



Success Indicator IN03: The school leaders set expectations that all teachers (including life skills, music, art, technology, physical education) plan and use appropriate, research-based differentiated instructional strategies to ensure that all ELs successfully achieve lesson objectives. (5880)

Overview: The federal government recognizes that services for ELs must include not only programs designed to increase English fluency and literacy, but just as importantly, instructional methods to ensure general academic achievement in all content areas (20 U.S.C. § 6825). Although the government does not prescribe particular instructional methods for ELs, it does require that educational entities use methods that are evidence-based and have been demonstrated to assist ELs “to learn English and meet the challenging State academic standards” (20 U.S.C. § 6825).

In providing educational services to language minority students, school districts may use any method or program that has proven successful, or may implement any sound educational program that promises to be successful. Districts are expected to carry out their programs, evaluate the results to make sure the programs are working as anticipated, and modify programs that do not meet these expectations. (United States Department of Education 2015).

Questions: What differentiated instructional strategies have been evidenced in current research on teaching ELs? Who is recommended to use these and why? How might school leaders set and regulate expectations that teachers incorporate research-based differentiation strategies into their teaching of ELs?

What differentiated instructional strategies have been evidenced in current research on teaching ELs?

Researchers associated with the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, or CREDE, conducted conducting a review of research on the education of ELs and reported that ALL students benefit from a combination of interactive and direct approaches. The interactive instructional approaches encompass give and take between learner and teacher, during which the teacher actively promotes students’ progress by encouraging higher levels of thinking, speaking, and reading (examples include structured discussions, brainstorming, and reviewing and editing teacher and student writing). Direct instruction consists of explicit and direct teaching of skills or information, using modeling, instructional input, corrective feedback, and guided practice (Genesee et al., 2006). In other studies, researchers have found that the use of graphic organizers, diagrams, predictable classroom routines, redundant key information (e.g., pictures and words), extra practice, cooperative learning, and peer support boosts performance for English speakers as well as ELs (Goldenberg, 2008; Richards-Tutor, Aceves, & Reese, 2016).

While strategies used with English speaking students have been helpful with ELs, teachers and administrators cannot assume that the same approaches used with English speaking students will be adequate for ELs. Language learning is complex and students learning English at the same time they are acquiring academic content require specific additional modifications. The list below offers a selection of additional evidence-based strategies to address the language and academic learning needs of ELs:



Teaching academic vocabulary: Explicitly teaching ELs general and domain-specific academic vocabulary, particularly high-utility words, results in greater achievement for ELs because it promotes comprehension of texts within and across content areas. Through this approach, instructors teach a set of academic vocabulary words across multiple days using multiple instructional strategies (e.g., August et al., 2009; S. Baker et al., 2014; Cena et al., 2013; Lesaux et al., 2010; Silverman & Hines, 2009; Vaughn et al., 2009). General academic vocabulary includes words such as “compare,” “analyze,” and “adapt.” Examples of domain-specific academic vocabulary are “integer,” “photosynthesis,” and “nation.” The research recommends teaching about five to eight words across several days, using robust instruction, and selecting words that are central to understanding a text, those used frequently in a text, those that might appear in other content areas, those that have multiple meanings, those with affixes, and those with cross-language potential (Baker et al., 2014).

Increasing familiarity with content material in texts: ELs’ mastery of content has been shown to improve when their familiarity with the subject matter is increased. This can be accomplished in several ways: (a) using texts in which the content is culturally familiar, (b) providing exposure to the content of the text prior to having the students read the text, and (c) progressively intensifying the complexity and challenges posed by texts as the students have greater exposure to the content (Goldenberg, 2008). Ensuring that ELs spend more time with texts, and “checking and supporting student comprehension of text before engaging them in activities that require ... more complex language production,” has proven effective in enhancing understanding and retention of material (Percy, Martin-Beltran, Silverman, & Nunn, 2015, p. 50).

Integrating oral and written English language instruction into content area teaching: Research demonstrates that ELs better acquire both English language and academic content when English language development is taught not only as an independent learning unit but when it is incorporated into subject matter instruction (August et al., 2009; Vaughn et al., 2009; Brown, Ryoo, & Rodriguez, 2012; Ryoo, 2009; Silverman & Hines, 2009).

Using multimedia, including visual representation: Visual representation of subjects, including pictures and video-clips, along with language-based explanation, promotes learning in ELs (Silverman & Hines, 2009).

