There is a challenge before us. The number of students entering U.S. public school classrooms with a first language other than English continues to grow (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2002; U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1999). Despite research recommendations that these students be supported in their first language and afforded four to seven years to become academically proficient (Collier, 1987; Thomas & Collier, 1996), English-language learners (ELLs) are commonly expected to become sufficiently fluent in English to take standardized and state-mandated tests in a matter of a few years. Although rapid proficiency is a lofty goal, appropriate instruction for these students has yet to become common practice (August & Hakuta, 1997; Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Unfortunately, too many ELLs in regular public school classrooms are not making sufficient progress to graduate and access the opportunities that are available to their native–English-speaking peers (Fitzgerald, 1995).

The need to provide better instruction for ELLs requires an updated, invigorated approach to their schooling. Related research emphasizes the need for rigorous instruction to maximize linguistic and cultural capital (Chaudron, 1988; Constantino, 1994; Moll, 1988). Better programs are characterized by a campus- or districtwide commitment led by well-informed administrators (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991) who seek social, academic, and linguistic development among ELLs (Romo, 1999). Strong bilingual programs design and deliver a language-oriented and challenging academic curriculum. Currently, however, most ELLs in U.S. school districts are assigned to English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers who typically remove the students from regular classroom instruction for short periods of time with the goal of developing their language proficiencies. This ESL instructional time is often focused on fostering basic English.

Without extensive support, ESL teachers cannot be expected to work miracles, especially in less than an hour of targeted instruction per day. A serious ramification of pulling ELLs out of their regular classrooms is that their classroom teachers might not see themselves as primarily responsible for the academic progress of these students. Classroom teachers can begin to think that it is someone else’s job to teach such students, especially in reading and writing. (See Dudley-Marling and Murphy’s 1997 discussion of this phenomenon in regard to low-achieving readers.)

Unless the ESL teacher has a strong background in reading, the focus on reading and writing during ESL lessons can be minimal (August & Hakuta, 1997). Despite many good intentions, pull-out programs are not accomplishing the task of fostering oral language proficiencies in English while scaffolding the grade-level reading and writing skills of these students (Fitzgerald, 1995; Romo, 1999; Slavin & Calderon, 2001). If ELLs are removed from their classrooms during language arts instruction, which is sometimes the case, these students may actually receive less help with reading and writing than the English-proficient students. To achieve parity with their English-speaking peers and to maximize educational opportunities, ELLs should receive consistent, congruent, and comprehensive instruction.

English-language learners may be better served if classroom teachers integrate some of the author’s suggestions with their instruction.
The classroom teacher and the ESL instructor should collaborate to provide excellent instruction. If the ESL program does not focus on reading and writing and accomplish these goals expeditiously, the classroom teacher must seek to provide accelerated instruction. It is hypothesized here that the well-equipped classroom reading teacher may, in fact, be the best person not only to instruct literacy but also to actually make English an accelerated language for ELLs. I use the term accelerated language to describe instruction that is fast paced, integrated, engaging, and enriching, rather than remedial, linear, passive, or inordinately patient. I am suggesting that unless we transform instruction of ELLs with a more accelerated approach, we may not be able to meet the challenge of educating these students in a timely fashion.

In some schools, administrators and teachers operate from the idea that students who do not speak English at home need to “feel good” about themselves while learning English at school. The argument follows that ELLs should be given certain dispensations so that their self-esteem is not damaged. Berzins and Lopez (2001) described this as the “pobrecito” (poor little one) syndrome. Often, one result of this perspective is that students receive seemingly kind but academically inferior instruction (Laosa, 1979; Schinke-Llano, 1983). Well-intentioned but poorly equipped teachers often excuse ELLs from classroom discussions, give them less demanding work, and require them to do less. Unfortunately, the self-esteem of any student is unlikely to develop by passivity or marginality. Rather, students need challenge and engagement—the opportunity to participate and the support to make sense and meaning of their academic lives. Some teachers continue to allow passivity and require less of their ELLs, not necessarily because they endorse such an approach but because they don’t know what to do differently and are hoping that the ESL teacher will be able to administer more appropriate instruction. So, in the past, many ELLs spent hours of class time doing little academic work and not improving their English-language competencies, despite the time spent in ESL programs.

