

# Sheltered English instruction: An Overview of the Model for Younger English Learners\*

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## Abstract

The authors describe Sheltered English Instruction as a set of instructional strategies designed to simultaneously teach English as a second language and academic content. After reviewing reasons why Sheltered Instruction was developed and the language and learning theories that support it, the authors review four Sheltered Instruction models used in the U.S. and internationally. Then, the authors consider the implications of Sheltered Instruction for teaching English to younger learners in Mexico, give an example of a sheltered science lesson, and recommend other strategies that teachers can use to adapt instruction. They conclude by discussing differences between teaching English in the U.S. and Mexico, whether Sheltered Instruction is appropriate in Mexican classrooms, and they suggest features of the models that can be adopted and adapted for the Mexican context.

Los autores describen "Sheltered English Instruction" (Instrucción Estructurada o Contextualizada) como un conjunto de estrategias diseñadas para enseñar inglés como segundo idioma y contenidos académicos simultáneamente. Después de analizar las razones por las cuales la Instrucción Estructurada fue desarrollada y las teorías de lenguaje y aprendizaje que lo apoyan, los autores analizan cuatro modelos de Instrucción Estructurada utilizados en los Estados Unidos y a nivel internacional. Luego, los autores consideran las implicaciones de este modelo en la enseñanza del inglés a niños pequeños en México, dan un ejemplo de una lección de ciencia utilizando este modelo, y recomiendan estrategias que los maestros pueden utilizar para adaptar su enseñanza. Los autores concluyen discutiendo las diferencias entre la enseñanza del idioma inglés en los Estados Unidos y en México, si este modelo es apropiado en los salones de clase de México, y sugieren aspectos de los modelos que se podría adoptar y adaptar en México.

## Introduction

Deciding on an appropriate method for teaching English depends on a number of considerations. Some of the most important criteria educators must take into account include: the students' age, the goals of the school curriculum, and the social context of the school and community. In this article, we provide an overview of one approach to L2 instruction which has gained increased attention by language educators in different parts of the world. We start by breaking down some of the terminology used by language teachers and researchers, and then we describe the theoretical rationale for sheltered instruction. *Sheltered instruction* refers to teaching of academic content (for example, mathematics, environmental studies, or some other topic or subject area) using special, "sheltered"

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techniques so that students are learning the content as well as the language associated with the topic. Richards & Rodgers (2001) classify this as a “content-based” approach. Specifically, we consider why and how sheltered instruction has been implemented using different models in the United States and internationally, and the impact sheltered instruction has for younger language learners. We conclude by discussing the implications of using sheltered instructional approaches for teaching English to young learners in Mexico.

### **Sheltered Instruction in the United States: Background**

There are 5.1 million English language learners (ELLs) in the United States, representing over 350 languages (NCELA, 2006) (Note that “ELL” is the most common acronym used to refer to L2 English students in U.S. schools). Within this population, students, families, and communities are emerging in areas where teachers and schools have been Anglo-American, mainstream, native English speakers (Zehler et al, 2003) in the past. Other reasons for the recent attention assigned to ELL education are the standards movement (the establishment of content area and TESOL learning standards) and the passage of the national education law *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) of 2001, which places strong emphasis on accountability systems for promoting academic achievement. A key component of NCLB is the requirement that students are tested annually, with the goal of schools attaining “Annual Yearly Progress” by 2014. For ELLs, this testing requirement demonstrates inherent bias because tests are administered using English as the medium of assessment (Menken, 2008).

Teachers are, therefore, often unprepared to support the language and content learning of the ELLs. There are a number of clearly identified and classified models used for language instruction by teachers around the world (Baker, 2006; Garcia, 2009). Notions of “sheltered instruction” and “sheltered content instruction” reflect ideas about language and content teaching that can be adopted in a variety of contexts, especially one in which minority students are taught through the majority language of instruction. In settings like these, students and teachers are held accountable not only for *language* learning, but also for *content* learning. Whereas these settings have been categorized as “immersion” or “sink or swim” models in U.S. contexts, and deemed problematic by some researchers (Baker, 2006; Crawford, 2004), “sheltering” content, or “sheltered instruction” provides an opportunity for teachers to work within today’s schools in an effort to avoid compromising either the language or content learning of ELLs in the United States (Sherris, 2008).

