.

But these positions were not so much in opposition to dictatorships per se, as they were part of an ideological struggle for their views on economic theory and social policy. Their positions were a means to promote one system of government and condemn another. So it was acceptable to some that right-wing dic-  
*(Continued on page 30)*

treasured. It was a Socialist union, in favor of civil rights, antitotalitarian, anti-Communist, and intellectually rigorous.

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By the late 1970s, Al Shanker was president of both the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). But his interest in international affairs—especially in defeating Communism—had not waned at all. His foreign policy positions were guided by three core beliefs: the need to fight Communists and other dictators who wished to curtail human freedom and crush free trade unions, the need to actively promote and nurture democracy abroad, and the need to have a strong American military ready to help accomplish the first two objectives.

To some it was questionable that the head of a teachers' union would take

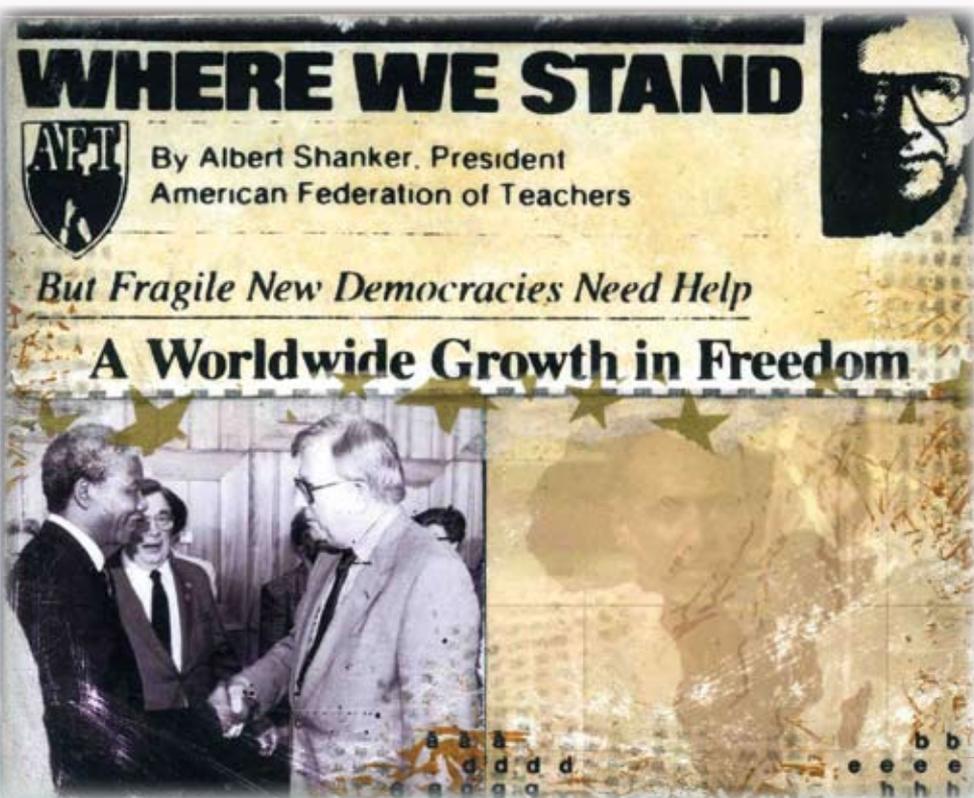
positions on foreign policy. But to Shanker, it was in the interests of American teachers to promote teacher unionism abroad because what happened overseas reverberated at home. Countries with weak teachers' unions, for example, were more likely to adopt school voucher plans, which would then be used to push for similar plans in the U.S.<sup>17</sup> But even more powerful was the civic argument for teacher involvement abroad.<sup>18</sup> Teachers' unions, Shanker argued, are uniquely positioned to promote democracy abroad. As a part of organized labor, teachers' unions are key political actors in societies seeking to democratize, Shanker said. As mass organizations that train people to vote and help create a strong middle class, they are crucial agitators for democracy.<sup>19</sup>

Shanker was deeply concerned that opposition to anti-Communism had

moved into the mainstream of the Democratic Party. What many liberals knew most about anti-Communism was its excesses—McCarthyism in the 1950s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s. At home, their egalitarian vision made them worry about defense expenditures diverting money away from social problems. And abroad, some even identified with what were perceived as the egalitarian aspirations of Communists, in contrast to the corporate agenda of the U.S. Finally, many liberals had pacifist tendencies and worried about ethnocentrism, which made them want to withdraw from the world and not impose American values on other societies.

Shanker wanted to rescue anti-Communism and emphasize that it was a part of the human-rights agenda. "Al's big contribution was in constantly keeping a very highly tuned beam of what Communism was all about," AFT staffer Eugenia Kemble says: repression of human rights, of free speech, of intellectual freedom, and of trade unionism.<sup>20</sup>

Shanker denounced what he saw as a double standard on the Left. He argued: "When men and women are imprisoned, tortured, and killed because they dare to speak, write, or organize, it makes no difference whether they were silenced by a leftist or a rightist dictator. The action must be condemned."<sup>21</sup> In the late 1970s, when the Vietnamese government was causing mass starvation in occupied Cambodia, Shanker asked: "Where are the expressions of outrage? Where are the demonstrations? How can it be that there are protests only against American support for the Shahs and the Somozas—whose crimes may be real enough and surely merit exposure—



and none at all against the Soviet Union and Vietnam, who are within weeks of annihilating an entire culture from the face of the earth?"<sup>22</sup>

Shanker was also critical of Jimmy Carter's handling of the post-Vietnam War Southeast Asian refugee crisis, which Shanker saw as an important matter of human rights. He was appalled when Carter said the refugees would be better off in Asia. The AFL-CIO, which in a time of high unemployment had reason to be concerned about immigration, Shanker said, was taking a much more open stance, "because there were larger principles at stake."<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, Shanker became very involved in the cause of Soviet dissidents. In September 1977, Shanker participated in and wrote about the third international Sakharov hearings to dramatize

the plight of Soviet dissidents and complained that the media mostly ignored the hearings.<sup>24</sup> He was disturbed that the issue, a basic question of human rights, did not seem to excite his fellow liberals.

In 1981, in addition to creating an International Affairs department in the AFT, Shanker gained a major platform from which to engage in foreign affairs: the presidency of the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU). Shanker made sure that the IFFTU helped finance and strengthen free education unions in places such as Chile, South Africa, and Poland, and he banned nondemocratic, state-sponsored trade unions from the organization, even though accepting them would have meant more dues for

the organization.<sup>25</sup>

Shanker actively engaged in foreign affairs throughout the 1980s, supporting the defense buildup, the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy, and anti-Communist groups in Central America, as well as promoting democracy in the Philippines, South Africa, and Chile. But first came the stunning developments in Poland.

Dramatic change in Poland began in August 1980, when workers in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk struck against higher food prices, but also against Communism itself.<sup>26</sup> Shanker urged an active role for American unions in supporting Poland's Solidarity movement, and in September 1981, Solidarity's managing director of press and information set up an American office at the UFT headquarters in New York City.<sup>27</sup>

## Assisting Teachers Around the World

### *The AFT's International Affairs Department*

*Given Albert Shanker's commitment to democracy at home and abroad, it's no surprise that he established an International Affairs department within the AFT. Here, David Dorn, the department's director, explains its current projects.*

—EDITORS

While the AFT has been active in international work to one degree or another for much of its history, Al Shanker created a formal International Affairs department in 1981. From the beginning, much of the funding has come from grants from a variety of sources, including the AFL-CIO's program for international labor solidarity (today named the Solidarity Center), the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Currently the department is developing projects with teachers' organizations in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia, and we continue to work with fraternal unions in Africa on a project to stop the spread of AIDS.

A new issue for us is teacher and healthcare-worker migration into the United States. For example, we discovered that 10 percent of our membership in Baltimore, Md., is Filipino, not Filipino-American. These are people who have come over from the Philippines to work temporarily in the U.S. They're not coming here to become American citizens. They're working as K-12 teachers in our inner cities. We don't know how many of these foreign teachers there are, but their numbers are growing. So the questions are: how do we help represent them and how do we ensure that they provide high-quality instruction? We want to make sure that they get fair treatment and that their students get the education they deserve.

The principles that guided Al Shanker's world view have

had a lasting influence on the department. Al was like a lot of the leaders in the labor movement. To them, it wasn't a question of being against Communism or against right-wing dictators. They had clear guiding principles for looking at political systems in other countries. The key questions were: Do they allow human rights? Do they allow free trade union rights? That basic idea led the AFT to support teachers' unions in Chile, Poland, South Africa, and other countries in their struggles against dictatorship and repression in the 1980s and 1990s.

A more recent achievement is our work in the African AIDS program. AIDS is one of the biggest challenges facing African teachers. The AIDS scourge is a threat to democracy because it undermines society. It undermines teachers and it undermines education. We are working with teachers in South Africa, Kenya, and Zimbabwe to help them develop peer-group education programs. In South Africa, the campaign is called "Breaking the Silence."

The world has changed in many ways over the past couple of decades, but the basic objective to support democracy and free trade unionism underlies AFT's international activity. For example, after 9/11, former AFT President Sandy Feldman directed the International Affairs department to seek ways to cooperate with teachers' organizations in the Middle East. As a result, we were one of the first groups to make contact with the new, independent Iraqi teachers' organization and to meet with Afghani teachers who are trying to establish a new union in their country. And now we're working in Yemen. We're also working with the main Palestinian teachers' union.

