

SOBRATO

Philanthropies

Using Coal, Oil,
and Gas

Brief Four



Photo courtesy of SEAL

Effective Curriculum for English Learner Success:

Building a System of Effective English Learner Responsive Curriculum: Implications for Philanthropy



**EL Curriculum
Brief Series**

JANUARY 2023

sobrato.org

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This brief is the fourth in a four-part series, “Effective Curriculum for English Learner Success,” written for foundations supporting schools in which English learners (ELs) have meaningful access to an intellectually rich, culturally responsive, and linguistically supportive education. Curriculum development and curricular reform present an opportunity to advance the goals of educational equity and an EL responsive education. This fourth brief summarizes the implications for philanthropy, including how the broader systems of EL education must work in tandem with curriculum to ensure that ELs receive the schooling they need.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Comprehensive, effective curriculum for ELs requires adaptations, additions, and supports for teachers beyond the general curriculum for all students. This effort calls for paying attention to and investing in multiple parts of the education system.

To build a system of effective EL responsive curriculum, foundations have an opportunity to:

- Motivate the design of such curriculum and support the development of materials.
- Educate the purchasers of curriculum about the aspects of curriculum and materials that are important to the success of ELs.
- Support the actual implementation and use of the materials in schools and districts.
- Fund professional development, pre-service training, and in-service infrastructure for teachers to assume the active role of curriculum adapters in response to EL needs.
- Support policy and mobilize advocates to push for the development and purchase of EL responsive materials.

The social and political context surrounding the education of ELs complicates the goal of attaining EL responsive curriculum. An important role for philanthropy is to champion the importance of culturally-inclusive curriculum and dual language/biliteracy curriculum.

Philanthropy is positioned to support the development of EL responsive curriculum, create the conditions for its dissemination and use, and help districts and teachers to implement it effectively. Doing so is key to narrowing the opportunity gap, ending the marginalization and invisibility of ELs, and building an equitable and inclusive educational system.

Introduction

SUMMARY OF INDICATORS FOR EL RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS:

The first three briefs in this series established critical indicators of curriculum and materials that enable ELs to learn a new language sufficiently for academic purposes, participate fully and engage in learning tasks, access and master grade-level standards-based content, and affirm their languages and cultures. Funders interested in the development and dissemination of curriculum can use these indicators as a resource in their work.

Indicators of EL inclusive and effective curriculum:

- » **Language development is integrated throughout all subjects**, simultaneously developing content knowledge, disciplinary practices, and language and literacy skills. The curriculum clearly articulates language objectives, identifies the linguistic demands of the content, supports differentiation of the curriculum, offers learning activities by English proficiency level, and references and aligns to the English Language Development (ELD) standards in addressing language development.
- » Curriculum and materials are available for **Designated ELD** instruction focused upon the ELD standards and aligned to the linguistic demands of grade-level content classes.
- » Learning activities are incorporated into the curriculum emphasizing **oral language**, engagement in discourse, and the building of **background knowledge** to bolster both **vocabulary** and concept development as needed for second language learners.
- » Curriculum and materials are available for **specialized settings** addressing particular EL subgroup needs including: newcomers, Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) newcomers, and Long-Term ELs (LTEs).
- » Content curriculum includes **supplementary materials and adaptations** of learning tasks to support EL subgroup needs, such as newcomers, SLIFE newcomers, and LTEs.



