Best Practices for Educating English Language Learners:
History, Controversy, and a Path Forward
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Educating English language learners (ELLs), one of the many ways to identify students for whom English is not a first language, has a complicated history, characterized by competing theoretical perspectives, a relatively small pool of research, numerous, changing policy instantiations, and compounding issues surrounding ELLs' sizeable and rapidly growing presence in the U.S. education system. This brief sets out to understand each of these characteristics through a review of literature, with the ultimate goal of understanding what's involved in implementing best practices in the education of ELLs. The brief begins by articulating the multifaceted challenge of ELL education by first providing context on its history, examining demographic and achievement data, and reviewing key policy initiatives. This section is followed by an abbreviated, but inclusive history of the debate among scholars and practitioners regarding best practices in educating ELLs. Next, the brief reviews major theoretical perspectives that have influenced the understanding of how best to teach ELL students, including: Cummins's (1980) theory about how social and academic languages develop in relationship with one another, and his theory that a common source of understanding underlies all language learning (Cummins, 1979; 2005), as well as Krashen's (2003) instructional theories about how teachers can make input comprehensible and what settings facilitate ELLs' language learning. This theory section is followed by a review of key findings from research studies and reports on both the needs of ELLs and best practices for teaching them. But first, the section below defines the population of ELLs.

ELLs – Who are they?

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), an ELL is defined as: "an individual who was not born in the United States or whose home language is a language other than English; or who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or who is an American Indian or Alaska Native and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on his or her level of English language proficiency" (ED Data Express, n. d.). Once these children enter school, their English language proficiency is assessed, and they are placed in classrooms that offer varying levels and models of support through: English as a Second Language (ESL) programming, bilingual programming, or no formal support at all, for which the language of instruction is entirely in English. In that case, language instruction is primarily content-based, where students are learning English as they are learning English academic content.

Most ELLs were actually born in the United States, and Spanish is the primary language spoken among them; although, over 400 languages are spoken by ELL students in schools across the country (Batalova, & McHugh, 2010; LeSeaux & Galloway, 2017). And there is considerable variance among ELLs in terms of their length of time in this country, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and cultural attitudes toward schooling (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008), indicating a diverse population. ELLs who were not born in the U.S., who are newly arrived adolescent students, and who need to learn English are known as *newcomers*, a similarly diverse subgroup, representing more than 90 countries. Newcomers, transitioning to a new culture and language, also vary in terms of their schooling, with some who were achieving at grade level (or above) standards in their home countries and others who may have missed months or years of schooling, as a result of political upheaval, warfare, or a migratory lifestyle. These ELLs are known as students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), and they often experience emotional difficulties, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Short & Boyson, 2012). Compared to their English proficient counterparts, ELLs are more likely to live in poverty and come from families with less formal education (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Meeting the needs of such a linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse population requires educational approaches that are attuned to the array of needs they present (Hos, 2016). Furthermore, the very nature of being designated as an ELL is highly changeable, as a recent report from the University of California (2013) points out that "the most academically and linguistically proficient among them exit from the ELL status group on a regular basis" (Callahan, p. 4), thus traditional markers of success, such as achievement scores and graduation rates are difficult to track among a rotating group of students where the most proficient constantly rotates out while the least proficient moves in.

Defining the ELLs Problem: Historical Tensions and Policy Demands

Educating ELLs in our schools has historically been and is presently a complex challenge that involves the following intersecting realities: a rapidly growing population, a persistent achievement gap, low graduation rates, misidentification for learning disabilities, and increasingly rigorous assessments that place new demands on already struggling ELLs.

Growing Population
In U.S. history, there have never been more ELLs in our public school system than there are today, constituting 4.6 million young people or 9.4% of all students in this country (Castellón, Cheuk, Greene, Mercado-Garcia, Santos, Skarin, & Zerkel, 2015; McFarland et al., 2017). This figure has more than doubled in the past three decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) and is predicted to account for 40% of the school-age population by 2030, signaling a rapidly expanding, substantial growth that demands attention and response from our educational system (LeSeaux & Galloway, 2017; Short, Becker, Cloud, Hellman & Levine, 2018).

Achievement Gap
ELLs consistently demonstrate lower scores than their non-ELL counterparts (Xu & Drame, 2008; Orosco & Klinger 2010) on measures of academic achievement, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the largest, most representative and continuing

