
Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model

Review by Alex Poole

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MAKING CONTENT COMPREHENSIBLE FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS: THE SIOP MODEL. Jana Echeveria, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah Short. Boston, MA: Pearson 2004, 2nd Edition. Pp. xv+237

One option for quickly teaching children and adolescents English is sheltered immersion. In sheltered immersion classrooms, students are taught content through simplified English, with the goal being to learn both language and subject matter. While an attractive choice for US public schools and international schools in non-English speaking countries, few tools have traditionally been available that show ESL and EFL teachers and curriculum designers how to implement such a mode of instruction. This text, however, solves part of this problem by providing a model of a theoretically-based sheltered English program called the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).

In effect, SIOP consists of a wide range of components, ranging from lesson preparation, strategy instruction, and practice/application opportunities, to how to provide comprehensible input, assess learners' progress, and implement techniques for dealing with reading difficulties. Each chapter contains, at minimum, a summary of the relevant research on the issues at hand, an explanation of the procedures taken in that part of the protocol, and most notably, lengthy examples of how real-life teachers carry out the protocol.

In general, the text's language is straightforward, making it accessible to novice and veteran teachers alike. However, the text contains some drawbacks that teachers and teacher trainers should note before using it. First, the theoretical basis of the SIOP, the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, has been widely criticized, yet little mention is made of such criticisms. In addition, the text's recommendations are sometimes amorphous. For example: The authors call on teachers to create 'non-threatening' environments, yet there is little elaboration on what would constitute such an environment. Furthermore, it is doubtful that most teachers intentionally create hostile classrooms. Finally, some of the authors' recommendations for practical instruction are rather simplistic in that they do not address the complexity of most of today's ESL/EFL teaching environments. They claim, for instance, that when preparing

individual lessons, teachers should take students' first language, English proficiency, cultural background and age into consideration. However, most ESL classrooms, at least in American public schools, have students from a variety of L2 proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds, and thus must address much more than the authors suggest.

While *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* contains some limitations, it nevertheless should be used as an introduction to sheltered English instruction. Newcomers to sheltered instruction will find it user-friendly and clear; moreover, teacher trainers will find its simplicity appropriate for beginning TESOL courses.

About the Reviewer

Alex Poole is an assistant professor of English at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA. His interests include focus on form instruction, second language reading strategies, and Spanish-English bilingualism.