To learn more about our work, I encourage readers to explore "AFT at Work in the World" online at [www.aft.org/topics/international](http://www.aft.org/topics/international).

By December 1981, Polish authorities had had enough. Solidarity's leader, Lech Walesa, and thousands of others were arrested and jailed. Martial law was declared and Solidarity was banned. With Ronald Reagan now president, anti-Communists hoped for a strong response, but they were disappointed.

In one of his weekly "Where We Stand" columns in the *New York Times*, Shanker lashed out at Reagan for being soft. "There was no expression of outrage at events in Poland, no demand for the release of Lech Walesa and thousands of others imprisoned." Shanker argued that the military crackdown in Poland was "clearly one of the historic moments of the 20th century. Many voted for a President they thought would be tough. So far, all they have heard is tough talk during an election campaign. But when it really counts, we get silence, then mushiness and evasion."<sup>28</sup>

Following the Communist crackdown on Solidarity, many people assumed that Walesa's rebellion would go the way of earlier quashed revolts in other countries. But the American labor movement continued to support Solidarity, and the UFT was among the first to provide money.<sup>29</sup> The AFT helped Polish unionists with their underground newspapers, smuggling in items including copiers and fax machines.<sup>30</sup>

After nine long years of struggle, Solidarity wore down the opposition and, in a stunning turn of events, came to power following a defeat of the Communists in democratic elections.<sup>31</sup> In November 1989, Lech Walesa appeared at the AFL-CIO convention, received 15 minutes of sustained cheering, and thanked the unionists for their strong support.<sup>32</sup> The Solidarity experience, Shanker said, was an important reminder



that unions not only provide better economic conditions, but they also provide a voice that can criticize both the boss and the government.<sup>33</sup>

If Solidarity should have underlined for liberals that anti-Communism was a pro-worker stand, Shanker argued that the experience should make clear to conservatives that unions were not just economic instruments—they were civic associations. As critical mediating institutions that stood between the government and the individual, unions allowed people to organize as a counter to the power of government and needed to be nourished in the battles for democracy.

In 1989, just as Communism was collapsing all around him, Shanker was named chair of the AFL-CIO International Affairs Committee.<sup>34</sup> But Shanker knew that Solidarity's victory and the fall of the Berlin Wall were only the beginning of the effort to promote democracy. It would be a mistake, he said, to assume that "we are now moving effortlessly toward a world in which everyone will live in a free society."<sup>35</sup> Democracy is much more than voting, Shanker said, and in places like Eastern Europe, nongovernmental democratic institutions—independent political parties, churches, unions, newspapers, business groups, and universities—had atrophied and needed rebuilding.<sup>36</sup> While most conservatives focused on creating market economies, Shanker argued, "free enterprise alone will not lead to a free

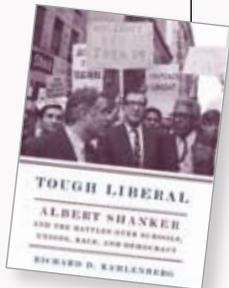
society. People need ... direct contacts with trade unionists, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and community leaders from democratic nations."<sup>37</sup> Shanker argued: "What we've seen are the beginnings of democracy. We haven't really seen democracy yet. We've seen the overthrow of dictatorship. Democracy is going to take generations to build and we have to be a part of that building because they won't be able to do it alone."<sup>38</sup>

Today, Shanker's worldview is not dominant in the Democratic Party. Chastened by Vietnam and more recently by Iraq, many liberals see promoting democracy and projecting American power as futile at best and arrogant and imperialistic at worst.

Shanker would disagree. Throughout his life, Shanker and the group he most closely identified with politically—the Social Democrats USA—argued that their mix of traditionally liberal and conservative views was part of a well-thought-out ideology that put democracy at the core. His "Where We Stand" columns returned time and time again to democratic ideals.<sup>39</sup> For many conservatives, the marketplace is the touchstone; for Shanker it was democratic values that drove everything else. Although Communism is largely dead, totalitarianism is not. Shanker's Social Democratic vision may be virtually absent from today's liberal discourse, but his tough liberalism is not obsolete; its relevance to social realities continues to grow.

(Endnotes on page 45)

AFT members may purchase Richard D. Kahlenberg's book, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*, at a discounted rate of \$18.00 including shipping (40 percent off list price). Visit AFT's online store at [www.aftstore.org/aft/productenlarged.asp?ProductID=906401](http://www.aftstore.org/aft/productenlarged.asp?ProductID=906401).



## Defending Democracy

*(Continued from page 27)*

tators were in power because they espoused economic market concepts that right-wing ideologues thought were the most important aspects of society. Extreme left-wing ideologues, on the other hand, accepted nondemocratic forms of government if they met certain tests, the most important of which was that they were generally anticapitalist.

For more than a century, the only organization in the U.S. that condemned and actively worked against both right-wing and left-wing dictatorships was the American labor movement. Labor unions were able to do so precisely because they saw the great world struggle as one between democratic and dictatorial regimes—no matter their political bent.

Consequently, it was the American labor movement alone that condemned both the Russian czars when they were in power, and then the Soviets when they came to power in 1917. And it was the labor movement alone that condemned both Chiang Kai-shek for preventing trade unions and the Chinese Communists under Mao for murdering trade union activists when the Communists came to power in 1948. This is the unique and indispensable quality that the American labor movement brings to the table. And this is the precise model that Al Shanker expanded when he became chair of the AFL-CIO's International Affairs Committee in 1989.

What is ironic is that Al Shanker's view of the world made him very controversial. He was attacked by those on the left who thought him too conservative and those on the right who thought him too liberal. They were both wrong. Al wasn't an ideologue in the regular sense of the word. He was a democrat. He was a humanitarian. And that, I believe, is the "tough liberalism" for which we long.

Whereas some determined which dictatorships they abhorred based on their political philosophy, Al was an equal-opportunity opponent of dictatorships on both the left and the right. He railed against both Fidel Castro and, before him, Batista. He was an opponent of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and, before that, also an outspoken opponent of Somoza. He spoke out against the Communist insurgency in the Philippines and also was an opponent of Ferdinand Marcos. There were those on the right who never could understand why Al criticized right-wing dictatorships who they believed we could live with because they represented stability and weren't a direct threat to the U.S. There were those on the left who hated Al for taking on the Communists throughout the world because they thought the greatest menace to the world was capitalism.

But the essential value of the positions that Al and the labor movement espoused provided something that is sorely missing today: credibility.

Al Shanker's tough liberalism is more necessary today than ever, precisely because the United States has lost a great deal of credibility when it talks of the importance of freedom and democracy in the world while it turns a blind eye to certain dictatorial governments based on whether they are perceived to be

"with us or against us" on the world's stage.

One of the reasons some have become disenchanted with the democratic imperative is that they were so disappointed when the Soviet Union fell and the end of a dictatorship did not immediately give rise to the birth of freedom and democracy. Al understood this. With the fall of the USSR, Al was one of the few voices that cautioned that democracy will not necessarily flourish at the demise of a dictatorship. He recognized, as Kahlenberg points out in his book, the need for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), independent political parties, the development of

**The reason for American dominance over the last century was not because of its economic vitality. What made America the leader of the free world was that it held up a beacon of hope in the universal quest for human fulfillment.**

churches, unions, newspapers, business groups, and universities for the long and hard conversion to a free, democratic society. Al would not have declared the "end of history." He understood that free enterprise by itself would not lead to a free society.

So what do we mean by tough liberalism? If Al were alive today, I believe he would not be meeting with representatives of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions—a wing of the Chinese government that is used to suppress worker rights, not enhance them. Some U.S. unions are doing that. Rather, Al would be speaking out and supporting the NGOs in Hong Kong and the fledgling worker movements on mainland China just as he did with Solidarity in Poland and the freedom movement in South Africa. It was not by happenstance that on their first trips to the U.S., both South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Poland's Lech Walesa visited the AFL-CIO and its International Affairs chair, Al Shanker. Were he alive today, I believe Al would be demonstrating at the embassies of Sudan and Burma. He would be fighting the dictator in Zimbabwe as well as the terrorist movements of Hamas and Hezbollah. He would be fighting for fledgling worker movements that are forming in Iraq and Afghanistan and speaking in support of free trade unions in Venezuela. Al would be articulating the role of unions as unifiers across ethnic, religious, and racial lines. That's how he would build credibility as an advocate for freedom and democracy.

The reason for American dominance over the last century was not because of its economic vitality. What made America the leader of the free world was that it held up a beacon of hope in the universal quest for human fulfillment. That beacon can only be credible if the U.S. remains a champion of human rights and democracy, and that will only happen if democrats, civil and human rights activists and, most of all, the free labor movement revive the tough liberal internationalism of Albert Shanker. □

## Freedom in Retreat

(Continued from page 24)

Authority. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has attempted to export his authoritarian brand of “21st Century Socialism” to other countries in South America, albeit with little success thus far. For its part, China has emerged as an impediment to the spread of democracy in East Asia and other regions, especially Africa. China has played a particularly negative role in Burma, where it sustains a brutal military dictatorship through economic and diplomatic support, and in North Korea, through its policy of forcibly returning those who flee the Pyongyang regime. In Africa, China provides various kinds of aid, including security assistance, to authoritarian countries and undermines the efforts of the United States, the European Union, and multilateral institutions to promote honest and transparent governance.