assessment of achievement for U.S. students. The NAEP tests students in math and reading every four years, and each time, ELLs score lower than their non-ELL counterparts. An example of this disparity is illustrated in Figure 1, which displays a graphic representation of NAEP 8th grade math scores for ELLs, non-ELLs, and former ELLs. This graph shows that not only do ELLs score lower, but that the gap has persisted for over 15 years (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015; ED Data Express, n.d.). Yet, keeping in mind the rotating nature of the population of ELLs that maintains a population of yet to be proficient language learners, as well as cultural and linguistic biases inherent in standardized assessments (Abedi & Gándara, 2006), these figures may not be the best indicators of ELLs' success.
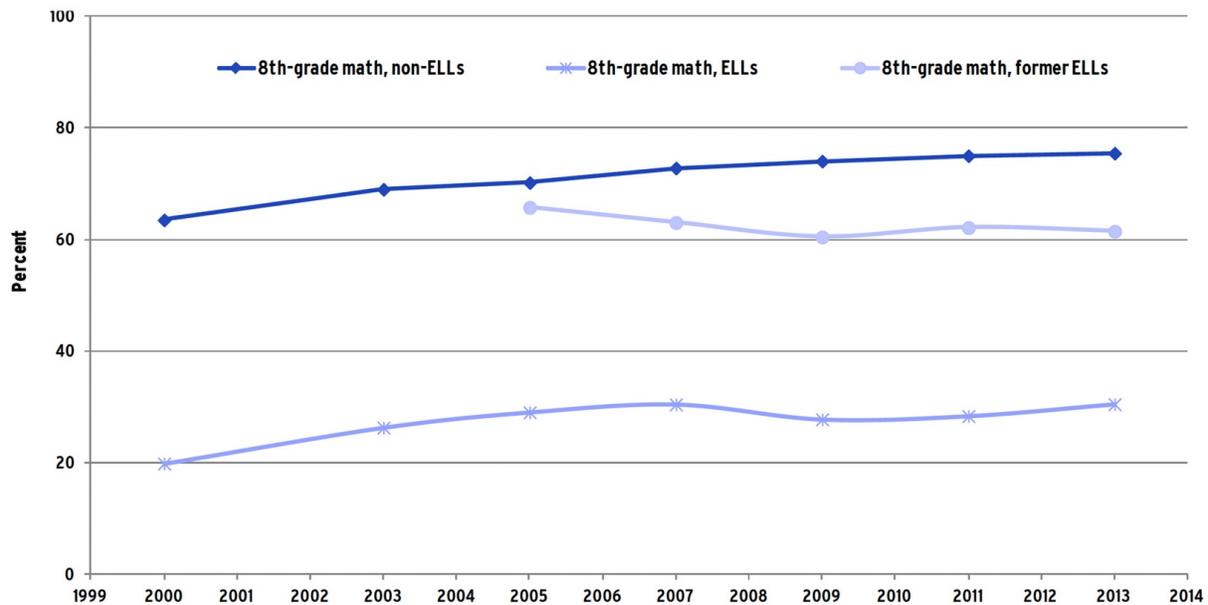

Figure 1: National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics Assessments, 2000-13.

Graduation Rates
Tied to low academic achievement, ELLs do not graduate in the same numbers as their non-ELL counterparts, and they drop out of school more frequently (Callahan, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2017), the 2015-16 national graduation rate for ELLs was 69.9%, compared to 84% for the general student population (National Center for Education Statistics).

Misidentification of ELLs with Learning Disabilities
A consistently misunderstood student population, ELLs are often overrepresented and sometimes underrepresented with disability labels. Fifty percent of ELLs, compared to 39% of the general student population, are identified as having a learning disability (Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (WIDA), 2017). The majority of ELLs who are identified as having a learning disability are classified as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) that involves language and literacy or as Speech and Language Impaired (SLI), indicating a psychological

processing disorder, yet this category has been increasingly questioned as subjective (WIDA, 2017). Misidentifying ELLs as having a disability presents a social justice issue, as "the cultural and linguistic resources they bring are framed as deficits, rather than differences" (WIDA, 2017, p. 3).

As part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization in 2004 (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2009), the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach was developed in reaction to the over-identification of ELL students as having learning disabilities. RTI involves more accurate and earlier identification of students with learning needs through the discrepancy of ability (IQ testing) and academic achievement (Berkeley, et al., 2009). However, using discrepancy criteria to determine level of support relies on valid and dependable measurement tools. Consequently, ELLs can either be *not referred* or *referred* to RTI based on a misinterpretation of their language proficiency and learning aptitudes. In other words, they may be inappropriately referred because of English language proficiency issues or inappropriately *not* referred because of the assumption that their problem is English language proficiency in development and not content misunderstanding (Haager, 2007). One factor that can hamper measurement in RTI, as well as other classroom contexts, is inadequate teacher preparation (Orosco & Klinger, 2010) – teachers who are not using best practices in teaching ELLs and consequently qualifying them for interventions they do not need or likewise, misunderstanding their disability as a language proficiency issue, and failing to recommend them for special education services. Relatedly, teachers can misunderstand ELLs' abilities by overlooking their cultural funds of knowledge and life experiences as assets (González, N. & Moll, L., 2002), which also serves to complicate accurate referral of ELLs for RTI (Orosco, 2010).

Increasingly Rigorous Standards
Concurrent with the myriad challenges ELLs are facing in schools, U.S. educational policy has been moving further along the continuum of standards and accountability that began with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, manifesting in increasingly rigorous assessments for all students, and particularly difficult for ELLs, who

> must do double the work in school by learning academic English at the same time that they study the core content areas …They are not given time to develop their English skills to intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency before they must participate in high-stakes assessments. Short et al., 2018

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association for Best Practices, 2010), which have been adopted by 42 states and the District of Columbia, have increased foci on curricular goals, such as content learning and increased text complexity, placing extraordinary demands on ELLs and their teachers (Goldenberg, 2013; Honingsfield & Dove, 2012). For example, during their first year in the U.S., middle school students are required to take math assessments; and after one year, reading assessments, which experts argue are too early for fair or accurate measurement (Short & Boyson, 2012). School communities are also impacted by such demands; poor performance on state assessments can lead to school closures (Breiseth, 2015). In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, introduced several requirements to identify ELLs and

to include English proficiency as a measurement of school quality. Some states, like New York, have attempted to align policy with standards in ways that support ELLs. According to New York State Education Department's (NYSED) *Blueprint for ELLs Success*, released in 2014, all teachers must be prepared to teach ELLs, emphasizing that "it is not permissible to assume that unsupported immersion of ELLs into an English-speaking environment will enable them to succeed academically" (p. 1). Yet, how districts will support such policies remains unclear (Gil & Bardack, 2010).

