

Research Brief

Helping Long-Term English Learners Master the Language of School

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THE CHALLENGE

The majority (59%) of middle and high school English learners in California are long-term English learners. Long-term English Learners (LTELs) are students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for more than six years without successfully acquiring the language and academic skills necessary to be reclassified and thrive in standards-based coursework. While most LTELs have a fairly strong command of social English, they are stuck at intermediate English proficiency, have profound gaps in their literacy and language skills, and perform below grade-level expectations. As a cohort, LTELs struggle academically with unacceptably high rates of receiving D and F grades and may exhibit passive, disengaged learning behaviors (Olsen, 2010).

Many factors contribute to English learners becoming LTELs: elementary and middle school language arts curricula that weren't designed for English learners; extended periods of time with no targeted English language support; placement into literacy interventions without a tandem focus on English language development; and social segregation and linguistic isolation (Olsen, 2010).

Few districts have formal evidence-based approaches for serving LTELs, particularly with regard to their English language and literacy development. The predictable program for LTELs in secondary school is a mainstream English language arts class with a second hour of support lacking an explicit focus on the language demands of schooling (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

English learners cannot be permitted to incur “irreparable academic deficits” during the time they are mastering English. Educators are challenged with the need to address deficits as soon as possible and to ensure that students’ schooling does not become a permanent dead end, but a path to career, college, and life readiness (Olsen, 2010).

RESEARCH-BASED PRINCIPLES

How can we actively engage students with a track record of non-engagement and advance their academic standing? Current research and best practices for LTELs recommend clustered placement into grade-level content classes mixed with English proficient students. LTELs need to interact academically with skilled English speakers and have access to rigorous curricula at their grade level.

LTELs should also be placed in a specialized English language development course designed for U.S.-educated bilinguals, not a traditional ESL program for relative newcomers. This specially designed course must address acute and distinct linguistic needs, with an emphasis on academic speaking and writing, to propel students beyond an LTEL intermediate level and enable them to thrive in secondary course work (Olsen, 2010; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

While LTELs benefit from targeted reading and writing interventions, just as English proficient students do, their literacy support must include an informed and systematic program to bolster their verbal command of English vocabulary, syntax, and grammar (August & Shanahan, 2006). They must have conscientiously planned, explicit instruction and daily structured, accountable opportunities to practice language they can leverage on writing and reading assignments (Dutro & Kinsella, 2010). LTELs also require consistent instructional routines, rather than an eclectic array of strategies and activities, so they can devote their full intellectual capital to learning critical content and using English (Goldenberg, 2008).

PROMISING APPROACHES

Dr. Kate Kinsella has partnered with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to develop **English 3D**, a language development program designed to ensure proficiency in the “language of school”—the academic language, writing, discourse, and demeanor vital to secondary school success.

The curricular underpinnings of **English 3D** were developed by Dr. Kinsella over multiple years through her involvement with adolescent English learners in San Francisco State University's Step to College Program and her extensive consultancy, training, and in-class coaching with secondary schools. For the past decade, Dr. Kinsella has focused her scholarship and school reform initiatives on the burgeoning LTEL population in California's secondary schools. The foundational instructional routines orchestrated within each **English 3D** unit are research-informed and classroom-tested by Dr. Kinsella and scores of teachers she has trained and coached. In doing so, she is confident that experienced and novice teachers alike will find the instructional units replete with targeted, robust, and thought-provoking lessons to engage their students in dynamic language and literacy development.

THE GOALS OF THIS PROGRAM ARE TO:

- Engage students cognitively and linguistically in every lesson phase through structured, accountable responses and consistent, interactive instructional routines.
- Explicitly teach high-leverage, portable language, including vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar that students can apply in academic and social contexts.
- Offer daily contexts for students to productively interact with peers, applying advanced social and academic language, critical thinking skills, and pragmatics.
- Equip students with the language, knowledge, and skills to tackle the informational reading and writing demands of state and Common Core standards and assessments.
- Make regular connections between course-work target language and literacy skills and the demands of college and the professional workplace.
- Improve scholarly demeanor, study skills, and habits through modeling, accountability, encouragement, and high expectations.
- Provide constructive, respectful, and timely feedback on language use, literacy skills, and scholarly comportment.

For more information visit hnhco.com/english3d

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