Photos courtesy of:
SEAL and Education
Trust-West

- » Curriculum and materials are **culturally and linguistically responsive**, inclusive, and relevant. Where possible, they incorporate global perspectives. Learning activities engage EL students' languages, cultures, and funds of knowledge as assets for learning.
- » Curriculum includes **teacher supports** (e.g., Teachers' Guides) for understanding the needs of ELs, including EL subgroups, and provides guidance for differentiating instruction to meet those needs.
- » Materials and learning activities support **leveraging the home language** through supplementary texts in major languages, cross-language connections and transfer curriculum, and informational resources for teachers comparing language features of other languages to English.
- » **Aligned materials are available in languages other than English**—at least in the major languages of EL communities—with resource links to enable teachers and students to access primary language supports.
- » **Curriculum-embedded assessments** are normed for and linguistically appropriate for second language learners, with clear guidance on using those assessments to inform differentiation of learning tasks, instruction, and supports for ELs.
- » Districts and curriculum publishers provide an infrastructure of **professional learning** and support for teachers on adapting and differentiating content-specific curriculum for ELs and in response to EL needs; including planning time, coaching, collaboration formats, and banks of supplementary resources from which teachers can draw.
- » Parallel, aligned, and equal content materials and curriculum are available in major languages other than English for use in **dual language and bilingual program** contexts. These materials are aligned to standards, incorporate biliteracy pedagogy, and are authentic to the languages of instruction.
- » Resources are provided for teachers to address **cross-language connections** and transfer specific to the content.
- » Selections of texts **are age and grade appropriate** in intellectual content, with guidance on supporting ELs to engage with complex text.
- » Curriculum supports **flexible pacing and extensions** that allow for a focus on language development, building background knowledge, and additional vocabulary support that ELs require.

This is a long list of indicators that together comprise EL responsive and inclusive curriculum. All indicators are important. They require paying attention to multiple parts of the education system to motivate the design of such curriculum, support materials development, educate the purchasers of curriculum that these indicators of curriculum and materials are important to EL success, and support the actual implementation and use of the materials. Funders seeking to make a difference in EL education through the lever of curriculum and materials therefore need to think beyond the materials themselves.

No matter which area of EL education you fund, there is a need to include support for EL responsive curriculum and materials

Curriculum and materials are an important part of a system of EL education, and therefore should be considered as part of any philanthropic agenda seeking to impact ELs.

Funders focusing on teacher preparation have to pay attention to preparing new teachers for their roles in adapting and creating curriculum for ELs. Those focusing on a particular group of ELs—such as the incorporation of immigrant and newcomer students, addressing LTELs, or early education for Dual Language Learners (DLLs)—have to consider the role of differentiated core curriculum and specialized materials designed for those students in separate program settings. Those interested in policy and advocacy for ELs enter into the territory of the role of state frameworks in defining guidelines for curriculum materials, and issues of state and local policies setting forth course requirements requiring curriculum. Literacy initiatives and ethnic studies initiatives also centrally involve curriculum and materials.

All funders concerned about ELs have to engage in some way with the issue of curriculum and instructional materials. High-quality EL responsive materials are contained within all education agendas impacting ELs. At the same time, curriculum and instructional materials are not wholly independent of other components of the educational system.



Photo courtesy of Californians Together



Photo courtesy of SEAL



Photo courtesy of Youth Leadership Institute

A systems view: Curriculum and instructional materials are part of an EL education agenda

Area of focus and funding to impact EL education	Curriculum and materials aspects and implications for funding
IMPROVED TEACHER PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate as teacher competencies the understanding of quality EL curriculum and materials, skills of curriculum adaptation and modification, and backwards-design lesson planning. • Incorporate a strong focus on EL’s trajectory of second language and dual language development with implications for curriculum and instructional differentiation.
POLICY AND ADVOCACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support work to develop curriculum frameworks that incorporate differentiation for ELs (levels of language proficiency), respond to various EL subgroups, and align to the ELD standards as well as content. • Support advocates to understand processes of standards and curriculum adoption, and curriculum framework development. • Build demand for EL responsive curriculum policy.
PROGRAMS FOR SPECIFIC POPULATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcomer programs need age-appropriate materials and curriculum for cultural orientation, and curriculum for SLIFE newcomers addressing foundational literacy and math. Curriculum content should include global perspectives and a strengths-based orientation. • LTEL initiatives need age-appropriate materials and specialized ELD curriculum that address written and spoken discourse and focus on academic English for second language learners, and World Language course curriculum and materials for native speakers.
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND DLLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschools and transitional kindergarten classrooms need curriculum that integrates strong, developmentally-appropriate language development with content learning, and incorporates explicit supports for DLLs. • Print-immersive environments for young children require collections of culturally-inclusive children’s books (narrative, fiction, informational) in multiple languages.