Alternative models for the instruction of ELLs in the United States that are useful as supplements to teachers’ use of sheltered instruction include bilingual, ESL pull-out, and ESL push-in. Three models of bilingual instruction have a long-standing: (a) early-exit (Transitional Bilingual Education, TBE); (b) late-exit (Maintenance Bilingual Education, MBE); and (c) dual language, or two-way instruction. In early-exit programs, the goal is to transition ELL students as quickly as possible into English. In late-exit and dual language programs, the goal is students attaining bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism. While these are primarily used at the elementary level (grades Kindergarten-6), versions of them are also used in secondary, or middle (grades 6-8), and high (grades 9-12)

school settings. Both ESL models (pull-out and push-in) include a general education teacher who may have limited to no professional development related to the instruction of ELLs, and an ESL teacher, who has a special ESL certification, training, or degree. In other words, one teacher is mainstream, and the other is a language teaching specialist. In the “pull-out” model, ELLs are kept in the mainstream classroom with native English speaking peers for the majority of the day. They are pulled out during once or more during the day to receive specialized support from an ESL teacher. This may be for work that occurs in the mainstream classroom, language learning, or other content learning. In terms of the languages represented in pull-out classes, populations may be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Critics of this model are often concerned that students do not have access to the material that is covered while they are pulled out. In push-in models of instruction, the language specialist works in the classroom with ELLs, offering support during activities or tasks that present challenges. Like pull-out settings, push-in ESL teachers are usually not present for an entire class or day. Rather, they join the mainstream group to support the ELLs for a limited period of time compared to time of overall instruction.

### **The Theoretical Framework for Sheltered Instruction**

In many classrooms in the U.S., ELLs and English native speakers are together in the same classroom. The challenge for the teacher is how to present topics and concepts in English in a way that is comprehensible for ELLs. Generally speaking, sheltering instruction means making language and content more accessible to language learners without “watering it down,” which means without diminishing the level of cognitive demands required for the student to learn the concept or complete the activity. Often sheltering involves adapting materials originally designed for native English speakers. Through sheltering, ELLs have access to the same content as native English speakers, but teachers’ explanations and the classroom activities are modified or differentiated to make content more understandable. Later sections of this article provide real-world examples of how instruction can be differentiated for ELLs. Sheltering as an approach to instruction is grounded in theories about both language and learning.

A basic premise of all sheltered or content-oriented approaches is that L2 learners will acquire the language most successfully when they are using it as a vehicle or medium for gaining knowledge about other topics. Therefore, for ELLs in a Sheltered Instruction classroom, learning English is “incidental” to learning about mathematics, science, social studies, or whatever the subject area is that they are studying. It is incidental in the sense that acquiring English happens naturally as a bi-product of studying the other subjects. Therefore, it is an indirect method of L2 learning, because there is no organization of syllabus according to “language functions” or “grammatical structures” or other features common to a Communicative Language Teaching Approach. Instead, in the process of learning in other content areas, the students will learn whatever vocabulary, grammar, or language skills they need to complete their activities or assignments.

As we will see in the specific Sheltered Instruction models below, this is not to say that students’ English learning is random, only implicit, or completely un-

planned. In fact, Sheltered Instruction models ascribe to certain theories about what makes L2 learning successful. For example, teachers should encourage students' involvement with activities that encourage them to practice language using various modalities: input (reading, listening) and output (writing, speaking) (Long & Porter, 1985). This means that teachers should provide students both with comprehensible input, and many opportunities for students to interact with the teacher as well as their classmates. Finally, Sheltered Instruction is based on a belief that language is learned best when it is meaningful and highly contextualized. Teachers should employ a variety of modes for presenting and explaining information, including diagrams, charts and other visuals, songs and rhymes, and even kinesthetic activities. The example of the "Habitats" lesson described below includes both visual (the chart of the deer population) and kinesthetic (the students pretend to be the deer) elements. Finding ways to contextualize language is especially important for acquiring academic language, which tends to be complex and abstract.

