ELL shadowing: Strengthening pedagogy and practice with pre-service and inservice teachers

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ABSTRACT

English language learners (ELL) student shadowing is a technique for examining specific areas of an ELL's school experience, and gaining insight into the student's perspective about school. Shadowing involves the selection of a student (often at random) and following him/her from 2-3 hours, noting the types of listening—one-way (lecture) or two-way (dialogue)—as well as academic speaking opportunities, at every five-minute interval. The purpose of student shadowing is to gather information about the daily life of an ELL student in order to participate in a larger conversation on improving the educational experiences for this group of students. This method of collecting student engagement information is introduced in this article as a way to train pre-service and inservice teachers in becoming more sensitive and responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of ELLs. Both teacher education programs and district professional development must become more focused and aligned regarding coursework and on-going reflective opportunities. Such reflective teacher training and professional development opportunities will enable ELLs to acquire English and the academic language needed to succeed in school and beyond.

Key Words: English learners, academic language, teacher training

INTRODUCTION

Each year in the United States, school systems contend with the changing face of public school children—a growing number who are English language learners (ELLs)—and enter school with many rich traditions and cultures, but also the task of doing "double the work" of learning grade level content while also learning English. According to Capps et al. (2005), by 2010, 13% of the total United States population will be foreign-born. A large portion of these students come from homes where English is not spoken, while many of their families do not have a deep history of formal education (August & Hakuta, 1994). This presents a challenge for many educators who may not know how to close the linguistic and cultural gaps of their students (Soto-Hinman & Hetzel, 2009). In the midst of the complexity of these dynamics, Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), continues to hold educational systems accountable for both ELL progress in English proficiency, or English language development (ELD)—the basics of English—and academic language development (ALD), or grade-level expectations. Educators and educational systems must become better at addressing both ELD and ALD simultaneously, or ELLs will not have access to the educational opportunities and futures they deserve. According to Abedi & Dietel (2004), "ELL students' academic performance is far below that of other students, oftentimes as much as 20 to 30 percentage points lower, and usually shows little improvement throughout the years." For many ELLs, the achievement gap begins when they enter school as they may already lag far behind in listening vocabulary and opportunities to orally practice English. In this way, the changing demography calls for both a change in the way that teachers are trained to work with ELLs, as well as the incorporation of on-going professional development, to assist teachers in becoming more effective with this growing group of students.

TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Many states require teachers to obtain a certification in order to teach ELLs. In California, it once was a separate certificate consisting of four classes that exposed pre-service teachers meeting the needs of ELLs. With the surge in the number of ELLs, California has moved towards an embedded certification process, requiring, in most colleges and universities, one course that addresses the needs of ELLs, while also integrating topics on ELLs into the rest of the teacher preparation coursework. In other words, teachers in California come out of teacher preparation programs with an ELL certification as part of their credentialing process. While this looks like a positive concept at the outset—teachers no longer have to take additional coursework outside of their credential to teach ELLs, and every teacher gets at least one course focused on the needs of this group—one course is hardly enough to become competent with the specific needs of ELLs. As Darling-Hammond (2008) suggests, "Teacher qualifications, teacher's knowledge and skills, make more difference for student learning than any other single factor. Clearly, this means if we want to improve student learning, what we have to do is invest in teachers' learning. We have to be sure that teachers understand not only their content area, which is very important, but also, how do students learn? How do different students learn differently? How do students acquire language? How do second language

learners need to be taught?" Teacher education programs must become more focused and aligned in both the coursework and fieldwork opportunities that they require of their pre-service teachers in order to ensure appropriate cultural and linguistic differentiation of ELLs.

SUSTAINED AND FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to findings from the National Staff Development Council (2009), "Teachers are not getting adequate training in teaching special education or limited English proficiency students. More than two-thirds of teachers nationally had not had even one day of training in supporting the learning of special education or LEP students during the previous three years . . . ." Specifically, teachers would benefit from both a series of courses, and a variety of coursework experiences, that sensitize them to the specific linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs in our schools. Additionally, when teachers enter their classrooms, on-going and focused professional development that supports them in best meeting the needs of ELLs, and scaffolding instruction for this group of students, is paramount to closing their literacy gaps (Soto-Hinman & Hetzel, 2009). The National Staff Development Council (2009) suggests that teachers need close to 50 hours of professional development to improve their skills and their students' learning. Therefore, teacher learning must also be on-going. One exercise that can both be incorporated into teacher education programs and used in staff development to sensitize teachers to the instructional and linguistic needs of ELLs is called the ELL Shadowing Project.

