FOURTH EDITION

Foundations for
Teaching English
Language Learners

Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice

WAYNE E. WRIGHT

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by

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Purdue University College of Education
Lafayette, Indiana

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Baltimore • London • Sydney

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The individuals described in this book are composites or real people whose situations are masked and are based on the author's experiences. In all instances, names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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About the Author

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Dr. Wayne E. Wright is Associate Dean for Research, Graduate Programs, and Faculty Development and the Barbara I. Cook Chair of Literacy and Language (with a focus on English language learners) in the College of Education at Purdue University. He is the co-principal investigator on over $10 million in federal grants focused on improving English language learning, bilingual education, and literacy instruction. Dr. Wright completed his B.A. and M.A. degrees at California State University Long Beach and his Ph.D. at Arizona State University. He has also studied Advanced Khmer (Cambodian) at Cornell University through the Southeast Asian Summer Studies Institute. He is a former ESL and bilingual teacher in Long Beach, California, where he helped establish one of the first Cambodian bilingual programs in the country. He also served with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to help develop the (Bilingual) Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD/BCLAD) teacher licensing assessments. Dr. Wright has extensive experience in Cambodia, where he taught ESL; provided graduate education training; provided teacher professional development; and conducted research on multilingual mother-tongue education, content and language integrated learning, and other language policy- and education-related issues.

Dr. Wright has more than 25 years of experience as a teacher educator, preparing both pre-service and in-service teachers to work effectively with students classified as English language learners and with other multilingual learners. Prior to Purdue University, he spent 10 years in the Department of Bicultural-Bilingual

Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he directed the MA-TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) program. He has also taught courses for Mesa Community College, Arizona State University, Arizona State University East (now ASU Polytechnic), Northern Arizona University, the Cambodian Institute of Economics (now the National University of Management), and the Royal University of Phnom Penh (Cambodia). He has presented his research and provided professional development workshops and trainings across the United States and around the world, including Cambodia, Thailand, China, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and South Africa. Dr. Wright also provides graduate-level training for education researchers and leaders.

Dr. Wright has published broadly in the areas of language, education, and assessment policy and programs for language minoritized students. His research has addressed the impacts of federal and state high-stakes testing policies; anti-bilingual education voter initiatives; and equitable policies, practices, and instruction for students classified as ELLs and other multilingual learners. Dr. Wright has been a Fulbright Scholar and has received several prestigious awards, including the Charles A. Fergusson Award for Outstanding Scholarship and the James E. Alatis Prize for Research on Language Planning and Policy in Education Contexts.

Dr. Wright currently serves as Co-Editor of the *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education,* as Editor of the *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement,* and as Co-Editor of the Bilingual Education and Bilingualism book series published by Multilingual Matters. In addition to this book, Dr. Wright is the author/editor of six other books*: Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, Eighth Edition* (co-authored with Baker; Multilingual Matters, 2025); *Language Diversity, Policy, and Social Justice: In Honor of Terrence G. Wiley* (co-edited with Rolstad, Liu, & MacSwan; Multilingual Matters, 2025); *Research and Reflections on Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement* (co-edited with Chap, Uy, Sak-Humphry, Chhuon, & Worra; Purdue University Press, 2025); *Innovating the TESOL Practicum in Teacher Education: Design, Implementation, and Pedagogy in an Era of Change* (co-edited with Pu; Routledge, 2022); the *Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education* (co-edited with Boun & García; Wiley-Blackwell, 2015); and *Ebonics in the Urban Education Debate, Second Edition* (co-edited with Ramirez, Wiley, de Klerk, & Lee; Multilingual Matters, 2005).