### **Sheltering in the Content Areas: Integrated Language and Content Instruction**

A means of emphasizing interaction among language learners is to teach them content that supports language learning. Sheltering approaches advocate adapting the language demands embedded in mainstream teaching materials without diminishing the level of content learning. In other words, teachers change how content-related information is communicated using strategies and activities that do not rely exclusively on language (Sherris, 2008). In addition to instructional changes, assessments and assignments are adjusted so that students can communicate content knowledge without requiring students to produce complex language to demonstrate learning. For example, teachers assessing a student's understanding of the water cycle should not require a written essay test in English, but rather student-demonstrated learning through the completion of a graphic organizer that uses one-word answers and pictures. Other examples include teachers adapting reading into shorter selections, teaching students how to tease key ideas from content-specific reading, highlighting key vocabulary in the margins so that literacy demands are diminished without compromising content.

The following sections review models of sheltered instruction that are used in the United States and in international contexts with minority language learners in which the target language is English. There are four main versions of sheltered instruction used in the U.S. (SDAIE, GLAD, SIOP, and CALLA), and two more used in Europe and elsewhere (CLIL and CBI). Though they vary slightly, most are based on similar research. We will review two based on US contexts and two used in Europe.

#### 1. Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) and English Language Development (ELD)

Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) is an approach to teaching academic courses to ELLs in English that originated in California. It is designed for nonnative speakers of English and focuses on increasing the comprehensibility of the academic courses typically taken by native speakers and more proficient ELLs within the standard school curriculum. Students reported in

this category receive a program of ESL instruction and a minimum of two academic subjects required to pass to the next grade level or to graduate were taught through (SDAIE) (California Dept of Education, 2008).

Sobul (1995) describes SDAIE as a model based on Krashen's notion of comprehensible input and Vygotsky's theories of the Zone of Proximal Development and learning as a socially mediated process. "SDAIE is grade-level subject matter in English specifically designed for speakers of other languages. It is rigorous academic core content required at the student's grade level; it is not watered down curriculum" (p. 2).

Gulack and Silverstein (n. d.) consider SDAIE as comparable to sheltered instruction,

*to understand the purpose of SDAIE (often referred to as 'sheltered instruction'), the umbrella is a useful metaphor. After LEP (Limited English Proficient) students enter United States schools, they encounter many unfamiliar elements. As an umbrella shelters pedestrians in a rain-storm, so SDAIE/sheltered classes offer LEP students some protection from the storm of concepts, contexts, and language, thus giving them the opportunity to progress academically as they acquire English language proficiency. (p. 2)*

They note areas included in the SDAIE model—higher-level critical-thinking skills, group work, multiple intelligences, curriculum concepts, the benefits of speaking English, paragraph graphic organizers, and self-directed learning. The authors' encouragement of English use in the classroom is noteworthy, given Sobul's (1995) inclusion of native language use and instruction in her overview of the SDAIE model "whenever possible primary language content instruction must be provided" (p. 6). Sobul lists the characteristics of SDAIE as: collaborative learning, contextualization of content, interaction, assessing prior knowledge and experience, scaffolding, multicultural awareness and the validation of diversity, thematic instruction, and teacher decisions and delivery focused on providing comprehensible input (related to contextualization of content and concepts) (p. 10).

Today, California's process for supporting English Language Learners to transition into mainstream settings includes both English Language Development (ELD) and SDAIE curricula. ELD teachers use the same sheltering strategies as SDAIE teachers; they are more like traditional ESL pull-out than SDAIE. ELD and SDAIE programs are viewed as sequential and transitional—the purpose is transitioning students as quickly as possible from their L1 to English (moving from ELD settings to SDAIE settings). Rumberger and Gándara (2004) describe ELD in the context of the California's ESL Teacher Credentials, "It is 'systematic' instruction of English language that is designed to (1) promote the acquisition of English-listening, speaking, reading and writing skills by students whose primary language is other than English, and (2) provide English language skills at a level that will enable equitable access to the core curriculum for English learners once they are presented with academic content. (CTC, 2001, p. A-8)" (p. 2036). Theoretically, the tenets of SDAIE and ELD are similar to other Sheltered Instruction approaches, like the SIOP Model.

