

New Book Explains Research on Teaching English Language Learners

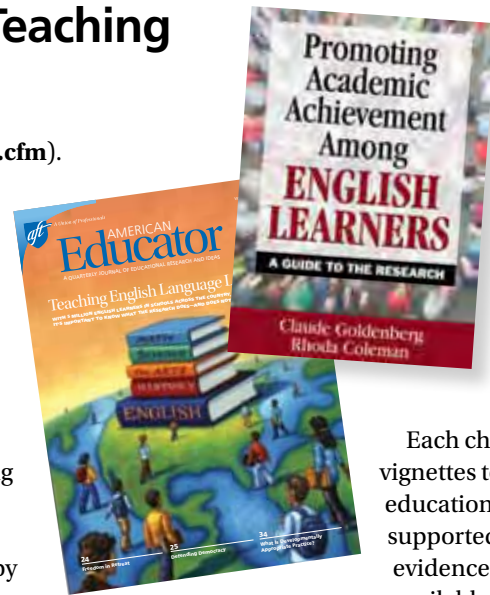
IN OUR SCHOOLS, the number of students whose first language is not English continues to grow rapidly. In 1990, 1 in 20 public school students was an English language learner (ELL); today that ratio is 1 in 9. Teachers and policy-makers need to know the best way to teach such children. To that end, Claude Goldenberg and Rhoda Coleman have written *Promoting Academic Achievement Among English Learners: A Guide to the Research* (Corwin, April 2010).

Goldenberg, a professor of education at Stanford University, and Coleman, a researcher and professional development specialist at California State University, Long Beach, based their book on two government-funded reviews of the research relating to teaching ELLs: *Educating English Language Learners: A Synthesis of Research Evidence* (prepared by researchers associated with the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence), and *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. The book also draws on “Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say,” an article Goldenberg wrote for the Summer 2008 issue of *American Educator* (which is available at www.aft.org/newspubs/

[periodicals/ae/issues.cfm](http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/issues.cfm)).

Goldenberg and Coleman write that “the need for such a book became manifestly clear when one of us (Coleman) conducted a study of how school districts decided on programs for ELLs. To an alarming degree (although not unique in education), decisions were driven by theoretical orientation or personal preference and philosophy.”

While the authors do address the controversies surrounding bilingual education, their main purpose is to set the record straight on what the research supports. They write that “the consensus—although it is not unanimous—among the experimental studies of primary-language instruction is that teaching ELLs in their home language in fact boosts their achievement in the second language, as compared to teaching them only in their second language.” For this reason, and because instruction in the home language helps promote bilingualism and biliteracy, Goldenberg and Coleman recommend



teaching literacy skills at least, and perhaps subject-matter content as well, in a student’s home language and in English.

Each chapter contains vignettes to illustrate educational practices supported by the best evidence currently available. The scenarios are based on the authors’ observations of actual teachers’ lessons and schoolwide practices during their visits to schools over the last four years. The book concludes with broader suggestions for educators, administrators, and policy-makers on improving the achievement of ELLs. Like students in general, children who come to school speaking little or no English “benefit from well-designed, challenging, and structured lessons and activities ... where teachers provide relevant, timely, and useful feedback that improves learning, understanding, and performance,” Goldenberg and Coleman write. “Don’t undersell ELLs’ academic abilities because they are less than proficient in English.”

Hotline Helps Families in Need

AS THE SCHOOL YEAR ENDS, teachers are no doubt telling their students to have fun and stay safe this summer. Teachers can also let students know that if they or their families run into trouble—if their parents lose their jobs or their health insurance runs out—they can pick up the phone and dial 2-1-1.

The United Way of America has helped establish this easy-to-remember telephone number to connect people to health and social services in their local communities. The ever-expanding hotline currently serves almost 250 million Americans and is available in 46 states plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Specially trained personnel help callers determine what services they need—for example, food banks and shelters, job training, and affordable housing options, among other supports—and provide them with relevant information on where to find those services.

Visit www.liveunited.org/211 to learn more.



Career Day Any Day

SINCE THE SCHOOL YEAR allows little time for visitors to share what it's like to be a surgeon, a carpenter, or a chemical engineer, teachers can turn to CTI Career Search, at www.citytowninfo.com/employment, to provide students quick and honest insights into all kinds of careers. This website features roughly 2,000 career stories based on interviews of people working in more than 200 careers. Those interviewed for career stories provide their educational backgrounds, job descriptions, previous experiences, the best and worst parts of their jobs, and tips for pursuing work in their fields. Since career stories are published anonymously, they offer a candid look at each profession. Accom-

panying these stories are hundreds of short videos that show the workplace—be it an office or a national forest—while describing a career.

The site also offers salary information and a college search tool that enables visitors to find institutions offering majors and degrees in a given field. Information about the popularity of a job in a particular industry and in various cities is also available.

The site explores a diverse range of careers and numerous types of jobs within each field. For instance, the career stories for lawyers include 52 jobs, such as appellate attorney for a city, bankruptcy attorney, real estate lawyer, probate lawyer, and Medicare senior

policy analyst, among others. For application software engineers, 34 jobs are listed, including chief software architect, robotics software developer, software engineer and team leader, software engineer for a startup, and technical consultant for a software company, to name a few. More than 200 career stories are posted from educators: a preschool music and drama teacher, a fourth-grade teacher, an elementary school reading teacher, a seventh-grade science teacher, a high school Latin teacher, and a high school math teacher, among them. Of course, students who want to learn more about education careers can consult another useful resource—their very own teachers.

Writing to Improve Reading

HAVING STUDENTS WRITE about what they read enhances their reading ability and comprehension, according to a new report from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. *Writing to Read: Evidence for How Writing Can Improve Reading* presents the results of a large-scale statistical review that identifies writing practices that improve students' reading ability. These practices include having students write about texts they have read, explicitly teaching spelling and how to write sentences and paragraphs, and increasing how much and how frequently students write. "Our evidence shows that these writing activities improved students' comprehension of text over and above the improvements gained from traditional reading activities such as reading text, reading and rereading text, reading and discussing text, and receiving explicit reading instruction," write the report's authors, Steve Graham, a professor of special education and literacy at Vanderbilt University, and Michael Hebert, a doctoral student in special education at Vanderbilt.

Graham and Hebert explain that responding to a text by writing an analysis, interpretation, personal reflection, or summary, or by creating or answering questions, improves comprehension because the act of writing

requires that students reflect on ideas presented in a text and put those ideas into their own words.

Opportunities for writing do not occur as often as the report's authors would like. Graham and Hebert cite a national survey of high school writing practices that "found that students were rarely asked to complete writing assignments involving analysis and interpretation." Also, assignments asking students to write more than one paragraph were given less than once a month in 50 percent of English (language arts), social studies, and science classes. While researchers have found that, compared with middle and high school teachers,

elementary school teachers "spend more time teaching writing and are better prepared to teach writing practices, most elementary students only spend 20 minutes a day writing," the authors note.

Graham and Hebert emphasize that writing instruction should not replace effective reading instruction, because students need both. Ultimately, they want to make teachers aware of the evidence that "good writing instruction is vital to realizing the goal of literacy for all."

Visit www.carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/WritingToRead_01.pdf to read the full report.

