



Ask a TESOL Leader: “How can my content teachers teach content to all students and English language development to ELs in the same class?”

Question: “I’m an administrator in a school where our content area teachers are required to teach content to all their students and, at the same time, English language development (ELD) to a small group of English learners (1–3 students) in the same class. The teachers have to adhere to our mandated curriculum for all students while also providing a block of ELD to the English learners, and we are all unsure of how to make this work. Any advice?”

In my experience, although it might take some time to adjust routines to make this work smoothly, classroom teachers and both English learner (EL) and non-EL students might benefit from the changes, since all students are acquiring new academic language and content.

It might help if the staff has SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) training and gains additional awareness of how to modify and differentiate instruction, if they haven’t already. Here is some background on [the SIOP Model](#). There are many free related resources online. Here is a [resource](#) I have found to be helpful. Jane Echevarria also provides background and examples of ways to implement the model in the classroom [here](#).

Once teachers become aware of the needs of their students, if they’re not already using small group rotations in their classrooms, I would recommend giving them a try. Even 20–30 minutes per day for [reading rotations](#), for example, can make a huge difference over time in language acquisition and reading proficiency for all learners. Many teachers find that grouping by level and targeting skills [during small group time](#) reaches more learners than whole group, and that it allows them to differentiate instruction for all learners, including those who are performing on and above grade level.

[Research](#) has shown that small group instruction is especially beneficial for ELs, whether they are elementary or secondary students, and regardless of the content. Working with small groups helps provide educators with data they might not be able to acquire while doing whole group instruction so they can better monitor growth. It also allows them to discover commonalities among students and more opportunities throughout the day to tie language and content together. Whether students are ELs, non-ELs, impacted by trauma, or excelling in all areas, small group instruction usually helps them to better process new information. Colleague Lara Shantz shares about some of these [benefits](#) when her school adjusted their program.

For adjusting to small group rotations, one thing I would suggest is to determine a selection of activity types that can remain static. That way, the only new input the students experience is the content, and the rest can become routine. Then from time to time, a new activity type can be introduced. When doing that, it can be less time-consuming for teachers to prepare and it can also empower a centers environment where groups can function on their own. Before implementing the small groups, it can be helpful to give a lesson on how the small group process will work. Small groups can be a great opportunity to give more agency to students. They can be given roles and responsibilities. Small groups are also proven to increase [student engagement](#). Here are some [tips for success](#).

I spent several weeks recently with teachers in California, where similar models (in which classroom teachers instruct their ELs within their classrooms, along with all content) are used throughout the state; you might reach out to colleagues at [CATESOL](#). We can also survey members in the TESOL PreK-12 Interest Section in the [myTESOL community](#) to try to find others who might be using a similar approach. If you're a TESOL member, feel free to join us there!

Do you have a question for the TESOL leadership? Email your question to tc@tesol.org with the subject line "Ask a TESOL Leader" and it could be featured in this column!

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