Now, however, many programs are increasingly concerned about how the performances of these students affect test scores and school ratings. Schools may be providing mandated ESL instruction for these students, and educators involved may be focusing on promoting listening and speaking skills in English, but what is also needed is a commensurate emphasis on reading and writing competencies in English. The reality is that the sooner ELLs (those not building first-language literacy in bilingual classrooms) learn to read and write in English, the sooner they will have the opportunity to function satisfactorily on grade level.

There is increasing research evidence to support the early introduction of literacy for ELLs. (Fitzgerald, 1993, 1995; Quiroga, Lemos-Britton, Mostafapour, Abbott, & Berninger, 2002; Youb, Lowenstein, Pearson, & McLellan, 2001). This research encourages educators to adopt a more accelerated and integrated approach to instruction (Diaz & Flores, 2001; Duffy, 2001). Typical ESL instruction has been linear—frontloading of listening, speaking, and basic vocabulary skills before expecting reading and writing skills to develop (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Many reading teachers, however, are aware of the complex nature of literacy and are comfortable with planning integrated lessons that emphasize reading and writing, for example, and yet build vocabulary, speaking, and listening competencies in the process (Gibbons, 2002). The theory for integrated language arts instruction acknowledges the mutually reinforcing benefits of nonlinear instruction and can serve as the premise for making English an accelerated language for ELLs. The careful combining of effective elements is at the heart of “balanced literacy” and is related to what Slavin and Calderon (2001) called “component stacking.” Diaz and Flores (2001) referred to the effective teacher as a mediator who abandons deficit beliefs and “habitudes” and organizes instruction to teach to a student’s potential. In their words, “Our challenge, then, becomes to organize the teaching-learning process to the potential and not the perceived developmental level of our children” (p. 31). This forward-looking perspective aligns with what I call accelerated instruction—a combination of well-organized components that synergistically promote language and literacy while enhancing motivation and engagement.

Schools and individual teachers need to assess their current programs to determine whether listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all strong components of instruction. Further analysis should include determining the linearity of the instruction provided and the engagement and motivation levels
of ELLs. Beyond these questions, one should ask whether the goal of instruction and management is to accelerate students’ acquisition of English, not only of conversational skills but also of the higher level academic language competencies that are required for school success (Tharp, 1997; Wong Filmore, 2002). Educators need to perceive ELLs as capable students who want to meet and exceed the high expectations teachers hold for them. They are already competent in one language and can use this language base to acquire English. The challenge is to find ways to accelerate their various acquisition levels of English, especially in academic literacy.

The example of Dora

Here is one example of what typical ESL instruction still looks like and some cautions about common practices. Dora (not her real name) is a Hispanic first grader in a small semirural U.S. school district that is 30% Latino. She is classified as limited English proficient but has been in class since almost the beginning of the year. On this particular morning many months into the school year, Dora begins the day with four worksheets in front of her. With minimal direction from the teacher, Dora is expected to quietly complete the worksheets, which include connecting dots to draw a dinosaur picture; cutting out and sequencing four sentences into a short story; writing a list of 10 spelling words three times each; and coloring, cutting, and pasting puzzle-like pieces to make a picture of a playground.

Dora begins work and occasionally responds to comments that other students at her table make about the worksheets. Mostly Dora keeps to herself and attends to her work, but she sometimes looks at what others are doing, perhaps to follow their lead or monitor her own progress. She doesn’t seem to read the written instructions or the content of the story sentences. She simply cuts out the sentences, looks on another’s paper, and pastes the sentence strips onto the paper in the same order that she sees other students use.