## 2. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model

One of the the most well known models for sheltered instruction is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, on which a text book is based entitled, *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP Model* (Echeverría, Short, & Vogt, 2007). The SIOP is presented as an 8:30 model because it is comprised of eight broad components and thirty smaller features. The features include "Lesson preparation: Language and Content Objectives," "Comprehensible Input: Appropriate Speech," and "Strategies: High-order Thinking Questions". The components and features are listed in Appendix A.

One reason the SIOP Model is accessible for teachers is the systematic review of each of the thirty features, which lends nicely to self-reflection and self-assessment during training, early implementation, and later instruction. The SIOP Model is well-known for emphasis on connecting to practice and instruction. Overlap among features ensures that teachers are incorporating strategies that directly support ELLs in the classroom. By strategic grouping, the authors suggest that teachers consider grouping structures in the planning and delivery stages that encourage interaction among native and non-native students, students at a variety of language proficiency levels, and structures that promote different types of interaction (through all four modes of language, for example). With regard to providing ample opportunities for students to learning strategies, the authors distinguish between *teaching* strategies and *learning* strategies. Teaching strategies include the adaptations that teachers bring to lessons to scaffold instruction, like graphic organizers and hands-on materials. Learning strategies are methods that students learn to deconstruct and better understand content as they learn English, like self-adapted text, self-sustained personal dictionaries, and highlighting key vocabulary. Learning strategies are especially valuable during summative assessments. In terms of student engagement, SIOP Model contributors suggest that teachers should keep students engaged for 90-100% of a lesson. In other words, high SIOP Model implementers keep students engaged with their peers, the teacher, or the material for this percentage of time during lessons.

Perhaps the SIOP is most well known for the focus it places on language and content objectives. Introduced in the first feature of the Model (Lesson Preparation), the notion of assigning objectives based on language tasks versus content learning expectations reflects a central tenant in sheltering models. Too often, teachers who are under-prepared for supporting English language learners, particularly in mainstream settings (where native English speaking peers are also present), make judgments about ELLs' content knowledge, when in fact they are assessing the students' (lack of) English proficiency. By clearly distinguishing between language and content in the planning stages of instruction, throughout instruction, and in assessments, teachers who adopt SIOP Model strategies are more cognizant of the difference between language and content. This understanding is perhaps most clear due to the strong emphasis on language and content objectives that drive curriculum delivery and instruction. Because of language and content objectives, teachers are encouraged to take into account not only the language demands embedded in assessments, but in all daily classroom activities. Ideally, teachers therefore, plan, deliver, and assess students' learning

of language and content independent from one another, rather than confusing the two.

### 3. International Models: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL, Content and Language Integrated Learning,

*is an umbrella term adopted by the European Network of Administrators, Researchers and Practitioners (EUROCLIC) in the mid 1990s. It encompasses any activity in which 'a foreign language is used as a tool in the learning of a non-language subject in which both language and the subject have a joint role.'* (Marsh, 2002, p. 58; Coyle, 2007, p. 545)

This label was intended to frame CLIL as a model comparable to other widely accepted methods for language instruction, like bilingual education. "Whilst CLIL shares some elements with many of these approaches, in essence its distinctiveness lies in an integrated approach, where both language and content are conceptualized on a continuum without an implied presence for either" (Coyle, p. 545). Unlike the U.S.-based models and methodologies described above, CLIL may be projected into a wide variety of contexts—elementary, secondary, adult education, vocational education, and with any native and/or target language populations. Baetens Beardsmore (2007) "identified five dimensions (culture, environment, language, content and learning) which determine how different programs are constructed. These dimensions account for multiple variables which led to a diverse range of CLIL programs" (cited in Coyle, 2007, p. 546).

