

NWREL Training Blends SIOP and Equity Components

It's hard to imagine two places more different than American Samoa and Kodiak, Alaska. But, educators in both locations have benefited from training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), provided by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Equity Center. Since 2003, NWREL's SIOP workshops have reached 1,000 educators from rural Jerome, Idaho, and Falls City, Oregon, to Washington's urbanized Puget Sound.

Developers at the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) created the SIOP model as a way to help students acquire grade-level content knowledge while increasing their English proficiency. The model consists of 30 items grouped in three broad categories: preparation, instruction, and review/assessment. Using SIOP, the teacher has a road map for everything from building language objectives into lesson plans to linking instruction to students' background experiences and to providing feedback.

After becoming certified SIOP trainers, NWREL staff members added their own twist to the model: They created a three- to four-day SIOP academy that incorporates key components of educational equity. Equity Center Director Joyce Harris talked about the program with *Northwest Education*:

Q: It seems more and more schools are investing in SIOP these days. What accounts for the growth in its popularity?

No Child Left Behind is forcing schools to focus on populations that have not done well for any number of reasons. One [population] that jumps out at you is English language learners and the expectations that these students will be able to show some academic growth in a relatively short period of time. The reality is if these students don't have a command of the English language, on which most assessment materials are based, they won't do well. The traditional approaches have really centered on 'let's develop the language and then we'll deal with the academics,' but SIOP is based on trying to help students develop their proficiency in the English language while they learn academic skills. Another reason for SIOP's popularity is the U.S. Department of Education's focus on using research-based best practices in our schools. The developers of SIOP were able to pull proven practices together in a cohesive professional development model.

What makes NWREL's version of SIOP unique?

When we returned to Portland [from CREDE], we began a very ambitious process of looking at the SIOP materials through the lens of trainers, and added some things that we

felt would strengthen the contents for our participants. One of them is the whole issue of second language acquisition. Teachers need to know the fundamentals of second language acquisition and understand the stages from a student's perspective. What is the student experiencing? So, we talk about things like affective filter and the "silent period." We often help teachers reflect on times when they may have visited a different country where they were in the language minority: How did you feel when everyone around you was speaking in a language that you didn't understand? What did you do? Did you try to get in the middle of the conversation? No, you were silent. You listened. You looked for cues to let you know whether what people were saying was angry or welcoming. That's something we spend a fair amount of time on in the very first part of the training. We think it's important for teachers to understand that the process of acquiring a second language is a total involvement of the whole being: It's not just reading words, trying to sound out words, or trying to figure out meaning. It involves some physical responses.

How would you answer the contention that SIOP amounts to just good teaching?

That's exactly what it is and that's why we got involved with SIOP. These are just things that you do if you want to be effective in the classroom and create students with high levels of academic performance. SIOP reaffirms that if you are using good teaching practice, you can adapt your content and the way you deliver it to help any child become successful academically. Teachers need to understand that they already have knowledge of the skills and strategies of good teaching, but with English language learners, they must focus every day on helping students develop their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. We constantly reinforce that whatever you do in the classroom to help ELL students, it has to give them the opportunity to practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking all the time—no matter what the subject is. ■



The Equity Center, led by Joyce Harris, offers a SIOP academy.

To bring a NWREL SIOP Academy to your site, contact the Equity Center at 503-275-9482 or visit www.nwrel.org/cnorse/. Professional development workshops on other issues regarding equity and access—including building cultural competency, reducing school-based harassment, and closing the achievement gap—are also available.