

## A Review of “Inclusive pedagogy for English language learners: a handbook of research-informed practices”

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### **Abstract:**

This article is a review of the book “Inclusive pedagogy for English language learners: a handbook of research-informed practices” edited by L.S. Verplaetse and N. Migliacci.

**Keywords:** Book Review | Education | English Language Learners | Pedagogy

### **Article:**

*Inclusive Pedagogy for English language learners: a handbook of research-informed practices* is a comprehensive book which provides information relevant to teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in kindergarten through 12th grade in US schools. The editors have assembled a collection of accessible teaching approaches from teachers, administrators and researchers who have experience addressing the specific linguistic and academic needs of ELLs. In order to make the content accessible for ‘educational leaders’, such as practitioners and administrators, this book does not assume a background in applied linguistics research. It therefore employs a reduced amount of discipline-related jargon. The effect, however, makes the content accessible to policymakers and could also serve as an introductory text for teacher-training programmes as a foundation for information about educating ELLs. The contents are divided into four sections, which include various teaching methods, example lessons, strategies and interviews with experts. Each chapter contains examples of successful methods, approaches or lessons for ELLs. In the final chapter, the editors synthesise and contextualise the examples from the previous chapters in relation to many of the challenges facing educators of ELLs in US public schools (e.g. heterogeneity of ELLs in terms of first languages or previous education experience). The thematic organisation allows the reader to benefit from literature on topics specific to their area

of interest, while the final chapter allows the reader to benefit from the combined recommendations from each contribution.

Section 1, 'In the elementary classroom', predictably addresses the needs of younger ELLs. Chapter 1 by Verplaetse and Migliacci provides an overview of research on second language acquisition and describes common misconceptions about educating ELLs. Chapter 2 by Brisk, Horan and MacDonald transitions into classroom-based examples of inclusive pedagogy. By providing concrete examples from a first-grade class, the authors demonstrate how the eight scaffolded steps of the rhetorical approach to writing emphasise text content and context to improve student writing. In another elementary literacy lesson, Willet, Harman, Hogan, Lozano and Rubeck describe a collaborative approach to inclusive pedagogy via a writing and reading partnership between Hogan's second-grade class and Rubeck's fifth-grade class. Although they taught in an 'underperforming' school, these teachers had the flexibility to create their own standard-based lessons to have ELLs and non-ELLs engage in reading and writing together. Chapter 4 by Yedlin reflects on the practices of first-grade ELL teacher to connect teaching to research and demonstrate how research-based teaching approaches help ELLs acquire academic English skills. In a different approach to assisting ELLs in public schools, Parker describes the efforts of a collaborative action research project between Brown University and New York public schools. This team made test items more transparent by incorporating test tasks into the classroom curriculum. This section of the book describes methods that classroom teachers could adapt for use in their classrooms. However, one small problem with this section is the omission of successful models of bilingual education (e.g. Freeman 1998). This oversight limits the scope of this section, which may lead some readers to disregard the value of a student's first language.

Section 2, 'In the secondary classroom', expands the intended audience from teachers of ELLs to district and external organisations with an invested interest in teaching ELLs in middle and high school. In chapter 6 Walqui suggests 10 pedagogical methods to engage adolescent ELLs in mainstream classrooms (e.g. creating classroom environments where all students are actively invested, teaching contextualised content as well as academic norms). She then outlines a model of teaching that complements these methods in order to focus attention on the multiple degrees of expertise a teacher needs to provide appropriate education for this population. In chapter 7, Verplaetse and Migliacci offer multiple strategies derived from a sheltered instruction model of teaching, which provides content area instruction with appropriate linguistic accommodations (e.g. contextualising content with effective visuals, improving comprehensibility of classroom discourse by repeating key terms and providing more wait time). Verplaetse continues the discussion about the use of research-based practices for ELLs by focusing on interaction in language learning in chapter 8. Her six strategies to improve the writing skills of adolescent ELLs include promoting the use of the first language in the classroom, an approach that may be a surprise to an audience unfamiliar with research in applied linguistics which promotes the benefits of continued first language learning. In chapter 9 Harklau expands upon approaches to meet the needs of ELLs in middle and high schools and discusses strategies to help ELLs prepare

for and succeed in institutes of higher education. Combined with Section 1, these topics show that although teaching ELLs is a complex task, there are multiple avenues available to educational leaders to help ELLs succeed in school.

