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Effective Curriculum for English Learner Success:

Appendix: Bright Spots and Glossary of Terms



EL Curriculum Brief Series

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This Appendix to the “Effective Curriculum for English Learners” series of briefs provides descriptions of “bright spots” that illustrate a variety of efforts to create EL responsive curriculum and a glossary of English Learner (EL) and curriculum-related terms used throughout the briefs.

Introduction

There are multiple examples of investments philanthropy has made that have resulted in moving the field of EL responsive curriculum forward. The following “Bright Spots” are offered as illustrative of various types of projects and initiatives, aimed at different aspects of creating a system of EL responsive curriculum including:

- Creation of specialized course curriculum for specific subgroups of ELs;
- Professional learning for teachers on creating EL responsive curriculum;
- Guidance for publishers and purchasers of curriculum on what effective EL curriculum should be;
- Provision of dual language curriculum;
- Open-source materials with embedding EL needs; and,
- Creation and dissemination of culturally-inclusive supplementary materials.

AVID EXCEL

Provides specialized course curriculum, plus tools for teachers to embed throughout curriculum to serve needs of middle school Long-Term English Learners (LTELs).

AVID Excel is an offshoot of the well-known AVID program that prepares high school students for college, but AVID Excel is designed explicitly to change the trajectory of LTELs in middle school and to prepare middle school students to enter high school with the language skills and academic engagement skills needed to succeed in rigorous coursework.

AVID is not a pre-packaged curriculum, instead offering turn-key teaching techniques and classroom activities that educators can easily incorporate in their classrooms to accelerate language acquisition, literacy, and academic engagement. Teachers flexibly add tools (including note-taking, organization, time management, how to engage in academic discourse, and critical thinking) from AVID Excel to augment learning of any subject. LTELs engage in peer tutoring, collaborative study groups, and student-centered activities such as Socratic Seminars and Philosophical Chairs. These strategies are layered onto/ incorporated into existing curriculum, focusing on changing how the material is taught, and respecting teachers’ expertise to flexibly respond to their students’ needs. Teachers are provided guided support in adapting curriculum utilizing training and coaching from AVID Excel on lesson development, diagnostic teaching, and evaluating student progress.

In addition, AVID Excel provides specialized curriculum for an elective course for LTELs providing explicit instruction in English language development (ELD) and academic language through reading, writing, oral language, academic vocabulary, college readiness skills, and development of study skills. AVID Excel works with districts to ensure curriculum for heritage language courses support full biliteracy, increase academic rigor, and provide a path to Advanced Placement language classes for middle school LTELs.

CENTER FOR TEACHING FOR BILITERACY

A professional development and technical assistance organization focused on biliteracy programs that support teachers in curriculum and unit writing.

The Center for Teaching for Biliteracy (The Center) is a professional development and technical assistance organization focused on biliteracy programs. The Center provides online and in-person professional development to educators and technical assistance to districts on the development of strong biliteracy programs based on the work of Cheryl Urow and Karen Beeman, authors of Teaching for Biliteracy. Teachers are immersed in biliteracy pedagogy and collaborative unit writing (in Spanish, English, or bilingually) thus supporting the development and implementation of strong dual language curriculum and biliteracy pedagogy in integrated language and content approaches.

ENGLISH LEARNERS SUCCESS FORUM

A focus on standards-aligned core subject academic material development responsive to ELs.

The English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) is a collaboration of researchers, teachers, district leaders, and funders who focus on improving the quality and accessibility of instructional materials for English Learners (ELs). Their mission is to improve the supply and accessibility of high-quality K-12 mainstream instructional materials that address the linguistic and cultural needs of ELs while building demand to reach educators at scale. ELSF focuses exclusively on full-year core instructional materials in English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science, guiding publishers and decision-makers to integrate and recognize benchmarks of quality curriculum that address students' varying needs within those content areas. ELSF believes quality teaching paired with effective instructional guidance is critical to the academic success of ELs. They provide a library of evidence-based resources and tools for curriculum developers and educators to create and adapt instructional materials to be more supportive of ELs.

