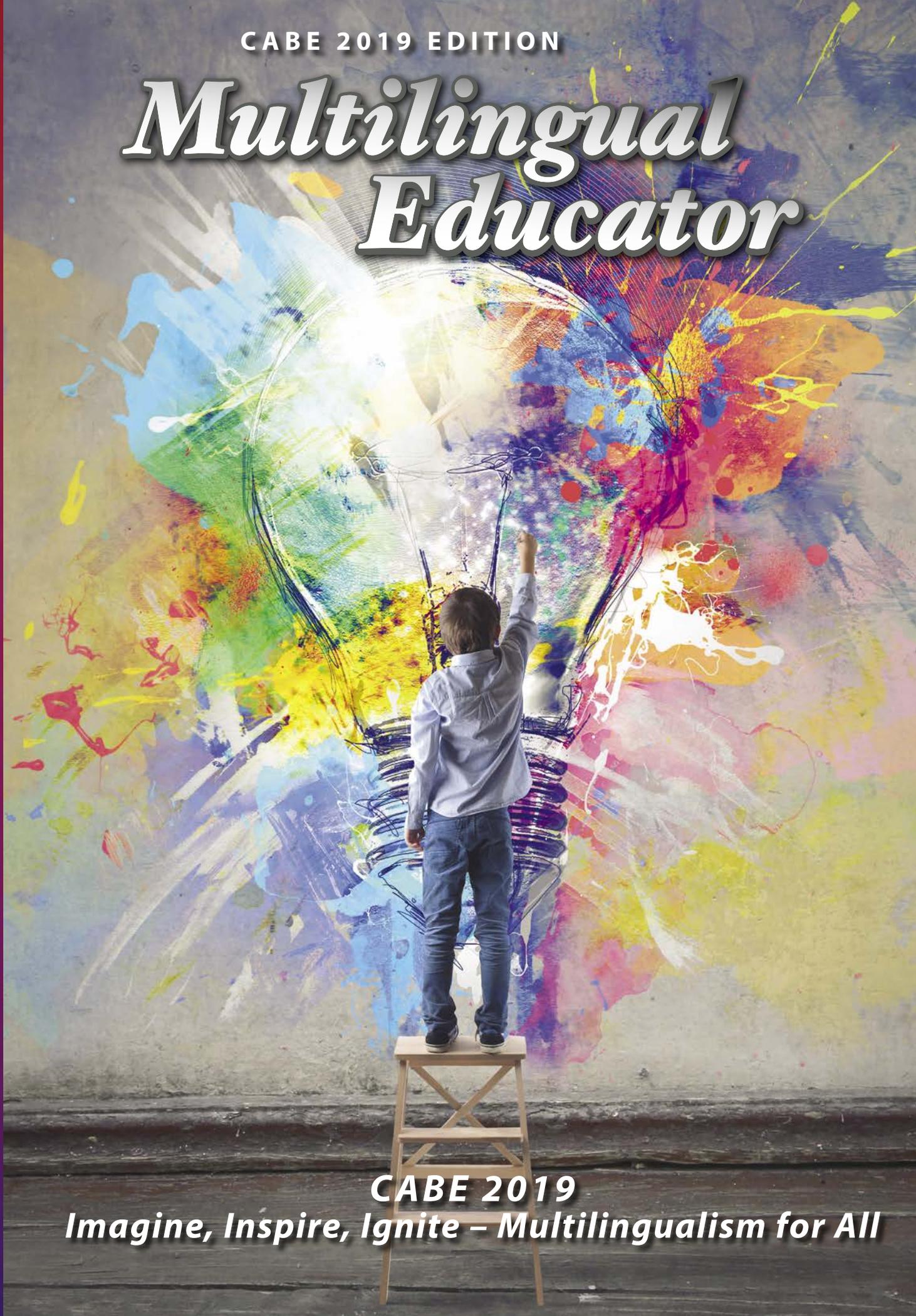


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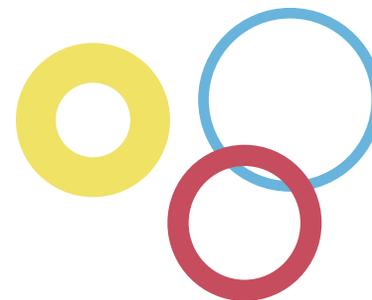
MARCH 2019



CABE 2019

Imagine, Inspire, Ignite – Multilingualism for All

SEAL's Approach to Building Teacher Capacity to Support English Learners



by
Martha I. Martínez, Ph. D.
Anya Hurwitz, Ed.D.
Joanna Meadvin, Ph.D.
and Laurie Olsen, Ph.D.