A Brief History of ELLs Debate

Most research and policy debates surrounding best practices for educating ELLs originate with a 1974 Supreme Court case, Lau v. Nichols, where the court decided that the "civil rights of non-English-speaking students were violated when the school (in this case) took no steps to help them acquire the language of instruction" (Cummins, 2000, p. 127). This decision informed what are known as the "Lau Remedies" (Sugarman & Widess, 1974), a set of federal policy guidelines requiring school districts to provide appropriate programs to ELLs, designed to ensure that classroom instruction be meaningful and accessible to them. The Office of Civil Rights interpreted the Lau vs. Nichols decision by mandating "transitional bilingual education," or teaching students in their home language as a bridge to English language learning and content instruction. Today, bilingual education includes an array of approaches, among them: the aforementioned transitional bilingual, designed to use a primary language to teach English and then to efficiently move students out into mainstream content courses taught in English; bilingual content area programs, where ELLs work in both their home language and English to develop their home language, but with a priority on developing English proficiency; and two-way bilingual immersion (also called dual language) programs, which aim to evenly combine students whose primary language is English with those whose dominant language is other than English, to promote proficiency in both languages (Short et al., 2018). Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act funds bilingual education (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). It's been reauthorized five times, most recently in 1994 when more priority was shifted to bilingual programs. But schools were unprepared at the implementation level. That's when the controversy intensified (Cummins, 2000). Almost two decades after the Lau v. Nichols decision, California passed Proposition 227 in 1998 – to eliminate the use of first language instruction for bilingual students (Cummins, 2000), touching off an ensuing, decades-long debate about how long ELLs should receive services and what theories of language learning should support guiding principles in administering them (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta et al., 2000; Rossell, 2000).

The question of how to best educate ELLs has been marked by speculation, uncertainty, and lack of consensus around defining, teaching, and learning English (Gil & Bardack, 2010; Rossell, 2000). According to proponents of a supported language learning process, there is a discrepancy between how long it takes ELLs to reach conversational/communicative language proficiency versus how long it takes them to reach academic language proficiency; some research finds that communicative proficiency takes anywhere between 1 ½ -5 years to develop and academic proficiency takes anywhere between 4-7 years (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta, et al., 2000). (These concepts will be expanded upon in the next section, Theoretical Perspectives on Language Learning). Such estimates led proponents of supported language learning to say that Proposition

227, which provided sheltered English immersion (highly scaffolded instruction, ELL students only, content-based classes) for a maximum of one year, was "unrealistically" short (Hakuta, et al., 2000, p. 13). Researchers in this field say the discrepancy between communicative and academic language proficiency feeds a misguided understanding of English proficiency resulting in prematurely exiting students out of ELL programs– once they have acquired communicative proficiency only, after which point they are assessed academically as if they are not a new language learner anymore. When that happens, they often score poorly on assessments, leaving the only explanation for their performance as cognitive deficits or "poor motivation" (Cummins, 1984, p. 10). Further, early departure from ESL or bilingual programming actually delays the learning of English and can cause increasingly poor performance on academic and cognitive tasks as students move into upper elementary grades (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Based on this common scenario, recommendations are made to support ELLs' academic and linguistic needs in two languages over a sustained period of time (Gil & Bardack, 2010; NYSED, 2014). Furthermore, proponents argue that such bilingual programming not only benefits students' English language learning but also contributes to school cultures by making them more empathic and inclusive of ELLs who have historically been punished, segregated, and discriminated against for using their first language; thus, "reversing this legacy of coercive power relations" (Cummins, 2000, p. 129) – a position that supports a pluralist perspective.

Critics of a sustained, supported, language learning approach cite a significant lack of research to support conclusions and an overreliance on proficiency tests as proper measurement tools to assess ELLs' English fluency (Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991; Rossell & Ross, 1986). Rossell (2000) in particular takes issue with Hakuta, Butler, and Witt's (2000) findings that communicative proficiency takes 3-5 years to develop and academic proficiency takes 4-7 years; she believes it could be shorter. Further, she critiques the instruments of measurement – ELA proficiency tests – as inherently biased against immigrants and students of lower socioeconomic status (SES); therefore, their low scores are not necessarily indicative of their lag in reaching English proficiency. Therefore, and according to critics like Rossell, since the design and methods of these studies are inadequate in determining how long ELLs should remain in ESL and bilingual programs, they produce unwarranted conclusions that are influencing policy. Rossell argues that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that a supported language learning placement (ESL or bilingual) might be any better than a mainstream English placement after an initial period (of about a year) because if ELLs remained in ESL and/or bilingual classes: 1) the pace would be slower than necessary, and 2) students would lack English speaking peers and role models. Goldenberg (2013) concurs with the point that there is insufficient data on length of time in home language instruction, citing that the most rigorous studies have had short durations (1-3 years), and these studies do not show a correlation between the amount of time spent in the program and achievement.