ENGAGE NEW YORK

Open-source standards-aligned curriculum and lessons, with EL exemplars.

Engage New York (EngageNY) is developed and maintained by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to support the implementation of key aspects of the New York State Board of Regents Reform Agenda by creating free materials and resources aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Anyone with access to the Internet can download free curriculum materials from EngageNY and the NYSED. Viewing curriculum decisions as local decisions, the curricular and instructional resources on EngageNY may be adopted or adapted by schools and districts for local use. Modules include lessons and lesson exemplars, including some specifically describing the application for ELs. Lessons are adaptable to allow for teacher preference and flexibility so that classroom instruction can meet EL students' needs

while maintaining alignment with the CCLS. Rubrics are available to help evaluate the quality, rigor, and alignment of adapted lessons. Note that curriculum materials are only available in English.

ILLUSTRATIVE MATHEMATICS

An open-source curriculum and professional development resource focusing on math, with emphasis on disciplinary-specific language development embedded.

Illustrative Mathematics (IM) is a professional development and open-source K-12 math curriculum organization that provides intentional language integration through the inclusion of language routines. IM K-12 Math “helps teachers catalyze mathematical proficiency with an engaging and inclusive approach that lifts students up to the skills, understandings, and practices that will stay with them for a lifetime.” The curriculum is a problem-based approach designed to address content and practice standards in math to foster learning for all. Students learn by doing math, solving problems in mathematical and real-world contexts, and constructing arguments using precise language. The language focus is highly supportive of ELs.

INTERNATIONALS NETWORK

A specialized program for newcomer, immigrant high school students, with a teacher-developed and principles-based curriculum approach.

Internationals Network is a community of schools and academies across the U.S. that collaborate to provide quality education for immigrant and refugee youth. The International High School model is based on a set of five core principles: language and content integration, experiential learning, heterogeneity, collaboration, and interdisciplinary. They emphasize “rigorous academics, linguistic dignity, and bilingualism.” At the Internationals Network, teacher-created curriculum and student-centered instruction are at the center of the educational model. Teachers are responsible for helping their students meet or exceed state standards. Within that framework, teachers have autonomy over what and how they teach, and while there is a great deal of resource-sharing among teachers, they almost always create their own curriculum. They choose the content to include, find the resources and readings, create the activities, and plan the classes.

Project-based learning, work-based learning, and performance assessments allow students to explore their interests and learn academic content in personalized and inquiry-based ways. Teachers engage students in learning experiences that require collaboration, effective communications, and self-directed inquiry, enabling them to “learn how to learn” and develop academic mindsets that increase perseverance and productive learning behaviors. Language instruction is embedded in every content class. Teachers all view themselves as language teachers first and foremost. “Language skills are most effectively learned in context and emerge most naturally in purposeful, language-rich, experiential, interdisciplinary study.” Building on students’ knowledge, interests, and strengths—a common approach in youth development work—is another practice that supports the principle of heterogeneity and collaboration, and is an important factor in how their teachers create across disciplines and across schools. This approach leads directly to the inclusion of ethnically and culturally relevant curriculum.

LEARNING FOR JUSTICE (FORMERLY TEACHING TOLERANCE)

A focus on supplementary materials and lessons that address social content, social-justice intent, and purposes of curriculum, important for infusing culturally-inclusive pedagogy into curriculum.

Learning for Justice provides free educational resources to educators—teachers, administrators, counselors, and other practitioners—related to building and delivering curriculum that focus on justice and inclusion. Their efforts include resources like articles, guides, lessons, films, frameworks, tools, lists of standards aligned and vetted texts, and tools for teachers and administrators to use in screening, vetting, and selecting materials by focusing on diversity and representation, critical literacy, and reader and task as part of the selection criteria. The tool called Reading Diversity is designed to help educators think about whether a text adds to or detracts from an accurate, representative story, and to vet manuscripts for the accurate representation of subjugation and resistance. It supports teacher-driven curriculum approaches.

