



Preface (pages viii–xii)

from **Scaffolding the Academic Success of Adolescent English Language Learners: A Pedagogy of Promise**

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PREFACE

This book is for all middle school and high school content area teachers who have English language learners in their classes — whether these classes are designed specifically for English learners or are mainstream content area classes in which perhaps a few or even only one or two students are not yet proficient in English. Upper-elementary teachers, too, will find relevant ideas for teaching disciplinary content while supporting their students who are English language learners.

We have written this book with a growing sense of urgency. In the 10 years from 1995 through 2005, the U.S. school population in grades K–12 grew by less than 3 percent while the population of English language learners increased by 56 percent (Batalova et al., 2007). For English language learners in high school, the odds of academic success are daunting: one-half of them fail their graduation tests, leaving school without a diploma and unprepared for the workforce (Hopstock and Stephenson, 2003). In the future, demographers project, English language learners will increasingly be students who were born and educated *exclusively* in the United States. In California, for example, by 2025, only 17 percent of English language learners are expected to be first-generation immigrants; 83 percent will come from families that have been in the United States for two or even three generations (Passel, 2006).

In the face of such sobering statistics, this book offers a future-oriented pedagogy, one that looks ahead to what students can become and that builds on the knowledge, beliefs, and values all students bring to school. We reject the idea that English language learners have less promise than others. What is true, however, is that they have much more to learn than do their English-proficient peers, and their teachers have much more to teach. Furthermore, it is not as though teachers can approach English language learners as a homogeneous group. These students' ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds span the globe. Academically, their backgrounds range from having had rigorous instruction in their native language to never having attended school. As English learners, their appropriation of this new language is equally diverse. Not surprisingly, according to a survey of 5,000 California teachers, most feel insufficiently prepared to serve these students well. In addition, those teachers who know the most about working effectively with English language learners are most likely to find shortcomings in the instructional programs designed for these students (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, and Driscoll, 2005).

We wrote this book to offer concrete examples of what we call *Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL)*, a way of teaching that accelerates what teachers can teach and English language learners can learn. Across the country, including in the New York City, Austin, and San Diego school districts, *QTEL* staff members and author Aída Walqui, who developed the *QTEL* approach, have worked with districts, schools, and individual teachers to engage learners' promise and enhance teachers' expertise. In this book, we visit a few of these classrooms and experience students' on-the-ground learning. Through extended vignettes and transcribed dialogue, we show how teachers have learned to structure challenging and inviting learning opportunities, as well as showing what they do to support students' learning once the invitation has been accepted. We also describe how other teachers can create similar high-challenge learning opportunities and provide high-support instruction.

It is no accident that sociocultural learning theory guides these teachers' practice and the lessons we describe. The *QTEL* principles for working with English language learners reflect explicit cognitive and social learning theories about how people learn in general, as well as how they learn in a new language. In the first three chapters of this book, we take care to describe these theories and the crucial notion of scaffolding. We have been advised that these chapters might not appeal to teachers who are more in need of practical ideas than of theoretical discussions. We agree that practice must be central; however, we also keep in mind the famous remark by psychologist Kurt Lewin that there is nothing as practical as a good theory. Theory without practice is useless, but practice without theory can be dangerous.

Even in the more theoretical chapters we have included many examples from classroom practice, both from the *QTEL* work reported in this book and from other sources. We are confident that the book as a whole brings practice and theory together in comprehensible and responsible ways. It is,

of course, possible to read the last three chapters first and then study the first three chapters for the theoretical background. More beneficial, perhaps, is to start reading at the beginning and check cross-references to other chapters as you go along. In that way, we hope, it will become clear why we call the QTEL approach a “pedagogy of promise.”

This is a book for practitioners more than for academics, but it takes the decidedly academic stance that teaching is an intellectual as well as a social and emotional calling. As teachers, all of us develop our own expertise when we can reflect on the theory that underlies our teaching decisions, that may cause us to insist, for example, that English language learners must talk, talk, talk about what they are learning (don’t miss chapters 1 and 3) or that classrooms where interaction is a constant are classrooms where learning emerges and takes root (see chapters 1 and 2).

Contributing to our arguments for theory-based teaching, author Leo van Lier draws on his background as linguist, sociocultural learning theorist, and university teacher of language teachers. In disclosing that the authors, Walqui and van Lier, are married to each other, we hope you will understand the pervasive commingling of authorial voices, and we apologize for suggesting perhaps too much about the topics that animate their dinner table conversation.

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