There is also a sociopolitical dimension to this controversy, with proponents of sustained ESL and bilingual programming denouncing critics for fearing immigration and fragmentation in American society. They articulate the fear by posing this rhetorical question: *If immigrants continue to speak in languages from the countries of their origins, and if bilingual education becomes institutionalized, what does that mean for American society?* Some scholars argue that such fears encourage a less-than-enthusiastic embrace of ESL and bilingual programming in

schools, increasingly prevalent amid our nation's more overt anti-immigration attitudes in recent years (Cummins, 2000; Short et al., 2018). These attitudes can translate into school budgets limiting funding for ELL programs and teacher professional development for instructing ELLs. Proponents of sustained ESL and bilingual education argue that supporting students in terms of their status, linguistic resources, and diverse identities and cultures is necessary for a program to be successful. Incorporating ELLs' primary languages into instruction is the best way to accomplish such support (Cummins, 2000).

Over the years, the combined mandates of NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015), along with the demands of the CCSS (2010), have coalesced to not only raise expectations of ELLs to meet standards but also to push schools and districts to meet the needs of ELLs (August, Staehr Fenner, & Snyder, 2014; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007; NYSED, 2014). According to a recent report issued by Stanford University's School of Education, "U.S. schools are currently considering the educational needs of ELLs like never before" (Castellón et al., 2015, p. 2). New York State, one of the first to adopt CCSS, is experiencing growing pains associated with implementing them (Kenmore & Materazzo, 2017); consequently, New York is now one of the first states to alter the standards, renaming them the Next Generation Learning Standards, that include increased emphasis on ELLs. According to their Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) – the office responsible for guidance, technical assistance, and funding to support ELLs in schools statewide – "it is not permissible to assume that unsupported immersion of ELLs into an English-speaking environment will enable them to succeed academically" (NYSED, 2014, p. 1). This intensified focus on ELLs' success has placed new pressure on districts, teachers, and ELLs themselves.

Theoretical Perspectives on Language Learning

A major focus in the field of language learning has to do with the relationship between language and cognition and the role social aspects play in language learning. One important theorist, Jim Cummins (1984; 2005), proposes that there is a need for a theoretical framework relating language learning to academic achievement to address some of the aforementioned confusion and controversy in assessing language proficiency in ESL and bilingual programs. Beyond diagnosing students' English proficiency levels for the purposes of entry into and exit from bilingual or ESL programs, the purpose of assessing ELLs' language proficiency is to scaffold the academic content students are learning to their language proficiency level to make it accessible to them. Cummins's theory therefore addresses the question: "When does a new language learner "have sufficient English proficiency (e.g., a threshold level) to participate effectively in an all-English classroom?" (1984, p. 2). Widely regarded as foundational to an understanding of language proficiency in ELL education, Cummins (1980) established the distinction between two aspects of language proficiency, "basic interpersonal communication skills" (BICS) and "cognitive-academic language proficiency" (CALP). (These are theoretical concepts related to the social and academic competencies discussed in the prior section.) BICS refers to a student's conversational fluency (e.g., oral fluency, sociolinguistic competence), which usually develops relatively quickly, yet it still takes ELLs four to seven years to catch up to their fluent English- speaking peers (Collier, 1987; Cook, Boals, & Lundberg, 2011; Klesmer, 1994). BICS tends to develop in context-embedded, face-to-face environments where a "shared

reality" provides frames of reference and feedback to the language learner. Depending on the student's previous educational attainment, CALP typically takes longer to develop and involves cognitively demanding tasks that require literacy practices, such as writing a persuasive or argumentative essay. CALP tends to rely on linguistic clues, rather than interpersonal communication (as BICS does). Typically, when ELLs show competence in context-embedded school tasks to develop their BICS and CALP, they often are then moved into context-reduced, cognitively demanding academic scenarios that require them to rely on their CALP, which can hinder their success. For the purposes of school-based best practices, the BICS/CALP distinction implies that standardized assessments (which are largely used to monitor yearly progress for ELLs) should involve "cognitively-demanding, context-embedded measures which are fair to the variety of L1 [home language] and L2 [target language] spoken by the child" (Cummins, 1984, p. 16). For ESL and bilingual program exit purposes, "it is recommended that cognitively-demanding, context-reduced measures be used" (p. 16) that are similar to the environments ELLs are likely to encounter in general education classes.

