



# Why Teach English Language Learners Math, Science, and Social Studies While We Teach Them English?

When many people think of teaching English language learners, they think of teaching them English first with conventional language teaching methods and subsequently putting them in regular classes;<sup>1</sup> however, professional researchers and educators challenge this assumption:

- Learning to speak English is not the main obstacle in English language learners' academic success.
- In fact, language learning is only a part of the challenge.
- Learning the math, social studies, and science taught at the student's grade level while gaining grade-level literacy is the real challenge.<sup>2</sup>

Teaching language apart from content is ineffective for ELLs' school success.<sup>3</sup>

- Isolating ELLs from native-speaking peers slows down their language learning.
- Focusing on learning English grammar is not as effective as using language purposefully to engage in completing assignments in math, science, language arts, and social studies.

Teaching English language learners math, social studies, language arts, and science in ways that also develop their English has advantages.<sup>4</sup>

- Such instruction provides an ideal condition for language acquisition—multiple opportunities to use the vocabulary and concepts needed for academic achievement.
- Teachers can meet instructional goals for learning content while they develop students' language skills.
- English language learners are less likely to get behind in gaining credit toward graduation because they are fulfilling course requirements in math, science, social studies, and language arts while they are learning English.

B R I E F

- Teachers can build on what students already know about a subject.
- English language learners are more motivated because the learning experiences are interesting and relevant.
- Good practices in teaching ELLs can benefit all learners.

<sup>1</sup> Kelly, L. G. (1969). *Twenty-five Centuries of Language Teaching: an inquiry into the science, art, and development of language teaching methodology 500 B.C. – 1969*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> Education Week, *Quality Counts 2009, Portrait of a Population: How English-Language Learners Are Putting Schools to the Test*, January 8, 2009. 50-State Report Card.

<sup>3</sup> Kaufman, Dorit, Ed.; Crandall, JoAnn, Ed. (2005). *Content-Based Instruction in Primary and Secondary School Settings*. Alexandria, VA.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

<sup>4</sup> Grabe, W. & Stoller, F.L. (1997). *Content-Based Instruction: Research Foundations*, in Stryker, S. B. & Leaver, G. L. (Eds.) *Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education: Models & Methods*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.