New and unstable democracies continue to be plagued by a host of problems stemming from a sharp and sometimes shocking increase in violent crime, often involving the narcotics trade, human trafficking, and organized criminal networks and exacerbated by corrupt or ineffectual police, a poorly functioning judiciary, and vigilantism. While the negative impact of crime on the public’s faith in democracy is a special problem in Latin America, it is also a growing phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asian countries like the Philippines.

### Disturbing Trends

1. *A resurgence of pragmatic, market-oriented, or energy-rich dictatorships.* Most visibly in Russia and China, but also in other parts of the world, governments are trying to harness the power of the marketplace while maintaining closed political systems. Strengthened by petroleum-based riches or capital amassed through long-term trade surpluses,

these autocracies are unapologetic and increasingly assertive, at home and abroad, in declaring that the paradigm of rights-based governance as the international community has long understood it is not relevant for the 21st century. Diplomatic and political efforts to undermine norm-setting bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe are advancing as a consequence, with implications for the fate of freedom in a growing number of countries.

2. *Decline in freedom of association.* As repressive regimes move to strengthen their authority and eliminate sources of political opposition, they increasingly target human rights organizations, advocates of government transparency, women’s rights groups, representatives of minority groups, and trade unions. While the countries of the Middle East established standards for freedom of association, Africa and the non-Baltic countries of the former Soviet Union also have poor scores for associational rights.
3. *Weak governance.* Nearly two-thirds of the world’s countries rank as electoral democracies, but many score poorly on government effectiveness and accountability. Corruption, lack of transparency, and concentration of power in the hands of the executive or nonelected forces represent major obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
4. *Islamic extremism.* While the world has been spared terrorist attacks of the magnitude of 9/11, the violent actions of Islamic radicals remain an important challenge to freedom, both in Muslim countries and in wealthy democracies. Terrorist violence remains a serious problem in Iraq, is a growing threat to freedom in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and continues to plague Algeria, Lebanon, and other



countries of the Arab Middle East. In Europe, during the past year alone, arrests for terrorist plots or actual attacks were made in Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Denmark. The threat of terrorism often provides an unjustified rationale for repressive emergency laws, torture, and the suppression of opposition political parties.

For the past few years, a number of the world's most important autocracies have engaged in what has been called a pushback against democracy promotion. The pushback differs from past strategies of repressive regimes in that it relies on the use of legal restrictions, tax investigations, bureaucratic regulations, and the like to neutralize opposition political parties and civil society organizations that seek political change, rather than rougher techniques like imprisonment, exile, or murder.

The rationale for pushback policies advanced by the authorities in Russia, Venezuela, Iran, and elsewhere is that they are necessary to prevent outside forces, primarily the U.S., from meddling in their sovereign affairs through the support of dissidents, human rights groups, and NGOs. In reality, the main target of this offensive is not the U.S., but the domestic advocates of democracy—those who are waging the on-the-ground struggle for fair elections, honest government, minority rights, women's equality, and freedom of expression.

During 2007, autocrats in various settings repeatedly singled out democracy advocates for especially harsh treatment. In Russia, the Putin regime went out of its way to force parties and candidates with strong democratic credentials off the parliamentary ballot. It has aggressively sought to eliminate or neutralize NGOs that seek political reform, while at the same time treating Communists, xenophobes, and outright racists with tolerance. In China, the harsh treatment meted out to scholars, activists, and journalists who publicly press for democratic improvements is exceeded only by the crackdown on proponents of increased autonomy for Tibet or Xinjiang. In Egypt, the Mubarak government has been as zealous, if not more so, in silencing those who advocate for peaceful democratic reform as it has been in suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood. Under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran has launched an all-fronts offensive against those who speak out for change, including members of democratic parties, students, trade unions, academics, and advocates of women's rights.

### **Promoting Democracy through Solidarity**

Yet even as autocrats fine-tune the mechanisms of repression and control, the past year brought impressive and inspiring examples of resistance from those who cherish freedom. Consider the following:

- A movement launched by students dismayed at Hugo Chavez's assault on freedom of expression grew into a broad opposition that came together to defeat the Venezuelan president's authoritarian constitutional overhaul.
- Even as the Iranian regime steps up its campaign of intimidation and reprisal, students, journalists, and human

rights activists have launched a series of protests that have gained substantial popular support.

- Lawyers in Pakistan, outraged by the government's efforts to undermine judicial independence, mounted protests that eventually galvanized a broader movement of civil society opposed to military rule.

To these champions of freedom can be added a number of others: bloggers and human rights lawyers in China, monks in

**The pushback differs from past strategies of repressive regimes in that it relies on the use of legal restrictions, tax investigations, bureaucratic regulations, and the like, rather than rougher techniques like imprisonment, exile, or murder.**

Burma, trade unionists in Zimbabwe, and students in Bangladesh. More recently, we can add those who used nonviolent tactics to press for democratic reform and cultural freedoms in Tibet, where the rights of Tibetans have been repressed for over a half-century since Chinese occupation.

The accusation that democracy campaigners are serving the interests of foreign powers is not only untrue, it completely distorts the goals and methods of today's dissidents. Indeed, it is too often the case that democracy's advocates are ignored by the outside world, governments, and the public alike. Today's generation of democratic dissidents work both in anonymity and—in Iran, China, and elsewhere—under extreme duress.

The achievements of these democracy movements represent grounds for optimism in an otherwise unimpressive year. But they need the support of their natural allies in the democratic world, including, and indeed especially, advocates of democracy outside government. At a minimum, those who are taking risks for freedom require the kind of protection that only outside attention guarantees, the kind of support that sustained Lech Walesa and Nelson Mandela in a previous era.

We should remember that freedom endured many dark days during the time of Mandela and Walesa, much darker than is the case today. Then, as now, many asked whether the tide had turned against freedom. Some suggested, as many do today, that a society's history or culture could render it inhospitable terrain for democratic development. We also hear again the argument that the democratic world should ignore incidents of repression on the grounds that our involvement will only make matters worse. Fortunately, democrats rejected these arguments. They stayed the course and gave critical support to the dissidents and freedom campaigners in Poland, Chile, South Africa, and elsewhere. The fact that democratic dissidents have thwarted autocrats in the current difficult atmosphere is an important accomplishment. The solidarity of democrats from around the world is essential if the broader momentum toward freedom is to be regained. □

# Which Countries Are Free?

According to *Freedom in the World*, a **Free** country is one where there is broad scope for open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media. A **Partly Free** country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil

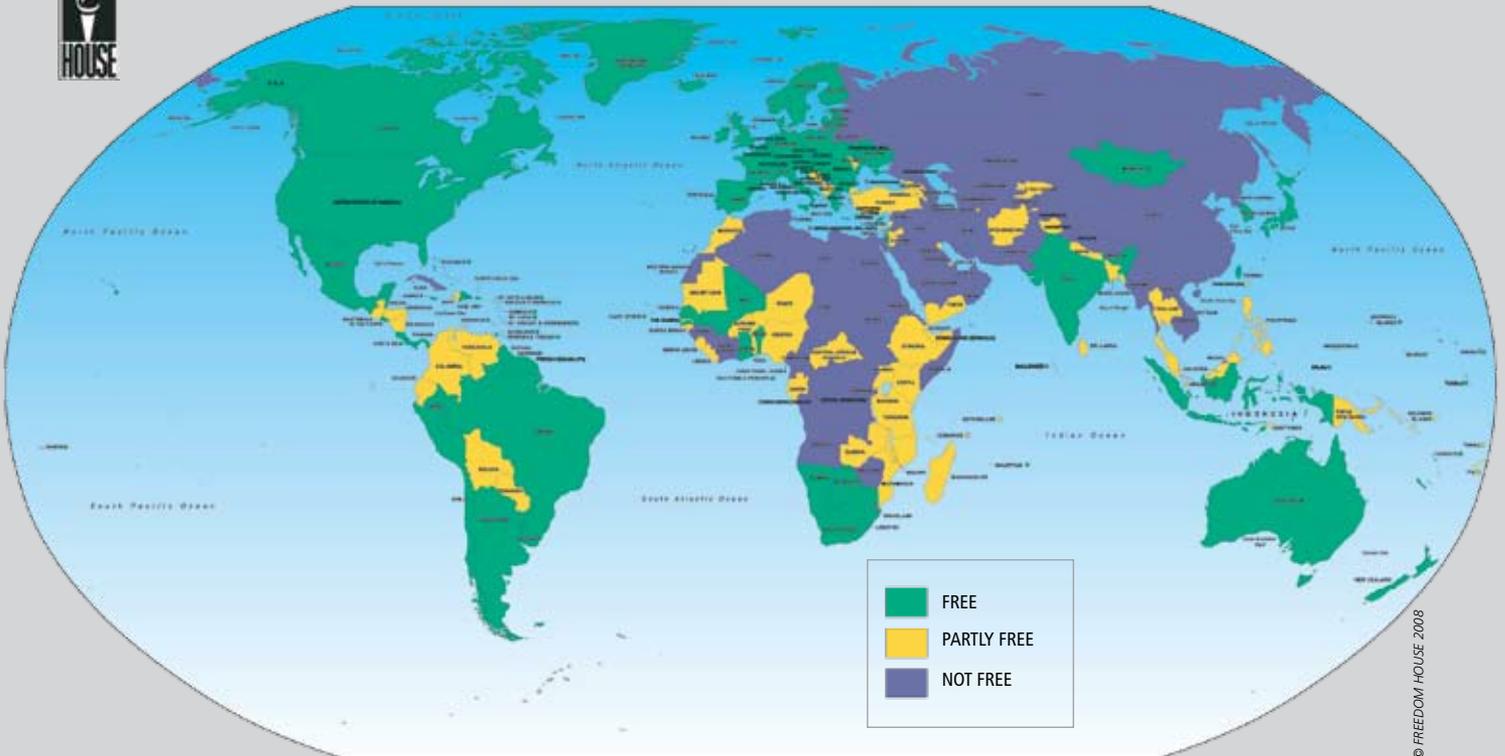
liberties. Partly Free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and often a setting in which a single political party enjoys dominance despite the façade of limited pluralism. A **Not Free** country is one where basic political rights are absent,

and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied.

