

Good Instruction is Good for Everyone—Or Is It? English Language Learners in a Balanced Literacy Approach

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Prior research suggests that many of the elements of effective instruction for native speakers are beneficial for English learners as well. But are specific strategies that appear effective for native speakers equally so for nonnative speakers? Are other companion efforts necessary? This article explores these questions by examining the comparative effects of selected literacy instructional practices on reading comprehension for English learners and non-English learners, using data from a 3-year study of the implementation and effects of a balanced literacy approach in San Diego City Schools. Then, using qualitative data gathered over 2 years from 133 teachers, as well as school administrators and instructional coaches in 9 case study elementary schools, the article considers what might have been missing in the district's approach to its over 24,000 elementary English learner students and how the strengths that were developed during the district's literacy reforms might be used to address continuing weaknesses.

In the past decade, concern about meeting the needs of the nation's growing population of English learners (ELs)¹ has increased markedly among educators and policymakers, spurred in part by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability measures and the large numbers of schools that miss their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets for the EL subgroup.² Currently, over five million English learner students are being educated in U.S. schools (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007), with 1.5 million of these in California alone (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2008). Moreover, as the nation as a whole, and states

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¹Nomenclature for students in U.S. schools who are dominant in a language other than English varies across time and jurisdiction. At present, the most popular terminology nationally is *English language learner* or ELL, and NCLB refers to this group of students as *Limited English proficient* (LEP). Since the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, the official designation of such students in California is *English Learner* (EL), which refers to students whose primary language is not English and who have not yet achieved fluent English proficiency (as measured by the CELDT) and/or reached a threshold level on the California Standards Test (CST) in English Language Arts or other criteria established by local district. For consistency, I have adopted the California nomenclature throughout this article to refer not only to students in San Diego and the rest of the state who have been designated as ELs, but also comparable students nationally.

²Analyses of a national school AYP database reveal that students with disabilities and students with LEP were the subgroups most likely to miss AYP targets. Thirty-seven percent of schools held accountable for the students-with-disability subgroup and 26% of those accountable for LEP students missed their targets for those groups in 2003–2004 (LeFloch et al., 2007). Those numbers are expected to increase as the required AYP targets move toward 100% proficiency in the coming years.

like California in particular, move away from reliance on bilingual education programs, mainstream teachers—often with little relevant training—are increasingly faced with the responsibility of addressing the needs of EL students integrated into their English-only or *sheltered English* classrooms.³

Prior research suggests that many of the elements of effective instruction for native speakers are beneficial for English learners as well (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). Thus, one might expect that reform efforts designed to improve instruction and learning for all students should also help to improve outcomes for English learners. But are specific strategies that appear effective for native speakers equally so for nonnative speakers? Are other companion efforts necessary? And what are the implications for literacy instruction in the nation's elementary schools? This article explores these questions by examining the relative effects of selected literacy instructional practices on reading comprehension for English learners and non-English learners, using data from a 3-year study of the implementation and effects of a balanced literacy approach in San Diego City Schools (SDCS). Then, using qualitative data gathered over 2 years from 133 teachers, as well as school administrators and instructional coaches in nine case study elementary schools, I consider what might have been missing in the district's approach to educating its over 24,000 elementary EL students and how the strengths that were developed during the district's literacy reforms might be used to address continuing weaknesses.

ELs IN SAN DIEGO CITY SCHOOLS

Located on the border of California and Mexico, the portal city of San Diego has both a large U.S.-born Spanish speaking population and a steady influx of immigrants, not only from Mexico and other parts of Latin America but also from across Africa, Asia, and Europe. With over 37,000 designated ELs (approximately 28% of total enrollment in grades K–12), SDCS has the seventh largest enrollment of EL students of big-city school districts across the country (Artunes, 2003). The proportion of ELs in district elementary schools (the focus of both this article and of the literacy reforms) was higher, at 37.5%. Seventy-nine percent of SDCS English learners are Spanish-speaking, with Vietnamese (5%), Filipino (3.7%), Somali (2.7%), and all other non-English languages (2.6%) trailing far behind. Perhaps unsurprisingly, EL students are concentrated in the lowest performing schools in San Diego. At the time this study began, 45% of students in San Diego's API 1–2 schools (those scoring in the bottom 20% of the state's schools on California's Academic Performance Index [API]) were designated English learners. In low-performing elementary schools, the proportion was even higher—a full 62%.

The Promise of Balanced Literacy for EL Students

Elsewhere in this issue, we describe San Diego's focus on balanced literacy in the instructional reforms instituted during the administration of Superintendent Alan Bersin and Chancellor of Instruction Anthony Alvarado (Bitter, O'Day, Gubbins, & Socias, this issue; O'Day & Quick,

³In 2001–2002, 60% of EL students nationally were receiving essentially all of their instruction in English (Goldenberg, 2008). Given recent trends in several states, including California, this percentage is likely higher now.

this issue). Designed to address the varying literacy needs of all students, several aspects of the balanced literacy approach would seem to hold particular promise for English learners.

Emphasis on meaning. First is balanced literacy's conception of reading as the creation of meaning through readers' active interaction with written text and with others about text. Supported in the classroom through a variety of instructional activities and interaction strategies (see Bitter et al., this issue), this pervasive emphasis on meaning-making and comprehension in balanced literacy is consistent with the research literature on the role of cognitive engagement in learners' development of literacy skills (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2003). Such an emphasis on meaningful interaction with and communication about text—both children's literature and expository text—is also likely to promote oral language fluency, as well as conversational and academic vocabulary development, in EL students. As oral language and vocabulary are fundamental precursors for reading comprehension for EL students (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005), the contribution of meaning-making activities to these aspects of second language development should provide an additional indirect benefit to raising EL students' reading comprehension, as well.

Literacy components instruction. Perhaps equally important for English learners is balanced literacy's combination of the interactive instructional strategies noted above with explicit teaching of literacy skills, including word recognition and comprehension strategies, through such techniques as modeling, as well as explicit training on how and when to use such skills. In their review of research on effective instruction for EL students, researchers at the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) concluded that "the best recommendation to emerge from our review favors instruction that combines interactive and direct approaches" (Genesee et al., 2006, pp. 139–140).

Differentiation. A third aspect of a balanced literacy approach likely to be beneficial for EL students is the emphasis on teachers' differentiation of instruction to meet the learning needs of individual students. The goal of balanced literacy is to move students toward independence in progressively more complex texts. To accomplish this goal, teachers use flexible grouping strategies, as well as modeling and coaching techniques, with the degree of teacher support diminishing as students gain proficiency in a particular level of text. To scaffold effectively, SDCS leaders and principals stressed the importance of teachers knowing their students well and of teachers monitoring and documenting specific aspects of student progress and related instructional actions. For example, in some San Diego schools, most teachers kept written notes on each student. These notes indicated such things as which reading behaviors and standards the student could perform independently, which behaviors he could perform with assistance, and what the next instructional steps for that student should be. We might expect this attention to individual progress to be especially beneficial for EL students, who are likely to come into their classrooms with differential skills that might otherwise go undetected and unaddressed in the course of daily instruction.

Accountable talk. Finally, San Diego's addition of accountable talk to the balanced literacy repertoire was intended to increase student engagement with text and to foster oral language skills. Accountable talk, a concept brought by Anthony Alvarado from his experience in

Community District #2 in New York City, emphasizes students' use of evidence from text to support their ideas and to respond to or elaborate on their peers' contributions to classroom discussion. Emphasis on sustained meaningful communication through such student talk should enhance the benefits of balanced literacy for ELs discussed previously in this article, particularly their oral language proficiency.

