**Essential Elements of Effective Practices for English Learners**

Karen Cadiero Kaplan, Center for Equity and Biliteracy Education Research, San Diego State University, Magaly Lavadenz & Elvira G. Armas, Center for Equity for English Learners, Loyola Marymount University with the Teacher Effectiveness Work Group, Californians Together

**Abstract**

One of the most powerful variables for English Learner success is the quality of their teachers. The lack of consistent and focused research-based professional development and preparation for teachers of English Learners (ELs) is a major contributing factor to the lack of adequate language and academic development. This policy brief (1) provides a synthesis of effective practices for instructing ELs; (2) presents four research-based essential elements critical for EL program implementation, teacher reflection, and monitoring of teacher effectiveness; and (3) concludes with program and policy recommendations. Three key areas for policy action are prioritized: 1) District and state level policies must require that local and state leadership support the implementation of these essential elements, and 2) Alignment of fiscal and human resources must be targeted to ensure that teachers are provided with professional development, materials and curricular program supports required to implement these key elements leading to English learner success. 3) Teacher preparation and credential requirements need to incorporate the four critical elements of effective practice for success with English Learners.

**Introduction**

Teachers need preparation in both instruction and assessment in order to create change that will result in effective instruction for English Learners. While a number of policy and program factors underlie the success of schools that serve English Learner (EL) populations in K-12 schools, teachers remain at the core of academic success for ELs. Our school systems must be prepared to support teachers in order to change the effects of over ten years of highly-structured, narrowly-focused reading and math curricula that have negatively impacted EL success (e.g., push outs, drop outs, long-term ELs) (Olsen, 2010; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). Many English Learners have been foreclosed from a comprehensive curriculum of high quality science, social science and the arts.

Credentialing requirements must equip teachers with essential elements of effective practice that leads to English Learner success. Teachers need specialized preparation and professional development to target and differentiate the language and academic needs of English Learners.

**Current Policy and Practice**

Currently, federal, state and local funding and programs (including Economic Impact Aid, Titles I, II and III of the No Child Left Behind Act) have not adequately funded or prioritized the professional development needs of teachers of English Learners. The state and federal accountability systems have generalized instruction and assessment measures without specific attention to the language and academic needs of English Learners. The current California credentialing requirements are too general, with few opportunities to develop expertise in working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. This brief presents specific elements of effective practice that need to be incorporated into all comprehensive teacher preparation and school reform efforts.

**Essential Elements of Effective Practice**

Four essential elements emerge from the review of effective practices in EL program implementation. They are delineated in the narrative below:

1) Consider effective practices that lead to student achievement

2) Understand the sociocultural and language demands that are unique for meeting the needs of English Learners.

3) Ensure that those who evaluate programs consider both the ways in which teachers concurrently accelerate language and content learning for their students (Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008; Santamaria, 2009).