Teachers can request a free Map of Freedom 2008 by contacting Katrina Neubauer at: 212/514-8040 ext. 10 or [Neubauer@freedomhouse.org](mailto:Neubauer@freedomhouse.org). The map is also available at [www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/mof2008.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw08launch/mof2008.pdf).



## MAP OF FREEDOM 2008

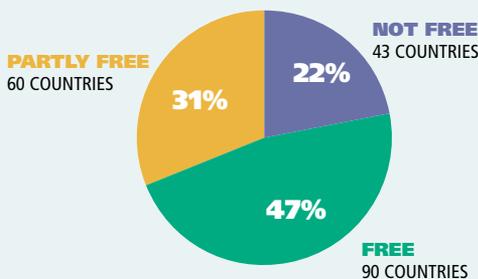


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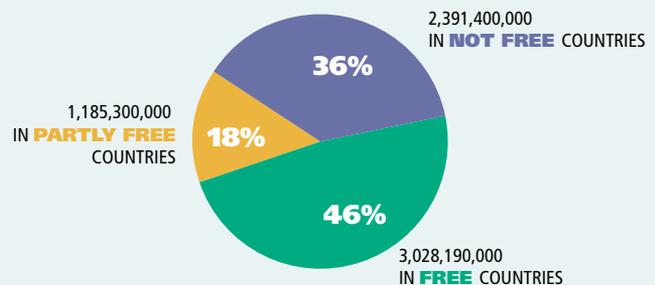
The number of countries judged by *Freedom in the World* as Free in 2007 stood at 90, representing 47 percent of all countries assessed and 46 percent of the global population. The number of countries qualifying as Partly Free stood at 60,

or 31 percent of countries and 18 percent of the population. Forty-three countries were judged Not Free, representing 22 percent of countries and 36 percent of the world population. About half of this number lives in just one country: China.

**Freedom by Country**



**Freedom by World Population**



## ASK THE COGNITIVE SCIENTIST

# What Is Developmentally Appropriate Practice?

*How does the mind work—and especially how does it learn? Teachers' instructional decisions are based on a mix of theories learned in teacher education, trial and error, craft knowledge, and gut instinct. Such gut knowledge often serves us well, but is there anything sturdier to rely on?*

*Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field of researchers from psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, philosophy, computer science, and anthropology who seek to understand the mind. In this regular American Educator column, we consider findings from this field that are strong and clear enough to merit classroom application.*

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

**W**hat is “developmentally appropriate practice”? For many teachers, I think the definition is that school activities should be matched to children’s abilities—they should be neither too difficult nor too easy, given the child’s current state of development.\* The idea is that children’s thinking goes through stages, and each stage is characterized by a particular way of understanding the world. So if teachers know and understand that sequence, they can plan their lessons in accordance with how their students think.

In this column I will argue that this notion of developmentally appropriate practice is not a good guide for instruction. In order for it to be applicable in the classroom, two assumptions would have to be true. One is that a child’s cognitive development occurs in discrete stages; that is, children’s thinking is relatively stable, but then undergoes a seismic shift, whereupon it stabilizes again until the next large-scale change. The second assumption that would have to be true is that the effects of the child’s current state of cognitive development are pervasive—that is, that the developmental state affects all tasks consistently.

Data from the last 20 years show that nei-

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ther assumption is true. Development looks more continuous than stage-like, and the way children perform cognitive tasks is quite variable. A child will not only perform different tasks in different ways, he may do the same task in two different ways on successive days! As a result, research on children's development can be useful to teachers, but perhaps not in the way they expect.

\* \* \*

It would be great if teachers could know in advance whether their students were capable of understanding a story, project, or activity. Imagine how much more productive lesson planning would be if developmental psychologists could tell teachers, "Students in kindergarten will generally be able to do tasks of type X, but will not be able to do tasks of type Y." Or "all students will be able to do task Z, but kindergartners will do it using Method #1, whereas first-graders will do it using Method #2."

Teachers who have taken a course in cognitive development may think that such specific guidance is not so far in the future. After all, it was some 50 years ago that the acclaimed psychologist Jean Piaget proposed his four-stage theory of cognitive development. Unfortunately, researchers are far from being able to provide teachers this type of guidance—and probably will never be able to do so. To better understand why, let's review Jean Piaget's theory. Although development psychologists no longer believe that his theory is right, it is a good starting place because so many people are familiar with Piaget's stages of development, and because the research prompted by his theory showed that development does not proceed in discrete stages with pervasive effects. That research is vitally important to our thinking about child development and classroom practice.

## Jean Piaget's Four Stages of Development

Piaget proposed that children go through four major stages of development. Each stage is a long plateau during which cognitive change is absent or modest, followed by a large, rapid shift in thinking marking the movement to the next stage.

The first stage, lasting from birth until about age 2, is the *sensorimotor* stage, in which infants gather information and express their knowledge about the world through their senses and through movement. Piaget proposed that children in this stage live very much in the present moment and that they have only a rudimentary understanding of space, time, and causality. He believed that deferred imitation, in which the child imitates an observed action after a delay, indicates that she is moving into the next stage—*preoperational*.

The preoperational stage lasts from about ages 2 to 7. Mental concepts become more complex because the child can represent ideas via language. Children are able to use mental symbols—for example, they can pretend that one object is another in play. Still, their ability to use these symbols in an organized way is not complete. One limitation (which Piaget called "centration") is the tendency to focus on just one aspect of a complex situation. For

example, if you show a 5-year-old child identical glasses containing the same amount of juice, she will say that they are the same. If, as the child watches, you transfer the contents of one glass into a taller, narrower glass she'll say that it now has more than the other (Piaget 1952). She makes this error because she focuses on one feature—the height of the juice in the glass—and ignores another, equally important feature—the width.

Children in the preoperational stage also have difficulty understanding that others do not see the world as they do (a

**Data from the last 20 years show that development looks more continuous than stage-like, and the way children perform cognitive tasks is quite variable.**

phenomenon Piaget called egocentrism). Suppose a child in the preoperational stage is shown a series of drawings with an accompanying explanation from an adult. Max puts a chocolate bar in a cupboard. When he's out of the kitchen, his mother moves the chocolate bar to a drawer. Where, the experimenter asks the child, will Max look for the chocolate bar when he returns? Most 4-year-olds incorrectly answer "the drawer." About one-half of 4- to 6-year-olds get the problem right, as do most of the children older than 6 (Wimmer and Perner 1983). It is only at the end of this stage that children understand that others think differently than they do.

The third stage of development is the *concrete operational* stage, lasting from about ages 7 to 12. According to Piaget, children in this stage are able to reason logically about concrete objects—thus they know that when juice is poured into a different container, it must be the same amount, however different it might look. They still have difficulty thinking about highly abstract situations, however. For example, they have trouble contemplating different conceptions of justice, or radically different worlds such as one might encounter in science fiction.

The final stage of development is the *formal operations* stage, which begins at about age 12 and continues throughout adulthood. Piaget believed that children in this stage can think about pure abstractions, and they can apply sophisticated reasoning strategies to them. For example, they can think about morality in the abstract, and consider the extended implications of a different view of morality. They can think systematically about complex situations, for example, using the scientific method of isolating variables to understand cause and effect.

**I**f Piaget's theory were right, knowledge of cognitive development would be quite useful to classroom practice. We would know, for example, that kindergartners, who are in the preoperational stage, would have a difficult time understanding other cultures. Their egocentrism would make

\* There is no formal work to verify or disprove my impression, so I conducted an informal survey of math teachers in which I simply asked them to define the term in a few sentences. Of the 25 who instruct K-3 students (usually taken to be the critical years for developmentally appropriate practice), all defined it largely in terms of readiness: does the child have the cognitive (and perhaps, emotional) capabilities to understand and benefit from a lesson?

it hard for them to comprehend that other people have different thoughts, beliefs, and experiences than they do. We might also conclude that science and mathematics would need to be quite concrete until children reached about the sixth grade. Before then, they would not be able to apply sophisticated reasoning to abstractions because they are in the concrete operational stage.

Unfortunately, Piaget's theory is not right. He is credited with brilliant insights and many of his observations hold true—for example, kindergartners do have some egocentrism and 9-year-olds do have some trouble with highly abstract concepts. Nonetheless, recent research indicates that *development does not proceed in stages after all*.

As I said at the outset, teachers generally think of developmentally appropriate practice as instruction that is sensitive to a child's stage of development, which is assumed to affect his or her thought processes quite broadly. But this characterization of development—discrete stages with pervasive effects—has been carefully tested in the context of Piaget's theory and has been found not to be true. The problem is not simply that Piaget didn't get it quite right. The problem is that cognitive development does not seem amenable to a simple descriptive set of principles that teachers can use to guide their instruction. Far from proceeding in discrete stages with pervasive effects, cognitive development appears to be quite variable—depending on the child, the task, even the day (since children may solve a problem correctly one day and incorrectly the next).