PURPOSE OF SHADOWING

ELL student shadowing is a technique for examining specific areas of an ELL's school experience and gaining insight into the student's perspective about school. Shadowing involves the selection of a student (often at random) and following him/her from 2-3 hours, noting classroom and campus activities. The purpose of student shadowing is to gather information about the daily life of an ELL student in order to participate in a larger conversation on improving the educational experiences of students.

In a school or district context, teachers may engage in shadowing projects where they follow a particular student for several hours to gain understanding regarding their educational experiences, as well as obtain qualitative data about their academic lives. Such shadowing projects have been conducted in several universities in Southern California, including Whittier College, Biola University and Claremont Graduate University, as well as a variety of school districts (the Los Angeles Unified School District and Hayward Unified School District) and county education offices (Kern and Santa Barbara Counties) in California, in order to have pre-service teachers and educators gain a glimpse into a day in the life of ELLs in their school settings. Participants have been trained using a protocol (see illustration that follows) where they monitor the domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing at five-minute intervals throughout a school day. It is important to note that participants are not ready to formally shadow ELLs until they have both studied the elements of academic talk in the classroom, as well as the different forms of listening that they will monitor. At Whittier College, students

do not shadow an ELL until mid-way through the course when they have amply studied academic speaking and listening.

Using Figure 1, the ELL shadowing protocol, pre-service teachers monitor, at every five-minute interval, who the primary speaker is—either the student or teacher—as well as who the primary speaker is speaking to. In addition, the type(s) of listening involved in the interaction are also monitored, whether it is one-way or two-way. One-way listening is an interaction where students are taking in information, such as a lecture. Typically, in one-way listening, there is not room for clarification or questions. In contrast, two-way listening allows for clarification to be made, because the interaction is dialogue-based. That is, the interaction is considered a conversation. Throughout the shadowing project, participants are often astounded by the fact that the teacher will do most of the talking, with much of the interaction being lecture-based, despite the fact that the teacher's primary duty is to develop ELL's language.

Figure 2 is an example of the ELL shadowing protocol completed for two intervals in a classroom interaction. In the first language exchange at 10:20, we see that the ELL has just engaged in a song during English/Language Arts time. Therefore, academic talk has been coded as a 4, because the primary speaker is the student singing with the entire class. Singing has been noted in the two-way listening exchange as the student is interacting in talk as well and not merely listening as he sings. Under the comments section, the observer has written down any anecdotal notes important to the interaction. Here, specifically, the observer has noted that the student is attentive and nods that he is ready to sing.

In the 10:25 exchange, the student engages in an instructional read aloud. Here, the exchange has been coded 2 under academic one-way listening because the student is taking in information and not asked to respond. Academic speaking has been coded 7 because the teacher is doing the talking while she reads the book aloud to the whole class. Students continued to code interactions this way every five minutes for two to four hours.

The shadowing project allows students to begin to find patterns regarding who is doing most of the speaking in classrooms, and what kinds of listening ELLs are often asked to undertake. Students soon begin to notice that the primary speaker in classrooms is often the teacher, which is the second box under primary speaker (and numbers 5-7). Similarly, students find that the listening interactions are often one-way, or in lecture mode, with little room for questions or clarification on the part of the ELL.

In the shadowing debriefing process, these student interactions become essential to changing instructional practice systemically. Similarly, the shadowing project illuminates for teachers the absence of opportunities for academic language practice in the classroom. Through this process, educators are able to reflect on their own instructional practices, and how such practices may positively or negatively impact student achievement. For example, one teacher in LAUSD's District 6 stated, "The person talking most is the person who is learning most. . . . *And I'm doing most of the talking in my class!"* This process, then, creates the urgency for changing instructional practice across levels.

RESULTS OF A COURSE SHADOWING PROJECT

Figure 3 represents the results that have emerged from a class shadowing project at Whittier College in the course Education 504: Second Language Acquisition. About thirty pre-service teachers shadowed ELLs at local schools, across both elementary and secondary levels.

