

# Nuggets of Knowledge

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, & Accountability  
*Supporting Kern County Districts*

## Director's Corner

**Kathy Caric**

The staff of the Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability Department of KCSOS is excited to share the first edition of the CIA newsletter, *Nuggets of Knowledge*, with you. The idea for providing a quarterly newsletter to share pertinent information from the latest in research in the areas of curriculum, instruction and accountability came from some superintendents and principals in Kern County who expressed their interest in receiving concise and timely information on research based best practices for district, site and classroom application. It is our hope that you will disseminate this newsletter electronically across your district as a resource for your staff and that you and your staff will e-mail topics of interest to us that might be addressed in future editions.

A major challenge for districts and schools across California is the acceleration of language and academic proficiency for English language learners. Many Kern County districts are seeing these proficiency rates grow for the ELs in their classrooms, but, in most cases, that growth is not keeping pace with the growth of the overall student population. This edition of the newsletter features articles addressing the critical topics of vocabulary development and oral English proficiency. The common thread found in the work of the authors and/or researchers summarized in these featured articles is the importance of **intentional, explicit instruction**. And we learn by applying the information from the research of Dr. Doug Reeves that **90% of the instructional staff must be routinely providing intentional, explicit instruction** on vocabulary and oral English proficiency if we are to see an increase in student proficiency.

We hope the *Nuggets of Knowledge* contained in this newsletter will be of use to you and your staff as you work to continuously strengthen your instructional program. For more information on any of the topics addressed, please use the contact information provided at the end of the article or contact Kathleen White at 636-4635 or [kawhite@kern.org](mailto:kawhite@kern.org).

## Explicit Vocabulary Instruction



- Kate Kinsella ([http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/ReadAbout/pdfs/RA\\_Research\\_Narrowing\\_Narrowing\\_the\\_Gap.pdf](http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/ReadAbout/pdfs/RA_Research_Narrowing_Narrowing_the_Gap.pdf)) contends that all students are \*AESL\* \*Academic English as a Second Language\* learners. In her work she states that Academic English is not a natural language but must be explicitly taught not \*merely caught.\* She has identified four essential components of Academic English Language: *vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and register*.
- Diamond and Gutlohn ([Vocabulary Handbook: For All Educators Working to Improve Reading Achievement](#)) state that to develop vocabulary, there must be *intentional* and *explicit* instruction in both specific words as well as word-learning strategies. Students must be given the tools that will help them independently determine unfamiliar words in the future.
- According to researcher Isabel Beck, ([Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction](#)) there must be *robust* (vigorous, strong, and powerful in effect) *vocabulary instruction* in every classroom. Beck goes on to say that a robust approach to vocabulary involves *directly* explaining the meanings of words along with effective follow-up. Beck offers the following steps to introduce words that will be taught (p.46):
  - Select words from the text that your students will be reading.
  - Create a student-friendly explanation for each word by -
    - ◆ Thinking about what specific elements make the word different from other words.
    - ◆ Using everyday language.
  - Develop some activities that will engage students in dealing with the word's meaning.

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# Leadership for Learning 2007: Closing the Implementation Gap

Douglas B. Reeves, Ph.D

Attendees of the 2007 *Closing the Achievement Gap* Summit in Sacramento in November of 2007 had the privilege of hearing Dr. Douglas Reeves's latest research in regard to closing the achievement gap.

Dr. Reeves emphasized that it is not the "brand name programs" that make the difference in closing the achievement gap. It is, rather, the degree of implementation of a few, research-based strategies that make the difference. His message was loud and clear: "Deep implementation of a FEW things beats superficial implementation of many things."

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In his study of 129,000 students, Dr. Reeves found that, regardless of the proven effectiveness of any particular strategy, the point of substantial impact on student proficiency rates was minimal until the strategy had a 90% rate of implementation within a school. This means that 90% of the faculty routinely utilized the strategy. For example, with less than 10% of the faculty utilizing the strategy of writing and note taking in science, the student proficiency rate was 25%. Compare that with a 79% proficiency rate when the degree of implementation rose to 90%.

For more information on this topic, you can refer to Dr. Reeves's latest publication: [The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results, 2006.](#)



**What are we doing well?** English language development is often taught well enough to allow language minority students the opportunity to attain levels of oral literacy equal to those of native speakers in word-level skills ~ such as *decoding, word recognition and spelling.*

**Where are we in need of more support?** English learners are not doing as well in text-level skills- *reading comprehension and writing.* Language-minority students rarely approach the same levels of proficiency in text-level skills achieved by native English speakers.

**How can we improve?** The research suggests one reason for the disparity between word- and text- level skills among language-minority students is *oral English proficiency.* Well- developed oral proficiency in English is correlated with English reading comprehension and writing skills for language-minority students. Specifically, *English vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, syntactic skills,* and the ability to handle metalinguistic aspects of language, such as providing definitions of words, are linked to English reading and writing proficiency.

**Extensive oral English development must be included into successful literacy instruction.**

Researcher Diane August ([The Critical Role of Vocabulary Development for English Language Learners, 2005](#)) reported that only 2 percent of an English learner's school day was spent talking ~ the teacher was doing the majority of the talking. When students did respond, they were using one-word or short responses to lower-level questions (e.g., fact recall). English learners have little opportunity for the practice they need. Oral language proficiency is the critical element to proficiency in the other language domains of listening, reading, and writing. To help English learners achieve academic language, classrooms need to be transformed into communicative, interactive, language-learning places.

Pauline Gibbons ([Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning, 2002](#)) offers classroom teachers **four** ways to immediately increase the amount of oral language that is produced daily by English learners:

- ◇ Expect all students to speak in complete sentences whether it is during a class discussion or answering open-ended questions
- ◇ Slow down the rate of dialogue (this doesn't mean you should speak slower, but it allows sufficient time for the learners to think about their answers)
- ◇ Ask students to clarify meaning (*Can you say that again? Can you explain that a bit more?*)
- ◇ Listen to what the students say and respond to the meaning of their answers—not just waiting for the "correct" answer

## **Additional resources:**

Hill, J. & Flynn, K. (2006). *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Learners.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

August, D. & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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