1 U.S. Schools Failing ELs

A Call for Change

THE URGENCY FOR CHANGE

An array of reports issued by nationwide committees of education and interdisciplinary experts point to the highest rate of academic failure experienced this decade for upper elementary, middle, and high school English Learners (ELs; Calderón, 2007; Tienda, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2007, 2008). Contrary to popular belief, adolescent ELs are not recent newcomers; they have been in U.S. schools since kindergarten! What is wrong with this picture? What has happened or has not happened in our elementary schools that permits this level of failure? Why are secondary school administrators folding their arms and not providing appropriate immediate interventions?

Recent statistical trends in U.S. secondary schools indicate that 80% to 90% of ELs in middle and high school are actually born in the United States. These Long-Term ELs (LT-ELs) are second- or third-generation immigrants. They have attended U. S. schools all their lives, but they have not achieved either high levels of academic English language proficiency or content knowledge to succeed in the all-English mainstream program (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

To complicate matters, the number of ELs in U.S. schools continues to skyrocket. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA, 2008), the percentage of mostly Latino ELs in U.S. public schools rose almost 61% between 1995 and 2005, although overall, the total student population growth was 2.6%. There was triple digit growth in 23 states that same time period; 11 of those states saw increases

of more than 200%. The Migration Policy Institute (2010) listed other new states such as South Carolina that experienced huge growths in 2007 and 2008. After systematic analysis of demographic trends, Tienda (2007) projects that Latinos will continue to have the highest birthrates until 2030, when they will be the majority in most states and most schools.

The dramatic increase in the EL population caught many states by surprise, particularly those in the Southeast and the Midwest. According to NCELA (2008), Nebraska served a fairly homogeneous White student population until recently. But due in large part to a growing meatpacking industry that employs many Latino workers, the number of ELs grew from approximately 4,000 to more than 16,000 in a 10-year period. ELs now constitute almost 6% of the state's student population. North Carolina has also experienced a dramatic growth of ELs, from approximately 15,000 in 1995 to more than 70,000 in 2005. This growth was due to an increased demand for farm workers, as the state's main agricultural product shifted from tobacco to other crops.

Although states may have been surprised, schools and districts have been overwhelmed by the increases in their EL populations. Not all employ English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, much less bilingual teachers. In most places, ELs have been placed in mainstream classrooms with teachers who may not be prepared to communicate with and teach ELs. The unexpected and growing numbers of ELs means that these students are no longer only the responsibility of ESL or bilingual teachers. Entire school faculties must serve the ELs, overwhelming mainstream staff.

The Urgency for Older ELs

Older ELs face unique challenges in the nation's schools because of the greater cognitive and linguistic demands of middle and high school. Secondary school ELs must be able to do the following: (a) comprehend, speak, read, and write more advanced course content; and (b) demonstrate deep comprehension on tests that demand advanced English skills. Most ELs have neither the time to catch up to their English-dominant peers, nor been taught the skills necessary to compete academically.

Furthermore, most LT-ELs have not developed high levels of literacy in either their first language or in English. This may be due to the lack of quality and consistent instructional programs that do not allow them to develop academic vocabulary, subject matter concepts, and language proficiency. They need a great deal of help to improve their word knowledge, reading, and writing skills. When the instructional program does not address these needs, students have a very slim chance of closing the achievement gap, promoting to the next grade level, or completing

high school requirements. ELs who are new arrivals to this country may not have had sufficient schooling in their countries. Thereby, teachers face added challenges and also need to be prepared to teach this type of student.

If students do not receive high quality instruction and intervention in the elementary grades, early reading problems often develop into serious reading difficulties (Stanovich, 1986). Remediation of reading difficulties for older students is possible in secondary schools, but it is more difficult than preventing the problems through early intervention (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998; Slavin, 1998; Slavin & Madden, 2001).