Preface

Teaching multilingual learners classified as English language learners (ELLs) is an integral part of K–12 education today in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 10% of the total U.S. student population is classified as ELL, with considerable variation across rural, suburban, urban, geographic, and socioeconomic contexts. Although states, teacher education programs, and districts require different coursework and competencies in ELL education, all educators—including general education and content-area teachers as well as literacy, special education, and English language development (ELD) specialists—share responsibility for ELL students. Wayne E. Wright's fourth edition of *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners: Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice* prepares all teachers to integrate ELL students into their classes, engage all students with rigorous standards-aligned curriculum and texts, promote the development of oral and written English for academic purposes, and get students to graduation. At the same time, this text shows teachers how to create enriching linguistically and culturally responsive classrooms and schools that benefit all students.

Educators need to remember that ELLs are, in fact, multilingual learners who draw on all of the languages in their linguistic repertoires as resources for learning (Seltzer et al., 2025). However, not all multilingual learners are officially classified as ELLs. In many districts, the academic mainstream includes a large population of "English speakers" who also speak languages other than English at home. Today, we find more multilingual learners—from more diverse backgrounds, enrolled in more classrooms, more schools, and more districts throughout the United

States—than ever before. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey (see Chapter 1), approximately 22% of children in the United States speak a language other than English at home, and more than 350 different languages are represented, including many indigenous languages. Critics argue that defining "ELLs" or "English speakers" simply in terms of English renders the home languages of these students invisible in the general education classroom. The fourth edition of *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners* encourages a strong language-as-resource orientation, not only for ELLs, but for all students.

NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

There have been many shifts in demographics, research, theory, policy, and practice since the third edition of this book was published. The fourth edition updates, reviews, synthesizes, and critiques each of these areas as they relate to multilingual learners classified as ELL students.

A greater focus in the field on sociocultural and bilingual approaches to teaching, and on issues of race, continues to challenge traditional beliefs and assumptions, resulting in new research and emerging theories to guide practice. Readers familiar with the previous editions will find in this fourth edition an even greater focus on raciolinguistics, and on viewing students, learning, and teaching through a bilingual lens. Chapter 1 includes an expanded discussion on current debates over what to call students who are in the process of attaining English proficiency, the growing popularity of the term multilingual learners (MLs), and the rationale for the continued use of the ELL term in this fourth edition for purposes of clarity and precision, but with added emphasis that ELL-classified students are indeed part of the larger population of multilingual learners. There was also a conscious effort throughout the book to reduce the use of ELL and other labels when a simple reference to "students" was sufficient given the context.

Chapter 1 also expands the discussion of the rich diversity hidden within the ELL label with updated discussions of special education considerations, and a new section on gifted and talented education considerations. The demographics and statistical information through the text, particularly in Chapter 1, have been thoroughly updated with the latest available data.

Awareness of and attention to translanguaging, the everyday language practices of bilinguals, continues to grow, along with newer research expanding, debating, and/or attempting to clarify what translanguaging is, and efforts toward building frameworks that use translanguaging as a pedagogical tool. Thus, even greater attention is given to translanguaging across all chapters.

The third edition of this book was published just 1 year before the global COVID-19 Pandemic caused major disruptions for all schools and students around the world. The particular impact of the pandemic on ELL students, policies, and programs in the United States is addressed in this fourth edition, particularly in Chapters 1 and 4. This includes the challenges faced by the federal government and individual states in fully implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as addressed in Chapter 4.

This fourth edition reflects many policy changes. For example, nearly all discussion and references to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been removed, given the overwhelming decline in this movement. Focus instead is given to individual state college-and-career-readiness standards, where many of the original ideas of the CCSS live on. Sections on federal education policy during

the first Trump administration and during the Biden administration have been added. The major changes to the 2020 WIDA English Language Development Standards are addressed throughout the book, and discussion has been added regarding WIDA's new Spanish language standards, MARCO DALE.

Chapter 8 has undergone substantial revisions to address state policy and instructional shifts surrounding the science of reading (SOR). This includes acknowledgments of the debates surrounding SOR, growing consensus between reading and ELL scholars about what SOR is and what it is not, more explicit discussion of the foundational skills of reading, and expanded discussion on important considerations for ELL students when implementing SOR. Chapters 7–9 also have expanded discussion on the scientific research specific to language and literacy development of ELL students.

