

Book Review

Karen L. Newman and Martha Nyikos
Indiana University-Bloomington

Echevarría J., Vogt, M. E., & Short D. J. (Eds.). (2000) *Making content comprehensible for english language learners: The SIOP model*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 212.

Despite the explosion in language programs, there is widespread inability to speak the language varieties necessary for access to economic resources and political power. The great linguistic paradox of our time is that societies which dedicate enormous resources to language teaching and learning have been unable—or unwilling—to remove the powerful linguistic barriers to full participation in the major institutions of modern society. (Tollefson, 1991, p. 7)

For new English language learners (ELLs) the challenge to participate in academic discourse of the content area classroom presents a significant barrier. Most programs do not consciously address this need. One approach to language programs that purport to incorporate a wide range of current research-based teaching and learning strategies and which is aimed at linguistic and academic success, is the sheltered instructional (SI) approach. By sheltering and supporting students in grade-level content courses such as social studies, science, or world history, emphasis is put on acquisition of academic language and skills while building on students' varied background experiences, multiple ways of learning, and different cultural perspectives through collaborative interaction and integration of oral and literacy skills. The components are increasingly part of our national discourse on inclusion and educational reform through the National Standards.

It is in this spirit of educational reform that authors Jana Echevarría, Mary Ellen Vogt, and Deborah J. Short offer their book *Making content comprehensible for english language learners: The SIOP model*. The authors lucidly argue that regular content-area teachers in America's classrooms are ill-prepared to meet the needs of their English language learners, having received little to no pre-service or in-service education in effective methods for educating these students. The authors' goal is ultimately to improve teacher development and instructional practice; thus, school administrators, teacher trainers, and pre-service and in-service teachers will benefit from understanding the advocated model for instructional training and supervision.

For the authors, sheltered instruction, which has been used in some American ESL and bilingual classrooms since the 1970s, represents the most cogent instructional method for teaching English language learners. Sheltered

instruction provides English language instruction through grade level and academic content, and it effectively “shelters” ELLs from competition with native English speakers via the use of special techniques designed to enhance comprehension of subject matter. These techniques cover a wide range of activities that provide enhanced alternatives to teacher lectures and textbook readings. Sheltered techniques include: The use of visual aids such as pictures, charts, graphs, and semantic mapping; modeling of instruction; allowing students to negotiate meaning and make connections between course content and prior knowledge; allowing students to act as mediators and facilitators; the use of alternative assessments to check comprehension; portfolios; use of comprehensible input, scaffolding, and supplemental materials; and a wide range of presentational strategies.

Sheltered instruction aligns itself with collaborative social approaches that allow learners to structure their own learning and learn from doing. Thus, SI positions itself on the opposite end of the spectrum from authoritarian, lecture-based approaches to teaching. In practice, however, the techniques of SI vary greatly from classroom to classroom. Because of this lack of consistency, the authors attempt to standardize the practices of SI via their SIOP, or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, a 30-item checklist of key principles that the authors developed as a result of years of collective teaching, research, and field testing. The SIOP, they maintain, can be used effectively as an observation instrument by administrators, teachers, and researchers alike, and as a tool for instructional planning and delivery.

Straightforward language makes this text readily accessible to the reader. The first chapter provides a brief, yet solid background for ESL instruction in the United States, highlighting the shortcomings and the recent changes brought about by the reform movements beginning in the 1970s. Also, it briefly outlines the SIOP model, consisting of 30 items grouped into three main areas: lesson preparation, instruction, and review/assessment. The authors anchor the advocated teaching strategies in their SIOP protocol in illustrative classroom vignettes that portray teachers achieving several of 30 stated standards or teaching techniques to varying degrees. Readers are invited to evaluate and reflect on these vignettes and then compare their own ratings to that of the authors. For each of the 30 items, a 5-point Likert scale allows scoring of classroom teaching from 4 (highest) to 0 (absent), with an N/A option. The bulk of the text—chapters 2 through 9—discusses the principles of SI, suggests specific classroom activities designed to incorporate skill areas into theme- and task-oriented projects, offers a thorough discussion of the three sections of the SIOP model, and highlights how the SIOP should be used to evaluate teaching. Throughout these chapters, each of the SIOP’s 30 principles of good instruction are illustrated through three teaching vignettes per item, demonstrating very effective, less effective, and ineffective implementation of SI techniques. Thus, the reader is provided with clear examples of how teaching practices may or may not adhere to the SIOP

model. The final chapter focuses closely on the scoring of the SIOP. Appendices A and B offer convenient copies of the full SIOP, while Appendix C addresses its reliability and validity. Finally, a glossary of useful terms used throughout the book rounds out its offerings.