Instructing in or with primary language: Providing instruction or materials in the students’ first language, particularly in reading, either prior to or simultaneously providing instruction in English (bilingual instruction), improves their achievement in English (Goldenberg, 2008). Research has demonstrated that introducing new concepts in the student’s primary language prior to providing the instructional lesson in English, and reviewing the new content in the primary language after the English lesson, increases the EL student’s comprehension and mastery of the subject matter. Additionally, when students are encouraged to use their first language to engage with content, even when their first language is not used by the instructor, students benefit.

Who is recommended to use these strategies (and why)?

Research demonstrates that academic achievement of ELs falls behind that of non-ELs (Goldenberg, 2008). Progress from the beginning stage of English language proficiency to advanced or native-like proficiency takes approximately six years for most students, resulting in ELs encountering academic material and concepts in a classroom setting that present linguistic demands (abstract concepts and references) beyond their English proficiency (Goldenberg, 2008; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000).

ELLs’ language limitations begin to impede their progress most noticeably as they move beyond the early stages of reading, and vocabulary and content knowledge become increasingly relevant for continued reading (and general academic) success – usually around third grade. This is why it is critical that teachers work to develop ELLs’ oral English, particularly vocabulary, and their content knowledge from the time they start school, even as they are learning the reading ‘basics’ (Goldenberg, 2008, pp. 21–22).

Content areas include visual arts, music, dance, theater, computer science, and physical education courses as well as math, science, social studies, and language arts. Multiple studies have found that students who participate in music and arts programs perform significantly better in academic subjects than those who do not.

Ample research findings indicate that the creative arts improve students’ school performance. The arts stimulate students’ imaginations (Csikszentmihalyi & Schief-



ele, 1992; Harste, 2014), foster critical thinking (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999), develop language skills (Chappell & Faltis, 2014), and increase reading comprehension (Shanahan et al., 2010). Importantly, the arts provide students with opportunities for using culturally-based sign systems for understanding their worlds (Burton et al., 1999); Harste, 2014), and evidence suggests that arts integration improves students' overall academic achievement (Caterall & Waldorf, 1999; Greene, 1995; Heath & Wolf, 2005; Lee, Patel, Cawthon, & Steingut, 2014; Walker, Tabone & Weltske, 2011) (as cited in McDermott, Falk-Ross, & Medow, 2016).

This is true for ELs as well as English speakers. "Content area teachers must understand and leverage the language and literacy practices found in science, mathematics, history/social studies, and the language arts to enhance students' engagement in language-rich classrooms that fuel both their academic and linguistic development" (Linquanti & Hakuta, 2012, p.9). Also see Greenfader & Brouillette's (2017) findings that creative drama and dance activities provide rich verbal classroom interactions and boost English oral language skills.

How might school leaders set and regulate expectations that teachers incorporate research-based differentiation strategies into their teaching of ELs?

School leaders and administrators can effectively promote the use of research-based differentiation strategies by setting policies and providing programming that encourage and support teachers in implementing them. School leaders should "[e]nact policies that allow for a wide range of accommodations to be used because no single accommodation works for all students" (Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, & Umansky, 2016, p. 19). Tools that principals and other administrators can use include the following:

Providing opportunities for educators in different roles (such as classroom teachers and EL specialists) to collaborate in and out of the classroom environment. This may include co-teaching, peer coaching, and collaboration. The "shared experiences of planning, teaching, and debriefing about lessons gave the teachers common ground on which they could critically examine students' learning" and "try different approaches to supporting student success" (Peercy, Martin-Beltran, Silverman, & Nunn, 2015, p. 52).

Ensuring that teachers have time allotted in the school day "to have instructional conversation, plan, and reflect on their practice" (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumisky, 2013, p. 8). School leaders who provide teachers with designated time during which they are expected to prepare to instruct ELs enhance their faculty's motivation and ability to innovate and implement differentiated practices.

Providing opportunities for ongoing professional development through trainings and workshops. Trainings should include instruction in how language development occurs and interrelationships between language and content (Umansky, et al., 2015). It has been demonstrated that when principals attend and engage as active participants in these trainings, teachers feel motivated to implement differentiated practices and feel supported in doing so. "A principal's understanding of professional development is essential in leading teachers in the implementation of innovation and facilitating school change and improved student learning (Lindstrom & Speck, 2004)" (as cited in Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumisky, 2013, p. 8). Additionally, principals have a role in continuing the professional development beyond training days by observing teachers' practices, engaging in discussion with teachers, and providing feedback about their practices (Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumisky, 2013).

Setting policies that ensure that ELs are enrolled in full course loads and have access to all content areas taught. This may include providing teachers with targeted professional development on integrating language and content instruction and lengthening ELs' school day or academic year (Umansky et al., 2015). Districts should shift their focus from language acquisition as the primary goal to a balanced approach of language acquisition and academic progress (Umansky et al., 2015).

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