The combination of all these elements of a balanced literacy approach should contribute to English learners' acquisition of English as well as of literacy skills more generally.

Is There Evidence That this Approach was Paying off for San Diego's EL Students?

One way to answer this question is to examine the performance data for EL students in San Diego, compared with data on comparable students in the other major urban districts in California. Figure 1 displays the percentage of EL students in Grades 2–5 who scored *proficient* or *advanced* on the California State Test (CST) for English Language Arts (ELA) in seven of California's largest districts between 2002 and 2006, controlling for school-level demographics. This indicator is particularly meaningful in today's accountability climate, as it is the basis for determining AYP for the EL subgroup in ELA. With an increase of 11 percentage points during this 4-year period, San Diego has the highest percentage of EL students reaching proficiency and the second highest gain for the seven districts. Only Fresno's estimated gain of 13 percentage points surpasses that of San Diego, and even with this level of improvement, Fresno continues to rank below all of the other districts in the analysis.

Of course, percentages of students reaching a particular level on the state test, even when key demographic controls are applied, are still a very crude indicator of the relative effect of the reforms on EL students in different jurisdictions. For one thing, the data are cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, at the student level. With differing immigration patterns for the districts and differing policies governing reclassification of students from EL to redesignated fluent English proficient (R-FEP) status, the potential for bias in such cross-sectional analyses is substantial.⁴ In addition, cross-city comparisons void of any data on instructional inputs do not provide sufficient information to draw any conclusions about the association of particular instructional approaches to student learning.

⁴In California, the reclassification process is determined locally, using four criteria established by the State Board of Education: assessment of English language proficiency on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), teacher evaluation of a student's academic performance, parent opinion and consultation, and performance in basic skills as measured by the CST in English language arts. The specific measures and cutoffs for these criteria, as well as the process for reclassification, may vary from district to district and from one time point to another, thus affecting which students are considered to be in the EL subgroup. For example, between 2003 and 2004 Long Beach Unified made a major push to reclassify more students from EL status to that of R-FEP. The percentage of EL students reclassified jumped from 6.4% to 16.9% in that one year and then continued to rise the following year. In 2005, Long Beach Unified's reclassification rate was twice that of the state as a whole. As higher performing students are reclassified out of the EL subgroup, which is also continually replenished with new immigrants (who are likely to have lower test scores), cross-sectional analyses of the scores for the EL subgroup may appear to decline when, in fact, longitudinal student level analyses would show considerable progress. To the extent that policies and rates for reclassification differ from district to district, resulting percentages of proficient EL students will not be comparable.

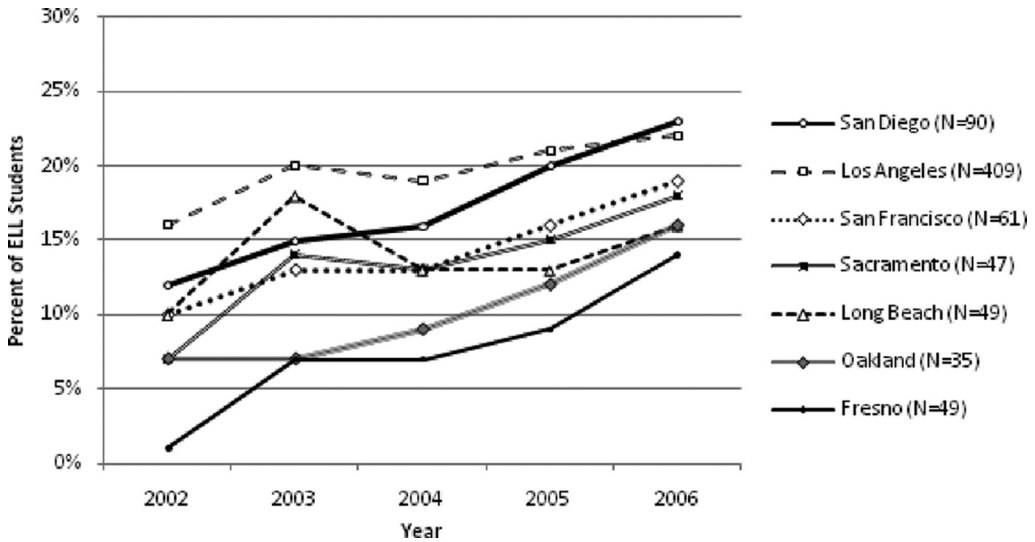


FIGURE 1 Estimated percentage of English Learner students performing at Proficient and Advanced on the California Standards Test—English Language Arts (Grades 2–5) in seven California urban districts, controlling for school demographics. *Note.* Estimated percentages control for differences among districts in school-level demographics (% poverty, % African-American, % Hispanic, and % Asian). *N* = number of district schools included in analysis. *Source:* California Department of Education, Data file compiled over time from official school-level data retrieved from <http://star.cde.ca.gov/> between 2003 and 2007.

LITERACY PRACTICES AND EL ACHIEVEMENT

Another more productive way to consider the effect of San Diego’s reform strategies on the district’s ELs is to look more directly at the effects of particular instructional practices in literacy on the achievement of EL and non-EL students. The second article in this issue (Bitter et al.) presents our findings with respect to the literacy practices shown to have a consistent effect on reading achievement when all students in the sampled Grade 3–5 classrooms are considered. Here I review these and related analyses, broken out for EL/non-EL students.

It is important to note at the outset that these analyses are exploratory in nature and only suggestive of differences that may exist between the two groups’ responses to the literacy instruction they received as part of the San Diego reforms. Indeed, we did not design the study specifically to investigate what was working for EL and non-EL students, although throughout the study we did collect data on the instructional goals, strategies, and outcomes for ELs, both because of the large numbers of ELs in San Diego and because prior research had indicated inadequate attention to the specific needs of EL students in the reform (O’Day, 2005). Rather, two factors provided the catalyst for the analyses reported here. First, throughout the 2 years of data collection, we continued to receive reports from teachers and administrators in our case study schools that EL students were receiving insufficient attention and that school personnel were receiving too little guidance on how to address the needs of this population. Second, when investigating several anomalies in the results for the literacy study in the second year

(2005–2006) compared to the first year of the study (2004–2005), we noticed that the numbers of ELs in Grades 3–5 during the second year had increased substantially (primarily due to an increase of ELs in Grade 3). We hypothesized that if ELs and non-ELs were responding differentially to the instructional strategies under consideration, this might help to explain the somewhat weaker and less consistent relationships found in the second year.⁵

A recent comprehensive review of experimental and quasi-experimental research on the development of literacy skills in second language learners provides support for such a hypothesis (August & Shanahan, 2006). Although research on the effects of instruction on literacy development in nonnative speakers is sparse, the National Literacy Panel's review suggests that the effects of instruction to promote word-level skills (decoding), vocabulary, and fluency are similar for first and second language learners. However, "when reading improvements were observed, they were less pronounced if reading comprehension was included in the battery of measures" (August et al., 2008, p. 146). Our interest in this study was primarily in reading comprehension, both because of the emphasis placed on comprehension in the San Diego reforms and because of the importance of reading comprehension to achievement in all subjects once students enter the upper elementary grades.

