
Introduction

The population of English learners in U.S. public and public charter schools is growing at a rapid and continuous rate. This growth is occurring while the total population remains relatively unchanged. As a result, our schools are becoming more and more populated with English learners (ELs).

Many teachers, administrators, specialists, and other stakeholders are in a quandary about what to do with beginning-level ELs, especially those with no or limited literacy and schooling experiences. They describe this as the most challenging aspect of working with this population.

The Essential Guide for Educating Beginning English Learners focuses on helping administrators, teachers, curriculum supervisors, teacher leaders, teacher educators, and others to prepare for ELs who are at the beginning stages of English language acquisition. This comprises three groups of ELs: those with literacy and school experiences in their home countries that are commensurate with American public schools, those with no or limited prior school experiences, and those who are experiencing the effects of trauma violence. The goal of our book is to help preservice teachers, administrators, and others who are just starting to work with this population, as well as veterans to build a welcoming classroom and school environment where ELs and their families can be engaged and can flourish. Each chapter opens with a scenario and focuses on key elements of teaching beginning ELs.

Chapter 1: Seeing the Big Picture

In Chapter 1, we describe the increase of ELs and discuss their performance in U.S. schools. We provide a rationale for creating optimal learning and school community environments for ELs at the beginning levels of learning English. Our focus on this particular segment of the population is based on the reality that these students are not being provided with

programming that is targeted for their needs. Using an asset-based model, we provide a framework for addressing this growing population more effectively.

Chapter 2: Taking a Closer Look

In this chapter, we examine beginning-level ELs through the lens of literacy as well as ELs who have experienced trauma. We elaborate on different types of literacy orientations and describe how different perceptions about time, individualism, and collectivism bear on the school performance of EL. We then discuss the mismatch that can occur between students and their educators. We also discuss the role that cultural disruptions and poverty play in this dynamic. Using an asset-based model, we begin to outline the steps that are needed to improve classroom and school environments.

Chapter 3: Effective Programming for English Learners

This chapter focuses on the key elements that should be included in identifying ELs and creating programming for them. We include a variety of forms and practices to support as seamless an enrollment process as possible and discuss the methods that should be used for identifying ELs and designing instructional programs that support their language, literacy, and academic development.

Chapter 4: Selecting Models of Instruction

In this chapter, we describe the different kinds of programs for ELs and how they affect the education of students who are just beginning to learn English. We include some of the factors that are important to consider in building programming for this group.

Chapter 5: Strengthening Family–School Engagement

This chapter discusses the importance of building partnerships with families of beginning ELs by taking five essential steps—understanding barriers, establishing a welcoming environment by building relationships, addressing differences, building connections with learning, supporting advocacy—all so we can form the foundation for empowering parents as important and critical assets in their child’s education.

Chapter 6: Teaching Beginners

This chapter moves students from their first months of school through the beginning stages of learning English. We include a framework for supporting educators to understand how learning English and content is social, developmental, academic, and based on building school-matched thinking skills. We present realistic expectations that teachers should have during this development phase and describe how to build a rich instructional program based on what students can do.

Chapter 7: Working With English Learners Who Have Experienced Trauma

In this chapter, we discuss the trauma (i.e., war, natural disasters, and personal trauma) that some ELs have endured, or are still enduring, and how schools can build “trauma-sensitive” practices while supporting social, language/literacy, academic, and thinking skill development within a whole-school, whole-classroom context.

Chapter 8: Teaching English Learners With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

In this chapter, we address who students with limited or interrupted formal education are and how schools can adapt programs for them. Using an asset-based model, we focus on programs that support student acquisition of English, literacy, and academic content.

Chapter 9: Providing Effective Professional Development

This chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the types of professional development activities that should occur for preservice and in-service teachers and administrators of beginning ELs. Included are observation, reflection, and interview tasks along with accompanying chapter-by-chapter activities for using this book in professional development settings.