After about 20 minutes of seatwork, the teacher gathers the students and initiates a calendar routine, covering the date and the weather and making note of related number patterns and selected mathematical concepts. During this time, Dora gives her attention to the teacher and the other students around her but does not orally participate as is expected of the other students. At one point, the teacher calls upon Dora, asking her which day was yesterday. But Dora appears not to understand the question, so the teacher says, “That’s OK,” and moves on to another student. Dora fiddles with her shoelaces as the calendar activity continues. A few minutes later, the ESL teacher appears at the classroom door and asks for Dora, who jumps up and heads out of the classroom while the teacher dismisses the rest of the students to their desks to introduce a story from their basal reader.

In her ESL classroom, Dora sits on the rug with eight other students while the teacher recites a similar calendar routine. The teacher busily recites a poem about the current month and reviews color names, the days of the week, and the “word of the day.” Dora whispers something in Spanish to a friend sitting nearby, but the teacher reminds her that she should be quiet while the teacher is talking. Beyond this, her engagement is quite minimal, even though Dora has been in school for almost a year. Several minutes later, the students are sent to their tables. The ESL teacher introduces a set of words (e.g., peach, nail, ladder), discusses them briefly, and writes them on the chalkboard. She tells the students to copy the words on the appropriate pages in their individual dictionaries. The teacher monitors the students’ copying to make sure the words are spelled correctly and on the appropriate pages. This activity takes up the rest of the ESL instructional time, after which Dora is sent back to her classroom where the other students are about halfway through their third rotation at literacy centers.

What can be done?

In the authentic example provided, Dora is participating in regular classroom activities and she is being served by an ESL program. But, if this scenario is typical, Dora cannot make accelerated progress in the acquisition of English or in grade-level academics. What concerns should we have about her situation?

First, it is important that classroom teachers evaluate the work they require of students to afford maximum learning opportunities. To complete worksheets that she does not understand may refine
Dora’s coloring, cutting, and pasting skills, but it also encourages her to merely copy the work of others. In such cases, students like Dora can begin to think that completing tasks to please the teacher is the goal, rather than having ownership of the inherent content.

On the rug at calendar time, which takes place every day, Dora should be expected to participate. With heavy doses of repetition, paralinguistic support, and visual resources, she is quite capable of learning the days of the week in English and making sense of the math concepts presented. It is probably not “OK” that after hundreds of hours of exposure she doesn’t respond to the teacher’s queries during these whole-group activities. Such allowances—to severely extend the silent period associated with some theories of second-language acquisition (Krashen, 1987)—communicate low expectations of Dora and encourage her to be passive.

Unfortunately, Dora is called out by the ESL teacher just before the beginning of the reading lesson and misses the teacher’s introduction and initial reading of the day’s story. In addition, she will not be able to complete her assigned worksheets and may have to stay in at recess time to finish that work, even though chatting with friends outside could improve her conversational English and support social connections. In the ESL class, the person getting most of the language practice is the teacher. The time spent on the calendar and basic vocabulary seems of dubious value if done day after day, throughout the year, with minimal student engagement. The word copying task also seems mechanical and promotes the writing of vocabulary apart from any meaningful context.

Although not an easy challenge, extending information-age literacy skills to all students, particularly ELLs, is certainly an informed one (August & Hakuta, 1997; de la Luz Reyes & Molner, 1991; Fitzgerald, 1993, 1995; Freeman & Freeman, 2000; Gibbons, 2002; Hiebert, 1994; Kottler & Kottler, 2002; Opitz, 1998; Spangenberg-Urbschat & Pritchard, 1994; Tharp, 1997). Much is already known about how to make this happen. Here are some well-supported recommendations for improving instruction. These components can contribute to making English an accelerated language within regular classrooms.