*Sobrato Family Foundation/
Sobrato Early Academic
Language (SEAL)*

California's Window of Opportunity to Support English Learners

California schools are tasked with educating over 1.3 million English Learners (ELs), more than 20% of the state's K-12 population (California Department of Education [CDE], 2017). While research has shown a student's first language to be an asset in second language development and academic achievement (e.g., Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Lindholm-Leary 2016; NASEM, 2017; Steele, et al., 2017), until recently, California schools have been prevented from capitalizing on this research base. The passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 effectively barred bilingual education until the state passed Proposition 58 in 2016. Moreover, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act's emphasis on standardized test scores to measure achievement gaps intensified the focus on English proficiency for ELs, and the expectation that ELs develop English proficiency as quickly as possible. While NCLB drew much needed attention to English Learners as a subgroup warranting special attention and monitoring, the law's heavy reliance on standardized tests was more successful in dismantling bilingual education (Lee & Wright, 2014; Menken, 2009) than it was at raising student achievement (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Both Proposition 227 and NCLB contributed to a subtractive schooling environment for ELs (Cummins, 1986; Valenzuela, 1999), which can be a contributing factor to students becoming Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) (Menken & Klein, 2010).

Thankfully, there is reason to believe that the tide is turning in favor of more responsive policies and more effective instructional practices for California's English Learners. In addition to the passage of Proposition 58, a new research-based policy called the English Learner Roadmap was adopted by the State Board of Education in 2017. This policy and the guidance documents that accompany it are designed to bring coherence to EL services and an additive approach to schooling for ELs. These policy shifts are long overdue and desperately needed to prepare ELs to meet the demands of the California's college- and career-ready standards and for future success.

It is within this context that the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) model is being implemented across 20 school districts. SEAL recognizes the critical role that teachers play in student learning and biliteracy development; as such, SEAL prioritizes teacher learning and coaching support. Moreover, SEAL understands that family engagement is critical to student success, and in the case of ELs, is instrumental in the development of a healthy cultural identity and of their home language. This article describes the SEAL model, its current reach in California, and its approach to building teacher capacity to provide ELs with a culturally and linguistically responsive education that prepares them for academic success.

The SEAL Model

Given the importance of early learning in closing achievement gaps and establishing a solid foundation for future learning (Barnett & Frede, 2010; Gomez, 2016), the SEAL model was initially designed to focus on grades Pre-K to grade 3, although in recent years SEAL's work has expanded into grades 4 and 5. The model is grounded in the following components:

- o Alignment of preschool and the K-3 systems around a shared vision of powerful language development as the foundation for academic success.
- o Simultaneous academic language and literacy (including bilingual options).
- o Language-rich environments and instruction with an emphasis on expressive and complex oral language development and enriched vocabulary.
- o Text-rich curriculum and environments that engage children with books and the printed word and lead to the appreciation and love of reading and writing.
- o Language development through engaging academic thematic units based on science and social studies standards and hands-on, inquiry-based learning.
- o An affirming learning environment that brings together teachers and parents to support strong language and literacy development at home and at school.

Because of its strong alignment with best practices for ELs, the SEAL model was identified in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) report as a promising approach (see NASEM, 2017, pp. 256-257).

The SEAL model began as a pilot in three schools in two school districts located in Northern California. All three

schools served large Latino and EL populations with high concentrations of students in poverty. An evaluation of the pilot concluded that SEAL students in all grade levels demonstrated significant growth on all measures of language, literacy, and mathematics, as well as cognitive and social development (Lindholm-Leary, 2015). These promising results led to a replication of the SEAL model in other districts. Currently, the SEAL model is being implemented in over 100 schools in 20 districts throughout northern, southern and central California.

The plans for SEAL replication were occurring in the midst of massive standards reform in California, specifically the Common Core State Standards and the new aligned English Language Development (ELD) Standards. Given SEAL's emphasis on providing ELs meaningful access to grade-level content, it became clear that SEAL could help teachers unpack and implement the new standards and the ELA/ELD Framework, which were largely based on the same emerging body of research on effective EL practices as SEAL. This remains a major focus of SEAL's work with teachers. The section that follows details the manner in which SEAL builds teacher capacity to create the kinds of learning environments that support deep and joyful learning for ELs.

Building Teacher Capacity to Effectively Support ELs

When the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB in 2015, states resumed control of student achievement and accountability. This enabled California to more fully implement a new paradigm for how schools should respond to their sizable EL populations. This paradigm shift was clearly articulated in the state's integrated English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) framework.

This framework not only integrates ELA, ELD, Social Studies and Science standards, ELD can no longer be taught as an isolated subject. In fact, the ELA/ELD framework articulates an approach to ELD instruction that specifically calls for the use of two different types of ELD instruction – Integrated ELD and Designated ELD – that must be coordinated and designed to ensure that each English Learner's academic and linguistic needs are fully met.