The third section, 'School and Community Collaboration', reaches outside the confines of the school into the surrounding communities and offers various approaches to facilitate educational engagement of ELLs through forming active partnerships. Chapter 10 is a 2004 interview with Anthony J. Colón, then the vice president of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). The questions asked by the editors elicit information about the importance of assisting grassroots efforts in creating community partnerships with schools by supporting the needs of the community when, for example, establishing charter schools. Striking a balance between the needs of each side of the partnership is also emphasised by Migliacci in chapter 11. She describes an initiative that brings together many groups to introduce students to a possible career in health care. However, many collaborative efforts between schools and the community encounter difficult challenges. The conversation with Deborah Wei in chapter 12 highlights the issues facing community-based organisations, which have not been able to get public school support and therefore have established a charter school. Wei's description of her sustained work in the Chinatown community in Philadelphia shows the importance of continued support to advocate for the educational needs of a community. The themes of this section illustrate the potential benefits of school and community collaborations that show educational leaders the available additional resources.

The focus of the book then shifts from specific examples of community and school connections to more general summaries and recommendations about school and district-level reforms. Chapter 13 by Coady, Hamann, Harrington, Pacheco, Pho and Yedlin gives an overview of nine principles that facilitate responsive education of ELLs. Each principle begins with the statement 'ELLs are most successful when...' and is completed with a variety of techniques (e.g. reinforcing students' cultures, maintaining high expectations, using appropriate assessments) highlighting the unique linguistic and pedagogical needs of ELLs. In chapter 14, Miranda offers a comprehensive overview of effective practices for teaching ELLs and four common models of bilingual education. Although some of his recommendations about determining linguistic dominance of bilinguals remain controversial (Abudarham 1998; Valadez, MacSwan, and Martínez 2002), his pragmatic approach to bilingual education may inspire more schools to consider first language support rather than focusing on English-only instruction. Focusing on a subset of the ELL population, De George addresses the complicated issue of diagnosing learning disabilities in ELLs. In chapter 15, he offers an extensive review of the mediating factors related to a student's background, what he calls 'opportunities to learn'. He emphasises the importance of conducting an almost exhaustive investigation of these factors before administering any formal testing to determine disabilities to avoid overrepresentation or misrepresentation of ELLs in special education. A chapter by Hamann concludes the section with a less optimistic portrait of how two different school districts, a large town and an urban district, still have a long way to

go to address the needs of ELLs. Combined with the previous examples, this section shows that there is much work left to be done in US public schools to provide appropriate education for ELLs.

Verplaetse and Migliacci conclude the book with a chapter that synthesises the content by section and provides graphic organisers that may serve as a reference for reviewing the topics in each chapter. In addition, they offer five new myths about educating ELLs that address the limitations of testing and inadequate professional development. This final chapter allows the reader to see how the different themes are related and may also be used as a preview of the book or a review for the reader who wants to revisit specific topics.

The editors succeed in presenting the major themes of *Inclusive pedagogy for English language learners: a handbook of research-informed practices* in a manner understandable to individuals without a background in applied linguistics. As an introductory handbook for educational leaders, it might have benefited from more interactive features such as discussion questions about chapter topics or an appendix of recommendations, graphic organisers or checklists to facilitate implementation of services for ELLs. Nevertheless, the content of the book offers a range of perspectives and suggestions that are accessible to and helpful for readers with an interest in meeting the unique educational needs of ELLs.

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