



Success Indicator IN01: The instructional program for ELs reflects a core philosophy and understanding that ELs are learning academic content in a language that they are still acquiring and will need appropriate support to be successful in acquiring both. (5878)

Overview: English learners (ELs) face the dual challenge of not only learning academic content, but doing so in a language they are still acquiring. For this reason, many ELs struggle to learn academic content. Although it may seem expedient and even kind to teach ELs easier, watered-down content, this sort of misplaced empathy ultimately denies students equal access to the curriculum. Instead, instructional programs should be designed to provide support for both English language and academic content learning. Research findings impress upon us the importance of integrating content and language instruction (See: Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2010; Solomon, Lalas, & Franklin, 2006; Short, 1991). By creating a program that honors students' first language (L1), challenges them in appropriate ways, and supports teachers in their efforts to do so, school leaders can help mitigate the struggle ELs face.

Questions: How might an instructional program for ELs reflect an understanding that ELs are learning academic content in a language they are still acquiring? What additional supports should EL programs include to help students be successful in acquiring both content and language (simultaneously)? What role do school leaders play in establishing programs that support students acquiring both academic content and English?

How might an instructional program for ELs reflect an understanding that ELs are learning academic content in a language they are still acquiring?

Schools serving ELs are not only responsible for teaching content, but also for helping students learn the language needed to access that content. That means teachers need the skills and resources to differentiate their instruction so that they are able to meet the language needs of ELs at varying stages of language development without changing the core content. Edwards (2014) explains, "When learning is differentiated for ELLs, the core content remains the same, and students' access to it is differentiated in a variety of ways, such as the use of texts at multiple levels, activities at different levels of difficulty, and differing amounts of teacher and peer support" (p 47). Of course, all of this requires a lot of attention to planning.

Capitalizing on Students' First Language. Instructional programs can focus on capitalizing on ELs' first language strengths. Instructional programs that encourage translanguaging and the use of students' L1 are most effective for ELs (Pacheco & Miller, 2016). This stands in contrast to "English only" models which ultimately decrease ways for ELs to communicate. ELs bring many skills from their L1 to the content area classroom (see: Watkins & Lindahl, 2010 for a comprehensive discussion of these skills). Baecher, et al. (2012) explain that schools can capitalize on students' L1 in the following ways:

- Provide access to L1 translations: Most importantly, teachers should be given access to reliable translation services. In addition, schools can amend policies about phones in order to allow ELs to use translation apps during class time. While automatic translations don't always translate concepts perfectly, they are a fine place to start.

- Encourage students to communicate in their native language to facilitate classroom interaction and completion of academic tasks: School leaders can manage students' schedules to ensure that, when possible, students are enrolled in classes with teachers or other learners who can communicate in the students' L1. Teachers can encourage students of the same L1 to work together, ask each other questions, and translate for one another when able. Teachers can also encourage students to take notes or write reflections in their L1.
- Make explicit connections between students' native languages and English: Teachers can learn about students' native languages and explicitly explain, for example, "In Arabic you write from right to left, but in English you write from left to right." Or, "In Arabic you don't write the vowels, but in English you do." School leaders can support teachers' efforts by providing them with opportunities to learn more about students' home languages.

Amplifying Language and Content. Great teachers never "dumb-down" the material for ELs, and they don't just reduce the workload. Walqui (2006) explains that rather than simplifying or reducing tasks and language for ELs, instructional programs can be designed to amplify and enrich the "linguistic and extra linguistic context so that students do not get just one opportunity to come to terms with the concepts involved, but in fact may construct their understanding on the basis of multiple clues and perspectives encountered in a variety of class activities" (p. 169). Gibbons (2003) explains this is a message of "abundancy"—providing ELs with multiple data sources and language sources.

Walqui (2006) explains that students should be provided with data rich learning opportunities in the following ways:

- Instructional programs can be designed to model appropriate language use. Students should encounter academic language in all of their school interactions and in all course materials.
- Bridge students' previous knowledge and experiences to new concepts and ideas. When programs, curriculums, and lessons are designed to start with what the student can already do, they can then help students build new concepts off of existing ones.
- Teachers can contextualize academic language by providing ELs with comprehension clues like images, videos, realia, and analogies. School leaders can support this effort by making sure teachers have access to materials they need and ways of sharing these with students.
- Instructional programs can be designed to help students develop metacognition by teaching students specific learning strategies. School leaders can set expectations that teachers spend time teaching, for example, specific reading, listening, research, and note-taking skills.

What additional supports should EL programs include to help students be successful in acquiring both content and language (simultaneously)?

Bilingual content materials. As discussed above, teachers need access to reliable translations. Professional services and automated translations each have their benefits and drawbacks (turnaround time, cost, and accuracy). The parents of ELs can be excellent resources for helping with translations. Of course, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. Websites like Teachersparadise.com and Teacherspayteachers.com contain a wealth of translated materials teachers can use. However, there is no denying the fact that there aren't nearly as many resources for ELs as there are for native English speakers or for students with other diverse needs, and teachers often end up creating their own materials which requires time and, often, money. For a comprehensive discussion of the challenges teachers face and how school leaders can support them, see Heitin (2016).

Differentiated Assessments. When teachers think about assessing ELs, it is beneficial to ask "Am I assessing the students' content knowledge or English language skills?" For example, if students are asked to write a paragraph explaining the process of photosynthesis, some ELs may struggle to explain the concept in English despite understanding it well. Instead, the teacher can ask ELs to draw a diagram. Similarly, imagine a math class in which students are given word problems to solve. This assessment doesn't just assess a student's understanding of a mathematical concept, but of their English language reading comprehension. Differentiating assessments for ELs means making sure they are able to show their understanding of academic content in ways which are not dependent on having high English language abilities.