Figure 4 represents the most frequent mode of academic speaking—46.2% (almost 50%)—was the teacher speaking to the whole class. This means that ELLs in these classrooms did not receive as many opportunities for academic language development, which they desperately need in order to become proficient with the language. According the August & Shanahan (2006) of the National Literacy Panel, oral language development is the foundation of literacy for ELLs. In order to become proficient in English, ELLs need ample opportunities to practice language in order to acquire the language at the pace needed (at least one proficiency level per year), as well as to move towards more cognitively and linguistically demanding grade-level material. When this kind of progress does not happen, ELLs can stagnate at basic or social levels of English, which makes access to grade-level and academic curriculum much more difficult. As Goldenberg suggests (2008), "It is not sufficient to learn English so that [a student] can talk to [their] friends and the teacher about classroom routines . . . [students] have to learn what is called 'academic English' a term that refer to more abstract, complex, and challenging language that will eventually permit [them] to participate successfully in mainstream classroom instruction."

LISTENING

There were similar results with the lack of listening experiences that ELLs needed during the shadowing process. Instead, ELLs sat with little active listening or engagement during most of the two hours shadowed. Figure 5 represents the specific listening percentages, where 57% of classroom interactions during shadowing were one-way exchanges. One-way listening typically occurs in a lecture where students are unable to ask questions or clarify concepts with the teacher or peers. In fact, the two-way listening mode is most helpful to ELLs because they are given the opportunity to dialogue about difficult cognitively demanding topics. During two-way listening opportunities, ELLs are also able to apply new learning, ask questions of their peers and make deeper connections. This finding points to the need to train teachers about the importance of active listening and engagement in a classroom setting. In fact, if we do not teach listening specifically, it oftentimes will not happen because ELLs may be focusing on just trying to make sense of individual sounds or words. We must scaffold the listening process for students by showing them how to listen and what to listen for. For example, they can listen for specific vocabulary words or generally for the "gist" of a lecture or reading. If we do not teach pre-service teachers how to do this, they will not know how to best support the needs of their students.

CONCLUSION

Results of the ELL shadowing project almost always include pre-service and inservice teachers becoming more aware of the needs of these students in their classrooms, as well as the importance of scaffolding instruction for them. Pre-service teachers begin to realize that the instructional methods that they do or not use in a classroom will positively or negatively impact the achievement gap. In essence, that they are part of perpetuating the problem or becoming the solution. In fact, they begin to see that listening and speaking are equally important domains of literacy that become scaffolds to reading and writing respectively. For example, listening and reading are both about making meaning, and just as we can read specifically or generally, we can also listen that way. Similarly, speaking and writing are both about output or production of oral and written language. When we allow students to speak out their thoughts before they write them, they will write more clearly and with more confidence.

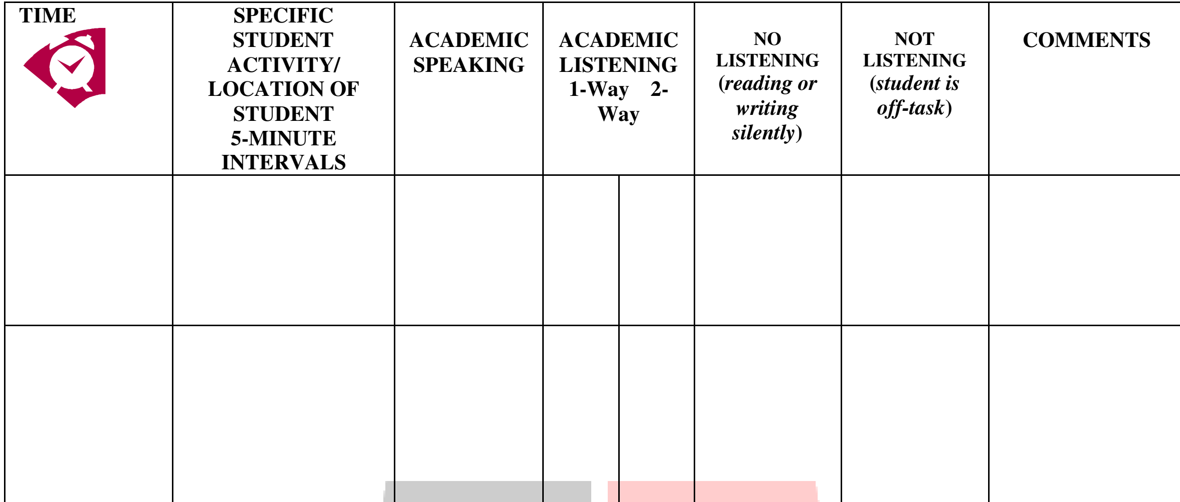
After the ELL shadowing project, pre-service and inservice teachers are then challenged to design a series of lessons that scaffold language and learning for this group of students. They are in essence using the urgency of what they didn't see in the classroom setting, as well as the new scaffolding techniques that they have learned regarding active listening and oral/academic language engagement, to create new lessons that address the linguistic and cultural needs of their students. In this manner, the ELL shadowing project allows pre-service teachers to practice critical thinking and problem solving skills by experiencing a need they will encounter in the field, as well as becoming aware of the communication and collaboration skills they will need to embed in their teaching to close the achievement gap with ELLs.