- **Hold high expectations for effort and achievement among students, including ELLs.** Teachers should expect a lot from their students (Moll, 1988) but be willing to provide appropriate support. This can be paraphrased—providing better scaffolds, not lowering expectations (Constantino, 1994; Gibbons, 2002). ELLs need help in learning a second language, but they also sometimes need general support in learning how to be productive learners in school settings. Just because they do not yet speak fluently doesn’t mean they can’t understand and develop a variety of skills, strategies, and attitudes that will help them succeed. Getting work done in a timely fashion is one aspect of being successful in U.S. schools. Asking for help when necessary is also a proactive behavior of good students in school culture. These are examples of characteristics ELLs may need to adopt to do well, and teachers can influence their development. English-language learners should be encouraged to apply effort and strive to meet the high expectations held by teachers who are willing and able to support their efforts (Diaz & Flores, 2001).

- **Increase talk time.** Expect students to talk more (Chaudron, 1988; Laosa, 1979). Make sure ELLs are more than passive observers of instruction. Communicate that you want, and will facilitate, their efforts to speak in class. Don’t refrain from asking them more questions, even if you have to give them choices for their responses or allow them to think of an answer while you move on to other students. Come back to these students and be sure to elaborate or extend their responses with more language input and feedback. Planning for more group work is one way to promote more student talk. Teachers should assess their instruction on a regular basis to ensure that the ELLs have opportunities to talk as much as the other students.

- **Use books to provide comprehensible input.** Reading experiences can provide students with comprehensible input (Elley, 1991; Krashen, 1987; Moustafa & Penrose, 1985) that fosters conceptual understanding and academic vocabulary. The reading aloud of Big
Books that present content information, useful language patterns, or vocabulary in context helps to foster oral language development. Rereading texts and reading several different or bilingual versions of a story provide ELLs opportunities to master vocabulary items and text features (Schirmer, Casbon, & Twiss, 1996). Students’ oral language development can be extended via choral reading, Readers Theatre, or retellings of well-known tales.

Remember that ELLs can understand far more language than they can produce, so spend considerable time inputting English via picture books, even with older students. Teachers should select books with illustrations that visually support and extend the concepts presented in print. Then use the books to generate discussions and related writing activities. Using texts as writing models (i.e., patterned poetry or text-typing) affords scaffolds that enable students to express themselves in their developing English (Meeks & Austin, 2003; Mohr, 2003).

• Use literacy lessons as the basis for instructional conversations. Strive for consistent literacy instruction that employs a conversational yet accelerated style (Goldenberg, 1992/1993; Perez, 1996; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Williams, 2001). Avoid too much repetition of basic language elements; instead, provide a strong model of English and then apply it in authentic discussions within academic contexts. For instance, during a minilesson on English vowels and their importance in reading and writing, one timid first grader spoke up excitedly. She said, “Teacher, teacher, my name [Veronica] has all the vowels but [u].” This epiphany exemplifies how students can begin to make sense of English before they are particularly fluent. In this case, the study of English vowels provided the basis for a personalized conversation, an authentic use of English.

• Include explicit instruction of English as a language system. English-language learners need to know that English is a language system that can be analyzed and applied (Chaudron, 1988; Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Hui & Yahya, 2003; Slavin & Calderon, 2001). Although as a language system English is complex, it is manageable. Even very young students can begin to pay attention to the written system while they acquire the basic skills. Instead of waiting for oral language fluency to develop before attending to the written system, use phonological and morphological awareness activities to enhance listening and speaking and facilitate efficient reading and writing (Birch, 2002; Quiroga et al., 2002). For example, students can learn a lot of vocabulary and something about structural analysis during a lesson featuring common compound words. Seeing the teacher make compound words by matching up single word cards can extend vocabulary while enlightening students as to how oral and written language works. Instead of memorizing each word as a separate vocabulary term, the students can begin discussing how some big words are composed of smaller words that lend meaning to the whole. Thus, word work promotes the concept of compound words while students are seeing spelling patterns, learning meanings, and developing a linguistic concept that will help them throughout school (Bear, 2002; Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1995; Mohr, 2002).