Comprehensive Input. Comprehensible input involves making the content accessible to students by adjusting

teacher-talk, differentiating texts to include L1 translations of key vocabulary, and using multimodal ways of communicating. In doing so, content area teachers can present information to ELs (and assess their understanding) in ways which are not language dependent. Examples of this include the following (Carrier, 2005):

- Manipulatives
- Realia
- Pictures
- Videos
- Demonstrations
- Movement
- Gestures
- Drama
- Graphic organizers
- Multimedia
- Experiential and hands on activities.

Focus on Vocabulary. While some ELs may appear to speak English fluently with their peers in social settings, they have not necessarily mastered the very technical, academic language used in content classes. Specific attention to vocabulary acquisition in the content area classroom is essential. In order for students to understand the concepts taught in content classes, they need support to master content-specific vocabulary (which they may not hear in their day-to-day lives).

Content-specific or domain-specific vocabulary refers to “the content-specific terms and expressions found in content area textbooks and other technical writing” (Baumann & Graves, 2010). Teaching this vocabulary is “the strongest action a teacher can take to ensure that students have the academic background knowledge they need to understand the content they will encounter in school” (Marzano and Pickering, 2005. p. 1).

Marzano and Pickering (2005) (as cited in Baumann & Graves, 2010) recommend teachers take the following steps to identify the content specific vocabulary they need to teach their ELs:

- “Identify the domain-specific words at an appropriate level.”
- “Identify words deemed to be important for instruction.”
- “Select words for instruction by asking, ‘Is this term critically important to the mathematics content I will be teaching this year?’”

- “Organize the selected words according to how they occur in your curriculum.”

Teachers can become familiar with Tier 1, 2, and 3 vocabulary words. The Common Core offers a “High Mileage Word List” and “High Mileage Word Families.” Once a teacher has considered which words students are likely to encounter and which words they will need to know to understand the content, Nation (2001; 2015) recommends teachers do the following to help ELs expand their vocabulary:

- Extensive reading, especially with graded readers, provides frequent and varied word encounters. While extensive reading may seem difficult to achieve, research shows that when teachers dedicate some in-class time to extensive reading, students can spend more time reading outside of school.
- Learning through listening. Teachers can use content specific vocabulary in their instruction, and teachers can read to and play audio recordings for their students.
- Deliberate, contextualized vocabulary learning. For example, using images and the L1 to make bilingual word cards.
- Teaching about morphology (stems, roots, prefixes, and suffixes) so that students can infer meaning, and using word chunks (teaching words in “family” groups).
- Teaching specific vocabulary learning strategies, such as inferring meaning from context and how to use a dictionary.

What role do school leaders play in establishing programs that support students acquiring both academic content and English?

Choosing the Right Model. School leaders can learn about the types of school-wide program models commonly used to teach ELs in order to choose one that is best for their school’s EL population. Research is clear that the most effective program model for both ELs and for native English speakers is bilingual education (Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). Understanding, however, that establishing a bilingual program requires major overhauls, many schools choose variations of ESL programs. A brief list of common programs follows. For a comprehensive list, go to: edu.wyoming.gov. For a comprehensive meta-analysis, see: Rolstad, Mahoney,



and Glass (2005). For a more nuanced analysis, see: Calderón, Slavin, and Sánchez, M. (2011).

- **ESL Pullout**—EL students attend mainstream classes for much of the day and also meet separately for about 3-10 hours a week in small groups with an ESL instructor who focuses on language development.
- **Content-Based ESL**—ELs receive ESL instruction, taught by an ESL licensed teacher, in preparation for grade-level content instruction in English. The emphasis is still on language development, but augmented with academic subject matter vocabulary and beginning concepts.
- **Sheltered English Instruction**—ELs are taught academic content in English by a content licensed teacher. However, the English language used for instruction is adapted to the proficiency level of the students. While the instruction focuses on content, sheltered English instruction also promotes English language development.
- **Structured English Immersion**—ELs are taught subject matter in English by a content licensed teacher who is also licensed in ESL or bilingual education. The teacher is proficient in the first language of the students. Students may use their native language for clarification, but the teacher uses only English. No ESL instruction is provided in this model.

While implementing new programs requires a lot of time, changes can be made at the department level in the interim. School leaders might work with curriculum teams to write program philosophies that reflect an understanding of the work ELs have to do and the supports they need in order to acquire both academic content and English.

Supporting Teachers. School leaders can promote these efforts by providing time for collaboration between content area teachers and ESL teachers or other content area teachers knowledgeable about teaching ELs. Alonso (2013) explains, “All forms of collaborative practice—strong, weak, and in-between—can offer content and ESL teachers ways to address the needs of ELLs across the curriculum in a way that makes sense given teachers’ personalities, the realities of their schools, and the needs of their students. Effective collaboration, regardless of the strength of the form, refers to activities where teachers develop partnerships to achieve a mutually agreed-on goal” (p 92). For a longer discussion of the benefits to ELs when teachers are provided time for collaborative

experiences, including coteaching, see: Dove and Honigsfeld (2010).

All faculty, including school leaders, can be provided with professional development opportunities. Increasingly, teachers and school leaders are being called upon to teach students they simply haven’t been trained to teach. Windle and Miller (2012) studied teachers of low-literacy refugee students in Victoria, Australia to determine whether or not teachers were using specific recommended strategies for this group of students. The recommended strategies were largely based on the transfer model described by Cummins (1991). The authors suggested engaging students’ prior knowledge, supporting comprehension and linguistic awareness by helping students to “recognize structural conventions and patterns” (p. 320), scaffolding students as text producers, and scaffolding through discussion. Yet, evaluations of teachers showed that these strategies were seldom used, and that teachers rather relied on whole-class discussions in which not all students were actively engaged.

Further Reading

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