Figure 1: Blank ELL Shadowing Form

ELL Student Shadow Study Observation Form

Student First Name: ____________________ **Grade:** ____________ **ELD Level:** _____________

Gender: _________________________ **School:** ____



TIME	SPECIFIC STUDENT ACTIVITY/ LOCATION OF STUDENT 5-MINUTE INTERVALS	ACADEMIC SPEAKING	ACADEMIC LISTENING 1-Way	2-Way	NO LISTENING (*reading or writing silently*)	NOT LISTENING (*student is off-task*)	COMMENTS

Primary Speaker	Mostly to Whom?	Primary Speaker	Mostly to Whom?
Your Student	1. Student 2. Teacher 3. Small Group 4. Whole Class	Teacher	5. Student 6. Small Group 7. Whole Class

Primary Listener	Listening Mostly to Whom?
Your Student	1. Student
	2. Teacher
	3. Small Group
	4. Whole Class

Figure 2: Completed ELL Shadowing Form

TIME	**SPECIFIC STUDENT ACTIVITY/ LOCATION OF STUDENT 5-MINUTE INTERVALS**	**ACADEMIC SPEAKING**	**ACADEMIC LISTENING 1-Way**	**2-Way**	**NO LISTENING**	**NOT LISTENING**	**COMMENTS**
10:20	*"Never Give Up" English/language arts song. Summing up— "make a long story short"*	4		*singing*			*Preparation for lesson B. paying attention, watching Head nodding to "Ready?"*
10:25	*Instructional Read aloud of Miss Rumphius*	7	2				

Primary Speaker	**Mostly to Whom?**	**Primary Speaker**	**Mostly to Whom?**
Your Student	**1. Student**	**Teacher**	**5. Student**
	2. Teacher		**6. Small Group**
	3. Small Group		**7. Whole Class**
	4. Whole Class		

Primary Listener	**Listening Mostly to Whom?**
Your Student	**1. Student**
	2. Teacher
	3. Small Group
	4. Whole Class