Methods and Results of the Literacy Analysis for All Students

The methodology of the literacy observation study is explained more fully in Bitter et al. (this issue). To summarize briefly, our purpose was to examine the degree to which literacy instructional practices in San Diego classrooms were consistent with the instructional approach that the San Diego leadership hypothesized as being effective, and then the extent to which these practices actually resulted in improved student achievement in reading. To address these questions, we used a methodology and observation protocol that had been validated in prior research (Taylor et al., 2003). The Taylor et al. methodology allowed us to look at a broad range of literacy practices rather than only those being promoted in the San Diego reform; it was also primarily behavioral rather than inferential and evaluative, and it allowed us to quantify effects of specific practices on reading achievement. We randomly selected two classrooms at each grade level in each of our nine case study schools. Literacy classrooms were observed for 90 min at each sitting, three times over the course of the year.⁶ Instruction was scripted and coded in 5-min segments using seven levels/types of codes (see Bitter et al., this issue). The analyses reported here involved two such code types, those for the specific literacy activities observed during each 5-min segment (e.g., use of questions or discussion about the higher-level meaning of text—i.e., meaning beyond that which is explicitly stated in the text—phonics instruction, writing) and those for teacher–student interaction patterns (e.g., coaching, modeling, conversation) associated with those activities during the same period. Data collectors were all

⁵We considered various explanations for the observed discrepancies in the findings for the first and second year of the study, including the timing of the visits with respect to test preparation activities, the separation of writing instruction from other literacy activities in some schools during the second year, and changes in characteristics of the student population. The most promising of these was the increase in ELs in the relevant grades in Year 2.

⁶In 2004–2005, we visited each classroom in fall, winter, and spring; however, in 2005–2006, we only visited classrooms twice, in fall and spring. The analyses reported here are for 2004–2005, as we determined that these data were more robust and fully reflective of the instruction taking place over the course of the year.

former teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators with a strong background in literacy instruction. Repeated trainings before each visit, interrater reliability testing, periodic review (and revision if necessary) of at least 20% of coded lessons for each visit all helped to achieve and maintain 80–100% reliability at each level of coding.

Analyses first involved aggregating data from all of the 5-min observation segments (across the three classroom visits) at the teacher level to estimate the percentage of each teacher's instruction that included each observed practice. We then estimated two-level Hierarchical Linear Models that nested students within classrooms to examine the effects of classroom characteristics (particularly the literacy practices of the teacher) on student achievement, controlling for student-level characteristics (grade-level, prior achievement, and demographics). We focus here on Grades 3–5, when comprehension becomes a particularly strong predictor of school success, and on our most robust outcome measure for reading comprehension, the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP).

As reported in Bitter et al. (this issue), the instructional practices most consistently associated with literacy growth were teachers' use of higher-level questioning and classroom discussion about the meaning of text, teachers' incorporation of writing instruction (both discussions about writing and actual composition) into their literacy instruction, and a composite index for accountable talk. As noted in Bitter et al., these practices are all consistent not only with the balanced literacy approach implemented in San Diego City Schools but also with the cognitive engagement framework investigated by Taylor et al. (2003; Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005). Indeed, the use of higher-level questioning was such a central emphasis in the San Diego approach that, after 6 years of reform effort, teachers' use of higher-level questioning and discussion about text was three times more prevalent in San Diego classrooms than it had been in similar classrooms studied by Taylor et al. (2003), who developed the original observation instrument for the CIERA School Change Study.

The accountable talk codes used in this study were measures our research team added to the coding scheme because of the emphasis in San Diego; the index was a composite of eight separate dimensions of accountable talk garnered from research and piloted in San Diego classrooms prior to data collection. The composite thus combined codes for whether the classroom talk was focused on ideas rather than facts and recall, was accurate and appropriate to the topic and flow of discussion, included a press for evidence from the text, involved students responding and elaborating on each other's contributions, and reflected a more facilitative, rather than directive, role for the teacher. Measures for writing instruction were also added to the original Taylor et al. (2003, 2005) coding scheme; these were included because at the time of data collection, writing instruction was making its way back into the literacy repertoire for SDCS elementary teachers.

It is important to note that the activities associated with higher growth in students' reading comprehension scores in this study (Bitter et al., this issue) were generally reflective of the types of associations found in the earlier study. The question for the analyses reported here is whether these same activities were equally beneficial for both ELs and native or fluent English proficient students.

Results of Literacy Practices on Achievement for EL Students

Pruned model. To explore whether the literacy practices emphasized in San Diego (and consistent with the cognitive engagement framework) were similarly effective for both EL and

non-EL students (i.e., English only students, Initially Fluent English Proficient, and R-FEP students), we began with the most robust pruned model from the full literacy study. At the classroom level, this model included only the higher-level questioning/discussion about the meaning of text, writing instruction, and accountable talk variables, the three practices that were positive in all models and significant in nearly all models, both the elaborated and pruned versions. Table 1 displays the results for this analysis, first for the combined sample of EL and non-EL students, then for the non-EL group and EL group analyzed separately.

Comparing the coefficients and the significance levels for these three variables reveals some potentially important differences among the groups. For the non-English learners, the effects of all three practices increase in magnitude when the group is considered separately—and in the

TABLE 1
Results for 2-Level HLM Analyses of DRP NCE scores, Grades 3–5, 2004–2005^a, All students, non-English Learner students, and English Learner students^b

<i>Fixed effects</i>	<i>Combined sample</i>		<i>Non-EL</i>		<i>EL</i>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>(SE)</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>(SE)</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>(SE)</i>
CST_ELA 2003–2004 ^c	10.123***	(0.434)	11.133***	(0.627)	8.484***	(0.616)
English Learner (combined sample only)	–4.240***	(0.868)				
Gifted	3.190***	(0.989)	2.539*	(1.353)	3.329**	(1.411)
Female	0.547	(0.669)	0.515	(1.056)	0.089	(0.839)
White ^d	4.196**	(1.711)	4.159**	(1.863)	6.331	(0.858)
Black ^d	–0.679	(1.182)	–0.649	(1.363)	0.021	(3.030)
Other Ethnicity ^d	3.027***	(1.114)	2.057	(1.579)	5.392***	(1.544)
Grade 3	2.928**	(1.201)	3.090**	(1.525)	3.649**	(1.677)
Grade 4	–3.998***	(1.128)	–3.803***	(1.396)	–3.564**	(1.587)
Experienced Teacher (2 or more years)	1.759	(1.374)	0.955	(1.853)	1.924	(1.837)
Literacy Activity: Higher-Level Meaning of Text ^e	1.606**	(0.630)	2.335***	(0.768)	1.212	(0.853)
Literacy Activity: Writing ^e	1.633***	(0.576)	2.728***	(0.746)	0.803	(0.762)
Accountable Talk Scale: Overall ^f	1.043*	(0.580)	1.121*	(0.659)	0.777	(0.869)
Constant	36.538***	(1.472)	36.799***	(1.964)	30.722***	(1.849)
Number of Students		843		397		446
Number of Classrooms		49		49		49

Notes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. DRP = Degrees of Reading Power; NCE = Normal Curve Equivalent; ELA = English Language Arts; CST = California Standards Test.

^aDRP NCE 2004–2005 is the Normal Curve Equivalent Score for students in the spring of 2004–2005.

^bEnglish learners are compared against students who are classified as Redesignated Fluent English Proficient, Initially Fluent English Proficient, and English Only.

^cCST ELA 2003–2004 is the CST total scale score in ELA for students in the spring of 2003–2004. This score has been standardized within grade for students in the sample.