### **Development Does Not Occur in Discrete, Pervasive Stages**

It is easy to see why Piaget (and others) believed that development occurred in stable, pervasive stages. Many parents, for example, have observed seemingly sudden shifts in their children's thought and behavior. In addition, the types of changes in cognition that Piaget observed were initially supported in laboratory studies.

To better understand why developmental psychologists (and thus teachers and parents) thought development occurs in stages, let's consider egocentrism, which Piaget initially tested with the three-mountain task (Piaget and Inhelder 1956). Children were shown a tabletop model of three mountains. The experimenters placed a doll in a chair on the side opposite the child. The child was shown several photographs and was asked to choose the one corresponding to what the doll would see from her vantage point. The experimenters reported that 4-year-olds are unable to do this task, thus showing an inability to appreciate others' points of view.

This finding certainly rings true to me. Like many parents, I have had countless conversations like this one with my 2-year-old daughter, Sarah, while in the car:

Sarah, looking out the window: What's that?

Dad: What's what?

Sarah: That!

Dad: Describe it. What color is it?

Sarah, increasingly frustrated: *That!* Right there!

She cannot understand that I don't know what she is looking at. Young children's thinking does indeed seem egocentric.

But it turns out that our perceptions about what children know depend on the task we use to probe their knowledge. Betty Repacholi and Alison Gopnik (1997) used a different task to test young children's egocentrism and showed that children as young as 18 months can behave in ways that are not egocentric. In their experiment, 14-month-old and 18-month-old children first had an opportunity to sample a food that toddlers typically like—

### **It turns out that our perceptions about what children know depend on the task we use to probe their knowledge.**

Goldfish crackers—and one that they typically do not—raw broccoli. Predictably, most of the children preferred the crackers. Later, each child observed an adult experimenter try each of the foods. In the critical condition, the child saw the experimenter show strong disgust after tasting the crackers (“Eww! Crackers! Eww! I tasted the crackers! Eww!”) and an equally strong indication of pleasure after tasting the broccoli. Later, this same adult, seated across a table from the child, put a tray on the table with a bowl of broccoli and a bowl of crackers, put her hand equidistant from the bowls and said, “Can you give me some?” If the child is egocentric, he will not be able to conceive that the experimenter could want the yucky broccoli, and so he will give her some crackers. And about 90 percent of 14-month-old children do just that. Even though they have seen the experimenter express disgust after tasting the crackers, they seem unable to understand that someone would have a different preference than they do. The 18-month-old children, however, get it. Seventy percent of these children offer broccoli to the experimenter. (They aren't just shrewder than their younger counterparts, hoarding the crackers for themselves. In another condition, the experimenter indicated that she liked crackers, and the same percentage of 18-month-old children willingly shared the yummy crackers.)

Here is still another way that we could measure egocentrism. Children as young as 6 months show distress when another child cries. We cannot conclude, however, that this is a show of sympathy—that is, that the infant understands that the other child is upset. It may be that hearing a baby cry is disturbing, and the child cries because *he* is upset, not for the sake of the other child. But sympathy quite clearly emerges between the first and second year. By the age of 2, children less often cry when they see someone in distress, and more often offer comfort, including voicing concern (saying “I'm sorry”) or offering physical comfort like a hug (Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992). That's not to say that 2-year-olds always behave in this sympathetic manner when they see someone in distress. But they often do, and it's a clear sign that they

understand someone else's mental state—that they are not behaving egocentrically.

**T**hese experiments tell us that there is not a rapid shift whereby children acquire the ability to understand that other people have their own perspectives on the world. The age at which children show comprehension of this concept depends on the details of what they are asked to understand and how they are asked to show that they understand it. This pattern of task dependence holds for other hallmarks of Piagetian stages as well. The implication is that stages, if they exist, are not pervasive (i.e., they do not broadly affect children's cognition). The particulars of the task matter.

Here's another example that explores how recent research is refuting the notion of discrete, pervasive stages of development. Suppose I give the juice-in-the-glass task to a group of children and all of the 5-year-olds say the narrow glass has more than the wide glass, about one-half of the 6-year-olds say that and one-half say they are equal, and all of the 7-year-olds say they are equal. We'd probably be inclined to interpret this result as consistent with a stage theory that predicts that children learn the conservation of liquid principle around age 6.

There is, however, an assumption embedded in this interpretation. We're assuming that the performance of the 6-year-olds varies because we happened to test some before they had mastered the concept and some afterwards. We assume that if we had administered the test to each 6-year-old twice on consecutive days, then he or she would be a solver or a nonsolver each time. In fact, that's not the case. Children are frequently inconsistent in how they perform cognitive tasks.

Here's an example using a conservation-of-number problem

that is conceptually similar to the juice-in-the-glass problem. The child is shown two rows of objects, say, pennies. Each row has the same number of pennies and they are aligned, one for one. The child will agree that the rows are the same. Then the experimenter changes one row by pushing the pennies farther apart. Now, the experimenter asks, which row has more? (Pennies might also be added to or subtracted from a line.) Younger children will say that the longer line has more pennies.

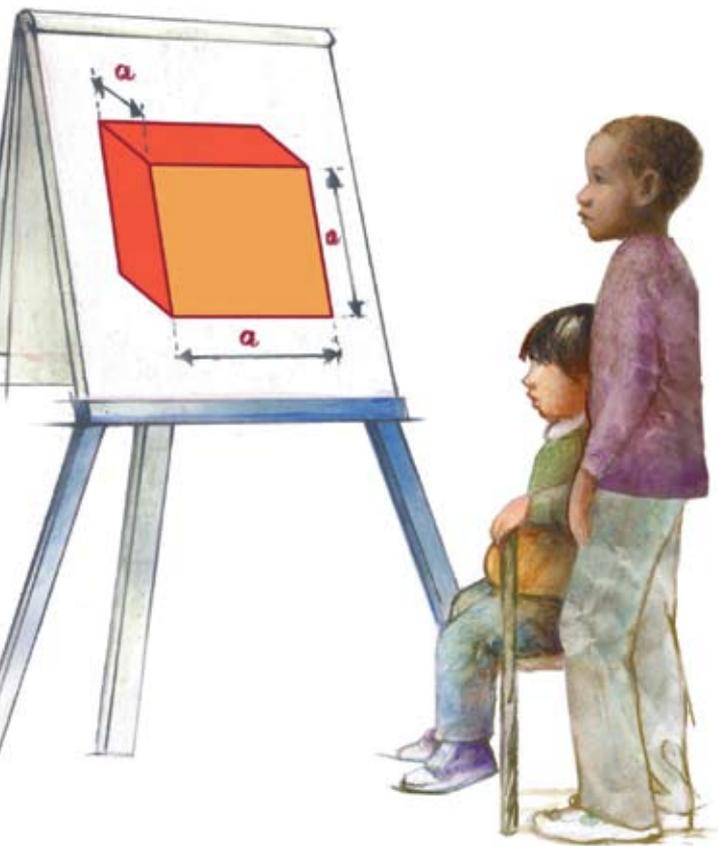
When Piaget (1952) developed this task he argued that children go through three stages on their way to successfully solving this problem. Initially they cannot process both the length of the rows and the density of coins in the rows, so they focus on just one of these, usually saying that the longer row has more. The next stage is brief, and is characterized by variable performance: children sometimes use row length and sometimes row density to make their judgment, sometimes they use both but cannot say why they did so, and sometimes they simply say that they are unsure. In the third stage, children have grasped the relevant concepts and consistently perform correctly.

Robert Siegler (1995) showed that children's performance on this task doesn't develop that way. Ninety-seven 4- to 6-year-olds who initially could not solve the problem were studied, with each child performing variants of the problem a total of 96 times over eight sessions. After each problem, children were asked to explain why they gave the answer they did, so there was ample opportunity to examine the consistency of the children's performance and their reasoning. The experimenter found a good deal of inconsistency. Children used a variety of explanations—sophisticated and naïve—throughout, even though they became more accurate with experience (the experimenter provided accuracy feedback, which is a big help to learning). It was not the case that once the child "got it" he consistently used the correct strategy. If the child gave a good explanation for a problem, there was only a 43 percent chance of his advancing the same explanation when later confronted with *the identical problem*.

This variability in children's thinking is not limited to Piaget's conservation-of-number task. The same variability is observed in mathematics (Siegler and Jenkins 1989) and scientific reasoning (Metz 1985, Schauble 1990). All in all, children's performance as they learn seems better characterized by variability than by consistency (Siegler 1994). So for teachers, changing strategies and experimenting with different methods of presenting and solving problems may be a more effective way to improve instruction than trying to match instruction to children's developmental level.

### **Children's Cognitive Abilities Vary by Task and Day, Not Just by Age and Individual Developmental Pace**

Having reviewed some key research, we're ready to ask: how can we apply our knowledge of cognitive development to the classroom? I have argued that an important characteristic of development is variability. Everyone appreciates that there is great variability among children of different ages, and most people appreciate that there is also variability among children of the same age—children change with age, but not at the same pace, so 5-year-olds, for example, differ. What I have added here is evidence for two other types of variability. There is variability



across tasks, meaning that children use or fail to use a cognitive concept—for example, knowledge that others' thoughts may be different from their own—depending on the task in which the concept is embedded. There is also variability within children. Day to day, the same child may perform the same task in different ways.

