

Foreword

Over the past few years several books and articles have come out on the topic of differentiating *instruction* for students with various needs. Many of these works have been helpful and teachers are more aware than ever before of the need to develop differentiated learning environments for students who are not well served by the mainstream school experience. And yet the topic of differentiating instruction as it pertains to *academic language development* for English language learners (ELLs) is still scarcely addressed and poorly understood at a time when the number of ELLs has surpassed 5 million across the United States.

Research has demonstrated 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 ensure understanding and active participation. This is a tall order, especially when we consider that, for the most part, only the English as a second language and bilingual teachers have received training that includes an extensive acknowledgment of the needs of ELLs and 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 the teachers whose professional development has included little or no information about meeting ELLs' needs.

Hence my excitement when I read Shelley Fairbairn and Stepahney Jones-Vo's guide written for all teachers who work with ELLs. I have been hoping someone would take the time to write a resource for teachers that clearly articulates the many needs ELLs have, but more importantly, goes the extra step and provides examples that teachers can follow as they differentiate language expectations in diverse classroom settings. *Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners* is an important resource for teachers precisely because it provides charts and activities that are easy to understand and return to long after an initial reading. At WIDA we talk often about illustrating the *linguistic pathways* ELLs need to be successful in all their academic subjects. This guide makes a significant contribution to recognizing and differentiating for ELLs' growth along a path from the beginning through the more advanced levels of proficiency. The most striking features are prose that is thorough yet "readable," the true-to-life scenarios of students and teachers, the focus on classroom assessment strategies, and the connections throughout to TESOL's and WIDA's English language

proficiency standards that illustrate the language demands of core content area classrooms.

The notion that we must explicitly teach academic language within all school classrooms 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 methodologies, there is still a role for developing meta-awareness of academic *languages*. 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. Such 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 throughout most content classrooms. It provides a guide for any teacher who is eager to assure that students are learning deeply. I predict this text will be as popular with teachers already facing the daily challenges of educating ELLs as it will be in university teacher pre-service programs. As teachers read it and make use of the strategies, they will begin to share the excitement I felt at finally seeing a guide that addresses language differentiation for ELLs.

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