This chapter highlights a **theory of action based on empirical evidence** that can be used as a foundation for planning instructional programs and professional development that address the needs of these students. The theory of action is founded on empirical studies of what teachers and educators need to know and on the processes that help transfer knowledge into the teachers' instructional repertoire and thus impact student achievement.

THE ROAD WE'VE TRAVELED ATTEMPTING TO TEACH ELS

We have spent over 40 years attempting to help ELs become bilingual, biliterate, brilliant, and bicultural. In the late 1960s and 1970s, school districts did not have much research on which to build transitional bilingual, dual language, two-way bilingual, or ESL programs. Nevertheless, the need and commitment were there and staff in public schools started taking implementation risks.

In the 1960s and 1970s, elementary schools hired bilingual teachers whose bilingual skills and instructional methods spanned the spectrum from high to low. Additionally, there were too few bilingual teachers to fill the need or vacancies. Teachers were self-taught because universities neither had the preparation programs nor issued bilingual certifications. Teachers had to go to Mexico or Spain or Puerto Rico to buy primary language materials because U.S. publishers did not think it was a good investment to develop and publish them. Yet, educators pushed forward inventing curriculum, instructional strategies, and continua of scope and sequence of language skills development. Thus, programs were developed at the grassroots. Federal funding became available for schools or district personnel who wrote proposals and applied. As long as the funding lasted, so did the programs. Most of the funding went to elementary programs.

Many middle and high schools hired one or two ESL teachers and the curriculum materials were slim pickings. ESL teacher background and methodologies ranged from grammar-based to audio-lingual with many variations of methods in-between. The emphasis was oral language development to help bring ELs up to a conversational level. Since most of the federal funds were devoted to elementary schools, the science of language, literacy, and content as an integral methodology remained untouched. The notion that, in middle and high schools, teachers of math, science, social studies, and language arts needed to embed language and literacy into content was out of the question.

In those early years, professional development approaches were also being invented. State and national associations for second language acquisition and bilingual education were formed and information began to be shared through these grassroots organizations. Other entities such as the Multidistrict Trainer of Trainers Institutes (MTTI), which began in Riverside/San Bernardino, California, and later spread throughout California, began to empirically measure the transfer of training into classroom practices, and new ways of focusing on student outcomes began to emerge (Calderón, 1984, 2008a; Marsh & Calderón, 1989). The MTTI educators also began implementing "coaching of teachers" and "training of literacy coaches" before it became popular. Hence, the notions and practice of comprehensive professional development and coaching were propelled by professionals in the field of ELs far ahead of many others in the early 1980s.

Program evaluation was in its infancy, student assessments to measure growth were nonexistent for ELs, and accountability measures such as those required by No Child Left Behind legislation were nonexistent. However, for the most part, the research community was not focusing on EL issues in those days. A few rigorous controlled studies began to emerge, but most were descriptive in nature. When the time for "proof" came of age in the 2000s, there wasn't much "quantitative" or "scientific" research to back up approaches. Even the most quoted research, regarding which program was more effective for ELs, was a compilation of after-the-fact results devoid of random student assignments, experimental control groups, or pretesting and posttesting. Thus, for many years, the implementation of instructional strategies and program designs were based on what teachers had started 40 years earlier, what was learned at a conference or from a workshop presenter, from the resources available at the schools, and from what schools wanted to adapt (Calderón, 2008a).

CHANGING NOW

After all these decades of "getting by," the schools are confronted with a huge achievement gap between White and Latino students and other

minority students. This gap widens as students get older. Adolescent Latino and other minority students have high dropout rates, and there are many high schools with such persistent low rates to be labeled by some as "dropout factories" (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Drastic reform is being recommended for these high schools. But, as in the 60s and 70s, reform efforts are less than successful. They are not constructed on researched-based practices, and are often layered with political interests instead of educational goals.