Area of focus and funding to impact EL education	Curriculum and materials aspects and implications for funding
LITERACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support curriculum development and adoption of curriculum that is comprehensive and multidimensional, integrates language with content, incorporates components based on the research on ELs and DLLs, uses a broad language focus as the frame for literacy, emphasizes oral language as the foundation for literacy, focuses on background knowledge and rich vocabulary-building across content areas, explicitly focuses on foundational skills in context, incorporates emphasis on meaning-making and comprehension, includes writing, and emphasizes cross-language connections. • Support school and classroom libraries to build collections of authentic high-quality texts, and digital and printed material in multiple languages that is culturally inclusive and includes texts written by diverse authors. • Support family literacy initiatives with materials in home languages.
DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADER DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed professional learning on EL responsive curriculum and materials into leadership development efforts, including development of support materials to assist leaders in processes of adoption and selection of appropriate and effective and inclusive curriculum for ELs.
TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional learning for teachers on adapting curriculum and materials to meet the needs of their ELs, including formative assessments, attention to the linguistic features of students' responses, feedback to support language development, understanding second language development, backwards lesson design, understanding the ELD standards, accessing supplementary materials, and the role of the home language. • Provide teacher time and collaboration formats for the adaptation of curriculum. • Support coach positions explicitly to work with teachers on adapting curriculum to meet the needs of ELs. • Create libraries of supplementary materials and teaching resources to help teachers in adapting curriculum to meet the needs of their ELs. • Develop curriculum that is written to be used and actively adapted by teachers in response to EL needs.

Area of focus and funding to impact EL education	Curriculum and materials aspects and implications for funding
EXPANDED LEARNING AND PANDEMIC RECOVERY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop curriculum for high-interest project-based programs specifically for ELs, incorporating language development “in action”—in English (ELD) and the home language—in formats workable for summer institutes, Saturday programs, and after-school programs.
BILITERACY AND DUAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop curriculum and materials in major target languages for use in dual language and bilingual programs. Use a biliteracy pedagogy, with materials aligned to grade-level content standards and of equal quality to English materials. • Support the creation and purchase of classroom and school libraries of books in multiple languages.
PARENT LEADERSHIP AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate parents about the indicators of EL responsive curriculum and to recognize gaps in curriculum quality and access. • Support the creation and purchase of books and text in home languages to advance family literacy efforts. • Provide tools, resources, and training for families to engage as literacy partners at home.



Photo courtesy of SEAL

Impacting the development and implementation of EL responsive curriculum materials

We know what EL responsive curriculum and materials should be. What will it take to make them happen?

Curriculum is big business. In 2020, the U.S. K-12 textbook industry brought in \$8 billion in revenue—not including additional books, print, and supplementary materials. Textbook and curriculum publishers respond to the market, which is comprised primarily of local school districts and influenced heavily by state government. While curriculum standards and materials adoption criteria differ from state to state, the largest states, California included, have some leverage in shaping what publishers create.

However, most often, publishers develop generic curriculum materials and then modify them only slightly to sell to the specific state markets. Why? Because the largest population of students in the U.S. are native English speakers and the numbers of ELs across the nation are relatively small. Because school leaders adopting a one-size-should-fit-all mentality do not demand materials to meet the needs of different student populations. As a result, textbook developers on their own are unlikely to be motivated to produce EL responsive curriculum. This is particularly true in the case of specialized curriculum for subgroups of ELs (e.g., newcomers, SLIFE newcomers, and LTELs) whose numbers are even smaller and program settings are fewer. What publishers produce is general curriculum with some minor nods to ELs, but that continues to marginalize or ignore their needs