^dStudents identified as White, Black, and Other Ethnicity are compared against Hispanic Students. Other Ethnicity includes Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian students.

^eMeasures the percentage of 5-min segments in which the given literacy activity was coded. This percentage has been standardized within the pool of teachers in the sample.

^fAccountable Talk is an index calculated by averaging all eight measures of accountable talk across segments and observations. This percentage has been standardized within the pool of teachers in the sample.

case of higher-level questioning, in statistical significance as well. For a one standard deviation increase in the use of higher-level questioning about text, non-EL student DRP scores increase by 2.34 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCE) (as compared to a 1.6 NCE increase for the sample as a whole). In the case of writing, the difference for non-ELs taken alone is even greater (a 2.73 NCE increase compared to a 1.63 NCE increase for the combined student group). Meanwhile, the accountable talk score also increases for non-EL group compared to the combined sample, though only very slightly.

By comparison, the effects of all three variables on EL students, though still positive for this group, decline substantially and are no longer significant. In other words, practices that have the most robust relationship to improved reading comprehension for non-EL students have little discernible benefit for ELs in these analyses.

How might one explain this pattern? First, it is important to stress that all of these analyses are likely reflecting effects primarily at the margins. For example, as previously mentioned, the mean levels of higher-level questioning in San Diego classrooms were already three times those of the earlier comparison study conducted by Taylor et al. (2003). Emphasis on comprehension discussions and questions about text, both lower-level and higher-level, were a key component of the balanced literacy reforms in San Diego, so after 6 years of reform work, it is perhaps not surprising to see such comparatively high levels of these practices. That Taylor and her colleagues found larger effect sizes for higher-level questioning in a sample of schools with more variable and lower levels of such instruction overall suggests that there may be a curvilinear effect. In other words, the differences in achievement gains may be substantial when comparing classrooms with little higher-level questioning and discussion to those with a moderate amount of such activity, but the marginal returns on increasing the quantity of such questions may diminish as they become a more predominant form of teaching. The same may be the case for accountable talk, although we have no comparison study to estimate what the levels might have been without the reform effort.

Second, although not reaching statistical significance, the coefficients for ELs remain positive for all three variables, suggesting that these practices are not harmful to ELs, and may even be beneficial, but not to the same degree as for fluent English speakers.

One hypothesis for why this might be the case is that at least some of the questioning, writing, and accountable talk discussion in San Diego classrooms was occurring at a linguistic level that was simply beyond the ability of many of the EL students to comprehend. It could be that they did not have the foundational English language skills to take advantage of the opportunities for meaning construction to the same extent that native speakers did. If such were the case, then being in classrooms in which teachers simply asked more of those questions or asked students to engage in such higher-level discussions more frequently could well be of little added benefit. Without being able to access the meaning of the text and the conversation around it (i.e., to cognitively engage in the literacy activities), there would be little learning that could transfer to other literacy-related activities at another time.

Elaborated model. A second set of analyses of the literacy data is similarly revealing and suggestive of issues meriting further investigation (see Table 2). In these analyses, we estimated a more elaborated model that included all of the literacy activities coded during the observations and many of the coded teacher–student interaction patterns, as well. These interaction patterns included such things as the use of discussion and conversation among students, scaffolding techniques of modeling and coaching, recitation forms of questioning, reading aloud to students,

TABLE 2
Results for 2-Level HLM Analyses of DRP NCE Scores, Grades 3–5, 2004–2005,^a non-English Learners and English Learners^b

Predictor	Non-EL		EL	
	<i>b</i>	(SE)	<i>b</i>	(SE)
<i>Fixed Effects</i>				
CST_ELA 2003-2004 ^c	11.443***	(0.629)	8.374***	(0.615)
Gifted	2.660*	(1.396)	3.545**	(1.414)
Female	0.427	(1.051)	0.040	(0.839)
White ^d	3.746**	(1.886)	5.595	(0.865)
Black ^d	-0.390	(1.385)	0.588	(3.048)
Other Ethnicity ^d	2.072	(1.583)	5.965***	(1.542)
Grade 3	0.667	(2.024)	4.762	(1.891)
Grade 4	-5.835***	(1.483)	-2.381	(1.532)
Experienced Teacher (2 or more years)	0.767	(2.159)	1.470	(1.879)
Literacy Activity: Lower-Level Meaning of Text ^e	-0.396	(0.720)	0.431	(0.869)
Literacy Activity: Higher-Level Meaning of Text ^e	2.838**	(1.127)	0.663	(1.036)
Literacy Activity: Writing ^e	2.439**	(0.951)	0.590	(0.784)
Literacy Activity: Comprehension Strategies ⁵	-1.170	(0.863)	-0.298	(0.858)
Literacy Activity: Text Features ^e	0.186	(0.720)	-0.971	(0.862)
Literacy Activity: Text Structures ^e	0.178	(0.816)	-0.583	(0.729)
Literacy Activity: Word Recognition ^e	1.570*	(0.807)	-0.784	(0.715)
Literacy Activity: Phonics ^e	-1.118	(0.712)	-0.222	(0.686)
Language Development/Vocabulary ^e	-1.070	(0.918)	-0.977	(-0.830)
Interaction: Telling ^f	-1.438*	(0.737)	1.427*	(0.775)
Interaction: Recitation ^f	0.812	(1.006)	1.520	(1.065)
Interaction: Discussion/Conversation ^f	0.576	(0.837)	1.614*	(0.850)
Interaction: Reading Aloud ^f	0.997	(0.831)	-0.812	(0.714)
Interaction: Modeling or Coaching ^f	-0.115	(0.819)	-1.006	(0.808)
Constant	38.081***	(2.307)	29.979***	(1.914)
Number of Students		397		446
Number of Classrooms		49		49

Notes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. EL = English Learner; DRP = Degrees of Reading Power; NCE = Normal Curve Equivalent; ELA = English Language Arts; CST = California Standards Test.

^aDRP NCE 04–05 is the score for students in the spring of 2004–2005.

^bEnglish Learners are compared against students who are classified as Redesignated Fluent English Proficient, Initially Fluent English Proficient, and English Only.

^cCST ELA 2003–2004 is the CST total scale score in ELA for students in the spring of 2003–2004. This score has been standardized within grade for students in the sample.

^dStudents identified as White, Black, and Other Ethnicity are compared against Hispanic Students. Other Ethnicity includes Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian students.

^eMeasures the percentage of 5-min segments in which the given literacy activity was coded. This percentage has been standardized within the pool of teachers in the sample.

^fMeasures the percentage of 5-min segments in which the given interaction pattern for the teacher was coded. This percentage has been standardized within the pool of teachers in the sample.

and providing students with explicit information through telling. These additional activity and interaction codes had been removed from the pruned model reported in Bitter et al. (this issue) because they had not had a stable or significant effect when we considered the combined sample

of students. Now that we were examining the groups separately, we reasoned that we might discover other differential effects of the literacy practices and interaction patterns on the two groups.

Table 2 displays the results of this second analysis. Several interesting patterns emerge. First, with respect to the specific literacy activities, the effects of higher-level questioning/discussion about text and of writing instruction remain relatively high in magnitude, positive, and statistically significant for non-EL students.⁷ In fact, the effect of higher-level questioning for non-ELs has even increased slightly in the elaborated model over the pruned model. Meanwhile, the effects of these two variables remain insignificant and become even more negligible in magnitude for ELs. Indeed, none of the literacy activities has a significant association with reading comprehension outcomes for ELs in this study. That is, marginal differences in the prevalence of these activities during the year do not seem to influence how ELs perform (on average) on a test of reading comprehension in the spring.