The documented variability in children's performance has changed the way developmental psychologists think about cognition. Until about 40 years ago, most thought of children's minds as a set of machinery. As children developed, parts of the machine changed, or parts were discarded and replaced by new parts. The machinery didn't work well during these transitions, but the changes happened quickly. Today, researchers more often think that there are several sets of machinery. Children have multiple cognitive processes and modes of thought that coexist, and any one might be recruited to solve a problem. Those sets of cognitive machinery undergo change as children develop, but in addition, the probability of using one set of machinery or the other also changes as children develop.

This conclusion doesn't mean that there is no consistency across children in their thought, or in the way that it changes with development. But the consistency is only really evident at a broader scale of measurement. A geographic metaphor is helpful in understanding this distinction (Siegler, DeLoache, and Eisenberg 2003). If one begins a trip in Virginia and drives west, there are very real differences in terrain that can be usefully described. The East Coast is wet, green, and moderately hilly. The Midwest is less wet and flatter. The mountain states are mountainous and green, and the West is mostly flat and desert-like. There is no abrupt transition from one region to another and the characterization is only a rough one—if I tell you that I'm on the East Coast

and you say, "Oh, it must be green, wet, and hilly where you are," you may well be wrong. But the rough characterization is not meaningless. Similarly, all children take the same developmental "trip." They may travel at different paces and take different paths. But at a broad level of description, there is similarity in the trip that each takes.

Obviously, the description of multiple sets of cognitive machinery rather than a single set complicates the job of the developmental psychologist who seeks to describe how children's minds work and how they change as children grow. Worse, it negates the possibility that teachers can use developmental psychology in the way we first envisioned. There is a developmental sequence (if not stages) from birth through adolescence, but pinpointing where a particular child is in that sequence and tuning your instruction to that child's cognitive capabilities is not realistic. Nonetheless, information gleaned from cognitive developmental studies can still be informative.

### What Does This Variability Mean for Teachers?

1. *Use information about principles, but not in the absolute.* The initial hope was that developmental psychologists could articulate cognitive principles that would characterize children at different ages, and thus could be used to predict their success on a variety of tasks. That won't work, but not because the principles are wrong—it's just that they are not absolute. Centration—the tendency to focus on a single dimension of a situation when more than one dimension is important—is a common feature of preschoolers' thinking. But whether centration is a feature of their thought depends on the task, and when it is, they can often be guided to attend to more than one feature. Thus, knowing principles of cognitive development like centration or egocentrism is useful because they may give you insight into how children are thinking, and may help you guide them to think more productively. But like any useful tool, overuse will lead to trouble.

2. *Think about the effectiveness of tasks.* Children sometimes understand a principle embedded in one task and fail to understand it in another task. Thus, a description of the principle does not provide a foolproof guide to what children will understand, but knowing which tasks have worked well in the classroom and which have not is obviously useful. I am sure that you keep track, at least informally, of how well an activity works, and either repeat or discard that activity for future classes. (I'm a fan of recording such impressions frequently in a teaching diary, as one's memory is never as reliable as one hopes.) But why limit yourself to your own experience? Do you share this sort of information with other teachers? If the teachers in your grade don't already meet regularly, consider setting up such a meeting for the express purpose of exchanging information about projects, activities, books, and other specific tasks that have (or have not) worked well in the past.

3. *Think about why students do not understand.* An important message from the research cited here is that any one task that the child attempts at any one time is not a perfect window into the child's abilities. Children's cognition is variable. That means



that if they fail to understand a concept, the problem may not be the concept—it may be some other feature of the task.

For example, suppose you read *Make Way for Ducklings* to a preschool class. Midway through the story you ask, “What do you think will happen next?” and you are met with blank stares. You might think to yourself, “That question was developmentally inappropriate. It was too abstract to ask them to think about the future.” Maybe. But maybe no one has ever asked them to make a prediction about a story, and so they were just unsure of what

## There is a developmental sequence (if not stages) from birth through adolescence, but pinpointing where a particular child is in that sequence and tuning your instruction to that child’s cognitive capabilities is not realistic.

to do, and would have answered readily if you had said, “Do you think the ducks will go back to the park or stay where they are?” Or maybe they hadn’t understood the story very well to that point, so they knew what you were asking, but they just didn’t know what might happen next. Or maybe they just don’t know that much about ducks.

If a child, or even the whole class, does not understand something, you should not assume that the task you posed was not developmentally appropriate. Maybe the students are missing the necessary background knowledge. Or maybe a different presentation of the same material would make it easier to understand.

4. *Recognize that no content is inherently developmentally inappropriate.* If we accept that students’ failure to understand is not a matter of content, but either of presentation or a lack of background knowledge, then the natural extension is that no content should be off limits for school-age children. Jerome Bruner suggested this provocative idea as follows:

We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development. It is a bold hypothesis and an essential one in thinking about the nature of the curriculum. No evidence exists to contradict it; considerable evidence is being amassed that supports it. (Bruner 1960, p. 33)

Bruner goes on to suggest that children can get an intuitive grasp of a complex concept before they have the background and maturity to deal with the same topic in a formal manner. For example, 6-year-olds may not be ready to understand the formulae associated with projective geometry, but they can get an intuitive understanding of some of the principles by experimenting with placing rings of different sizes between a light source

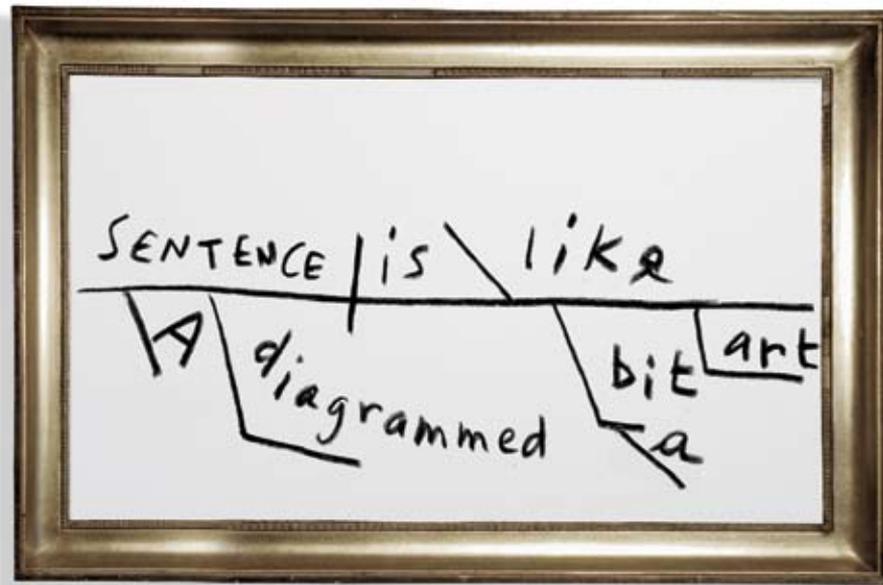
and a screen, and seeing that the size of the cast shadow depends on its distance from the light. Similarly, the notion of probability is embedded in games that children play using dice, and this understanding can be expanded to include the notion of a distribution. Thus, one approach is to help the child gain an intuitive appreciation of a complex principle long before she is prepared to learn the formal description of it. Without trivializing them, complex ideas can be introduced by making them concrete and through reference to children’s experience.

Of course, as teachers, you must also consider the cost if students do not fully understand a concept the way you had intended. The cost may be minimal, and the content may be worth knowing—even if in an incomplete way. For example, suppose your preschool students have learned about Martin Luther King, Jr., but you are having a hard time getting them to understand that he was a real person who is no longer here, and that fictional characters such as Mary Poppins are not here and never were. If it’s hard for a 4-year-old to conceive of people living in different times and places, does that mean that history should not be taught until the child is older? Such an argument would not make much sense to a developmental psychologist. For children and adults, understanding of any new concept is inevitably incomplete. The preschoolers can still learn something about who King was and what he stood for. Their mistaken belief that they might encounter him at a local store, or that he lives at a school that bears his name, will be corrected in time. Indeed, how do children learn that some people are fictional and some are not? Not by a magical process of brain maturation. Children learn this principle as they learn any other—in fits and starts, sometimes showing that they understand and other times not. *If you wait until you are certain that the children will understand every nuance of a lesson, you will likely wait too long to present it.* If they understand every nuance, you’re probably presenting content that they’ve already learned elsewhere. □

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# A Picture of Language



BY KITTY BURNS FLOREY

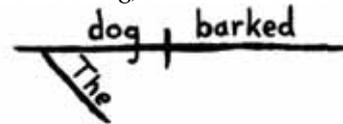
**D**iagramming sentences is one of those lost skills like darning socks that no one seems to miss. When it was introduced in an 1877 text called *Higher Lessons in English* by Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg, it swept through American public schools like the measles, embraced by teachers as the way to reform students who were engaged in (to take Henry Higgins slightly out of context) “the cold-blooded murder of the English tongue.” By promoting the beautifully logical rules of syntax, diagramming would root out evils like “him and me went” and “I ain’t got none,” until everyone wrote like Ralph Waldo Emerson, or at least James Fenimore Cooper.\*

Even in my own youth, many years after 1877, diagramming was serious business. I learned it in the sixth grade from Sister Bernadette.

Sister Bernadette: I can still see her, a tiny nun with a sharp pink nose, confidently drawing a dead-straight horizontal line

*Kitty Burns Florey, a copy editor, is author of nine novels and many short stories and essays. This article is excerpted with permission from Sister Bernadette’s Barking Dog by Kitty Burns Florey. Copyright © 2006. Published by Melville House.*

like a highway across the blackboard, flourishing her chalk in the air at the end of it, her veil flipping out behind her as she turned back to the class. *We begin*, she said, *with a straight line*. And then, in her firm and saintly script, she put words on the line, a noun and a verb—probably something like *dog barked*. Between the words she drew a short vertical slash, bisecting the line. Then she drew a road—a short country lane—that forked off at an angle under the word *dog*, and on it she wrote *The*.



That was it: subject, predicate, and the little modifying article that civilized the sentence—all of it made into a picture that was every bit as clear and informative as an actual portrait of a beagle in midwoof. The thrilling part was that this was a picture not of the animal but of the words that stood for the animal and its noises. It was a representation of something that was both concrete (we could hear the words if we said them aloud, and they

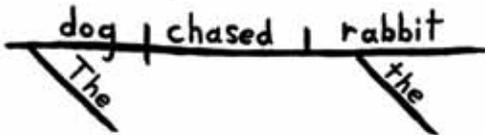
\*I’m thinking here of Mark Twain’s famous and still highly entertaining essay, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses,” in which Twain concludes that “in the restricted space of two-thirds of a page, Cooper has scored 114 literary offenses out of a possible 115. It breaks the record.” But Wilkie Collins called Cooper “the greatest artist in the domain of romantic fiction in America.”



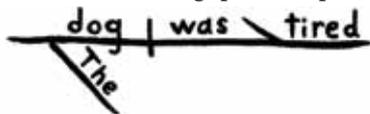
conveyed an actual event) and abstract (the spoken words were invisible, and their sounds vanished from the air as soon as they were uttered). The diagram was the bridge between a dog and the description of a dog. It was a bit like art, a bit like mathematics. It was much more than words uttered, or words written on a piece of paper: it was a picture of language.

I was hooked. So, it seems, were many of my contemporaries. Among the myths that have attached themselves to memories of being educated in the '50s is the notion that activities like diagramming sentences (along with memorizing poems and adding long columns of figures without a calculator) were draggy and monotonous. I thought diagramming was fun, and most of my friends who were subjected to it look back with varying degrees of delight. Some of us were better at it than others, but it was considered a kind of treat, a game that broke up the school day. You took a sentence, threw it against the wall, picked up the pieces, and put them together again, slotting each word into its pigeonhole. When you got it right, you made order and sense out of what we used all the time and took for granted: sentences. Those ephemeral words didn't just fade away in the air but became chiseled in stone—yes, this is a sentence, this is what it's made of, this is what it looks like, a chunk of English you can see and grab onto.

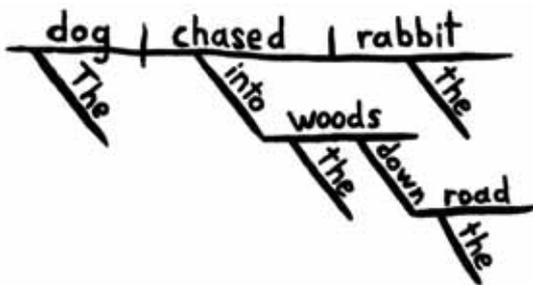
As we became more proficient, the tasks got harder. There was great appeal in the Shaker-like simplicity of sentences like *The dog chased the rabbit* (subject, predicate, direct object) with their plain, no-nonsense diagrams:



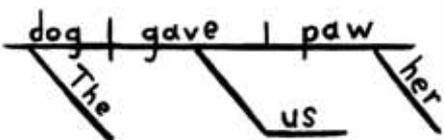
But there were also lovable subtleties, like the way the line that set off a predicate adjective slanted back toward the subject it referred to, like a signpost or a pointing finger:



Or the thorny rosebush created by diagramming a prepositional phrase modifying another prepositional phrase:

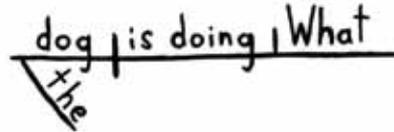


Or the elegant absence of the preposition with an indirect object, indicated by a short road with no house on it:

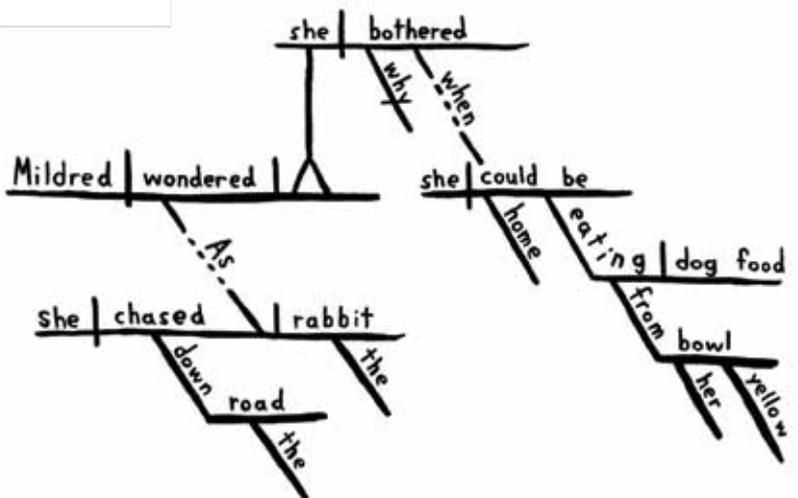


The missing preposition—in this case *to*—could also be indicated by placing it on that road with parentheses around it, but this always seemed to me a clumsy solution, right up there with explaining a pun.

Questions were a special case: for diagramming, they had to be turned inside out, the way a sock has to be eased onto a foot: *What is the dog doing?* transformed into the more dramatic: *The dog is doing what?*

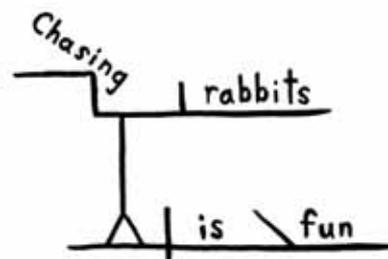


Mostly we diagrammed sentences out of a grammar book, but sometimes we were assigned the task of making up our own, taking pleasure in coming up with wild Proustian wanderings that—kicking and screaming—had to be corralled, harnessed, and made to trot in neat rows into the barn.



We hung those sentences out like a wash, wrote them like lines of music, arranged them on a connecting web of veins and arteries until we understood every piece of them. We could see for ourselves the difference between *who* and *whom*. We knew what an adverb was, and we knew where in a sentence it went, and why it went there.

And we knew that gerunds looked like nouns but were really verbs because they could take a direct object:



Part of the fun of diagramming sentences was that it didn't matter what they said. The dog could bark, chew gum, play chess—in the world of diagramming, sentences weren't about meaning so much as they were about subject, predicate, object, and their various dependents or modifiers. All you had to do was

get the diagram right—the meaning was secondary. And for a bunch of 11- and 12-year-olds, there was a certain wacky charm to that idea.

\* \* \*

Diagramming has lost much of the cachet it used to claim in education circles when I was in school. Sometime in the '60s, it nearly came to a dead stop. But, like pocket watches and Gilbert & Sullivan operas, the practice persists, alternately trashed and cheered by linguists and grammarians. It's sometimes used in English as a second language courses, and it's making a small comeback in schools.

The practice is in the process of recovering from the steep slide into marginality that began in the 1960s. But the climb back up is slow. An English teacher I spoke with told me (not happily) that such close attention to the making of correct sentences is now considered dull and dreary—that it interferes with “the full flow of the students’ creativity”: if they have to think about making every little thing correct, how can they express themselves? As I remember it, the last thing you were expected to do at my school in the '50s was express yourself. You were indeed expected to make every little thing correct, and if you inadvertently expressed yourself in the process, well, Sister Bernadette might just grab you by the ear and drag you to the principal’s office.

The teachers I’ve talked to who teach diagramming seem to have found a nice balance: the kids are free to express themselves, but in correct, intelligible English that’s a pleasure rather than a chore to read. □

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## Teaching English Language Learners

*(Continued from page 23)*

reasonably high level in just two to three years, but proficiency in academic English can require six, seven, or more years.<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \*

Although there are numerous areas in which there is insufficient research to guide policy and practice, we can lay claim to some things that matter for the education of ELLs. Chief among these is that 1) teaching children to read in their primary language promotes reading achievement in English; 2) in many important respects, what works for learners in general also works for ELLs; and 3) teachers must make instructional modifications when ELLs are taught in English, primarily because of the students’ language limitations.

Practically, what do these findings and conclusions mean? In spite of the many gaps in what we know, the following is the sort of instructional framework to which our current state of knowledge points:

- If feasible, children should be taught reading in their primary language. Primary language reading instruction a) develops first language skills, b) promotes reading in English, and c) can be carried out as children are also learning to read, and learning other academic content, in English.
- As needed, students should be helped to transfer what they know in their first language to learning tasks presented in English; teachers should not assume that transfer is automatic.
- Teaching in the first and second languages can be approached similarly. However, adjustments or modifications will be necessary, probably for several years and at least for some students, until they reach sufficient familiarity with academic English to permit them to be successful in mainstream instruction; more complex learning might require more instructional adjustments.
- ELLs need intensive oral English language development (ELD), especially vocabulary and academic English instruction. However, as the sidebar on critical unanswered questions explains (see p. 12), we have much to learn about what type of ELD instruction is most beneficial. Effective ELD provides both explicit teaching of features of English (such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage) and ample, meaningful opportunities to use English—but we do not know whether there is an optimal balance between the two (much less what it might be).
- ELLs also need academic content instruction, just as all students do; although ELD is crucial, it must be in addition to—not instead of—instruction designed to promote content knowledge.

