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Using Language Acquisition Descriptors To Teach and Assess
English Learners In Mainstream Classrooms

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Abstract:

In the United States, English learners (ELs) are the fastest growing population of students enrolled in public schools. Each year approximately five million public school ELs attempt to master conversational and academic English. California alone has 1.6 million ELs attending public schools (CDE, 2011, Hakuta, Haertel et al, 2007). If an EL speaks English with difficulty, 82 percent will not graduate from high school (Echevarria, and Short, 2010).

The achievement gap between Caucasian students and those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups continues to widen primarily because many teachers are under prepared to make English content comprehensible or to teach content-area literacy to a population of ELs (Echavarria and Short, 2010).

Annually, ELs participate in standardized assessments to measure, (a) how much they know, (b) how much progress they've made in acquiring academic English and (c) areas where they need additional support (Plank, 2011).

This paper will focus on how mainstream classroom teachers can identify what ELs bring to the classroom, what ELs can do in the classroom and what classroom teachers should know and be able to do to provide ELs with, (a) systematic language development, (b) academic literacy skills, (c) successful experiences in mainstream classes, (d) the ability to comprehend content standards and (d) pass standardized assessments as they move toward full fluency in English.

Key Words: Language Acquisition, English Learners, California English Language Development Test, English Language Development Standards, English Language Proficiency, Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English, Sheltered instruction, Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol,