

Sheltering Learners from the English Storm

More and more English language learners are entering U.S. schools with limited proficiency in English and gaps in their educational backgrounds. Yet most of our curricula and instruction build from the belief that students already know some English when they start their schooling, at least in terms of oral language skills. Without oral and written English language skills, however, English learners are hard pressed to learn or demonstrate their academic knowledge. The SIOP Model is a proven approach for sheltered instruction that helps English language learners develop oral language proficiency while building academic English literacy skills and subject area knowledge.

The History of SIOP

The SIOP Model is the product of six years of research sponsored by the National Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence and funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Originally a research instrument, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was modified into a lesson planning and instructional system by practicing teachers and researchers.

In the SIOP Model, language and content objectives are systematically woven into the grade-level curriculum that teachers present to

students through modified instruction in English. Teachers systematically develop students' academic language proficiency as part of their lessons, paying careful attention to the English learners' second language development needs. The model is composed of 30 items grouped into eight components essential for making content comprehensible for English language learners: Preparation, Building Background, Comprehensible Input, Strategies, Interaction, Practice/Application, Lesson Delivery, and Review/Assessment.

Training and Materials

Through special training, teachers can learn how to plan lessons using the SIOP Model as well as practice techniques that they can later apply in their classrooms. This type of professional development can be helpful, but effective sheltered instruction also requires high quality instructional materials for teachers and students to work with in class. There are materials, student activities, and teacher lesson plans available which are aligned to the SIOP Model to support high quality sheltered instruction in English language arts and reading. The programs introduce students to major topics, vocabulary, and subject-specific activities in other content areas. The following discussion gives an overview of the eight components of the SIOP Model.



Deborah J. Short explains how the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model can be used to develop to accelerate the progress of English Language Learners

Preparation

SIOP lessons have language and content objectives linked to standards. In this way, students gain important experience with key grade-level content and skills as they progress toward proficiency in academic English. The SIOP Model encourages teachers to share learning objectives with students so that students know what they are expected to learn each day and can take an active part in assessing their own progress. Well prepared SIOP lessons include activities that spark purposeful communication and integrate academic concepts with oral and written language practice.

Such programs are aligned to national and state curriculum standards and address students' language development needs by providing:

- daily oral language activities,
- comprehensive grammar instruction,
- visuals that boost vocabulary,
- reading selections with built-in support, and
- writing tools and resources.

These materials prepare English learners for mainstream and content area classes by giving them practice with the academic language, tasks, and topics they will encounter in those classes. For example, students have opportunities to read different types of fiction and non-

fiction texts, use graphic organizers to analyze story grammar and text structure, and complete a variety of writing assignments.

Building Background

Effective SIOP lessons connect new concepts with the students' personal experiences and past learning. The SIOP Model also incorporates findings from research on vocabulary development that underscore the critical importance of a broad vocabulary base in order for students to be effective readers. In the SIOP Model, teachers directly teach key vocabulary and provide opportunities for students to use this vocabulary orally and in writing.

Recommendations include relating themes to students' own experiences, cultures, and personal lives; building on prior lessons to reinforce and extend information students are learning and language skills they are acquiring. For younger children, key vocabulary can be taught through songs, games, role-play, and colorful visuals. Older children can learn key vocabulary through graphics, word webbing, and other research-based vocabulary strategies. To deepen word knowledge, key vocabulary needs to be reinforced.

Glossaries of less essential vocabulary also enable students to quickly access the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases and continue with their reading.