The Trouble with SIOP: How a Behaviorist Framework, Flawed Research, and Clever Marketing Have Come to Define—and Diminish—Sheltered Instruction for English Language Learners
Crawford, J., and Adelman Reyes, S., 2015. Portland, OR: Institute for Language and Education Policy

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This book, hot off the press, has a title that seems to say it all. The consensus for practitioners when SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) first appeared fifteen years ago seemed to be relief that our content-area colleagues finally had a resource that would aid them in adapting their content-heavy lessons for ELLs. Co-author James Crawford pulls back the curtain and systematically analyzes and delegitimizes this ubiquitous resource.

The text comprises two sections: the first section contains five chapters that critique SIOP; the second contains two appendices that propose an alternative curricular structure. Chapter 1 outlines a rationale and the original research base for sheltering content for ELLs. Chapter 2 defines SIOP and challenges its claims of validity and reliability. Chapter 3 delves more deeply into the five studies supporting the adoption of SIOP. Chapter 4 attacks the philosophical base of the model, claiming it is a corrupted version of Krashen's work, noting that

> the concept and terminology of sheltered instruction originated with Stephen Krashen more than a decade before SIOP was introduced . . . yet curiously, the SIOP authors fail to credit Krashen for his breakthrough in any edition of their manual. (p. 31)

Chapter 5 evaluates sample SIOP lesson plans and videotaped lessons.

Appendix A outlines The Engage Framework, the proposed substitute for SIOP; Appendix B describes a thematic unit used with middle-school ELs based on the framework.

SIOP, which was created by Jana Echevarria, Mary Ellen Vogt, and Deborah Short, has grown into an empire. I have recommended the SIOP model myself to teachers and was unaware of its weaknesses until Stephen Krashen recommended this book via Facebook.

The authors' criticism is launched against both SIOP's philosophy—that it is prescriptive rather than inquiry-based—and its methodology—that its research base is flawed and deficit-based. Crawford also questions the claim that one model could possibly be effective in so many contexts with so many types of learners.

To be specific in describing the critique, Crawford posits that SIOP is "theoretically confused" (p. 41); "essentially hijacks" Krashen's notion of i+1 sheltering and applies it inappropriately; lacks an emphasis on reading (p. 40); focuses on teacher-centered, explicit instruction (p. 41) and "dumbed down" instruction (p. 42); [prescribes] a "tightly scripted format" (p. 44); [is] "contradictory" (p. 45); "reduce(s) ELLs to passive receptors of official knowledge" (p. 45); and [is] "behaviorist" (p. 46), overly focused on language mechanics (p. 48), and micromanages teaching and learning (p. 51).

In Appendix A, co-author Sharon Adelman Reyes proposes the Engage Framework, a constructivist approach "designed to help teachers develop imaginative ways to engage students in academics while they are acquiring English . . . [via] sheltering and scaffolding content" (pp. 58–59). According to Adelman Reyes, the model incorporates "authentic assessment, a low affective filter, free voluntary reading, adequate resources [and] comprehensible lessons" (p. 67). The description of this model is followed by an outline of a thematic unit based on the framework, a middle-school unit called "Discovering the Amazon."

Adelman Reyes states that the Engage framework encourages creativity and improvisation (p. 59) and does not "exclude the use of other methodologies. In fact, it implies a role of culturally responsive pedagogy and native language instruction" (p. 60). She continues by defining constructivism, sheltering, and scaffolding, and by providing advice on how to create a positive classroom environment.

Each of these sections is an excellent resource for teachers in training, especially those who will need to reflect upon and write about their practice for New York State certification exams like the EdTPA. The text is short (only 90 pages) and is an easy read; it would be an excellent addition to a reading list for graduate students in TESOL or bilingual education.

Also of potential interest to graduate students will be the relationship between theory and practice as discussed in the text. In Chapter 4, Crawford clearly explains why theory matters, a bone of contention for so many in our field. Though Krashen is considered by some to be less than current, his theory of comprehensible input is fundamental to the field, and graduate students will benefit from understanding not only his contribution but also the relationship between theory and practice as discussed in the text.

The Engage Framework is reminiscent of the training I received in the early 1990s, the heyday of whole language instruction. This text might help graduate students unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the fluid curriculum design techniques common in the past to be more creative and recursive. In particular, Appendix B is particularly well suited for achieving this goal; specifically, one might ask students to analyze the chapter to determine the steps described in the creation of the thematic unit and then notice that these steps are recursive rather than linear.

While today's teachers can benefit from learning to develop authentic and meaningful thematic units based on the Engage Framework, it will create some thorny issues for both teachers and teacher educators. Crawford writes, for example, "SIOP's authors imply that, without a conscious emphasis on objectives, teachers and students would get lost and forget what they are supposed to be doing. Who knows what might happen if a class strayed from its preplanned path? Spontaneity, discovery, fun" (p. 38)? He posits that having a fixed outcome or set of answers set forth in a lesson plan by a teacher is inimical to students; the sample unit in Appendix 1, however, lists these student-generated research questions (p. 76):

- Are there tribes in the Amazon rain forest who have not had contact with the outside world?
- Why are there so many plant and animal species in the Amazon region?
- Why are so many of them threatened with extinction?
- Why is this important to the people of the United States?
- Threats to the rain forest

With all due respect to Crawford, these questions are predictable and teachers should always anticipate student questions. Furthermore, there is some common sense to the notion that well-educated students and citizens will know and have certain information and skills. Crawford's critique may be an issue; as an observer of MA in TESOL student teachers and teaching fellows, I have insisted for years on achievable and measurable content and language objectives, teacher methodology with which Crawford takes issue. I feel that teachers, especially novices, teach best when directing students toward a specific and measurable goal, simultaneously inspiring curiosity through free voluntary reading and modeling intellectual curiosity. Having a learning goal for students will not necessarily prevent them from learning less tangible lessons, such as how to be curious. Some students (especially global learners like me) benefit from having a learning target and knowing the whole in order to understand the parts. As novice teachers gain experience and confidence, they are more able to go off-road and take advantage of teachable moments.

Another issue is that of accountability. I have found that teachers do not mind being held accountable when that accountability is reasonable; how will teachers and students be accountable within the Engage Framework? Portfolio assessment is a likely answer, but this too creates issues. In addition to the time required for appropriate implementation, portfolio and similar assessments are tricky options for large urban school systems. In addition, while the Engage Framework makes sense on an intuitive level, it has also not been validated by research.

In spite of these issues, Crawford provides a critique that will provoke thought well beyond choice of approach, and Adelman Reyes outlines a sensible alternative to SIOP. It certainly is not perfect, but I contend that SIOP still has the potential to inform educators' choices in their work with ELLs when adopted as one tool rather than as a prescriptive straitjacket. This is particularly true for colleagues who struggle to adapt content-area materials for ELLs they are now accountable for educating to an unprecedented degree.

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