Photo courtesy of Californians Together



Photo courtesy of Ben Gibbs of Early Edge CA

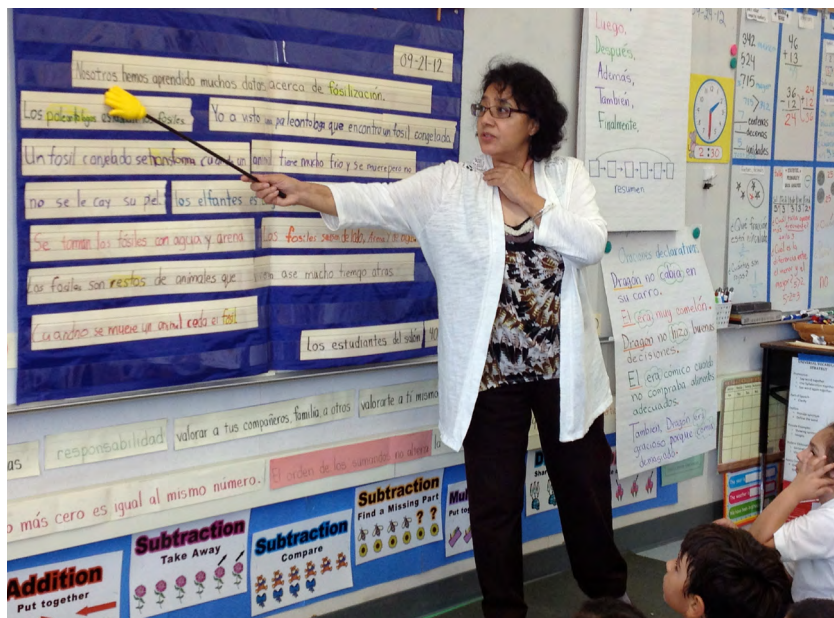


Photo courtesy of SEAL



Photo courtesy of Youth Leadership Institute

overall. This curriculum designed for native English speakers with only minimal, if any, attention to ELs leads to growing equity gaps.

What publishers produce is general curriculum with some minor nods to ELs, but that continues to marginalize or ignore their needs overall. This curriculum designed for native English speakers with only minimal, if any, attention to ELs leads to growing equity gaps.



Philanthropy should consider EL responsive curriculum and materials throughout the education system and across the chain of events that make curriculum part of EL schooling. Standards, including content and ELD standards, are defined at the professional level, adopted by states, and incorporated into federal, state, or district policies. State guidance, frameworks, and sometimes adoptions define appropriate or approved curriculum and materials. Publishers produce curriculum for state markets, which local school boards and superintendents purchase. Then, curriculum hits the classroom. At that point, teachers determine whether and to what extent they put it all into practice—what and how to teach, based on what they know.

California already has the Common Core English Language Arts and Next Generation Science standards that actually incorporate language development into content. The state has strong visionary ELD standards. California state curriculum frameworks pay attention to the integration of language and content, and to ELs. But as a local control state, districts have the power to choose their own curriculum and materials, and they have a dangerously weak understanding of ELs needs and the implications for curriculum. Furthermore, the textbook and curriculum publishers pitching products to these districts have not yet produced significantly EL responsive curriculum. Teachers providing input on curriculum selection and who are in the position of using and delivering the curriculum also have a relatively weak understanding of EL needs or how to adapt curriculum for their linguistically diverse students (see Brief #2).

Improving the quality and content of curriculum materials and bringing about the development of EL responsive curriculum requires a systemic approach:

- Supporting advocacy and efforts to create state policy and initiatives that call for the use of EL responsive curriculum or that require it as a condition of state grant funding.
- Investing in the development of materials to fill the gap.
- Building demand by educating school leaders about the importance of EL responsive curriculum and helping them choose and purchase such curriculum.
- Supporting professional development, pre-service training, and in-service infrastructure for teachers to assume the active role of curriculum adapters in response to EL needs
- Mobilizing advocates to push for the development and purchase of EL responsive curriculum.

