Infusing the SIOP Model into the ESL Classroom

By Scott B. Freiberger

What is it with our profession and acronyms? It seems the more acronyms we coin to define new teaching strategies and terms, the more complex and scientific they sound. “Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)” may appear difficult to digest, but, with motivated students, it actually goes down as easily in the ESL classroom as does a simple phonics game of “Shoots and Ladders.” SIOP is a protocol developed by Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2008) to help with the purposeful teaching of language necessary for ESL students to understand content. The goal is to provide content-area instruction that accommodates students’ needs at varying levels.

While the SIOP Model was developed specifically for use in sheltered classrooms—that is, those without mainstream students—many of the strategies may benefit all students. In addition, while there are high performance expectations in core content areas, the authors point out that ESL students are, by definition, not proficient. Nevertheless, however, they are tested in English, and many require a minimum of four years before reaching average academic performance levels in English (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

The SIOP model essentially integrates academic language instruction into content-area instruction. The eight components are preparation, building background, comprehensible input (Krashen, 1989; 2003), strategies, interaction, practice and application, lesson delivery, and finally, review and assessment (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Many components, such as the development of background knowledge (activating schema), incorporating content-related vocabulary, cooperative learning and various reading comprehension strategies, differentiating instruction, and a keen emphasis on the writing process, may already be components that sound familiar to ESL teachers, such as the development of background knowledge (activating schema), incorporating content-related vocabulary, cooperative learning and various reading comprehension strategies, differentiating instruction and a keen emphasis on the writing process.

What makes the SIOP model unique is the inclusion of a language objective in every lesson. It features The SIOP model includes separate, clearly defined content and language objectives so students better understand the content they will learn and the process of how they will be learning it (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Academic literacy practice is highlighted, which allows for scaffolding and differentiating content objectives. The authors also suggest adjusting content to various learning styles and intelligences (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

To adapt content, the authors suggest using thinking maps and graphic organizers, by helping students take effective notes, highlighting important vocabulary and key academic text, and using marginal notes. Adapted texts and leveled study guides may also be used to adapt content for ESL students. Supplementary materials may include hands-on manipulatives and realia; pictures, photos, and other visual images; multimedia clips, songs, or chants; teacher modeling; and related materials that support core content instruction (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).
Regarding lesson delivery, there are clearly delineated content and language objectives, stated orally and in writing. Lessons are to be meticulously planned meticulously (your co-teachers and administrators will love this), with lucid explanations of academic tasks.

The SIOP model may not be the panacea for ESL teaching, but it does offer some helpful tips. The emphasis on the instruction of language as well as content may benefit not only English language learners (ELLs), but also all students. Remember to plan your lessons carefully and to differentiate instruction to best accommodate your students’ various need. And, be sure to provide opportunities for students to apply learning in relevant and meaningful ways (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008).

References


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