• Promote vocabulary and cognitive strategy instruction via thematic units. Consider the use of well-reasoned thematic instruction for ELLs so that any targeted vocabulary or useful language structures can be applied and reinforced rather than merely introduced. Thematic instruction makes sense for all students for many reasons, but ELLs certainly benefit from dwelling on a topic long enough to build and extend conceptual and linguistic knowledge (Romo, 1999; Schirmer, Casbon, & Twiss, 1996). In addition, thematic instruction often includes a projects approach that requires cognitive learning strategies (Slavin & Calderon, 2001) and the exploration of various kinds of texts, including multicultural literature, related to selected themes.

• Use integrated literacy instruction to foster language and social interactions. Present reading and writing tasks from the initial stages so ELLs can see their interconnectedness and realize the need to become literate (Hudelson,
English-language learners can have varying learning preferences, just as other students might. In fact, ELLs may even rely more on their visual abilities while English is still mostly noise to them. Therefore, doing more with print makes instructional sense.

There is empirical evidence that word-building activities, for example, can enhance students’ pronunciation of English, thereby improving their oral competencies as a byproduct (Mohr, 2003). In addition, an integrated approach can afford both top-down and bottom-up experiences and encourage more social interaction with native-speaking students.

**Dora revisited**

So how might instruction for Dora be enhanced by a more accelerated approach to her language development? How might a combination of research-supported components improve her likelihood of school success?

First, instead of doing superfluous coloring, cutting, and pasting, Dora could spend some early morning time at a computer completing a customized series of tasks that focus on English vocabulary. If this requires some special technology-based programs for ELLs, having students like Dora work on the computer first would allow the software to be switched before the fluent English speakers use the computers. Working on the computer first might also help Dora warm up her English before regular instruction begins.

If there is paperwork to be done, the teacher should find time to discuss it with Dora and any other ELLs. The teacher should check to see if Dora knows what to do and why and give Dora the scaffolding she needs to use English to communicate what she knows and where help is needed. Here is where some modification can be made for Dora’s proficiency in English. If she cannot read the worksheet with the scrambled sentences and doesn’t understand them when they are read to her, she needs a differentiated task. For example, the teacher might cut up one of the sentences into separate words and call out the words, having Dora find the words as the teacher speaks them. Then the teacher could model reading the words as a sentence and Dora could be encouraged to read along. This would help Dora use what she knows to identify English words and to practice oral reading of sentences to match the prosody and intonation modeled by the teacher.

During the morning calendar routine, the teacher might repeat or rephrase the question she asked of Dora and tell Dora that she will call on her again in a few seconds to see if she has an answer. Or, she could follow up the initial question with a choice, such as “Was yesterday Tuesday or Wednesday?” At least Dora could be asked to come up and point to the words as she joins the class in naming the days of the week, in order. In any case, Dora should be expected to participate and should be supported in her efforts to do so.

To improve language and literacy opportunities for Dora and the other ELLs at the same grade level, the ESL teacher might develop a thematic unit titled Getting Out and About and relate it to the grade-level unit Our Own Backyard. The ESL teacher should confer with the first-grade teachers to determine their content objectives and plan to use her ESL instruction to support class units and objectives.

The ESL teacher could choose to present a Big Book and ask students to predict the story via a picture walk. Once students are primed by the pictures, the teacher could ask them if they have ever had similar experiences, probing for any details that the students might offer in English or their native language. Invoking prior knowledge and promoting culturally relevant connections would encourage student engagement and interest in the text. During a few rereadings of the text, the teacher could encourage Dora and the other students to “read” along with her and point out particular vocabulary. If the Big Book story includes some useful sentence structures, the ESL teacher might list those on chart paper and encourage the students to use the sentence structures and repeat them with variations.

Let’s suppose the ESL teacher decides to use the Big Book *I Went Walking*, a patterned, predictable text (Williams, 1989). The teacher could print the model phrase (I went walking and I saw...) several times on the chart and have the students offer sentence endings based on the book or their life experiences. Completing this Language Experience chart would help students see the written language and match it to the shared oral language. In addi-
tion, the students would be using much more English and in integrated and authentic ways.

Following the Big Book reading and the Language Experience chart, the teacher could distribute cards with simple verbs written on them. After rehearsing the verbs on the cards by reading them out loud and pointing them out when asked by the teacher, Dora and the other students could be introduced to the suffix -ing and be challenged to add it to specific verb cards and read the new present participle that is formed (e.g., walk + ing = walking). As an extension, the students could be asked to use the words in their own sentences. If time allows, Dora and the others could be asked to complete a picture of themselves out walking and use the sentence prompt “I went walking and I saw ___” to compose individual responses. During the picture portion, the students would be encouraged to chat about or role-play their experiences and be engaged by the teacher in related conversation.

A call to action

The previous scenario might seem familiar to elementary reading teachers. It may seem typical because it includes many components commonly associated with balanced early reading instruction. Yet, it is equally appropriate for Dora and other ELLs. First, the lesson is literature based, providing access to good children’s books. There is a focus on literacy with reading and writing tasks, which are modeled and practiced even with the least proficient. There is a strong emphasis on vocabulary, but the words are rehearsed in context and related to a theme. The revised lesson also integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The teacher scaffolds the related tasks to promote student success. The lesson affords the enjoyment of literature and personal conversations (Tharp, 1996) but engages students in an analysis of English as a language system at the same time. Finally, it evidences higher expectations of students and lets the students use pragmatic English in a conversational yet academically focused way. Stacking these components in combination, day after day, would certainly begin to provide more comprehensive literacy for ELLs.

The point is that ESL instruction should include combinations of the best practices that characterize excellent literacy instruction—instruction that is based on researched techniques and that affords students engagement with others and with texts. Some might argue that literacy instruction for ELLs should be twice as good so that they learn the language system while learning to read and write. It is essential, however, that typical reading and writing tasks (reading basal stories and completing worksheets) be modified in ways that challenge students to apply themselves personally in productive ways. Such modifications should include an emphasis on vocabulary, explicit analysis of the language system, cultural connections, and real-life applications. Multiplying the chances for ELLs to personalize their learning (the why of learning) and be productive (the how of learning) should dramatically increase their sense of agency (Stipek, 2002). It is this sense of agency that may mitigate the temptation to withdraw or drop out of school.

For ELLs it is also important to build on first-language competencies (Freeman & Freeman, 1993) rather than to assume that linguistically diverse learners have few language strengths and therefore need a remedial approach. English-language learners need to acquire and learn English as the expected school discourse, and they need opportunities to develop language competencies and academic content as quickly as they are able. If teachers are equipped to provide such instruction, ELLs can make excellent, even accelerated progress in English proficiency. Both the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher should accept this responsibility. Unfortunately, while we may agree with the value of good literacy instruction, such an approach is not yet pervasive practice for all ELLs.

Currently, there is evidence of a shift in the focus of instruction for ELLs. While some instructional strategies, such as translation and cognate recognition, apply specifically to ELLs (Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996), most effective literacy practices benefit all learners (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000). As they continue the quest for balanced literacy that has characterized the reading field for the last several years, researchers and teachers are now seeking to define a more blended literacy approach for ELLs. In both endeavors, educators must consider best practices and work to deliver efficient, effective instruction, especially for the students who need it most. It is time for educators to evaluate their programs and instruction.
for ELLs and determine whether these students have strong opportunities for success. Such instruction must be culturally respectful, cognitively challenging, and academically oriented and must include accelerated, rather than remedial, practices. It is imperative that reading teachers accept the challenge of contributing appropriate instruction for their ELLs. This imperative is a call to action for reading teachers to lead the way in making English an accelerated language for their students. Exploring how classroom and ESL teachers can more productively implement effective literacy instruction with special consideration for ELLs is one way to meet the challenge of extending best practice for all.

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