This text represents one of only a handful of teaching methods books that address older learners for whom complex cognitive and critical thinking is considered *condicio sine qua non*. Similar to Peregoy & Boyle's (1997) *Reading, Writing and Learning in ESL*, it avoids a four-skills approach in favor of concrete illustrations of content area classes; valid instructional strategies are employed masterfully in some of the vignettes. Another appealing quality of this book is that the focus is on learners' needs to comprehend, experience, interact, summarize, and reason in a new language; these needs guide the teaching strategies advocated and rated throughout the work.

As with other content-based approaches, there is little reason to doubt the efficacy of the student-centered approach offered by SI. However, Freeman & Freeman (1998) indicate a number of shortcomings with SI: teachers often sacrifice academic content to meet the language needs of their students, teachers lack training in implementing sheltered instruction, students who do well in sheltered classes often flounder when mainstreamed, and students of differing ability levels are often relegated to the same sheltered class (pp. 39–40). With the exception of inadequate teacher training, Echevarría, Vogt, and Short do not adequately address the weaknesses of the sheltered instructional model in their text. Another omission is a better discussion of where SI is situated vis-à-vis the different models of bilingual education. SI is often categorized as a transitional approach leading to mainstreaming. Furthermore, at the expense of advocating the SIOP model, the authors overlook the possibility that ELLs frequently need transitional preparation to enter less enlightened classrooms dominated by traditional “chalk-and-talk” instructional methods. Perhaps SI may itself be too “sheltered” at times, for while it offers learners a temporary safe-haven, it may not fully address educational realities/inequities that learners are bound to encounter. A more thorough discussion of these points would have strengthened the text.

Furthermore, traditional teachers and traditional approaches to instruction become too easy a target of the authors' classroom vignettes, with such teachers receiving predictably low scores on the SIOP items. These vignettes begin to appear somewhat contrived in their pattern of predicable ratings as the chapters progress. Vignettes often break the flow of information relating to SI techniques. This might have been mitigated by separating the text into two distinct sections—one that fully discussed SI, and one that focused strictly on the SIOP, classroom vignettes, and scoring. Nevertheless, the vignettes do offer novice and practiced teachers clear, contextualized views of acceptable classroom practice, which—while they appear to be good practice—we find do not meet the standards offered by the authors. If readers are new to teaching, they may appreciate the blend of principles with

contextualized pictures of classroom practice. In fact, many novice teachers may find themselves liking some of the portrayed monolithic teaching strategies simply because they do not yet possess a variety of techniques. Thus, the more highly rated vignettes do serve to illustrate what is attainable for skilled teachers. Teachers who shy away from explicit discussions of theoretical constructs will appreciate how theory is seamlessly interwoven with practical vignettes.

While they do not expect that each of the 30 items be addressed in daily lessons, the authors do advocate that effective SI teachers address each item several times over the course of a week. This Herculean task may well be feasible for more practiced instructors in small classroom settings where individualized attention is more likely, but the reality of large classroom size and underprepared teachers will no doubt pose a challenge for instructors who attempt to wholly embrace the SIOP model. The authors do mention the National Standards movement (specifically, the ESL standards developed by TESOL), but they might have more fully articulated the interrelation of their model with the standards, particularly as classroom teachers increasingly look for explicit ways to correlate the standards with their teaching.

To its strength, the authors indicate that SI “draws from and complements methods and strategies advocated for both second language and mainstream classrooms” (p. 7) and that it “shares many strategies found in high-quality, nonsheltered teaching for native English speakers” (p. 11). Ideas discussed in this text can readily be transferred to second- and foreign-language instruction, as well as to mainstream classrooms, for they represent examples of highly effective teaching and learning in any setting. The authors clearly indicate that, for the SIOP approach to work effectively, all teachers, not only ESL teachers, must work in concert with each other. Overall, this book offers a strong contribution to the literature on improving instructional practices and guiding ELLs to participate in the ongoing educational conversation, one that, for them, will be dominated by a new language. Through effective teacher training, particularly through models such as the SIOP, perhaps we may make further steps toward removing the powerful linguistic barriers that dominate America’s educational institutions.

References

- Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E. (1998). *ESL/EFL teaching: Principles for success*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (1997). *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource book for K-8 teachers* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Tollefson, J. W. (1991). *Planning language, planning inequality*. London: Longman.