We continue to see an increase in bilingual education, particularly in dual language bilingual education programs across the country. All states now offer some form of the Seal of Biliteracy to recognize graduating seniors with demonstrated bilingual and biliteracy skills. This fourth edition includes expanded discussion of the Seal of Biliteracy.

This fourth edition includes many updates related to the integration of technology into oral language and literacy development, and content-area instruction. A major development—and disruption—to education is recent and rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly with large language models, natural language processing, and generative AI. New sections specifically focused on AI have been added to Chapters 6 through Chapter 11 with discussion on the concerns and the potential benefits of AI tools for assessment, oral language, reading, writing and content-area teaching and learning, particularly for ELL students.

Other new theories, concepts, items of research, and practices are interwoven throughout the book. Some of these include humanizing pedagogies, age effects on second language acquisition, bilingual first language acquisition, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), translanguaging strategies, critical dialogic education, academic conversations, instructional conversation for equitable participation, gestures for vocabulary development, encoding, opaque and transparent orthographies, language functions, and language features.

Throughout the text, older references have been removed and over a hundred new references have been added to reflect the latest research and thinking in the field. Several boxes, tables, and figures have been revised or added. Others have been removed. Recent books and articles have been added to the Recommended Reading at the end of each chapter. Several changes have been made to the Discussion Questions and Research Activities, many of which are integrated with new videos and other online resources. Also, the links to online resources in the text of each chapter have been updated or replaced with newer resources, and are accessible through an updated companion website for this fourth edition.

COMPREHENSIVE, LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners provides current and future educators with a solid foundation from which to make informed instructional and programmatic decisions. The book takes a comprehensive, learner-centered approach to research, theory, policy, and practice. The special features of the book and the

companion website facilitate prospective and practicing teachers' and administrators' learning about how to educate ELL students in their classes, schools, and communities. These features also support professors, instructors, and professional development providers who are responsible for ensuring that their students (i.e., teacher education candidates or participants in on-site professional learning configurations) develop the competencies they need in educating linguistically and culturally diverse multilingual learners.

The book begins by looking closely at who the students are, emphasizing the diversity represented by the English language learner designation. Prospective teachers are introduced to the challenges these learners face in school, as well as what they need to know and be able to do to address each learner's needs. Concrete examples of classroom practice illustrate key points. Samples of student work are included for discussion and analysis to give readers practical experience making the kinds of instructional decisions they will make as teachers.

Research

The practices, strategies, and techniques discussed throughout this book are firmly grounded in research. Each chapter provides a survey of what we know from scientific research related to the chapter content. These surveys include, for example, the findings of major national reviews of the scientific literature on language and literacy instruction for ELLs. Readers are asked to look critically at the research, review the current controversies in the field, and identify gaps to be addressed. Activities at the end of chapters and on the companion website provide readers with opportunities to make research-based decisions about what constitutes effective policies, programs, and practices.

Theory

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners reviews theories of second language acquisition, language learning and teaching, literacy development, bilingualism, and sociocultural perspectives. Language and literacy development for academic purposes are important concerns, and the spectrum of second language and literacy approaches and methods are included. Readers see how the sociocultural context shapes learning and teaching as they analyze how different theories of language and literacy development are reflected in policies, programs, and practices. Readers are encouraged to develop their own approaches to providing effective instruction for ELLs based on the theories and research reviewed and synthesized in the text and in relation to the contexts of their own classrooms, schools, and communities.

Policy

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners skillfully links macro language and education policy debates to the decision-making power that educators have within their local domains of authority. Chapters analyze the evolution of federal and state language education policy, review the range of program models that we find in schools, outline the essential components of effective programs, and introduce readers to the fundamentals of assessment and accountability. Special features in the book and on the companion website encourage readers to review and respond to these policies and to make decisions about appropriate policies,

programs, and accountability systems for ELLs at the local district, school, and community levels.