Using the BICS/CALP distinction, Cummins (1979; 2005) developed the "interdependence hypothesis," often referred to as the "dual iceberg" metaphor (Fig. 2), which illustrates that "although the surface aspects (e.g., pronunciation, fluency) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages" (Cummins, 2005, p. 3), depending on students' previous educational experiences. The underlying proficiency that works to support learning in multiple languages has also been referred to as "common underlying proficiency" (CUP). Accordingly, instruction in either a child's home or new language can develop their CUP to support proficiency in *both* languages, as long as the learner has the appropriate lexis in L1 to name a given new concept. Thus, learning in multiple languages is understood as beneficial, without adverse effects on the development of English literacies because regardless of the language in which academic English is learned, understanding crosses both languages (Corson, 1997) – a theoretical position that supports sustained ESL and bilingual programming.
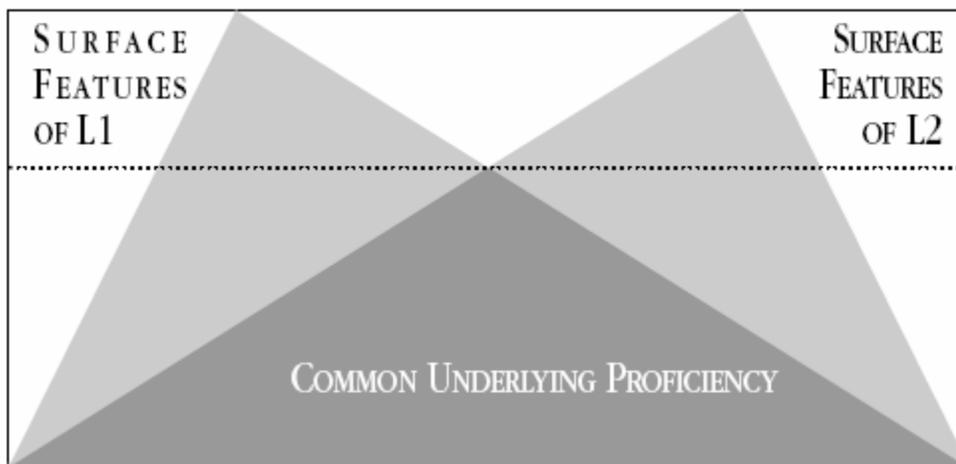

Figure 1. The Dual-Iceberg Representation of Bilingual Proficiency

The interdependence model also supports the claim that additive bilingualism (or adding a new language while continuing to develop in one's home language) has cognitive benefits for academic achievement (Lasagabaster, 1998; Mohanty, 1994). Accordingly, multilingualism is seen as a resource to ELLs, rather than a detriment to their learning.

Another oft-cited theory, particularly in the literature focused on preparing mainstream teachers to teach ELLs (Bunch, 2013; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Myles & Mitchell, 2014) is Krashen's (2003)[1] five principles of language acquisition, based on five hypotheses that dovetail with Cummins's theories to operationalize new language learning in classrooms. The hypotheses include: 1) Acquisition-Learning; 2) Natural Order; 3) Monitor; 4) Input/Comprehension; and 5) Affective Filter. Among this set of principles, practice literature often emphasizes #4 (Input/Comprehension) – that context helps with making input comprehensible to learners without relying exclusively on language (e.g., modeling, pictures, body movements, demonstrations, etc.) – and #5 (Affective Filter) – that emotional factor, such as anxiety or stress/post-traumatic stress disorder, serve as barriers to language acquisition and learning. Krashen's five hypotheses inform language learning at the instructional level, as shown in the last section of this brief.

Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) concur with other researchers that it takes ELLs five to seven years to develop oral and academic language proficiency to be on par with native English-speaking peers, particularly with regard to the contextual factors. In other words, Krashen's hypothesis that language learning happens when learners receive comprehensible input facilitated in low affective filter/stress-reduced environments, and Cummins's claim that the more cognitively demanding language skills (CALPs) develop gradually alongside the quicker development of BICS, all rely on context as a crucial element influencing language learning. Put another way, ELLs need social language practice to develop academic language and concepts (Echevarria & Voigt, 2010; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007). The theories reviewed in this section contribute to the frameworks of the studies reviewed in the following section.

Key Findings on ELL Learning

Most of the findings to follow address, either directly or indirectly, the question of whether or not best practices for teaching ELLs is good practice for *all* students. However, the pool of research is relatively small. A comprehensive review of studies for effective instruction for ELLs (Goldenberg, 2013) attributes a recent proliferation of publishing activity in professional publications as a reaction to two major research reviews published in the same year (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian 2006) that arrived at the same conclusion, that there is "a dearth of empirical research on instructional strategies or approaches to teaching content" (Genesee et al., p. 190) for ELLs. Therefore, there remains an absence of empirical research on ELLs, problematic because without such findings, policy decisions about are susceptible to drawing on anecdote, leaving teachers an inadequate knowledge base for developing their practices (Gil & Bardack, 2010; Goldenberg, 2013). Based on available

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[1] See Krashen's (2003) *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*, Chapter 1 for detailed explanations and applications of each of the five hypotheses.

research, the following two sections organize findings by 1) general, comprehensive program designs for ELLs and 2) finer-grained instructional practices for ELLs.

Programmatic Design Elements

While theorists, researchers, and policy makers continually claim that good teaching for ELLs is good for all students, several argue that this idiom does not work in reverse. In other words, "just good teaching" (JGT) for general population students, is in fact, *not* enough for ELLs, because unfortunately JGT often fails to account for linguistic and cultural diversity (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Therefore, the program models reviewed in this section all share a value on culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as necessary to promote effective English language learning (Adams & Jones, 2006). Such understandings help teachers to ascertain what cultural barriers or disconnects may be interfering with ELLs' content learning and then to address those differences intentionally. Therefore, cultural diversity training for mainstream teachers must entail "specific rather than generic understandings of cultural similarities and differences" (de Jong & Harper, 2005, p.111). Strategic hiring of staff who were former English language learners themselves with their own multicultural histories, as well as recruiting those who are dually certified in ESL and general education/or a subject area have been found to be particularly effective in the design of schools that have been successful in ELLs' achievement and graduation rates. Once recruited, continued professional development for these teachers is also necessary (Castellón et al., 2015; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). Beyond the classroom, properly prepared teachers of ELLs can act as "cultural brokers" in school communities, working to advocate for their myriad cultural, academic, and linguistic needs (Honingsfiled & Dove, 2012).