Coyle (2007) developed the 4Cs Framework for CLIL. The four Cs are: content, communication, and cognition, which are connected and exist around the central C, culture. A revised version of this framework advocates that CLIL adequately regard the *use* of language where "CLIL teachers and learners in using and developing language *of* learning, *for* learning and *through* learning (Coyle, 2007, p. 552, emphasis in original). This sort of distinction is similar to the idea of teaching language through content, which is the basis of Sheltered Instruction in the US. Of CLIL, she writes, "The strength of CLIL focuses on integrating content and language learning in varied, dynamic and relevant learning environments build on 'bottom-up' initiatives as well as 'top-down' policy" (Coyle, 2007, p. 546). Here, Coyle is drawing from other work (Nikula, 1997) noting that there is no single, structured, large-scale example of CLIL implementation across different countries and contexts (therefore, it occurs on a "bottom-up," rather than top-down basis. Jappinen (2005) researched the use of CLIL methods for foreign language instruction in Finland using the content areas of math and science:

*In CLIL, learning the foreign language is not the direct objective of education but a natural part of the whole learning process. Because of their diversity, European CLIL programmes have various aims related to culture, environment, language, content, and/or learning. This means that, in many cases, language learning or teaching is not the focus point of the CLIL programmes although language is always one of the key features of a CLIL environment. (p. 149)*

Jappinen (2005) also notes that CLIL settings typically have four key characteristics: a large zone of proximal development, specific socio-culture-psychological

factors, special discovery learning related settings, and informal and natural language learning development (p. 151)

A key difference between the European CLIL model and U.S. models is the integration of culture and its central role in integrating language and content instruction. While culture is acknowledged in SDAIE and SIOP, its role as a core value is not the aim in these models. An explanation for this disparity may be the conservative ideology in the U.S. that results in overt value ascription to English over other minority languages. In other words, transitioning ELLs into majority, mainstream, monolingual English speaking U.S. society remains the central goal of these programs, unlike late-exit and dual language programs, which usually place the development of biculturalism as a central goal.

#### 4. Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

Schleppegrell, Achugar, and Oteíza (2004) characterize Content-Based Instruction (CBI) as "an approach to teaching ESL that attempts to combine language with disciplinary learning, suggesting that teachers can build students' knowledge of grade-level concepts in content areas at the same time students are developing English proficiency" (p. 67). Similarly, Song (2006) describes CBI as "language instruction is integrated within specific academic contexts as students enroll concurrently in linked language and discipline-specific content courses" (see also Brinton et al., 1989). Although utilized in both ESL and EFL contexts, Davies (2003) describes CBI as a model that might utilize both a content area teacher and an ESL teacher for EFL in higher education. He outlines a syllabus for a psychology course to demonstrate what he terms theme-based CBI:

*One of the strengths of theme based CBI is its flexibility; teachers can create units with specific learner needs in mind. For example, Unit 3 began with some textbook readings followed by questions and written work. After this the students were given some advertisements to analyze and also brought in their own examples for use in group discussions. Finally, for a small group project, they designed their own advertisements and then presented their work to the other class members with a rationale for how they had chosen their project and who the target customers would be. (Davies, 2003, p. 2)*

Like CLIL, the primary goal in CBI is teaching language *through* content instruction. Though research supports its use in a variety of settings, from Kindergarten through postsecondary levels, most research CBI concentrates on university level EFL contexts.

#### **Implications of Sheltered Instruction for Mexican contexts**

CLIL, CBI, as well as the versions of sheltering described above – SDAIE and SIOP – are all content-oriented models which attempt to teach English as an additional language through content instruction (and content through English). Though similar, they serve slightly different purposes and ELLs in different contexts. Sheltered English instruction has become a popular way of integrating content and language instruction for younger L2 English students in American classrooms. But how appropriate is sheltering as a method for teaching English to younger students in Mexico? Often, new language teaching methods from Eng-



lish-speaking countries are assumed to represent more advanced pedagogical practices, and other countries are eager to adopt them. However, before implementing sheltering in Mexico, we need to evaluate its suitability for the needs and realities of the Mexican context.

Some important questions to consider are:

In what ways are the contexts of L2 English learning in the U.S. and Mexico similar or different?