One other difference emerges between EL and non-EL students with respect to the literacy activities. Note the positive significant association of word recognition strategies for non-ELs and the slightly negative (but insignificant) effect for EL students. In this observation scheme, word recognition strategies were coded when students focused on use of one or more strategies to decode words while reading, typically prompted by the teacher. The positive finding for non-ELs with respect to word recognition is particularly interesting in light of the prior research of Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (2000). These researchers found that effective teachers helped students to apply word recognition strategies to their everyday reading. They suggest that such activities—along with modeling and coaching in other areas of literacy instruction—become part of a general *student support stance*, leading to students' greater cognitive engagement in literacy activities. If such is the case, it would seem that this particular form of student support may be insufficient for improving ELs' comprehension of novel texts. That is, any increased facility in applying word recognition strategies may have little benefit for ELs if the meaning of those words, once decoded, is still elusive.

Teacher–student interactions. Equally interesting differences between EL and non-EL students emerge with respect to the teacher–student interaction codes. The largest of these is the opposite effect of telling in the analysis of non-EL students versus ELs. “Telling” was coded in these observations whenever the teacher simply provided students with information rather than engaging students in the creation of that information through coaching, recitation, or other forms of interaction. Taylor et al. (2003) hypothesized that in classrooms in which telling was the normative mode of instruction, students would be less cognitively engaged in literacy activities and would demonstrate lower literacy growth as a result. Indeed, these researchers found a negative relationship between telling and growth in students' writing, though not apparently in their reading comprehension. In our analyses of the comprehension strands for the CST, using the combined sample of students, we did detect a small but significant negative association with increased levels of telling in the classroom (Bitter et al., this issue).

⁷In this model, the accountable talk code has been replaced with the code for discussion/conversation. These two variables were correlated and the effects of both were washed out when the two were analyzed together. The main distinction (as discussed later) is that the discussion/conversation variable did not include any inferences about the focus on ideas or the press for evidence.

This negative effect seems more pronounced in this analysis—although only for native and fluent English proficient students. Indeed, what is particularly interesting in these analyses is the sizable and opposite relationship for ELs and non-ELs of telling on subsequent DRP scores. The coefficients are both slightly over 1.4 NCEs and statistically significant, but the relationship is negative for non-ELs and positive for ELs. Moreover, this difference in coefficients between the two groups (2.9 NCEs) is larger than that for any of the other variables in this analysis. One plausible explanation for this pattern is that for ELs in these classrooms to access the texts they were trying to read, they needed more explicit instruction and direct provision of relevant background information or instructions. Such would fit with our previous hypothesis that some of the literacy activities in the observed classrooms were at too high a level linguistically for EL students to effectively engage with the texts without other supports. It is conceivable that additional telling of background information provided some of the needed support for those students. Another possible reason for the positive impact of telling on EL students' comprehension is that this form of teacher talk provided more extensive and consistent modeling of academic English than may have been the case when students engaged in conversation with their classmates, many of whom were, themselves, second-language learners. Several teachers suggested such an explanation when the team discussed our findings with the staff of the sampled schools.

The other interaction pattern that seems to matter for EL students' reading comprehension is the opportunity to engage in discussion and conversation with their peers in the classroom. Although coefficients for discussion/conversation are positive for both EL and non-EL students, the magnitude is small and the effect insignificant for non-ELs, whereas the effect is over 1.6 NCEs and significant for EL students. We might hypothesize in this case that increased opportunities for talk in the classroom could contribute to reading comprehension of ELs by building students' oral language skills through meaningful communication and practice. Prior research has demonstrated a relationship between oral proficiency and literacy development in ELs (Lesaux & Geva, 2006), as well as between opportunities for meaningful practice and the development of oral language. Additionally, such interaction may help to increase EL students' active involvement, motivation, and confidence in classroom activities, thus increasing their cognitive engagement and resulting comprehension growth. The emergence of discussion and conversation as a significant contributor for EL students, whereas accountable talk was not, may again support the notion that some aspects of the accountable talk index (e.g., pressing for evidence, focus on ideas rather than facts) may simply have occurred at too high a level for some of the ELs to access the meaning of what was being said. By contrast, more opportunities to engage in talk at a variety of levels of complexity may provide multiple avenues into the content and increased opportunities for language acquisition for these students.

In sum, consistent with the research reviews of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006) these analyses suggest that the impact of key instructional activities shown to be effective in improving reading comprehension for native and fluent English proficient students may be somewhat attenuated for ELs, although the direction of influence is generally the same for both groups. The main exception to this pattern is the positive influence of telling for EL students, a finding that is consistent with the CREDE researchers' conclusion that interaction strategies should be combined with direct instruction in classrooms serving EL students (Genesee et al., 2006). In addition, it would appear that EL students benefit from opportunities to engage in conversation and discussion in literacy

lessons, most likely because such interactions provide practice for oral language development in a context of meaningful communication.

ADDRESSING THE LANGUAGE NEEDS OF EL STUDENTS: FINDINGS FROM NINE SDCS SCHOOLS

At this point, the obvious question is, “What are the implications of these and related findings for improving instruction and literacy outcomes for EL students in SDCS or elsewhere?” Although these analyses suggest that all students may benefit from many aspects of good instruction—in this case, instruction that cognitively engages students in literacy-rich activities coupled with explicit teaching on specific literacy components—ELs need additional supports if they are to take full advantage of that instruction. The National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (August et al., 2008) offered several conclusions regarding areas in which this support might occur, each of which require further research and development. Our qualitative data on the San Diego reforms suggest that three of these areas may have particular relevance for our discussion here. These are:

- *Use of EL students’ native language:* “English-language learners may learn to read best if taught in both their native language and English from early in the process of formal schooling. Rather than confusing children, as some have feared, reading instruction in a familiar language may serve as a bridge to success in English because decoding, sound blending, and generic comprehension strategies clearly transfer between languages that use phonetic orthographies, such as Spanish, French, and English” (Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006, p. 397).
- *Differentiation:* “That instruction in the components of literacy benefits English-language learners does not mitigate the need to adjust these instructional approaches for use with these students” (Shanahan & Beck, 2006, p. 436).
- *Attention to English language development:* “The smaller effect sizes [of literacy components instruction], particularly for reading comprehension, suggests the importance of building greater knowledge of oral English simultaneously so the literacy tools provided by instruction can be used to maximum advantage” (Shanahan & Beck, 2006, p. 436).

Drawing on the qualitative data from the case study schools and observed teachers in this study, I now briefly consider each of these areas, on the assumption that attention or inattention to each of them may help both to explain the findings discussed above and to suggest directions for future improvement.

The data from these nine schools provide a particularly rich source of information on EL instruction in San Diego. Each of the elementary schools in the case study and literacy portions of this study had substantial EL student populations: two enrolled between 25% and 35% English learners; two between 45% and 60%, and five of the nine schools had student enrollments that were 60% to 80% English learners. Over the course of the 2+ years of data collection, we visited each of the schools six times. The first visit in the spring of 2004 involved interviews and meetings with the principals and other leadership team members; subsequent visits throughout 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 involved classroom observations of literacy

instruction; interviews with all participating teachers, as well as administrators and instructional coaches; and additional observations of professional development, leadership team meetings, or other activities as appropriate and available. Interviews with teachers varied somewhat from visit to visit but always included discussion of the goals and strategies for the observed lesson and, depending on the focus of the visit, then covered topics such as curriculum and planning, professional development, strategies for ELs, and assessment and monitoring of student progress. Participating teachers also filled out logs of their professional development activities, including the substantive foci, goals, and forms of each activity, along with evaluations of the activity's linkage with prior or planned subsequent PD and consistency with school goals and personal growth goals.