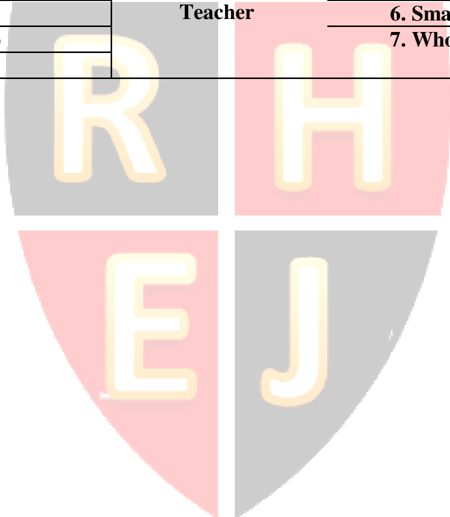


Figure 3: Academic Speaking Results

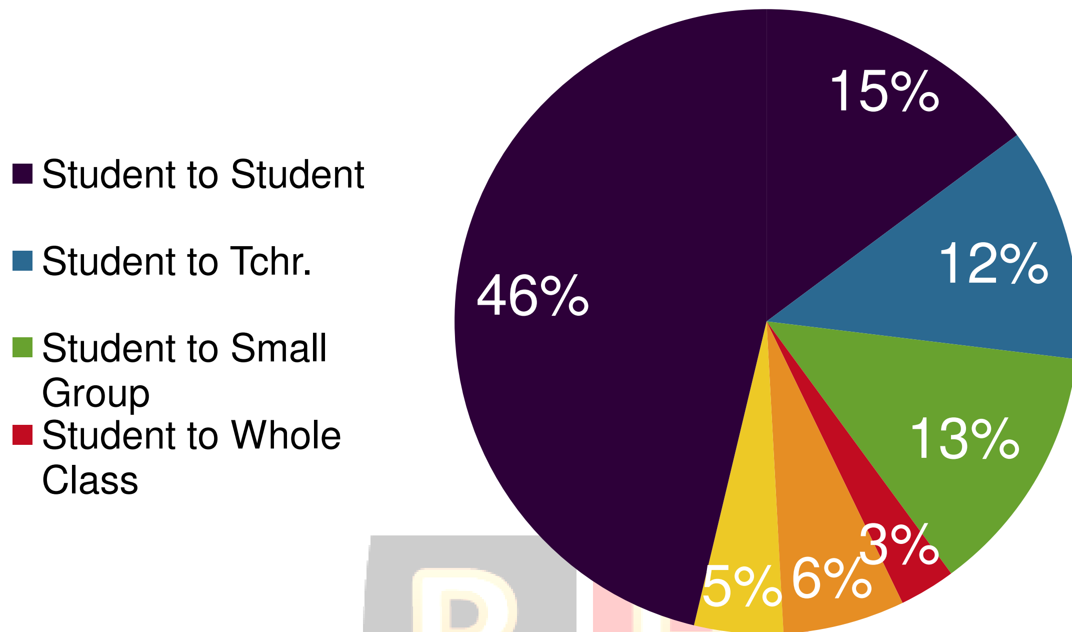
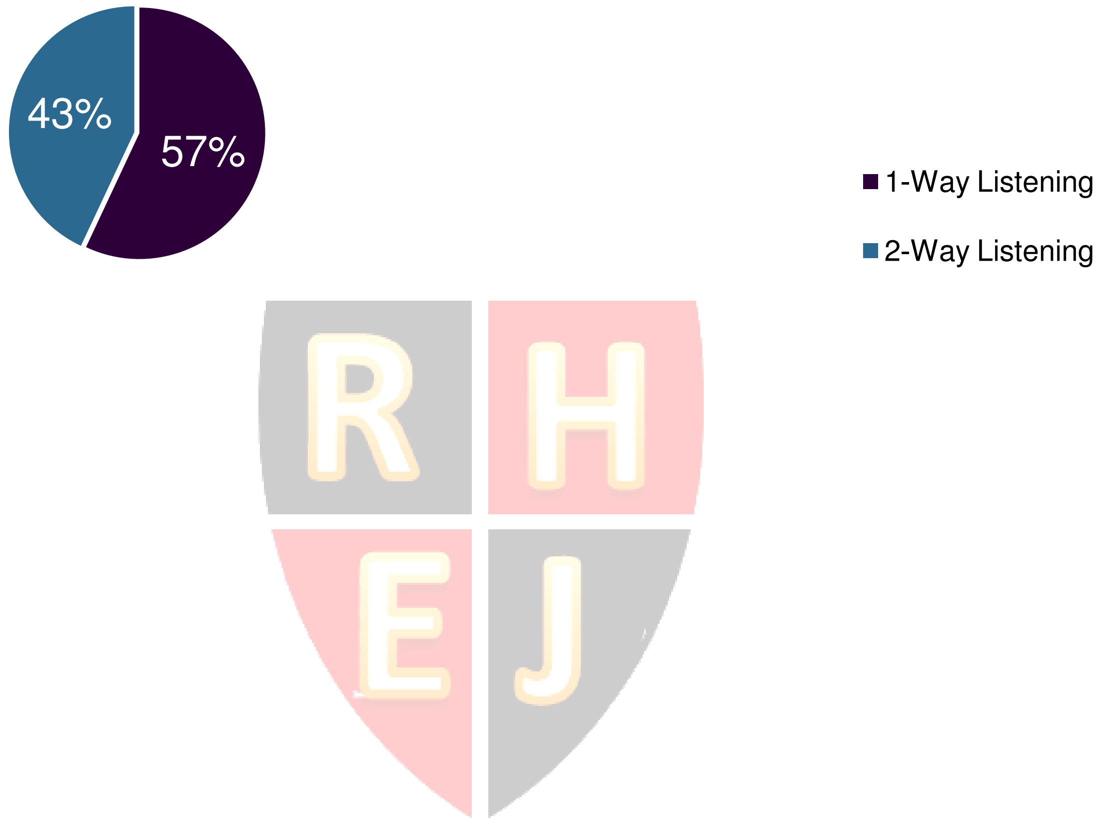


Figure 4: Academic Speaking Results

Academic Speaking		Percentage within speaking
1. Student to Student	35	14.8%
2. Student to Teacher	29	12.1%
3. Student to Small Group	31	13%
4. Student to Whole Class	7	2.9%
5. Teacher to Student	15	6.3%
6. Teacher to Small Group	11	4.6%
7. Teacher to Whole Class	110	46.2%
Total Incidents	238	

Figure 5: Listening Results



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