The greatest shift in this country's aims derives from the current trend of globalization and the necessity to compete in a "flattened" world within a progressively more integrated world economic system (Friedman, 2005). No longer does the United States remain unchallenged as the greatest economic power. The 21st century has already witnessed a shift in the global marketplace with the United States surrendering its advantage over economic rivals whose levels of educational attainment are surging beyond that of American citizens. Proponents of 21st-century skills assert that "creating an aligned 21st century public education system that prepares students, workers, and citizens to triumph in the global skills race is the central economic competitiveness issue for the next decade" (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008, p. 3) and will require students who can integrate basic skills with content knowledge as well as think independently, solve problems, and make decisions (Johnson, 2009; Rotherham & Willingham, 2009; Silva, 2009).

To meet these needs, policymakers are implementing reform initiatives, and schools are broadening their goals to strengthen academic expectations while encompassing rigorous standards and real-world, problem-solving skills. One indicator of the success of these endeavors is the results of standardized assessments of student performance outcomes.

The United States has participated in international assessments since the 1960s; yet, American students have never fared well in competition (Hanushek, 2004; Koretz, 2009). The most commonly reviewed literacy assessments are the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Program for International Student Achievement (PISA). Together, these assessments offer a comprehensive understanding of the American education system and its ability to create a competitive workforce for the 21st century.

In analyzing primary school literacy outcomes, PIRLS provides an international comparative study of fourth-grade students' reading literacy. In 2001, the United States placed 12th out of 35 participating education systems, scoring below Lithuania and Hungary (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2003). PIRLS 2006 results indicate that there was no appreciable change since the previous testing in 2001 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007, 2009).

PISA assesses academic achievement at the high school level with testing conducted with 15-year olds in reading, math, and science literacy. Sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it was first implemented in 2000. In this context of competing national education systems, the United States placed 15th[h] out of 31 participating countries and last among English-speaking countries in the content area of reading (U. S. Department of Education, 2001). By the 2003 testing cycle, the United States had dropped to 18th out of 41 participating countries (OECD, 2003). In 2006, no reading literacy results were reported due to a printing error in the test booklets (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Thus, it's not just ELs whose learning needs must be addressed by our schools. Our attempt with this book is to help schools implement the type of systematic instruction that will help more students succeed—a lot more students!

ADDRESSING THE GAP AND HELPING MORE ELS GRADUATE

Our work with schools also leads us to believe that prevention of LT-ELs and older struggling readers starts at kindergarten. Like all students, ELs need to be able to read something, talk to each other about it, and write about it (Schmoker, 2006). Furthermore, schools need to deliver a content-rich curriculum for all students. Now that more ELs are entering preschool, many believe that we ought to start there.

We cannot continue to do the same things we have been doing. We cannot continue to promote the same programs, curricula, instructional approaches, and evaluation methods. For effective and efficient transformation, we need to become bold and change what needs to be changed from preschool to high school. We need to take a profound look at what we have and then systematically set about changing what needs to change. We need to begin with a theory of change and with the empirical research that supports our theories. Upon these we then develop a plan of action for our schools. Nonetheless, the plan needs to be developed simultaneously by the central district offices, the state department policies and practices, the universities' teacher preparation approaches, the research/evaluation perspectives, and the U. S. Department of Education rules and regulations. We invite everyone to participate in the concerted effort.

A THEORY OF CHANGE BASED ON CURRENT RESEARCH

Three recent seminal reviews of the literature on EL education helped to dispel some long-held myths and brought to light solid research. One review

was conducted by the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (NLP; August & Shanahan, 2006), another by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE; Genesse, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006), both published in 2006, and one by the Carnegie Panel on Adolescent EL Literacy, published in 2007 (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). The 18 researchers working on the NLP report spent three years identifying studies from 1980 to 2002 that met strict criteria for inclusion in the final report. Studies had to analyze data from experiments or quasi-experiments and include a control or comparison group or random assignments. Out of an original 1,800 publications/studies reviewed, less than 300 met the criteria. From these, CREDE researchers were more inclusive and had their own criteria that enabled them to include more qualitative studies (Genesse et al., 2006). The Carnegie Panel consisted of researchers and practitioners working with adolescent ELs and focused on a few projects and practices that seemed promising (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