EL responsive curriculum in a political, societal context

It seems fairly straightforward to call for EL responsive curriculum and materials. However, the education of ELs has always been in the cross-hairs of larger social and political forces and dynamics. Developing, adopting, and using EL responsive curriculum and instructional materials means navigating what can sometimes be tricky political waters. Funders should be aware of these political cross-currents and know that **philanthropic voices, partnerships, and investments play a key role and send an important message about centering and serving the needs of ELs.**

First, curriculum is fundamentally related to the content of what gets taught. Content matters. An EL responsive curriculum should include materials and content that is culturally and linguistically inclusive and relevant. Simple language accommodations alone are not sufficient. Underlying the relatively vague terms of “relevant,” “culturally responsive,” and “inclusive” curriculum material is an actual call for paying attention to the stories, histories, and experiences that are included in the curriculum—and for bolstering the presence of language, cultural, and racial minority groups whose voices and stories have been largely missing or misrepresented in the curriculum. For ELs who are either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, this also involves the need for global relevance.

An EL responsive curriculum is one in which students see themselves, their families, and their communities authentically represented. Though using somewhat different terminology, the real substance behind

“culturally responsive, inclusive, and relevant” curriculum means positionality in what has sometimes become a polarized state and national battle over what history gets taught, ethnic studies, what has been labeled “critical race theory” and anti-bias education. Aside from the important issue of curriculum telling a full story, research identifies the sociocultural aspects of schooling, assets-oriented and affirming learning environments, and the impact of relevance on engagement and motivation as effective practices for ELs. From a research and educational point of view, this is not controversial. The danger is that in efforts to avoid controversy, pressures mount to create curriculum that is focused on skills rather than content, which undermines learning and bypasses one of the major purposes of education—understanding the world.

Second, curriculum designed to address the language needs of ELs builds language development into and through all content curriculum, and where language and literacy development are intimately connected with meaning-making, foundational skills, and content knowledge. This has been a basic fundamental concept since the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (2008), which the Common Core standards and the California ELA/ELD Framework both embrace. The indicators of an EL responsive curriculum emphasize a comprehensive, multidimensional, and integrated approach to language and literacy development. As an explicit and direct EL approach to curriculum, the indicators derive from and reflect the research and science about second language development and dual language. The extent to which this shifts and adds to a monolingual perspective on literacy is essential to its appropriateness for ELs. This could be misread, however, and dragged into what is shaping up to be a battle over the primacy of certain foundational reading skills in what some are characterizing as a return to old “reading wars” and the assertion of a single “science of reading” for all students. By remaining focused on the research base that is directly about ELs, philanthropy can be an important balancing voice.

Third, almost three decades after an English-only movement decimated bilingual education programs in California and closed the door on research and efforts to engage children’s home language in the process of school learning, there is now consistent research on the role of the home language, the benefits of bilingualism, and the effectiveness of dual language programs and approaches. While policy is beginning



Photos courtesy of:
Ben Gibbs of Early
Edge CA, Education
Trust-West, and SEAL

to catch up to this research—for example, California now has a framework of policies calling for increasing dual language programs and opportunities—understandings and attitudes in the field are still lagging. It therefore takes intentionality and work to incorporate and keep dual language on the table. This impacts the field of curriculum development in which producing materials for dual language programs seems to be a small market, and impacts decisions about purchasing materials in languages other than English by school leaders who deem it a lower priority or as an extra “luxury” (if at all), but certainly not essential. Teachers in English-taught programs do not understand the need or use of primary language materials for their students and classrooms. While bilingualism is not as controversial as it once was, it is often marginalized. Philanthropy has the important role of standing up for the importance of bilingualism as a powerful educational approach for the rights of children to develop literacy in and engage in study in their home language as well as English, and for moving our schooling system to welcome children’s home languages and to embrace bilingualism. Seeing to it that there are curriculum and materials to bring home languages into the schooling of ELs is one important part of that effort.

Fourth, there are those who still and again believe that special efforts for “those kids” is not warranted. Sometimes voiced directly as anti-immigrant or anti-languages other than English, and sometimes muted behind insistence on addressing the needs of “all students” instead of focusing on the needs of ELs—nonetheless, the undercurrent of ignorance or aversion to embracing language and cultural minority communities is alive in schools and in the curriculum development world. Being a voice for embracing ELs explicitly and directly in curriculum is an important role for philanthropy.



Being a voice for embracing ELs explicitly and directly in curriculum is an important role for philanthropy.



