Core Function → **Instructional Practices**

Effective Practice → **All ELs have access to comprehensible, grade-level, standards-based instruction in all content areas**

Success Indicator IN02: The school leaders set expectations that all teachers (including life skills, music, art, technology, physical education) develop age and grade appropriate, standards-based content objectives for their lessons that are achievable by all ELs regardless of English language proficiency (5879)

Overview: Regardless of a students' English language proficiency, teachers must develop standards-based content objectives that are achievable by all. All students deserve to learn challenging and highly relevant information and skills, and ELs especially need access to rigorous content, defined as "material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner" (Met, 1991, p 150). While ELs certainly require additional supports in acquiring English, they can still be held to the same high academic standards as their native English speaking peers (for examples, see Lundquist and Hill, 2009).

Questions: Given ELs varying proficiency levels, how might teachers create achievable grade-level content objectives? How might school leaders set and maintain expectations that all teachers create content objectives achievable by all ELs, regardless of language proficiency?

Given ELs varying proficiency levels, how might teachers create achievable grade-level content objectives?

ELs are still working to acquire English, but there is no correlation between their English language level and their cognitive abilities. Unless a teacher has evidence to the contrary, he/she must assume that their ELs are able to cognitively work with age-appropriate concepts and processes being presented in a lesson. Simply put, teachers cannot lower content standards or expectation based exclusively on a student's English language proficiency. In fact, research indicates that when ELs do not receive rigorous content and ongoing language support, achievement gaps are exacerbated (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014).

On the other hand, there is evidence to support that when ELs are presented with highly relevant and cognitively challenging information, not only are they able to learn academic content, but their English language skills also improve (Farrell, 2015). Maintaining high level content expectations, while supporting ELs in their language development, takes knowledge and skills. The more school leaders are aware of the strategies that work—such as distinguishing between content and language in academic objectives, differentiating English language demands, and building on what students can do—the better positioned they will be to support teachers in their implementation.

Parsing Content and Language. As teachers work to craft clear, attainable, and measurable objectives, they must be mindful of learning goals that can only be met if students are proficient English speakers. Specifically, objectives that require learners to "describe," "explain," "list," "name," and so on set expectations for language use that may well exceed the proficiency level of ELs in the class. This does not suggest the language use targets be removed altogether from the lesson. Rather, under the umbrella term "learning goals," teachers need to distinguish between two types of objectives: (a) content objectives, or those that focus on the physical skill or cognitive work of the subject, which are consistent for all learners; and (b) language objectives or targets, or those that focus on the language needed to participate in the class activities or communicate content knowledge or ability. This latter set is varied, or personal-

ized, based on the language proficiency needs, levels, and abilities of the learners.

For example, a math objective might read, "Solve a two-digit multiplication problem and describe the process." Although this objective does meet the criteria of being measurable and clear, the language demands of the second part of the objective may be difficult for ELs. Another way to look at this objective is that it contains two sets of skills—one is the cognitive skill of solving the math problem and the other is having the (English) oral language skills to be able to describe the process. An objective like this is best crafted as two objectives: "Solve a two-digit multiplication problem" (content objective) and "Describe, list, or name the process of solving a two-digit multiplication problem" (language target).

Differentiating English Language Demands. Teachers can include a language focus in their objectives by thinking about the language demands of a lesson, and considering what their ELs at different levels can do. For example, when teaching about the causes of WWII, a teacher might consider that students will need to use and understand language for expressing relationships, such as linking words and phrases. Some ELs may struggle to read the textbook chapter the teacher has assigned, so the teacher plans to show students Nazi propaganda from 1940s Germany, newspaper articles from 1940s England, and short films from 1940s USA. The teacher might write an objective that reads, "After reading about the causes of WWII and analyzing multiple 1940s media sources, students will create a timeline of the events leading to WWII, describing each event using linking words and phrases." The following example, taken from Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2016), describes what this might look like in a math class:

> In the math class where students are determining the surface area of polyhedrons, the math teacher realized that students would need to use different terms and grammatical structures as they worked in small groups to calculate surface area. For example, they needed to use sequence terms (e.g., "first," "second," "finally"), technical vocabulary related to surface area (e.g., "length," "width," "side," "face," "radius," and "circumference"), and explanations (e.g., "To calculate surface area of a pyramid, we need to …").

With these language demands in mind, the teacher created objectives.

- Students will be able to use sequential language in stating procedures for calculating the surface area of their group's object.
- Students will be able to use technical geometry terms and explanatory language in their oral presentation of the procedure for calculating surface area of a selected polygon.

In sum, when teachers include a language focus, they increase the likelihood that their ELs will be able to access academic content.

Understanding what ELs Can Do. As a resource, teachers might turn to WIDA Can Do descriptors (Visit: www.wida.us/standards/CAN_DOs/). WIDA Can Do descriptors are performance descriptions which highlight what ELs at different levels currently "can do" in English. These descriptors are specified by grade and area of language (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and correspond to students' ACCESS scores. As an example, a ninth-grade, Level 2 Emerging EL can "Process recounts by: following modeled oral commands," and can "Recount by: Providing examples of content-related information previously studied." Becoming familiar with these Can Do descriptors will help teachers write content objectives which are achievable by students at every stage of English language development.

How might school leaders set and maintain expectations that all teachers create content objectives achievable by all ELs, regardless of language proficiency?

School leaders play an important role in ensuring that ELs are taught using age- and grade-appropriate, standers-based content objectives. It is important for school leaders themselves to understand the skills teachers need to develop and the resources they need access to in order to provide appropriate supports for teachers and make informed decisions about where to focus professional development. Corallo and McDonald (2002) explain that ELs thrive when school leaders provide appropriate expectations and supports for teachers. Specifically, school leaders can:

- Provide opportunities for classroom-focused professional learning that target the adaptation of instruction for diverse linguistic learning needs (Gebhard & Willett, 2008).
- Provide specialized EL-related staff support within, or connected to, general education teachers' class-

rooms. For example, having paraprofessionals in the classroom (see Arkoudis, 2006). Of paramount importance is creating opportunities for teachers to talk to and collaborate with ESL specialists (Heafner & Plaisance, 2016).

- Ensure availability and appropriateness of instructional materials and other resources that address specific EL-related instructional concerns and provide a meaningful connection to curriculum across grades. For example, making sure teachers have access to diverse modes of representation such as videos and laboratory materials, and ways of sharing these with students (Williams, Hakuta, Haertel, et al., 2007).

In some schools, teachers who have not achieved tenure are asked to submit lesson plans to principals or assistant principals. While reading weekly lesson plans from all teachers is a daunting task, principals, assistant principals, and ESL specialists can share the task of reading only the content objectives from one lesson per week from teachers who have ELs in their classes. The purpose of doing so is not to evaluate, but to assess teachers' progress and to provide additional supports when needed, providing workshops in which teachers learn to craft content objectives which are not language dependent.

Another possibility is to host content objective workshops in which teachers learn how to write content objectives which are not tied to language—that is, writing objectives which are achievable by all students regardless of their English language level.

Finally, school leaders can explore and provide access to technology and other resources specifically designed to help teachers create rigorous content objectives for their ELs while also providing them with the language supports they need. As an example, HELP Math is a Web-based supplemental curriculum designed to help students develop both math vocabulary and concepts (Freeman & Crawford, 2008).

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