Practice

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners makes explicit connections among theory, research, policy, and practice. Chapters on assessment, oral language, reading, writing, content-area instruction, translanguaging, effective instruction, and advocacy begin by reviewing the research, theories of language and literacy learning, and policy debates surrounding the topic. Then, each chapter describes a range of research-based practices (i.e., approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques) that teachers can implement. This comprehensive approach equips prospective teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to provide equal educational opportunities for ELLs.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners uses special features to structure student learning, teaching, and research. These features also facilitate course preparation for professors.

Guiding Questions

Each chapter opens with a series of questions that preview the concepts and practical focus of the chapter. Guiding Questions encourage users to read with a specific purpose in mind and to summarize and synthesize major concepts. These questions also prepare readers to apply what they learn in the chapter to teaching and learning situations.

Key Terms

Key terms listed at the beginning of each chapter offer a powerful way to approach the concepts discussed in the chapter. These terms are boldfaced and defined at first mention in the text. These terms also appear in the Glossary and on the companion website.

Figures, Tables, and Boxes

Every chapter is supplemented with summaries, photographs, illustrations, samples of student work, or resources for additional research and practice. This material is presented in figures, tables, and boxes that enhance the chapter content.

Discussion Questions

Five end-of-chapter Discussion Questions provide opportunities for students to reinforce their understanding of the material covered in the chapter, and to reflect on and apply chapter content to their own learning and teaching contexts. These include traditional questions, questions based on online videos, and questions based on analyzing an online document, such as a lesson plan or policy statement. Discussion Questions may be used for individual reflection or group discussions in traditional class sessions, in hybrid or online classes, or as homework assignments.

Research Activities

Research Activities offer students the opportunity to conduct short classroom-based, school-based, and online research projects on topics and issues discussed in the chapter. Professors can also ask students to expand any of these activities into larger culminating projects and incorporate them into their learning and teaching portfolios.

The Research Activities for each chapter are short and focused. These activities include an ELL Student Interview or Assessment, an ELL Teacher Interview, an ELL Classroom Observation, and an Online Research Activity. This design ensures that students in all types of learning situations (e.g., traditional classes with field observation components; summer courses with limited access to schools, students, and teachers; and online or hybrid courses) can easily complete at least one research activity.

Recommended Reading

The list of Recommended Reading at the end of each chapter includes recent books that reflect new developments in the field. The readings are annotated with suggestions for the further study of topics presented in the chapter.

QR Codes for Easy Access

A QR code appears at the beginning of each chapter and prior to each chapter's Discussion Questions. Users may scan the QR code with a smartphone or other mobile device for quick access to all online resources, which are indicated throughout the book with the companion website icon ↗.

COMPANION WEBSITE

Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners includes an extensive companion website, which adds value by providing a space for professors and students to access additional materials outside their university class.

The companion website is organized into sections aligned with chapters of the book, and each includes resources that enrich student learning and facilitate professors' class preparation. Companion website users will find the following:

- Links–accessible via QR codes at the start and end of each chapter–to additional readings, professional organizations, useful teaching and learning resources, videos of instructional practices, and expert commentary

- Downloads, including forms, templates, and review activities that students can complete and use to enhance learning

- Discussion Questions that invite students to: share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences relevant to the chapter content; view and analyze related videos and documents; and read and comment on postings from other students

- Research Activities are enriched on the companion website; upon completion of activities, students can upload and share their findings in various formats

- Review Questions that students can complete online in a selected-response format, with results made available to students and course instructors

- Professors'-Only Resource Room with tools designed to facilitate and review student discussions and other resources for classroom use

Access to the Companion Website

Access to the companion website is included with every new copy of *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners.* Professors and students can go to https://wright4ed.brookespublishing.com/ and use the access code found with the book to register as a companion website user. Those with a used copy may purchase access to the companion website with this link.

Navigate quickly to the registration page ↗ with this code.