Major Findings From the NLP

- Instruction that provides substantial coverage of the key components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension) has clear benefits for language-minority students; however, development of oral proficiency in English is critical along with explicit reading instruction.
- Oral proficiency and literacy in the first language can be used to facilitate literacy development in English.
- Individual differences contribute significantly to English literacy development. Reading difficulties may be more a function of individual differences than of language-minority status.
- Similar proportions of language-minority students and monolingual English speakers are classified as poor readers. Studies revealed that some language-minority students classified as learning disabled can achieve grade-level norms.
- Most assessments do a poor job of gauging individual strengths and weaknesses.
- There is surprisingly little evidence of sociocultural variables on literacy achievement or development. Immigration status, family background, and so forth, do not influence as much as does quality instruction.
- Regardless of the program type (e.g., ESL, transitional bilingual, dual language), what matters most is quality of instruction.

For the complete executive summary, see the Center for Applied Linguistics (http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/nlpreports/Executive_Summary.pdf). A newer publication entitled, *Developing Reading and*

Writing in Second-Language Learners, extends into implications from the review (see http://www.cal.org).

The CREDE reviews and publications (www.cal.org/crede/pubs/research/rr6.pdf) offer promising practices, but as Goldenberg (2008) admits, the CREDE review did not find any studies that addressed how or even whether progress in the acquisition of English can be accelerated and through what programs. He further asserts that the NLP did not even address this issue (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 12). Thus, the verdict is still out, but we do know what hasn't worked and the basic features that we can use for program development.

The publication, *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners—A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York,* emerged from the Carnegie Panel on Adolescent EL Literacy (Short and Fitzsimmons, 2007; http://www.adlit.org). The 13 panelists provided the following recommendations for practitioners:

- Integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills into instruction from the start.
- Teach the components and processes of reading and writing.
- Teach reading comprehension strategies.
- Focus on vocabulary development.
- Build and activate background knowledge.
- Teach language through content and themes.
- Use native language strategically.
- Pair technology with existing interventions.
- Motivate adolescent ELs through choice.

In this book, we present results and implications for schools from two field studies that integrated these features into models for professional development and curriculum programs. One is *Expediting Comprehension for English Language Learners (ExC-ELL*), developed by Margarita Calderón and colleagues. Over a five-year research study funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, ExC-ELL was empirically tested in Kaua'i and New York City schools.

The second research-based curriculum and professional development study, *Reading Instructional Goals for Older Readers* (RIGOR), was created to address the needs of middle and high school ELs/Newcomers/Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) who are reading at K–3 levels. RIGOR was also developed by Dr. Calderón and published by Benchmark Education Company. It was empirically tested for ELs and struggling readers in 17 middle and high schools in New York City and in three additional schools with special education ELs (SE-ELs).

There are four components of the ExC-ELL and RIGOR staff development programs that also serve as a background of this book: (1) Quality Professional Development, (2) Coaching, (3) Measuring Teacher Implementation and its Impact on Students, and (4) Preparing Administrators to Support and Observe Literacy Instruction in Content Classrooms.

Why Professional Development and Not "An EL Program"?

One important finding from the NLP that needs to be emphasized is the conclusion that regardless of the program being implemented (e.g., ESL, transitional bilingual, dual language), ***the most important factor in attaining EL success is quality instruction.*** Teacher quality is the one factor everyone agrees has the greatest impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009; National Reading Panel, 2000; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Although there is still questionable data on which program is best for ELs (Genesse et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2008), we have found that the definitive factor is quality instruction accompanied by quality learning in all classrooms, day by day, minute by minute. ***As teachers learn, so do their students.***

Both the NLP and the CREDE reports were concluded in 2003 and 2006, so they did not include in their reviews many of the evidence-based studies that were being conducted at the time or about to be concluded. One set of ongoing longitudinal empirical and randomized studies that were not included (Calderón, 2007, 2008c; Slavin, Madden, Calderón, Chamberlain, & Hennessy, 2010) have identified researched-based instructional strategies that can affect student success in a variety of K–12 school programs.