Local or state policies, such as in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, that block use of the primary language and limit instructional modifications for English learners are sim-

ply not based on the best scientific evidence available. Moreover, these policies make educators' jobs more difficult, which is unconscionable under any circumstance, but especially egregious in light of the increased accountability pressures they and their students face. Despite many remaining questions, we have useful starting points for renewed efforts to

## Effective English language development provides explicit teaching of features of English (such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and norms of social usage) and ample, meaningful opportunities to use English.

improve the achievement of ELLs—the fastest growing segment of the school-age population. Given all the challenges that ELLs (and their teachers) face, policy and practice must be based on the best evidence we have. □

### Endnotes

Throughout the article and sidebars, individual studies discussed but not cited are included in either the NLP report or the CREDE report, and often in both.

1 Most of the preceding list is derived from content standards for second grade adopted by the California State Board of Education, available at [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov). Reading fluency figure from Behavioral Research and Teaching 2005. *Oral Reading Fluency: 90 Years of Assessment* (BRT Technical Report No. 33), Eugene, OR: Author (available at [www.jhasbrouck.com](http://www.jhasbrouck.com)). Vocabulary from Lehr, F., Osborn, J., and Hiebert, E. (n.d.). *A Focus on Vocabulary*. Honolulu: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning; and from Nagy, W.E. and Herman, P.A. 1987. Breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge: Implications for acquisition and instruction. In *The Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition*, eds. McKeown, M. and Curtis, M., 19-35. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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6 Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Passel, J.S., and Herwatoro, S. 2005. *The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Also: Larsen, L.J. 2004. The foreign-born population in the United States: 2003. *Current Population Reports*, P20-551. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

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10 Zehler, A.M., Fleischman, H.L., Hopstock, P.J., Stephenson, T.G., Pendzick, M.L., and

Sapru, S. 2003. *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students and LEP Students with Disabilities. Volume I: Research Report*. Arlington, VA: Development Associates, Inc. 11 Ibid.

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18 This finding was first reported in Slavin, R. and Cheung, A. 2005. A synthesis of research on language of reading instruction for English Language Learners. *Review of Educational Research* 75:247-281. Robert Slavin was a member of the NLP and was working on the meta-analysis of instructional language. He resigned in order to publish his review before the Panel's work was completed.

19 The CREDE report also reached the same conclusion, but it was a narrative review, not a meta-analysis. The other four meta-analyses are as follows: Greene, J. 1997. A meta-analysis of the Rossell and Baker review of bilingual education research. *Bilingual Research Journal*

21:103-122. Rolstad, K., Mahoney, K. and Glass, G. 2005. The big picture: A meta-analysis of program effectiveness research on English Language Learners. *Educational Policy* 19:572-594. Slavin, R. and Cheung, A. 2005. A synthesis of research on language of reading instruction for English Language Learners. *Review of Educational Research* 75:247-281. Willig, A. 1985. A meta-analysis of selected studies on the effectiveness of bilingual education. *Review of Educational Research* 55:269-317.

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26 Carlo, M.S., August, D., McLaughlin, B., Snow, C.E., Dressler, C., Lippman, D.N., Lively, T.J., and White, C.E. 2004. Closing the gap: Addressing the vocabulary needs of English-language learners in bilingual and mainstream classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly* 39 (2):188-215.

27 See, for example, Beck, I., McKeown, M., and Kucan, L. 2002. *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*. New York: Guilford.

28 Collins, M. 2005. ESL preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition from storybook reading. *Reading Research Quarterly* 40:406-408.

29 Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., and Christian, D. 2006. *Educating English Language Learners*. New York: Cambridge University Press; quote from p. 140.

30 Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., and Christian, D. 2006. *Educating English Language Learners*. New York: Cambridge University Press; quote from p. 140.

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## Critical Questions Endnotes

(Continued from page 13)

1 Readers interested in finding out more about two-way bilingual education should consult: Lindholm-Leary, K.J. 2001. *Dual language education*. Avon, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters; Lindholm-Leary, K.J. 2003. Dual language achievement, proficiency, and attitudes among current high school graduates of two-way programs. *NABE Journal* 26:20-25; Lindholm-Leary, K.J. 2005. The rich promise of two-way immersion. *Educational Leadership* 62:56-59; Lindholm-Leary, K.J. 2007. *Effective Features of Dual Language Education Programs: A Review of Research and Best Practices* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

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3 Saunders, W., Foorman, B. and Carlson, C. 2006. Do we need a separate block of time for oral English language development in programs for English learners? *Elementary School Journal* 107:181-198.

4 See, for example, Lyster, R. 2007. *Learning and Teaching Languages through Content: A Counterbalanced Approach*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

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## Modifications Endnotes

(Continued from page 21)

1 Collins, M. 2005. ESL preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition from storybook reading. *Reading Research Quarterly* 40:406-408.

2 Roberts, T. and Neal, H. 2004. Relationships among preschool English language learners' oral proficiency in English, instructional experience and literacy development. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 29:283-311.

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4 See Ovando, C., Collier, V. and Combs, M.C. 2003. *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts* (3rd Ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

5 Fung, I., Wilkinson, I., and Moore, D. 2003. L1-assisted reciprocal teaching to improve ESL students' comprehension of English expository text. *Learning and Instruction* 13:1-31.

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## Tough Liberalism Endnotes

(Continued from page 29)

- 1 Lillian Feldman interview, p. 3.
- 2 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 2. Eadie Shanker interview, 10/24/02, p. 3.
- 3 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 2-3. Albert Shanker interview with Sara Mosle. New York: NY 1996. Wayne State University Archives, part 1.
- 4 David Hill, *Education Week*, 2/21/96.
- 5 *New York Times*, 2/23/97, p. A1.
- 6 Jennie Shanker interview, p. 11.
- 7 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 1/5/92.
- 8 Jack Schierenbeck, *Class Struggles: The UFT Story*. United Federation of Teachers, 2/2/05, part 8.
- 9 Pearl Harris interview, 5/6/03, p. 4; Albert Shanker interview with Neil Cowan, United Federation of Teachers, 1985. NYU Archives, p. 4.
- 10 Albert Shanker interview with Neil Cowan, United Federation of Teachers, 1985. NYU Archives, p. 3.
- 11 *New York Times Magazine*, 9/9/73, p. 72.
- 12 *New York Times Magazine*, 9/3/67, p. 28.
- 13 Jack Schierenbeck, *American Teacher*, 4/97, p. 7.
- 14 Ted A. Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster*, New York: Random House, 1999, p. 7.
- 15 Jack Schierenbeck, *Class Struggles: The UFT Story*. United Federation of Teachers, 2/2/05, part 8.
- 16 Melvin Lubin interview, p. 14-16.
- 17 Tom Mooney interview, p. 39-40; Ruby interview, p. 4.
- 18 Eugenia Kemble interview I, p. 48.
- 19 Burnie Bond interview, p. 17; Albert Shanker, Memorial Service transcript, 4/9/97, p. 4; David Dorn interview I, p. 10; "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 10/28/84.
- 20 Eugenia Kemble interview.
- 21 Albert Shanker, quoted in *American Teacher*, 4/97, p. 10.
- 22 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 12/30/79.
- 23 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 5/11/75.
- 24 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 10/21/79.
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- 28 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 12/20/81.
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- 33 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 11/12/89.
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- 36 "Where We Stand" column by Albert Shanker, in the *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" section, 6/10/90.
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- 38 Albert Shanker, in AFT video, "The Road to Democracy," 7/30/90.
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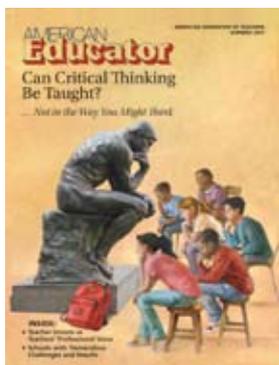
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**Critical Thinking**

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**The Quest for Professional Voice**

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**Uncovering Academic Success**

BY KARIN CHENOWETH

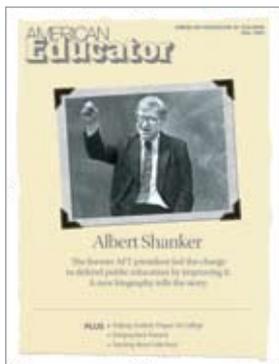
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*Together, Poetry and History Make Field Trips Memorable*

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**Focusing on Academic Intensity and the Road to College Success**

**Focusing on the Forgotten**

*How to Put More Kids on the Track to College Success*

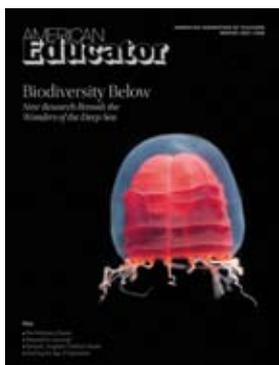
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# Center for School Improvement

The Center for School Improvement is a new AFT Web site that offers an array of resources for members to use in the course of school redesign. You'll find:

- Guidance on the steps of the school improvement process and how they fit together;
- Profiles of school districts and unions that are working together to improve low-performing schools;
- Examples of contract language that supports school improvement;
- Information on financial resources, professional development opportunities, AFT staff contacts, and more.

Visit the Center at

[www.aft.org/topics/csi/index.htm](http://www.aft.org/topics/csi/index.htm)

