



Book Review

Reviewed by: Lauryn Kincheloe
Doctoral Student
University of Colorado- Denver
1201 Larimer St,
Denver, CO 80204
lauryn.kincheloe@ucdenver.edu

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Every day, teachers are tasked with providing an equitable education to all students which is engaging and relevant to their lives. As teachers plan their instruction, they need to consider the needs of their students, and differentiate lessons that make content comprehensible. *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible* (2017) stands out as a strong resource to promote collaboration between content teachers and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers. It also provides insight into how teachers can advocate for English Language Learner (ELL) students and provide them with the instruction needed to foster success. If you have not yet read this important volume, I would recommend it as a resource for ESOL and content area teachers of all grade levels.

With the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, ELL students are required to meet the same rigorous content standards as their native English-speaking peers, while also acquiring the English language. Due to the increased level of challenging content, it is crucial that content teachers obtain the skills necessary to support language development. All teachers

must have knowledge of tools and strategies that can effectively support ELL students, as one in four students across the United States is from immigrant families (Samson and Collins, 2012). All teachers must also be able to create an environment where ELL students feel welcomed and valued. Unfortunately, many teachers of ELL students do not receive second language acquisition training, and do not have a tool-box full of research-based strategies to help their students who are at various levels of language proficiency.

Within this book, Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner and Dr. Sydney Snyder set out to provide this toolbox for teachers. The purpose of this book is two-fold: to provide teachers of ELLs with the ability to develop their own advocacy and leadership skills. It also provides educators with research-based strategies, modeling and examples, and application activities that can be implemented across content areas and grade levels.

One of the highlights of the book are the suggestions for collaboration between ESOL teachers and content teachers. There is a growing trend in schools across the United States to integrate ELL students into mainstream classrooms, rather than have students pulled by the ESOL teacher (Samson and Collins, 2012). This provides an opportunity for ESOL teachers to work alongside content teachers. *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible* (2017) provides excerpts at the end of each chapter that suggests how the two teachers can work together to provide mutual support. For example, at the end of Chapter 6: Vocabulary Instruction and ELs, the authors include a section titled, "What is the Role of Collaboration in Teaching Academic Vocabulary to ELs?". This section details how content and ESOL teachers can share their expertise with one another and select appropriate vocabulary together. The authors suggest that the two teachers can work together to select and implement appropriate activities and strategies. There is an emphasis upon the idea that content teachers are not alone in the planning and instruction of ELL students. There is support within the school setting, and positive relationships with the ESOL teacher can strengthen the learning environment and learning experiences for ELL students.

Another highlight found within the book are the suggestions provided by the authors to inspire content teachers to advocate for ELL students within the school and classroom. Advocacy and equity in learning are important features of ELL instruction, and those features may get overlooked as content teachers strive to educate ELL and non- ELL students alike. The authors stress that content teachers must leverage the strengths of their ELL students, as well as learn all they can about the students' culture and background. There is also an emphasis on establishing an asset-based approach with students, rather than a deficiency approach. The asset-based approach promotes inclusivity and encourages ELLs to share what they know in a safe and respectful environment.

There are a variety of elements that content teachers need to consider when structuring a productive learning environment for ELL students. *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible* (2017) is structured in a way that any content teacher at any grade level can find strategies to incorporate into their classroom, and they do not have to follow the book chapter by chapter. For example, if a teacher is struggling with constructing formative assessments, they could skip to Chapter 9: Formative Assessments for ELs and focus on the content that is relevant to their needs. The authors provide background information on

this topic, indicate the research that supports the strategies, and incorporate application activities that are relevant across content areas, grade levels, and varying language proficiencies. It is a one-stop-shop for educators that need advice, but do not want to scour through a variety of books and resources.

Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner and Dr. Sydney Snyder have provided strategies to help educators in areas such as scaffolding instruction, teaching academic language, and constructing formative assessments that are supported by research. For example, in Chapter 3: Scaffolding Instruction for ELs, the WIDA Consortium's Categories of Scaffolds is presented as a resource to help educators as they plan how to differentiate instruction for their students. In Chapter 7: Teaching ELs Background Knowledge, the authors reference Marzano (2004) and his claim that what students already know about a topic will indicate their success with learning new information regarding that topic. The authors also reference Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) as they describe how jump-starting students' background knowledge will result in greater understanding. The list of references that are provided at the end of each chapter further support content and ESOL teachers with gaining additional research-based information.

As a middle school ESOL teacher, and doctoral student focusing on Educational Leadership, this text has provided me with many useful strategies to work with my colleagues and support students. While I have studied and read many texts that discuss advocacy, and strategies that will support ELL students, this text helped me integrate strategies that will help me to more effectively collaborate with my peers. For instance, when working with my colleague, we discussed practices that would support Non-English Proficient (NEP) students within our classroom. Our goal was to encourage them to share their perspectives and develop critical thinking skills. Through an exploration of the strategies found in *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible* (2017), we determined that primary language support would be an effective strategy. We also decided that integrating small group instruction would allow our students to help one another and improve their oral language skills. Alone I am one voice advocating for ELL students, and after using this volume, I have gained skills to help others create an educational climate that benefits all students.

References

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