Through these multiple-year studies, researchers looked at features in elementary, middle, and high schools across the country and found program structures, curriculum components, and professional development designs that work and, of course, some that do not. One prevalent feature of success was that *sustainability of research-based interventions must be accompanied by conscientious accommodations to the particularities, needs, constraints, and resources that occur in a school or district.* It takes extra effort and time on behalf of all school personnel, but they work!

Getting the type of quality teaching and learning you want for your school is highly dependent on the school leader. The school leader becomes fundamental to the changes. The principal of the school will set the culture for continuous professional learning, create the timetable or speed of change, and create expectations for teachers. The principal espouses professional learning that is embedded in the usual practice of the school. There are teams of mainstream, ESL/bilingual, special education teachers working together, planning lessons for ELs, reviewing EL work and progress together, and looking for instructional practices that might be more effective for ELs and all students still struggling.

A Theory of Change

Robust learning and high quality instruction should be the expected outcomes of school practices. ELs should acquire grade level content with high standards in rich learning environments with highly prepared teachers. Continuous progress toward developing academic English, reading comprehension skills, and academic content language are important related goals that should be monitored and assessed until students are achieving. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2008)

We now have a strong research base upon which to build solid programs for ELs in K–12, unlike in the 1970s and 1980s. We can now provide an understanding and a way to develop a school's theory and infrastructure for addressing EL learning needs. A theory of change helps guide a path and explore goals and ways to attain these. In this book, examples are shared of what has lead exemplary schools (with small or large numbers of ELs) to expedite sustainable change.

A theory of change is a specific and measurable description of a change initiative that forms the basis for strategic planning, for ongoing decision making and evaluation (The Aspen Institute, see http://www.aspeninstitute.org; and the ActKnowledge and Aspen Roundtable, see http://www.theoryofchange.org). A theory of change helps participants do the following:

1. Be clear on long-term goals or desired outcomes.
2. Identify measurable indicators of progress and success/accomplishments/results.
3. Formulate action plans/improvement plans (interventions) to achieve goals.
4. Create a commonly understood vision of all your efforts.

The four procedures apply to schools with small or large groups of ELs. The plan of action will help to address the following:

1. Professional development to set the framework for developing a plan of action
2. Curricula alignment with language proficiency levels, English language proficiency standards, and core content standards—and how all of this comes together

3. The integration of instruction for language, literacy, and content in all classrooms
4. The professional development design for ensuring quality instruction

Addressing Response to Intervention

The theory of change also hinges on the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework and the recent research on struggling readers and on preventing learning disabilities from the National Council on Learning Disabilities (NCLD, 2008). RTI is a three-tier process designed to prevent academic failure or special education labels. It is important to assess how each tier applies to ELs with or without learning disabilities.

RTI acts as a scaffold for teachers to understand their ELs' needs, to develop appropriate methods to address those needs instructionally, and ultimately to determine the difference between an instructional need and an actual disability. Thus, the RTI model enables educators to simultaneously assess ELs' instructional needs and ensure that they receive appropriate daily instruction to promote their literacy skills (Francis, Rivera, Moughamian, & Lesaux, 2008).

Tier 1

All students in Tier 1 receive high quality, scientifically based instruction, differentiated to meet their needs, and are screened on a periodic basis to identify struggling learners who need additional support. Progress of all students is assessed at three points during the school year: fall, winter, and spring. This progress monitoring data should indicate whether ELs and all students are responding adequately to instruction. If not, students are given additional support from a Tier 2 intervention.