Program Models

The field of bilingual and ELL education offers numerous professional publications and policy reports covering as many programs for ELLs; the following emerged most prominently in both research and practice publications.

ESL. The most common, encompassing model for educating ELLs in our nation's schools falls under the ESL umbrella – all of the other models discussed in this section incorporate ESL as a component. Generally, ESL classes are taught in English by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), experts in new language learning, who provide ELLs support by serving as their primary instructors in ESL classrooms and as co-teachers in mainstream settings. Often, much of the responsibility for ELLs learning language and content falls upon ESL teachers, regardless of how much time they have with each ELL (Dormer, 2016). The primary goal of general ESL programs is English proficiency, with a focus on academic English. Students typically stay in ESL programs for 1-5 years (Short et al., 2017). Such English-only programs have been found to be marginally effective for ELLs' achievement (Collier & Thomas, 2002).

Sheltered English immersion. Also known as *content-based ESL,* sheltered English immersion programs are set in self-contained classrooms and are focused on academic English proficiency (Zacarian, 2011). They are designed for students to learn English as they learn academic content, and English is the language of instruction, with some use of primary language

for support. Students typically stay in sheltered English immersion programs for 1-3 years (Short, et al., 2018). Since the 1980's, teachers have used sheltered instruction to teach grade level content in English to ELLs by using clear and direct language, scaffolds and lesson adaptations (discussed in subsequent section, Finer-Grained Instructional Elements). Sheltered programming can be the "ideal solution" for schools that have large numbers of ELLs who speak a variety of languages, but not enough who speak one language, which would warrant bilingual programming (Dormer, 2016, p. 104; Zacarian, 2011), as they allow for some tailoring toward students' linguistic, cultural, and academic needs. A popular resource for sheltered English immersion programs is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004), which identifies 30 elements organized into eight general categories. Although SIOP's effectiveness has been questioned, especially as it relates to helping students succeed with learning advanced content (Goldenberg, 2013), its creators cite findings of increased academic achievement using SIOP (Echevarria & Vogt, 2010).

Newcomer programs or programs for ELLs with limited schooling. Designed to meet the specific needs of ELLs who are newly immigrated students with limited or no formal schooling (also known as SIFE), newcomer programs address beginning English language learning, some content instruction, and work to strengthen primary language skills, as well as acculturate students during a limited period of transition. They are most common in secondary educational settings. Described as "specialized academic environments" (Short & Boyson, 2012, p. 1), newcomer programs are separate from a school's general education classrooms and are typically part of a district's more encompassing ESL or bilingual program. Not all districts offer them. Similar to sheltered English immersion programs, newcomer programs require resources that are warranted by relatively high numbers of newcomers. Successful newcomer programs have been found to feature elements that are also common to more successful ELL programs generally (Short & Boyson, 2012), such as: flexible scheduling that allows for teacher collaboration, extended days, and weekend instruction (Castellón et al., 2015; Honingsfield & Dove, 2012; Howard et al., 2007); careful staffing and professional development (Howard et al., 2007; Castellón et al., 2015); pathways to general education courses; and strong, sometimes strategic, connections with families, communities, and social services (Castellón et al., 2015; Howard et al, 2007). Effective instruction in these programs provide: materials focused on basic literacy learning and reading interventions for adolescents, an awareness of and efforts to fill the gaps in ELLs' educational backgrounds, and extended instructional as well as support time after school, on weekends, and in the summer (Short & Boyson, 2012).

Bilingual programs. Primary language can be used to promote academic development. This can be a controversial stance in the field of ELL education. Known as a "politically charged" (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; Goldenberg, 2013) debate, the controversy features an assimilationist stance (prioritizing English language speaking over other languages) on one side and cultural pluralism (valuing students' primary languages as much as their learning of English) on the other (Lucas & Katz, 1994, p. 9). There are two main categories of bilingual programs used to teach ELLs: 1) *transitional bilingual programs* that promote the use of a student's primary language to learn English and English academic content and 2) *two-way bilingual immersion programs* (also called dual language) that promote bilingualism or biliteracy among all students who participate.

Proponents of transitional bilingual education argue that using home language to teach English simultaneously strengthens home language and helps facilitate learning English content, an instructional strategy that relies on Cummins's (1979; 2005) CUP theory. Critics say prolonged placement in transitional bilingual programming slows down English proficiency as well as ELLs' entrance into mainstream academic courses. An additional and equally important point that sometimes gets sidelined in this "great bilingual debate" (Goldenberg, 2013) is the inherent value of being literate in two languages – the goal of two-way bilingual immersion programs. This idea, that bilingual education promotes proficiency in a language other than English, "should be seen as a value in itself" (Goldenberg, 2013, p. 9). Optimally, two-way immersion models comprise a 50/50 balance of ELLs and fluent English speakers (Zacarian, 2011). Research documents that not only ELLs but also their English-speaking peers make significant academic gains in dual language programs (Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Additional benefits to bilingual education of ELLs include the social and emotional support ELLs reap from contexts that affirm their identities and cultural histories, and facilitate relationship building with peers and teachers (Auerbach, 1993; Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005; Lucas & Katz, 1994). And, in fact, schools found to be most successful in ELL achievement, graduation rates, and college placement are those that place multiculturalism and bilingualism at the heart of their ELL programs and school cultures (Collier & Thomas, 2002; Castellón et al., 2015; Howard et al., 2007). Moreover, bilingual programming raises the status of languages other than English, promoting greater social equality (Garcia, 2011), again reflecting a pluralist perspective on education.