Case reports for each of the schools were based on iterative analysis of interview, log, and observation data for specified dimensions in the domains of leadership, professional development, and instruction across all visits, with particular attention to variations among staff and over time. Reports on each domain included specialized analyses of data on ELs. Analysis of these reports, supplemented with extant data and interview transcripts, provide the basis for this discussion in the three areas noted above: language of instruction, differentiation, and English language development.

Biliteracy—Goal or Barrier?

The first theme that emerged from the qualitative data concerned the approach to—or rather the retreat from—bilingual education in the district. Most discussions about English learner instruction start with a delineation of program models, with considerable emphasis on variation in the language of instruction within these models. In San Diego, these program models included biliteracy, Structured English Immersion (SEI), and Mainstream English Cluster (MEC—English only) classrooms. SDCS was unusual among many districts in California in that, after the passage of Proposition 227,⁸ the district continued to offer large numbers of biliteracy classes for students whose parents signed a waiver requesting it. Nonetheless, the numbers of staff in biliteracy classrooms declined by over 75% between 1998–1999 and 2003–2004, and staff in SEI and MEC nearly doubled (Lesaux & Crosson, 2005).

While biliteracy instruction was not a focus of this study, several observations are worth noting here as they have implications for EL students' literacy instruction in English. The first of these is that by the time our data collection for this study began in the spring of 2004, a clear pattern of turning away from biliteracy education seemed to have set in. Of the nine case study schools in this study, three had no biliteracy classrooms as of 2004–2005 (one had eliminated the

⁸Proposition 227, passed in 1998, the same year that Alan Bersin and Anthony Alvarado took the helm in San Diego, required that

English learners entering California Schools be placed in structured English immersion for a period 'not normally to exceed one year,' then be transferred to mainstream classrooms taught 'overwhelmingly in English' . . . The law also included a provision allowing parents of English learners to opt for bilingual education via waivers. (Parrish et al., 2006, pp. 3–4)

program in 2003–2004 despite having over 70% EL students). During our 2 main years of data collection (2004–2005 and 2005–2006), three of the remaining six schools sharply reduced their bilingual offerings. In one of these schools, half of the parent requests for the biliteracy program were denied in the primary grades; in another, the number of biliteracy classes was reduced from 17 to 7; and in a third, the biliteracy program, which had involved half the school and spanned Grades K–5, was eliminated in all except one kindergarten and one first-grade class. In the remaining three schools, reports from teachers indicated that the biliteracy classes were increasingly focused on early transition and an emphasis on English, with little attention to deep literacy development in Spanish.

Second, definitions and approaches to both the biliteracy classes and SEI classes differed from school to school, and even from classroom to classroom. With respect to biliteracy, we found little evidence of an explicit or shared set of assumptions about the relationship between EL students' first language and English literacy development, and so, not surprisingly, heard about substantial variation in the amount and nature of native language instruction across the schools. Indeed, although several principals commented on the lower test scores of biliteracy students compared to those of other ELs in the schools, it is not possible to draw any conclusions either from our data or from those provided by principals about whether this pattern was due to use of the native language, inadequately trained teachers, differences between the students in the different instructional programs, or a host of other possible factors.

Third, and perhaps most relevant for our purposes here, is that as EL students were moved out of the biliteracy and into the mainstream classrooms, teachers of English-only classes were increasingly faced with the challenge of addressing the instructional needs of ELs—and were increasingly aware of their lack of preparation for doing so. One principal put it this way: “Everyone realizes now that they have bilingual learners. . . . Last year, [when] I gave them the book *How Second Language Learners Learn a Second Language*, they didn’t understand why they needed this. They didn’t realize their kids have those language needs.”

The Promise and Limits of Differentiation

This decline in the use of biliteracy classes to educate EL students, coupled with federal and state accountability for the EL subgroup and the differential instructional effects discussed previously, raises the question of how literacy instruction might be adjusted to meet the needs of this population when EL students are taught to read in English alongside their native English-speaking peers. I noted earlier the likely benefits of a balanced literacy program for EL students, in part because instructional differentiation is so integral to the approach. Grouping strategies, text selection, and specific activities to scaffold instruction (e.g., read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading) were to be designed and implemented to respond to the needs of individual learners as they progressed toward independence in increasingly more complex texts. Moreover, the emphases reported across the case study schools on teachers knowing their students well and documenting student progress was to provide the bases for matching instructional strategies to the needs of specific children at specific points in their development.

Emphasis on differentiation in general, however, does not guarantee that instruction will be adequately tailored to address the language needs specific to EL students. For this, school

personnel must first recognize that EL students require such tailoring. They must also know enough about texts, literacy instruction, and second language acquisition (a) to analyze potential barriers to EL comprehension of a given text, and (b) to diagnose and monitor their students' particular language needs and progress. Only then will teachers be able to design and implement effective strategies for helping their EL students engage sufficiently with the text and with literacy-related activities to actively construct meaning and become proficient readers (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Lesaux & Crosson, 2005).

By all reports, such recognition, attention, and knowledge were generally lacking in the San Diego district and most of our case study schools prior to 2005–2006. Although there was some variation among schools and respondents, our qualitative data indicate that, for the most part, specific attention to the needs of EL students within the larger literacy reforms was not “called out” in central directives, professional development, or in school or teacher plans. Many teachers reported that even when they requested assistance to address EL needs, they received little response: “We bring [instruction of ELs] up as a staff, and the leadership team says that we’re all pretty much ELs. . . . [But] my students who are truly English learners need more explicit language teaching.”

This notion that EL student needs were the same as those of other low-level readers and could be similarly addressed was common among our respondents. When asked about what they did in their literacy instruction that was particular for ELs, the common responses in 2004–2005 were:

- Nothing really. . . . I do nothing special.
- Nothing beyond keeping an eye out for them, just the same as the other students [who] are having difficulty.

There were, however, a few exceptions to this pattern even as early as our first school visits in the spring of 2004. For example, one school leader placed emphasis on the development of oral language proficiency as a means of increasing EL students' comprehension and noted the difficulty the school faced due to the small number of English models in the predominantly EL student population. Similarly, a handful of literacy coaches, principals, and teachers in the other schools noted both the need for greater attention to EL needs and sporadic attempts to incorporate aids to comprehension into their literacy instruction. For the most part, these focused on greater use of strategies that were already a regular part of balanced literacy instruction for all students: small groups and partner talk, guided reading, and use of familiar texts. In other cases, however, teachers talked about such techniques as using pictures, realia, and gestures to open the meaning of text to their EL students.

By 2004–2005, there was an emerging recognition among district leaders that EL students were not faring as well as others under the reforms, that they were concentrated in the lowest performing schools, and that those schools would not move out of the bottom state rankings or make their AYP targets under NCLB without more effective attention to EL support, which became a topic in several principals conferences later that year. Lesaux and Crosson (2005) suggested that,

With respect to ELs, one might conceptualize the SDCS reform process as a two-stage process. SDCS first implemented a reform process designed to raise the achievement of all students including ELs. The second stage began . . . when the district began initiatives aimed at augmenting instruction for ELs. (p. 268)

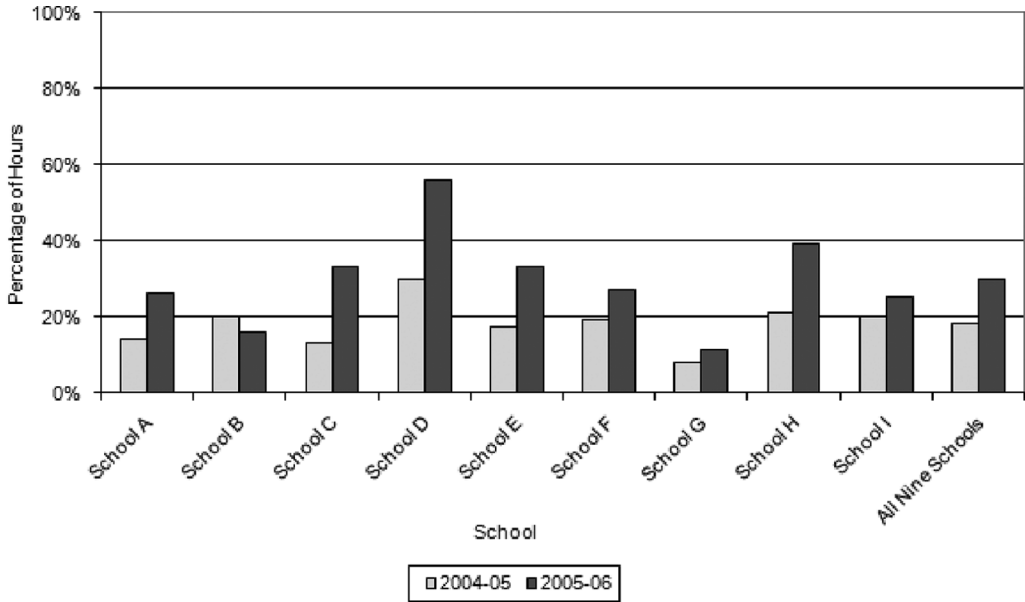


FIGURE 2 Proportion of ELA professional development hours in which learning instructional strategies for EL students was a goal by case study school, 2004–2005 and 2005–2006.

Our data provide some support for the two-stage conceptualization, for in 2005–2006, the situation appeared to have changed sharply as leadership teams in the majority of our case study schools included explicit attention to EL student progress among the top goals for the year.

One manifestation of this goal was the 67% increase across our case study schools in the proportion of ELA professional development that incorporated specific attention to ELs within the context of regular literacy instruction. Figure 2 displays the proportion of professional development time spent in activities incorporating this attention, by school and year, based on teacher logs (see Quick, Chaney, & Holtzman, this issue). All but one school experienced such an increase; in five schools, the proportion of such professional development approximately doubled. Interview data suggest, however, that despite this increased attention in professional development activities to the need for differentiation for ELs, teachers received little guidance on how to incorporate such differentiation in practice. Typical of the comments are the following:

- Professional development does not connect in a harmonious way toward that goal.
- Terms were thrown out like “we’re going to help ELs,” but we were never given help on *how* to do that.

As a result, teacher reports on what they actually did instructionally for EL students reveal tremendous variation and a continued lack of clarity. Teachers in two of the schools continued to report little special attention; in the other schools, teacher reports varied from little or no

attention to a smattering of strategies to open the meaning of literacy texts to EL students and engage them in relevant classroom activities. Most common among these strategies were modeling, use of realia and other hands-on activities, partnering limited proficiency students with more fluent peers, using familiar texts, and in some cases, use of cognates, word walls, and translated texts. Few teachers spoke explicitly about systematic vocabulary work, although vocabulary development and instruction have been found to be critical to reading comprehension for ELs (August et al., 2005). Indeed, only 19% of observed literacy segments across the case study classrooms included any attention to vocabulary, and often this was quite minimal. The comparable figure for the Taylor et al. (2003) study was 26%.

In only one school was there evidence reported by multiple teachers of consistent prelesson anticipation of potential linguistic barriers for ELs in the literacy texts being used and of systematic mechanisms for addressing those barriers as part of teachers' regular lesson planning process. Teachers' systematic use of these techniques appeared to be the result of some intensive work with a consultant from the district who was working with specific grade levels to develop such approaches. Teachers in other schools had apparently not yet had such an opportunity.

Principals in several of the schools were aware of the limited use of differentiated strategies for ELs in their teachers' literacy instruction. At least one attributed this situation to the limited understanding of her teachers about the language acquisition process and of the particular needs of EL students at different stages in their language development process. Indeed, attention to English language development (ELD)—not just to differentiation to provide access to meaning—was something that rose to the top of the district's agenda in the final year of this study.

The Elephant in the Room—English Language Development

“Language development is the elephant in the room” that no one is paying attention to, quipped one vice principal in the spring of 2005. By the following fall, along with increased attention to differentiation, ELD had risen to place among the top school priorities. Although only two principals had mentioned ELD as a school goal, either in interviews or their school plans, prior to 2005–2006 (one in 2003–2004 and one in 2004–2005), six of the nine listed ELD as one of the central school goals in 2005–2006. One principal summed up the sentiments of many in her annual work plan: “English language acquisition and development remain the key to making significant gains in achievement.” In not one of these schools, however, did either the principal or the teachers feel that they had a clear or cohesive approach to ELD at either the classroom or the school level. Typical among the comments were the following statements from two principals:

- People were telling us that they were doing ELD all day, but they are not really thinking about what they are doing. It is very difficult because it is a new area and stretching the comfort level.
- Right now, it is like inventing the wheel. . . . There are a lot of different pieces, but there isn't a cohesive program. . . . We are scrambling and it is too bad because it is a district scramble too.

One common structural approach to ELD instruction was to introduce a dedicated ELD block into the instructional schedule. In four of the nine case study schools, the leadership team

members and teachers all reported that teachers were required to include 20–30 min of dedicated ELD instruction during the day; in another three schools, reports were inconsistent (either the leadership team or some teachers reported such a requirement; others did not); and in two schools, respondents said there was no such requirement, noting instead that ELD was to be incorporated throughout the day. Although research on the value of a separate ELD block is only now emerging (Goldenberg, 2008), a recent study suggests that EL students may benefit from such an approach, particularly with respect to their oral language development (Saunders, Foorman, & Carlson, 2006).

Across the board, expectations for what should happen with respect to ELD, either during the dedicated block of time or in the context of regular literacy or content area instruction, were unclear in these schools, having generally been left up to individual teachers or grade levels. In one school, the principal reported that students at each grade level were to be divided by proficiency level during the ELD block and teachers were expected to become knowledgeable about instruction for their specified level of English language proficiency, but the extent to which this was actually occurring was unclear. At least two schools had purchased special ELD materials, but it was not clear from teacher reports the extent to which these were regularly used. In all of the schools, teachers and principals alike reported needing models for what good ELD instruction looks like and sounds like, but these models were not forthcoming. Speaking of the principals conferences that were intended to prepare principals to lead this work, one principal noted, “They would throw this word around, ‘strategies,’ but no one can tell you what strategies they are really talking about.” Nor was there clear attention to the connection between ELD and literacy development, even from the handful of school leaders and coaches with a strong background in this area. One such leader commented: “As much as I know about language acquisition, I haven’t given it enough attention. I haven’t been strategic enough in figuring out how to help teachers help students get what they need.”