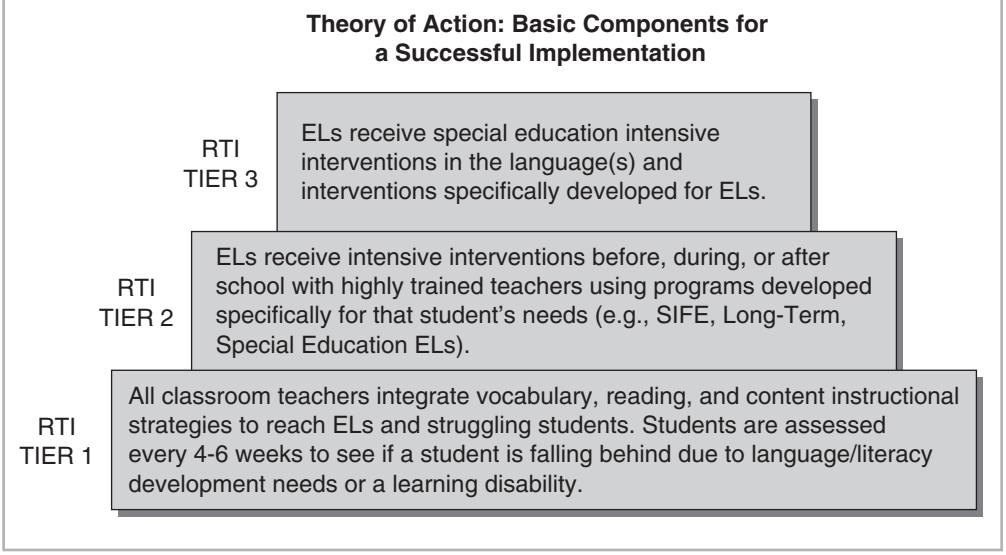
Tier 2

In Tier 2, students not making adequate progress in the core curriculum are provided with increasingly intensive instruction matched to their needs on the basis of levels of performance and rates of progress.

Tier 3

At this level, students receive individualized, intensive interventions that target the students' skill deficits for the remediation of existing problems and the prevention of more severe problems. These students participate in daily research-based interventions that are delivered individually or in small groups, and their progress is monitored closely, often once or twice a week.

Figure 1.1 RTI



THE THEORY OF CHANGE ASSUMPTIONS

Our theory of change is based on the following key assumptions. ELs can be successful, if the program that a school establishes provides a variety of interventions focusing on individual needs, because not all ELs need the same intervention.

> Teachers and specialists who are highly prepared to impart evidenced-based instructional practices conduct these programs.
> Only evidence-based instructional programs proven to work with similar ELs in those grade levels is implemented by schools.
> Teachers only use researched-based instructional strategies in their repertoire.
> The teachers are well supported by their administration and work collaboratively to improve learning for all students.
> The focus for everyone in the school is not necessarily on "teaching" but on student "learning" and "outcomes."
> Quality teaching is not an end in itself; it is a vehicle to attain terrific student learning outcomes.

Setting High Expectations With Equally High Support

Interaction and collegial skills appear to be a positive trademark of great school leaders. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) describe resonant

leadership as those leaders who bring out the best in people and inspire those around them. They help to dispel fears and despair and replace those with hope, compassion, and risk-taking.

ELs can be successful if

1. Appropriate programs are offered to address the diverse backgrounds of ELs.
2. EL programs are comprehensible and schoolwide.
3. EL instruction is based on evidence that it works for them.
4. Principals convey the importance of rigorous quality teaching and continuous professional learning.
5. All their teachers know how to provide effective instruction and are sensitive to their cultural and background knowledge.
6. Vital participation from school, district, and state administrators is in place.
7. They know you care for them.
8. You are not afraid to take that first step.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What works for ELs?
2. What are the changes you need to make to adjust that paradigm?
3. What are the implications from this chapter for your school?
4. What would take these ideas to another level?