SEAL's work with schools is designed to ensure that ELs are developing high-level cognitive and academic skills, analytical thinking, and the language that goes with it. The shift from strict adherence to pre-packaged curricula with rigidly defined scope and sequence, into a more student-centered, creative and responsive mode requires teacher intentionality and responsiveness. This shift is exciting, but, especially for veterans of the NCLB era, it can also be daunting. To make this shift, teachers need professional development, planning time and coaching support. The SEAL professional development model supports teachers as they make this transition by combining the latest research on best practices for ELs with the research on professional development, incorporating six key characteristics of effective professional development programs: workshops, outside experts, ongoing delivery, follow-up support, activities in context, and content (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

The SEAL professional development series is comprised of approximately 25-35 days across two years. All teachers participate in seven two-day trainings and 8-10 days of collaborative planning. The teacher professional development series begins with a two-day Teacher Launch meant to establish a common understanding of the SEAL

Model, its research foundations, and implementation plan. The next six trainings are provided in an intentional sequence of six modules and cover topics such as: promoting oral language practice and academic language development; understanding California's ELD standards, ELA/ELD Framework, and the difference between Designated and Integrated ELD lessons; fostering collaboration and teamwork in the classroom; bringing the world into the classroom; creating shared research projects and literature studies; and, using formative and summative assessments in an appropriate manner for ELs. All modules include a designated ELD component and engage teachers in reading research together, learning strategies, classroom demonstrations, reflection and planning.

Many teachers also participate in Summer Bridge, a 10-day summer institute that involves team teaching in the morning and reflection and planning in the afternoon. The cross-grade-level co-teaching allows teachers to try new strategies and build articulation and alignment across grades while observing and supporting each other to build a shared understanding of SEAL's approach. The coach-led afternoon sessions allow for reading, research, inquiry and reflection. While teachers develop their own curricular materials during the regular school year, SEAL provides a fully developed thematic unit plan for Summer Bridge. This allows teachers to focus all of their energy on mastering strategies while they become increasingly responsive to the needs of their English Learners.

To promote sustainability of practice, to deepen impact, and to provide intentional instruction designed to enact the ELA/ELD Framework, SEAL teachers collaborate with grade-level colleagues across sites to plan and deliver content-based thematic units addressing Science

and/or Social Studies standards. SEAL thematic units, which typically last for six weeks in the classroom, are carefully crafted to integrate language development with content instruction.

The creation of the thematic units and their subsequent implementation is impossible without the skilled and strategic guidance of the SEAL coach/facilitator, an internal employee chosen by the district to be a key instructional leader. Research shows that coaches play a key role in the instructional leadership needed for comprehensive education reform efforts (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003). Moreover, coupled with professional development for teachers, coaches can significantly improve instructional practices related to language and literacy development (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Poglinco & Bach, 2004). The coach/facilitator role was deemed a necessary component of the SEAL model to ensure the likelihood of changed instructional practices and improved student outcomes in the long term.

All professional development modules are attended by coach/facilitators because, while professional development modules and workshops are important venues for reading and discussing research and learning new strategies, they are not, by themselves, sufficient to support actual implementation in the classrooms. Teachers need guided collaborative planning time to consider how to incorporate the strategies into their instruction. And they need opportunities to see the practices modeled in their own classrooms, as well as constructive feedback from a knowledgeable and supportive coach. The SEAL Coach/facilitator works with all teachers, during grade-level collaborative planning time and on a case-by-case basis, to maximize the consistency and coherence of instruction and to encourage

collaborative and reflective practice.

After almost ten years of working in a variety of school settings and different geographic regions in California, the SEAL model has evolved to include a stronger emphasis on building the capacity of school and district administrators. Another recent change to the model has been grade levels served. Although the model was created with a focus on grades from Pre-K to grade 3, over the years several elementary school partners approached SEAL about expanding the model into the upper elementary grades. As a result, in the 2017-18 school year, SEAL launched a pilot to expand into grades 4-5 with two district partners. Preliminary results from the pilot were very promising, which led to grade 4-5 expansion efforts with four additional districts in 2018-19. This expansion rests on the core goal of SEAL which is to ensure that ELs can learn, thrive and lead in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The path to becoming a good teacher and meeting the needs of ELs and all types of students is not an easy one. The SEAL model, and the professional development teachers' experience through implementation is designed to be as joyful and enriching for teachers as it is for their students. See Figure 1 (online): T-Chart Developed by Teachers at the Culmination of their SEAL Training.

To improve the educational outcomes and experiences of ELs, there is much work that remains to be done. SEAL is committed to this effort for the long term and is cautiously optimistic that the EL Roadmap and Proposition 58 have created a new political climate that may provide a window of opportunity for California schools to be more responsive and inclusive of ELs and immigrant families. 

Online version: <http://www.gocabe.org/index.php/communications/multilingual-educator/>