Given the research-documented success of bilingual programming, coupled with the increasing demands posed by the CCSS, state education departments are beginning to respond. As an example, New York State has recently enacted legislation and related policy that unequivocally promotes bilingual programming in schools as best practice in educating ELLs. Rooted in research (Cummins, 2000; Krashen & McField, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006), the New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative (NYSBCCI) (2014) has issued a revised set of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELLs, known as "New Language Arts Progressions" (for the learning of English and all world languages) and "Home Language Arts Progressions" (for the learning of Language Arts content in students' home languages), designed to support ELLs' biliteracy as an asset. In 2014, New York issued the aforementioned *Blueprint for ELLs Success*, which reinforces the Department of Education's position of support for biliteracy education through the articulation of eight principles. Part of the fourth principle charges that "districts and schools recognize that bilingualism and biliteracy are assets," and the seventh principle instructs districts and communities to leverage ELLs' primary languages, cultures, and prior knowledge" (p. 3) in teaching them (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Likewise, in a recent report out of Stanford University's School of Education that studied six schools in New York City and Boston, chosen for their outstanding success in ELL achievement, graduation rates, and college placement, identifies "leveraging students' knowledge and language assets as integral to developing their academic and English learning" (Castellón et al., 2015, p. x; Cummins, 1979; 2005) as a key design element common to all six schools.

Finer-Grained Instructional Elements
Connecting the multifaceted challenge of educating ELLs (introduced at the beginning of this brief) to instructional practices brings forth the discussion of solutions to classrooms. As LeSeaux and Galloway (2017) articulate: "When large numbers of students are struggling, the instructional core should be adjusted as the primary line of defense and response" (p. 2). This section, based on available research, is intended as a resource to teachers of ELLs.

As mentioned previously, instructional practices (e.g., clear goals & objectives, well-established classroom routines and behavior norms, effective modeling of literacies, strategies, and procedures) that are effective for the general student population are likely to also be effective with ELLs (NYSED, 2014; August et al., 2014; Goldenberg, 2013). For example, structured and explicit writing instruction helps improve writing quality and make writing understandable to audiences (Gómez, Parker, Lara-Alecio, & Gómez, 1996; Sengupta, 2000). As is also true for the general student population, ELLs' learning progress depends on high engagement during instructional time (Echevarria & Voigt, 2010).

However, while effective practices for the ELL population are applicable to the general student population, ELLs also require teacher specific knowledge, skills, and especially cultural dispositions to support ELLs (de Jong & Harper, 2005). These additional supports are not only research-documented as effective, but also mandated by policy, such as the Lau remedies and the CCSS (Goldenberg, 2013). For example, teachers need to know that when ELLs have "relatively high English literacies" (p. x), their reading comprehension increases, but when their literacies are not high enough, instruction can be less effective or even counterproductive (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2007).

Additionally, an awareness of the social and emotional factors at play in ELL learning must be at the forefront of instruction. In their effort to "reconcile[e] conflicting expectations between home and school" (Xu & Drame, 2008, p. 309) that often represent significant cultural differences, ELLs are confronting unique challenges that raise their affective filters, making learning more difficult (Krashen, 2003) and requiring teachers who understand their ELLs' cultural backgrounds, to specifically address them.

The next five subsections provide brief syntheses of research on effective features of instruction for ELLs. They are drawn primarily from research studies (August & Shanahan, 2008; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Echevarria & Voigt, 2010; Goldenberg, 2013; Howard et al., 2007; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010) or program evaluations (Castellón et al., 2015) of successful ELL instruction and are organized by the following categories: comprehensible language input, classroom learning structures, social supports, assessment, and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For more detailed descriptions of these strategies, a resource guide is provided at the end of this brief.

Comprehensible language input. The following instructional strategies contribute to a classroom environment that enhances the use of comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003) and have been found to foster engagement and facilitate access to the English language:
- Slower, deliberate, and repetitive speech

- Contextualized language and gestures
- Scaffolds for meaning making
  - Visual aids (pictures, charts, graphs, semantic mapping, and multimedia)
  - Modeling
  - Wide range of presentation strategies
- Explicit and contextualized vocabulary instruction (including academic vocabulary)

Classroom learning structures. Classrooms that feature cooperative learning activities and meaningful opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning, rather than the traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) that often limits learning to recalling the facts, are particularly effective for ELLs.

Social supports. ELLs benefit from class discussions and conversations with each other and with their English-speaking peers, but in a detailed, sequenced way. Interacting with others develops their oral language competencies, which then impacts other aspects of their achievement, like grades, test scores, and literacy learning. But for ELLs, these conversations require structures focused on meaning making, such as sentence frames that guide the speaking and writing of English.

