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Introduction

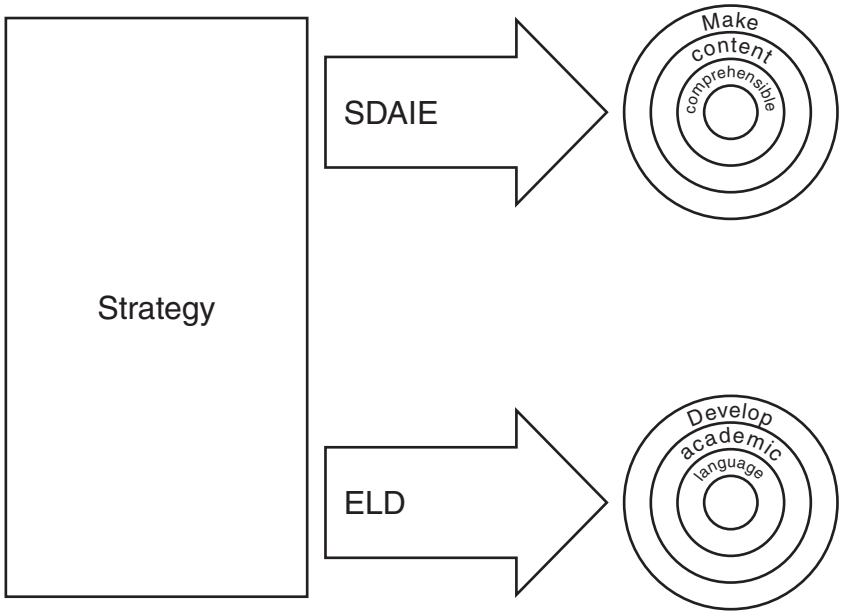
My goal in writing this book is to empower teachers to believe in their students and themselves as teachers of English language learners. We often lack a sense of self-confidence when we encounter challenges in our profession. We can feel frustrated and ineffective when we see our students staring back at us in puzzlement. We think about our preparation as teachers, trying to remember what we learned about English language learners and how to support them. Unfortunately, most teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers well for working with English language learners (Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez 2008). With a lack of preparation, we find ourselves reverting back to traditional pedagogical approaches that do not work with English language learners. We talk *at* students and have them complete worksheets where they just fill in the blank or copy the answer from the board. We overwhelm them with language and content without taking time to check for understanding.

I can remember what it was like from year to year when a new group of students entered the room ready to learn. It was my responsibility to provide them with a quality and holistic education in which they had opportunities to explore content, engage with literature and their peers, and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. Yet daily, I found myself questioning my approaches and asking myself, "Are my students learning?" I began to think about what it means to learn a new language and learn *in* a new language at the same time. In my own struggles I began to feel empowered. I had the potential to do something great—the power to help my English language learners navigate this difficult task and learn alongside them. I came to understand that every task had its challenges, but with every challenge came success and an amazing learning opportunity. Though this was my journey, I also began to realize that I was not alone. Many teachers struggle when faced with the challenges of working with English language learners.

Academic Language Output

Many of the SDAIE strategies we have learned and use can often be used as ELD strategies as well (refer to Chapter 6). When an instructional strategy is used to help content become comprehensible to students—that is, for students to make meaning of the information—you are presenting SDAIE. When you are using a strategy to provide students with an opportunity to develop academic language—that is, to use language to share what they have learned orally or in writing—it is an ELD strategy. Figure 3.2 demonstrates how integrating strategies can result in making content comprehensible as well as helping students develop academic language.

Fig. 3.2 The Outcome of Incorporating Instructional Strategies



and knowledge of syntax. These skills are not relearned when developing second-language literacy; rather, they are recalled and then applied to reading in English. What teachers need to understand, however, is that this transfer may not always be automatic or natural for students. English language learners with strong L1 literacy skills need to be made aware of the transferable skills and knowledge from their L1 to English (Goldenberg 2010). This includes knowledge of cognates, knowledge of letter-sound connections that are similar in both languages, knowledge of syntactic similarities and gaps, and knowledge of word meanings.

The transfer of language knowledge must be made explicit for students. I share a few of these here: cognates and letter-sound connections, and then I move toward discussing the essential elements of literacy in English in the absence of primary language support. These include the role of oral language, phonemic awareness and phonics, written discourse, and vocabulary reading comprehension.

Cognates

Cognates are words that have similar spelling, meaning and pronunciation from one language to another. The similarities between the Spanish and English languages offer a large number of cognates for Spanish-speaking English language learners to draw upon when making meaning from words. The challenge occurs, however, when students have not developed enough strong primary-language (L1) vocabulary upon which to rely in order to understand the English cognates. Many academic words we see across the content areas have Spanish-English cognates, but if students are not familiar with the word and its meaning in Spanish, it will not support English language development. For example, in social studies the word *federation* shares the Spanish cognate *federación,* the French *fédération,* and the Italian *federazione*. However, if students do not know the word or meaning of *federation* in their primary language, their L1 vocabulary does not support their learning the word *federation*. The development of a primary language helps facilitate second-language literacy.