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# Foreword

Jerry Jesness's *Teaching English Language Learners K–12: A Quick-Start Guide for the New Teacher* fills a crucial need in the education of a growing number of children who enter U.S. public schools with little or no knowledge of the English language. Four and a half million children, now described officially as English Language Learners, are enrolled in schools across the country, with the greatest concentration in California, where one of every five students fits this description. Before highlighting the particular strengths of this *Guide* for teachers and administrators, it is useful to explain why the information conveyed in this volume is so important at this time.

The field of English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching has evolved and improved dramatically over the past 35 years. Following the state and federal laws and a U.S. Supreme Court decision *requiring* special help for English Language Learners, enormous activity has been expended in producing effective models, teaching strategies, and materials for helping children of all ages gain mastery of the English language for access to an equal educational opportunity. However, since most of the emphasis has been on bilingual education programs based on native-language teaching, the ESL component played a minor role. Most of the effort in colleges of education across the country has endorsed the gradual, transitional nature of bilingual programs, the slow shift from learning in the native language to learning in English, with less emphasis on English language and literacy as the prime goal.

This *Quick-Start Guide* fills another hole in the ESL field by focusing not only on young learners but on the urgent needs of older students in grades 4–12. Although these older students make up about one-third of all English Language Learners, their needs are much more pressing as they have fewer years ahead in school and they must meet much more challenging academic standards than their younger classmates if they are to master the language, literacy, and course content for high school graduation. Most attention in the publishing field has, naturally enough, been given to the education of younger English Language Learners who enter school in kindergarten through grade 3, and this *Guide* does provide good, practical ideas for teachers in the primary grades.

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Two other factors affect the timeliness of the *Quick-Start Guide*: the high standards, high-stakes testing movement across the states, and the swelling sea of change in state laws, away from a focus on native-language teaching in favor of expanded ESL, usually called “English Immersion.” Two-thirds of the states now require a tenth-grade test to be passed for high school graduation, generally a test of English literacy and mathematics, and these mandates are further supported by the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind policy. English Language Learners are held accountable for meeting the same standards as their native English-speaking classmates, a daunting prospect for many. The changes in state education laws in California (1998), Arizona (2000), and Massachusetts (2002) now require students of non-English background to be provided an intensive English learning program from the first day of school, with the clear objective of rapid and effective language, literacy, and subject matter learning in English. This expansion of the role of English as a Second Language teaching calls for recruiting and training (or retraining) of teachers on a large scale. For this, the *Quick-Start Guide* is an excellent primary resource.

The valuable classroom experience in the author’s background and a genuine sensitivity for his students’ needs are evident on every page of clear prose. How I would have benefited from having a guide of this sort in the decade when I directed the Bilingual/ESL programs for the Newton Public Schools in Massachusetts from 1980 to 1990! The practical information included here addresses the major issues in educating language minority students, without overloading the new teacher with extraneous matter. Among the basic ideas examined with sufficient thoroughness:

- The enormous variety in student backgrounds (first language, previous education or the lack thereof, socioeconomic status, family mobility) that poses great challenges for teachers in setting realistic goals, instructional grouping, pacing of lessons, and testing.
- The age-old question of introducing the different aspects of language, i.e., focus on speaking and listening comprehension first and for how long? when to introduce reading, writing? how much to focus on grammar, vocabulary, error correction, and spelling? when to initiate subject matter learning in English and how (with a few useful examples in science and social studies given)?
- A discussion of grading policies for students from such disparate backgrounds, as well as evaluating when English Language Learners are best prepared to work independently in mainstream classrooms, for part or all of the school day.
- The dilemma of distinguishing between students with learning disabilities and students acquiring a second language—sound advice for avoiding the misclassification of English Language Learners as learning disabled.

- A good review of appropriate teaching materials, especially in the area of computer assisted learning, a set of reproducible lessons for beginner students in the classroom, and a section on professional resources and organizations.

This book delivers what it promises—a concise array of teaching strategies, curriculum, and things ESL teachers need to know to become most confident in their work and most effective with their students. Truly important lessons for readers are present throughout the book: These students deserve the encouragement and support of the entire school community and are not just the responsibility of the ESL teacher alone; and given the essential learning opportunities we provide, English Language Learners are capable of high achievement in our schools and in our society as future productive, self-fulfilled adults.

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