Assessment. Another element of successful ELL instruction is ongoing, intentional assessment. From entry through graduation, assessment informs instruction, course offerings, and organizational structures. Regular comprehension and confirmation of understandings mark important aspects of formative assessment for ELLs. Effective assessment features student ownership of learning and growth, as they engage in alternative assessments, like portfolio presentations, and collaborative work, as well as participate in regular revision based on feedback, which, in particular, is emphasized among best practices in ELL assessment strategies.

Culturally relevant pedagogy. As mentioned earlier and repeatedly throughout this brief, welcoming and valuing diverse cultures, languages, and traditions that are not connected to mainstream English, underlie all research, theory, and programs that rely on best practices for ELLs and their positive outcomes. All of the above instructional strategies are important, essential even; however, without teacher dispositions toward a culturally diverse environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995), these strategies and techniques will not work. A particularly effective, well-documented way of adopting these dispositions and putting them into action is by building upon ELLs' backgrounds and prior experiences to facilitate their learning (Cummins, 1979; 2005; González & Moll, 2002), providing important information that teachers can use to incorporate content that is familiar and accessible to them.

Conclusions

The situation for ELLs and those charged with educating them remains unclear. While policy and research communities have taken notice of the problem and the growing presence of ELLs in the U.S. education system, the field is marked by controversy, cultural tensions, and ever-changing mandates. As the charge to educate ELLs intensifies, research and theory are pointing to programs that focus on dual language support for a sustained period of time in order to expect

English language learning and related academic success for ELLs. Yet, human and material resources are often unavailable for dual language programming, especially for languages that are not represented by a critical mass of students in the school. Programs that promote dual language proficiency or bilingualism appear to offer the most promise, not only for academic achievement, but for social-emotional support and cultural affirmation of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The importance of culturally relevant instruction and an acknowledgment of the assets ELLs bring to U.S. classrooms underlie all academic success they may achieve. Further, such an approach promotes pluralism and linguistic diversity, not only in school, but also in the wider society in which ELLs and native English speakers must continue to live and work together.

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RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ELL PRACTITIONERS

RESEARCH:

Unlocking the Research on English Learners: What We Know – and Don't Yet Know – about Effective Instruction (Goldenberg, 2013). With teachers in mind, this article reviews relevant, recent research on educating ELLs, explains the history of research and lack thereof in this field, and outlines findings focused on instruction in classrooms.

Developing Reading and Writing in Second-Language Learners: Lessons Learned from the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2008). This edited book provides a briefer and more accessible summary of the long report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, entitled *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners* and published in 2006. The report identified, assessed, and synthesized research on the education of ELLs' literacy attainment. This volume reviews the state of knowledge on the development of literacy in ELLs across five domains: the development of literacy in ELLs, cross-linguistic relationships, sociocultural contexts & literacy development, instruction & professional development, and student assessment.

Schools to Learn From: How Six High Schools Graduate English Language Learners College and Career Ready (2015). From Stanford University's Graduate School of Education, this paper documents the values and design elements of public high schools that have demonstrated academic success for ELLs, based on graduation and college-going outcomes. The paper integrates individual case studies of each school and uses the Common Core State Standards as a guiding document.

PRACTIONER GUIDES:

Preparing Mainstream Teachers for English Language Learners: Is Being a Good Teacher Good Enough? (de Jong & Harper, 2005). This article proposes a framework that identifies areas of expertise necessary for mainstream teachers to be prepared to teach ELLs who are in their classrooms. This resource would be particularly helpful for teacher preparation programs and professional development.

Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model, 5th Edition (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2016). This book introduces and explains the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) Model, a framework for practitioners implementing sheltered instruction.

Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education, 2nd Edition. (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2007). This report, published by the Center for Applied Linguistics, was developed as a tool to help dual language programs with planning and ongoing implementation. The principles included were developed by a national panel of dual language researches and practitioners and are supported by research. The principles are guided by the following seven strands: assessment

& accountability, curriculum, instruction, staff quality & professional development, program structure, family & community, and support & resources.

GO TO Strategies. Funded by a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the GO TO strategies is a set of 78 scaffolding options for practitioners (K-12 general education and content-area teachers with ELLs in their classrooms, ELL teachers, special education teachers, principals, and other supervisors overseeing the instruction of diverse groups of students). The strategies are organized by five principles of instruction for ELLs.

WEBSITES:

ColorinColorado.org. This is a bilingual website for educators and families of ELLs. It includes general resources; resources for schools, teachers, and families; videos; an online library; and book recommendations for a variety of stakeholders, including children.

SupportEd. This website provides educators and other stakeholders in ELL education the skills and resources that support ELLs' success both inside and outside the classroom. It includes professional development, support services, and a repository of resources on searchable topics.

ell.stanford.edu. This website, out of Stanford University, provides resources particular to understanding the role language plays in the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards, with a focus on improving education for all students, especially ELLs as it pertains to content areas. It includes teaching resources (e.g., units and lesson plans); professional development; research briefs; and information about policy, news, and events.

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) – This center promotes language learning and cultural understanding by providing research, resources, and policy analysis. Guided by a set of core values, CAL demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting access, equity, and mutual understanding for linguistically and culturally diverse people around the world. Resources include: language assessments, instructional materials, professional development, and online courses.