When should we recommend using sheltered instruction to teach English in Mexico? In what situations is it not recommended?

What are appropriate adaptations to make sheltered English instruction relevant in Mexican classrooms?

In the remainder of this article, we will discuss these questions related to the feasibility and drawbacks of implementing sheltered instruction for young learners in Mexican classroom settings.

### Main differences between American and Mexican contexts for learning English

Sheltered Instruction was developed to respond to the needs of English language learners in public schools in the United States. Therefore, before implementing Sheltered Instruction in other settings, we must explore differences between the two contexts. One main distinction between the American and Mexican contexts in terms of learning English is that the U.S. is an ESL (English as a Second Language) context, (because English is the language spoken by the majority population) whereas Mexico is an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context (because English is not the language spoken by the majority population). This means that in the U.S., English is the dominant language of the wider community, and children outside the classroom are exposed to English in their daily lives – through television, in public places, and interacting with friends and peers. On the other hand, in an EFL setting such as Mexico, generally the only exposure students have to English is for the limited time they are in the EFL classroom. Outside the classroom, opportunities to hear or use English are often limited.

In fact, studies show that because of the increased exposure to the L2 in ESL settings, children often learn conversational English relatively quickly – within one to three years (Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000). Often, it takes ELL students longer to learn academic English; studies show that in most cases children need from five to seven years to learn the kind of standard, academic English that they need to be successful in U.S. schools. Cummins (2000) points out that this distinction between **social language** (the conversational language of social interactions in our daily lives) and **academic language** (the standard and literate language used in school) is an important one for understanding the often lower achievement rates that immigrant and minority-language students experience in American schools.

Sheltering methods were developed to address the problems of language minority students falling behind in mainstream American classrooms because they could not understand or use English well enough to keep up with their grade-level peers. Because they had not acquired enough English to learn the academic content, they were falling behind in both language and content. However, we should appreciate that students learning English in Mexico are not immigrants or

language minority students. The main design feature and purpose of sheltering – a set of instructional strategies to help ELL children cope with mainstream English-only classrooms – is not present in a Mexican EFL classroom. Therefore, we recommend making careful modifications when adopting Sheltered Instruction in Mexican classrooms. This is not to say that the Sheltered English Instruction has nothing to offer EFL teachers in Mexico. In fact, most of the features of sheltering content described above are based on sound pedagogical principles that improve English language instruction for all.

### In what ways is Sheltered Instruction useful for EFL in Mexico?

Since Sheltered English Instruction is a content-based approach, there are several criteria necessary for its success. First and foremost, teachers must adapt language to fit the proficiency levels of the students. This is a major challenge, since students in Mexico may have more limited access to English, and it is hard to teach a lesson entirely in English using only basic-level vocabulary. However, by relying on visuals such as pictures, models, and graphs, as well as realia, and multiple ways of presenting the content, teachers can make input comprehensible and deliver effective Sheltered Instruction lessons even to beginner-level students. Obviously, this is easier to do with some ages and topics than others. The lesson about “Animals of the Forest” presented to kindergarten-aged children described in another article in this issue (see Piser, this issue) uses stuffed animals to model language forms in a way that is accessible for younger children.

The theme of HABITATS is a common unit of study in science for fourth grade students. Even with a complex topic like habitats, where the cognitive and linguistic demands are higher, an effective teacher can use sheltering strategies to scaffold both the language and content learning. For example, the teacher would start by clearly stating both the content and language objectives (from the SIOP model, see Echeverría, Short & Vogt, 2007). The content objective for a lesson might be:

1. Students will be able to identify three basic characteristics of a habitat.
2. Students will be able to explain why there are fluctuations of animal populations in a habitat.

Although this language is quite complex, notice that words like “characteristics” and “fluctuations” are cognates shared by English and Spanish. If students have studied similar topics in Spanish, such as “Life Cycles” or “Endangered Animals,” then they will be familiar with some of the main concepts in the lesson, and will not need to re-learn the concept, but rather transfer their knowledge while learning about the new topic in English. The language objectives for this lesson might be:

1. Students will be able to discuss related habitats using key vocabulary.
2. Students will be able to describe in writing the life cycles in certain habitats.