This lack of consistency and clarity in the area of ELD is indicative not of negligence on the part of San Diego officials, but rather of the dearth of useful research in this area.

To some extent, the exception to this pattern was the overall emphasis on student talk. In four of the nine schools, leadership team members and/or teachers reported that increasing the amount of student talk and oral language development were among the central goals of the school. Meanwhile, at least several respondents in seven schools noted that providing opportunities for students to talk to one another during literacy instruction would help students both to acquire oral language and to more effectively engage in comprehension activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that the lack of such opportunities was a major concern for several principals. As one noted, “Teachers say they do [ELD] all day long. They talk at students all day long, but they don’t give students the opportunity to talk or use language.”

Outside the general expectation that teachers should address students’ ELD needs, specific goals with regard to language development were rarely called out. When interviewed about what they were trying to accomplish with their students, either in the day’s observed literacy lesson or over the course of the year, participating teachers made no mention of specific language-related goals. Nor, for the most part, was progress in language development specifically tracked by teachers or principals, other than monitoring the CELDT scores on an annual basis. In 2004–2005, one principal had attempted to include English language

proficiency as part of the monthly literacy monitoring sheets filled out by teachers, but she abandoned this notion after finding that teachers had neither the tools nor knowledge for assessing student progress in this area. In the spring of 2006, two schools reported piloting (on a limited scale) the newly developed district English Language Development Proficiency Index to monitor progress in EL students' writing. We observed this tool in use as a central component of professional development and planning with a small group of teachers receiving focused assistance with their EL students in one of these schools. It appeared both to focus their attention on aspects of syntax and vocabulary relevant to the task under consideration and to provide a means of talking about student progress and plans for instruction targeting specific language goals. But such attempts were very limited and only at the beginning stages of development at the time of this study.

One final note on ELD must address the availability of supports outside the classroom to facilitate English language development. Teachers in five of the nine case study schools reported that there were pull-out sessions for newcomer students for anywhere from 30 min to 90 min a day, and in one school, the Reading Recovery teacher worked regularly with newcomers after school. One school also had a language lab available for EL students, but otherwise teachers reported no access to additional ELD supports in these schools.

What, then, is the overarching set of conclusions from this analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data on ELs in San Diego's balanced literacy reform? One conclusion is that, for the first 6 or 7 years of the literacy reforms, there was little district-wide attention to the unique needs of EL students, either with respect to differentiation for comprehension in the English literacy classrooms or with respect to ELD. The attention we did observe during this time appeared to be haphazard, rather than systematic, and to derive mainly from the initiative of individual principals, instructional coaches, or teachers. In the main, the approach reported by most respondents reflected an overriding belief that good instruction is good instruction for everyone, and that all students should benefit from the balanced literacy strategies and techniques used for low-performing students in general. Although this belief has some support in the literature, our quantitative analyses of the effects of particular literacy activities and interaction patterns in the context of this reform suggest that EL students may benefit from some modified or additional strategies to more effectively open the meaning of particular texts and classroom activities to them, to cognitively engage them in those activities, and to support the acquisition of oral language as a basis for improved reading comprehension. This latter conclusion is also supported by the literature.

By 2005–2006, the eighth year after the introduction of balanced literacy under Alan Bersin and Anthony Alvarado, district leadership and school personnel—at least at the elementary level—seemed to have recognized the need for more explicit attention to differentiation of literacy instruction for ELs and to the development of these students' English language proficiency as well. Such attention was increasingly evident in professional development activities and administrator and teacher reflections on instructional goals and activities. However, teachers and principals both reported insufficient guidance as to how this attention was to be realized in the classroom, and there appeared to be no overarching theory of or approach to the development of literacy and language for this group of students. The lack of a coherent approach was felt strongly by school personnel and stands in sharp contrast to the coherent and consistent theory of literacy instruction driving the reforms as a whole. Its development may be the next stage of literacy reform in SDCS.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS—STRENGTHS ON WHICH TO BUILD

As noted earlier, Lesaux and Crosson (2005) argued that in 2003–2004, SDCS was entering a second phase of the reform effort in which the needs of particular groups, like ELs, could be more effectively addressed. It is unclear at this point the extent to which the progression of those efforts may have been interrupted by the leadership changes in the district⁹ and subsequent dismantling of key reform elements by the school board. But to the extent to which the balanced literacy approach remains, our data indicate important strengths developed in the course of the work that the district could build on as it moves forward to more fully address the needs of EL students.

First, teachers and school leaders in San Diego’s schools understand the value of differentiating instruction to meet the specific learning needs of students in their charge and have gained considerable experience in doing so in the course of the balanced literacy reforms. They have also gained experience in incorporating such strategies into their instructional planning, particularly in the course of using the Units of Inquiry introduced to guide such planning during the 2 years of this study. Experience in both of these areas provides a sound basis for incorporating planning and instructional work specifically related to ELD and literacy needs of EL students.

Second, the reforms deepened the knowledge base across the district in the area of literacy teaching and learning. In all of our case study schools, teachers reported that they had learned a lot in the course of the reform efforts and that they had come to appreciate the value of and need for continued professional learning. This was true not only for those who had come of professional age in the course of the reforms but also of many long-term veterans, many of whom had been critical of district tactics and leadership styles. This intellectual capacity can be deepened and expanded to include ELD. Indeed, the teachers we interviewed were looking for precisely this sort of learning and guidance, as they identified inattention to language acquisition as a reason for the continued low performance of EL students.

Finally, and perhaps most important, during the course of the reform effort in San Diego, particularly with respect to ELD, school leaders and teachers had moved toward incorporating collaborative inquiry into their approach to instructional improvement. In 2005–2006, for example, six schools had established leadership teams, teacher study groups, or inquiry processes for developing their collective understanding and work in the area of ELD. In one school, the principal had assigned the newly hired EL resource teacher to work in five classrooms at Grades 2–4 to provide additional small group instruction (guided reading and writing) to EL students in the class and to work with the group of five teachers to “unpack what this ELD instruction looks like, so when I stand up in front of people next year and say you need to have this designated ELD instruction time, I might have an idea of what it looks like and sounds like.” In another, all teachers undergoing their required state (Stull) evaluations were to incorporate ELD as one of their foci of inquiry and self-reflection. In four other schools, school-wide study groups had been established to investigate potentially effective approaches for ELD instruction. Moreover, across the schools, staff members were

⁹Alan Bersin’s superintendency ended in June 2005 and the district is now on its fourth superintendent (including two interims) since that time. Our data indicate that, in 2005–2006, the balanced literacy reforms were still in force in the elementary schools in the district—at least those serving much of the EL student population.

experimenting in their own classrooms with a variety of such approaches, systematic investigation of which could inform larger district-wide efforts.

In all of this work, the missing piece appears to be a practical theory of English literacy instruction for EL students, including the role of oral language development, academic vocabulary instruction, attention to complex syntactic structures common in academic text, and differentiated activities and interaction patterns useful for EL students in the mainstream classroom. This area is a critical and potentially fertile area for research—not only experimental and quasi-experimental research on particular interventions and developmental patterns, but also action research into problems and practices identified and investigated as part of schools' ongoing improvement efforts. San Diego, with its base built in literacy instruction and its recognition of the need for attention in this area, is a potential site for both types of knowledge development activities.

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