Photo courtesy of SEAL



Photo courtesy of SEAL

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT FUNDER STRATEGIES

- Build demand for EL responsive curriculum
- Support writing and piloting of EL responsive curriculum, including for subgroups of ELs
- Educate policymakers, education leaders, teachers, and parents about the characteristics and stakes of EL responsive curriculum
- Support professional learning and instructional systems that enable teachers to create, adapt, and deliver responsive curriculum to ELs
- Be a voice for attention to ELs within curriculum

Conclusion

Philanthropy is positioned to make a difference by making it possible to develop EL responsive curriculum, creating the conditions for the dissemination, adoption, and use of this curriculum, and supporting districts and teachers to implement it effectively. Doing so is key to narrowing the opportunity gap, ending the marginalization and invisibility of ELs, and building an equitable and inclusive educational system. Overall, funders need to be clear about what curriculum looks like that is responsive to the needs of ELs, and the stakes of continuing to marginalize or sideline ELs in curriculum. They need to understand the various contributors to creating a system of EL responsive curriculum, and the leverage points for philanthropy in that system. They need to walk into funding for EL responsive curriculum and materials with eyes wide open about the challenges and flash points, and then stand firm and clear as a voice, a convener, and a source of funding to produce and put in place curriculum that delivers on the promise of educational equity and opportunity for ELs.

FOR FUNDERS: CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

To ask of curriculum writers and developers:

- Tell me about your understanding of ELs and their needs, and how this understanding impacts the curriculum itself.
- How do you ensure that what you are developing responds to the research on second language development, ELs, and the dual language brain?
- What intentional language supports are part of your curriculum's architecture?
- What do you view as the role of teachers in implementing the curriculum, and how are teachers supported in your curriculum materials and approach to differentiate and modify in response to EL needs?
- How does this curriculum relate to, align with, or address ELD?
- In what ways, if at all, does this curriculum leverage the students' home language and embrace their linguistic and cultural resources?
- What kind of support or partnerships would help you incorporate and respond to the needs of ELs in the curriculum that you produce?

To ask of district and school leaders:

- What do you expect from your teachers, and how do you support them in their role of implementing curriculum in ways that meet the needs of ELs?
- What do you look for in selecting curriculum that assures you that the needs of your ELs are being addressed?
- Do you use specific tools or frameworks as guidance to ensure choice of curriculum that is research-based? What are these?
- Do you have the curriculum you need for quality Designated ELD? For quality Integrated ELD? What is missing? How do these materials align and build from the grade-level core content students are learning?
- To what degree do you feel that lack of quality curriculum is a factor impacting the achievement and success of your ELs?
- How do you determine whether the curriculum is effective for ELs?
- What kind of support or partnerships would help you select EL responsive curriculum, and support quality implementation of such curriculum?

FOR FUNDERS: CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

To ask of advocates:

- Are curriculum and materials part of your advocacy agenda for EL education? If so, what are you trying to achieve and put in place through your advocacy?
- What is your vision of curriculum and materials that are appropriate for and meet the needs of students and families of ELs?
- Which level of the system are you working to impact in terms of bringing about strong curriculum and appropriate quality materials for ELs? Why?

To ask of policy makers:

- To what degree do you focus on and think about curriculum and materials when you are taking actions to improve schooling for ELs?
- What do you see as your role in assuring that high-quality curriculum and materials for EL success are available and being implemented?
- How confident do you feel that EL responsive curriculum is in fact in place in your state and/or district?
- How important do you think curriculum and materials are in an overall agenda of ensuring quality education for ELs?
- Do you feel you have an adequate vision of what constitutes appropriate and quality EL materials? If not, what kind of support or partnerships would help you?

This series of briefs was conceived and authored by Laurie Olsen, Ph.D. We are grateful for review and input provided by Alesha Moreno-Ramirez (Director, Multilingual Support Division, California Department of Education), Crystal Gonzales (Executive Director, English Learners Success Forum) and Nicole Knight (Executive Director, English Language Learner and Multilingual Achievement, Oakland Unified School District).

SOBRATO

Philanthropies

599 Castro Street, Suite 400
Mountain View, CA 94041
650-876-7010

sobrato.org