Again, the sheltered lesson should be dynamic. In this example, after presenting the objectives, the teacher would introduce the key vocabulary by using pictures. For instance, to show the characteristics of a habitat – food, water, and shelter –

the teacher might show a picture or video of a deer eating grass, drinking water, and sleeping under a tree.

Students could take an active role by playing a game that demonstrates the concept, thus integrating Total Physical Response (TPR) in the lesson. In this “application and review” activity, some students take the role of deer, and stand facing the wall at one end of the classroom (or even better if you can play this in the patio). The other children represent the habitat: they stand at the other end of the classroom, and choose one of the three elements: they put their hands over their stomach to indicate food, hold their neck to indicate water, and hold their hands above their heads to indicate shelter. Each “deer” decides which element he or she is looking for: they turn around and run quickly to catch a “habitat” student at the other end whose hands are showing the element that they are looking for. Any “habitat” student who is caught by a deer becomes a deer during the next round. Any student who is not chosen by a deer stays where she is. Any deer who cannot find the element she is looking for is “dead,” and she becomes a habitat element during the next round. For each round, one student must be the recorder, and write the number of deer on a large graph. If you repeat the activity for five or ten rounds, the graph will show the natural fluctuations of a deer population. This activity idea is from Project Wild (2007).

The habitat lesson is a good example of a Sheltered Instruction lesson. The purpose of the lesson is to learn why populations of animals fluctuate in the wild, however in order to learn this content students must also use the English necessary to get this knowledge: in this case vocabulary related to habitats, as well as carefully listening to the teacher’s instructions in order to be able to do the activity. Both the vocabulary learning and the listening comprehension become more effective because they are highly contextualized within the activity that the students are doing. Although the teacher is modeling L2 structures for the students, there is little direct teaching of grammar in sheltered lessons. However, for content-based lessons in EFL settings the teacher may want to include a “focus on form” component which isolates and explicitly teaches some aspect of grammar or one of the four skills. This approach to instruction includes overt recasts, clarification requests, and other methods that strategically and systematically identify and correct grammatical errors in language learning. Another way to embed focus-on-form in the classroom is for teachers to correct children’s speech errors when they occur, including mini-lessons regarding language structure. Such instruction would not be appropriate in an ESL setting; rather, teachers would recast students’ statements modeling correct language structures. In the habitat lesson example above, the teacher may ask the students to produce a report based on the graph showing the population fluctuation, and focusing on the grammatical structure of the past tense of the form *there is/there are*. The report would include information like: “In the first year there were eight deer. In the second year, there were five deer...” The final product would be evaluated on the students’ use of the particular language form and key vocabulary from the lesson, as well as their ability to transfer the information from the graph into a written report.

## Conclusions: Recommendations for Incorporating Sheltered English Instruction

Although Sheltered Instruction is not feasible for teaching English in Mexico at all levels, some elements can be incorporated in English lessons for younger learners. First of all, a content-oriented approach works well for the youngest learners. Students in the earliest grades (from four to six years old) have not yet learned literacy skills or have gained linguistic awareness (for example about what a noun or a verb is) in their first language. Hence, it makes sense to have their English lessons mirror what they are learning in their regular lessons: for instance, learning shapes and colors and practicing motor skills by cutting colored paper; or learning about the calendar while practicing counting and days of the week and names of the months in pairs or small groups. This adaptation of the model, which utilizes hands-on manipulatives and grouping structures while teaching English demonstrates how key components of Sheltered Instruction may be effective in the Mexican contexts with children learning English.

For students in primary grades, Sheltered Instruction can be used selectively to teach English and reinforce content learned in Spanish. We offer the following list of five features of content-oriented instruction that can represent what we consider “best practices” for teaching English as foreign language to younger learners:

1. *Specifying learning objectives for each lesson.* This helps orient the children’s attention and shows them what they are expected to learn. For content-based lessons, you as the teacher should have a clear idea about both the *content objectives* and *language objectives* for the lesson. For example, when small children are learning colors, the teacher would carefully distinguish between children understanding the difference between red, blue, and yellow (content) and using new English vocabulary words to point to the colors (language).

