

Foreword

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The recent and continual movement toward College- and Career-Ready Standards has increased the interest in differentiating instruction for students with various needs. Many articles and books are written each year and the better ones have been helpful for increasing teachers' awareness and skillset to develop differentiated learning environments for students not well served by the mainstream school experience. Despite this increased interest and work, the topic of differentiating instruction as it pertains to language development for English language learners (ELLs) is scarcely addressed and poorly understood—at a time when the number of ELLs has surpassed 5 million in the United States.

ELLs are one of our fastest growing and most diverse populations of students and it is clear that as a nation we are not serving them adequately. Research demonstrates that ELLs, like all students, need access to the same challenging academic skills and content to maximize their opportunities to learn. However, access to grade-level content is only meaningful if teachers have the skills to recognize where ELLs are on the continuum of language development and to differentiate the instruction and assessment in ways that increase engagement and ensure understanding. This is a tall order when we consider that, for the most part, only the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) or bilingual teachers have received training that includes an extensive understanding of the needs of ELLs and effective strategies for meeting those needs. Within most language support programs, ELLs spend a fraction of the day with the ESL or bilingual teacher and most of the day in content-area classes with teachers whose pre-service program and ongoing professional development has included little or no study about meeting ELLs' needs or how to create a discourse-rich, engaging learning environment for every student.

Hence my excitement when I read Shelley Fairbairn and Stephaney Jones-Vo's guide written for all teachers who work with ELLs. Now we have the second edition of that work—even better than the first! The new edition provides more focus on and connections to College- and Career-Ready Standards, and shows teachers how to prepare ELLs to meet the increasing language demands of these standards. Teachers will learn how to use language and literacy-rich practices for ELL success, with attention to the role of home languages and cultures in learning. The second edition emphasizes the importance of gathering formative information about student progress and using that evidence to guide

instruction, programming, and professional learning. This edition also prepares teachers to address the particular educational needs of long-term English language learners (LTELs), students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), and simultaneous bilinguals in very helpful, pragmatic ways. Fairbairn and Jones-Vo understand the importance of assets-based “can-do” approaches and schoolwide collaboration among teachers to promote equity and excellence for ELLs. Thus, their second edition reflects the practices and mind sets that can make all the difference.

Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners, second edition, is an important resource for teachers because it provides charts and activities that are easy to understand and return to long after an initial reading. At WIDA, we talk a lot about creating an instructional framework that illustrates the linguistic pathways ELLs need to be successful in all academic subjects. This guide makes a significant contribution to recognizing and differentiating for ELLs’ growth from the early levels to the more advanced levels of language proficiency. The most striking features of the book are prose that is thorough yet “readable”; the true-to-life scenarios of diverse students and teachers; the focus on classroom assessment strategies; and the connections throughout to content and English language development standards that illustrate the language demands of core content-area classrooms.

The notion that we must explicitly teach language within all academic classes is gaining ground today. Gone are the assumptions of language learning “by osmosis” or that a specialized language arts curriculum alone can provide what ELLs need. Even under the best of classroom circumstances where teachers use a variety of student-centered methods, there is still a role for developing meta-awareness of the role of language in students’ learning. To engage students in this kind of intellectual work, teachers have to develop awareness of language and the ways that language is uniquely employed within their class and across differing academic subjects. This attention to academic language helps ELLs access the core school curriculum, but it also supports any learner who struggles with the discourses of school.

This guide is packed with ideas for purposeful and differentiated language instruction and assessment that can be applied in most content classrooms. It provides a guide for teachers who are eager to ensure that students are learning deeply. I predict this second edition will be as popular with teachers facing the challenges of educating ELLs as it will be in university teacher pre-service programs. As teachers read this book and make use of the strategies, they will begin to share the excitement I felt at seeing a guide that addresses language differentiation for ELLs.

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