2. *Extensive use of the L2.* Learning an L2 depends on having enough exposure to the language. This is most limiting factor in EFL classrooms, since students generally do not have exposure to the language outside the classroom. Sheltered Instruction lessons use the L2 as the “medium of instruction,” meaning that the teacher uses English almost exclusively for explanations, questioning, instructions, and even routine classroom management. For example, one way teachers can use more English in classrooms in Mexico is careful and strategic paraphrasing and providing definitions for new words using simpler language within instruction and the integration of realia and visuals. For example, a teacher might say: “Types of transportation, or how we get from home to school and back to home, might be a car (holding a toy car), a bus (holding up a toy bus), or to walk (holding up a photo of someone walking).”

3. *Selective focus on language forms.* The teacher should keep in mind that the focus of the lesson should be on the content, whether it is understanding feelings (sad, mad, happy) or learning the difference between the senses (touch, smell, taste, see, hear). Thus, the teacher should limit the amount of time focused on the language itself, and instead concentrate on the topic or theme. Any language forms that the students need – especially key vocabulary – should be presented within the context of the lesson. For example, instead of strictly teaching voca-

bulary like sad, mad, and happy, teachers might play games and sing songs that have physical movements that mimic those feelings. This way, children are learning the vocabulary while they play, instead of rote repetition.

*4. Multiple ways of presenting and exploring content.* In order for Sheltered Instruction to be effective, students must have multiple ways of engaging with the content. This must include activities that engage students, including models, graphs and visuals like concepts maps and Venn diagrams, as well as realia and manipulatives like puppets, blocks and figures. For example, if children are learning about parts of the body, instead of only reading a book or looking at pictures, students might trace their own bodies on butcher paper, then identify arms, legs, the head, and hands in partners.

*5. Make connections across the curriculum.* Children will be able to learn the content and language objectives faster if there are connections to other things that they are learning in their first language. For example, if the students are learning about endangered animals in Spanish, reading a story or playing a game about polar bears in English will be more meaningful, and allow them to transfer their knowledge from one language to the other.

In conclusion, rather than adopting Sheltered Instruction completely in Mexican classroom as a method for EFL instruction, we suggest that it can be strategically incorporated into EFL classes in Mexico. It offers teachers an effective way of integrating language learning into instruction with little need for major curriculum or system-wide changes. Once teachers develop materials for lessons with young learners, they can be used for other groups over years to come. Sheltered Instruction practices do not require significant funding resources or outside support. Rather, teachers can make straightforward adaptations to instruction that result in more effective English language development. Through emphasizing the five features of best practice and related strategies outlined above, teachers can better support English development, especially for younger children. When teachers specify objectives, increase the use of L2 in instruction, focus on language forms in ways that are meaningful, present content in a variety of ways, and make connections across the curriculum, Sheltered Instructional approaches will benefit young children learning English in Mexico.

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### Appendix A: Features of the SIOP Model

1. Lesson Preparation
  - Content objectives
  - Language objectives
  - Appropriate content concepts
  - Supplementary materials
  - Meaningful activities
  - Adaptation of content
2. Building Background
  - Concepts linked to students' backgrounds
  - Links between past learning and new learning
  - Developing key vocabulary: Academic language
3. Comprehensible Input
  - Appropriate speech
  - Clear explanations of academic tasks
  - A variety of techniques used
4. Strategies
  - Learning strategies
  - Scaffolding techniques
  - Higher-order questioning
5. Interaction
  - Frequent opportunities for interaction
  - Grouping configurations
  - Sufficient wait time
  - Clarify concepts in L1
6. Practice/Application
  - Hands-on practice with new knowledge
  - Integration of all language skills
  - Application of content and language knowledge in new ways
7. Lesson Delivery
  - Support content objectives during lessons
  - Support language objectives during lessons
  - Promote student engagement
  - Pace lesson appropriately
8. Review and Assessment
  - Key vocabulary
  - Key content concepts
  - Regular feedback on student output
  - Assess student comprehension of objectives