SEAL

Supports teacher teams to use integrated thematic curriculum centralizing the needs of ELs.

The SEAL model is a research- and evidence-based, professional development and instructional model of language-rich, early education through an upper elementary grade model designed to build the capacity of educators to powerfully develop the language and literacy skills of young EL children. The investment in comprehensive professional development supports teams of teachers to develop a toolkit of effective instructional strategies within the context of integrated thematic curriculum units that incorporate language development, ELD, and content knowledge. While the instructional strategies themselves can be utilized in the context of various packaged curricula, that curriculum must be flexible enough to accommodate the variations in pacing and differentiation needed for EL engagement and success, and to be enhanced with text and materials selected for high-level expressive language and culturally inclusive content.

SEAL works with coaches to support teachers in application. Teachers are provided the models of SEAL-created integrated thematic units (based on science, social studies/history, language arts, and ELD standards), and supported in learning the architecture and approach to constructing units through backwards design and principles of EL effective instruction. Videos and demonstrations illustrate the application of the approach in various classrooms. Time built into teacher schedules to do ongoing planning is required to enable them to meet the needs and assets of their students in deeply engaging ways.

THE SIFE EQUITY PROJECT

A specialized focus on Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), under-schooled immigrant adolescents.

The SIFE Equity Project is a non-profit organization that partners with educators to create equitable and empowering learning opportunities for under-schooled immigrant adolescents, including addressing the need for alternate programs and curriculum. They work with schools to integrate content, language, and literacy instruction appropriate to effective pathways for SLIFE. The SIFE Equity Project designs teacher



Photo courtesy of SEAL

toolboxes and student materials that target the specific needs of SLIFE and newcomers that are culturally-relevant and age-appropriate, both for access in regular content classrooms as well as comprehensive curricula for target intervention classes designed specifically for SLIFE. They also develop and facilitate interactive sessions (in-person and online) that target the needs of secondary school teachers and administrators who are creating and implementing pathways for new immigrants and SLIFE, focusing on understanding student needs among the spectrum of EL newcomers, unpacking language and literacy development for ELs, leveraging students' full language repertoire, and designing instruction.

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE

Professional learning related to enhancing curriculum with a language focus, including explicit ELD.

Understanding Language (UL) is an initiative of the Stanford Graduate School of Education dedicated to help policymakers, researchers, states, district staff, and schools better serve ELs. They conduct research, provide professional learning for leaders and educators, write policy documents, develop assessments, and enhance curriculum aiming to heighten educator awareness of the critical role that language plays in the college-and-career-ready standards. The long-term goal of the initiative is to increase recognition that learning the language of each academic discipline and its use in higher order cognitive skills is essential to learning content. The focus on ELD curriculum centers around four designated ELD fundamentals to guide what curriculum makers and teachers should keep in mind as they develop or enhance their own curricular units to build on the strengths and meet the needs of their multilingual learners at any level of English language proficiency. They support the development of units that reinforce each other and revolve around a central disciplinary focus or theme and language practices. To create depth rather than breadth, these curriculum units incorporate disciplinary practices from multiple content areas, encourage students to work toward the creation of meaningful performance tasks, include opportunities for students to use language and develop communicative competence, and expand students' linguistic toolkit by analyzing how language works within rich, engaging texts.

Glossary of Terms

CURRICULUM

A standards-based sequence of planned experiences through which students learn, practice, and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills. It serves as the central guide for instruction—defining learning objectives, outlining the units and lessons that teachers teach, defining assignments and projects and learning tasks given to students, including the books and materials used in the course, and often including assessments and other methods used to evaluate student learning. In some cases, teachers develop their own curricula, although it is also common for teachers to adapt lessons and syllabi created by other teachers, use curriculum templates and guides to structure their lessons and courses, or purchase prepackaged curricula. In many districts, schools purchase comprehensive multigrade curriculum packages in a particular subject area that teachers are required to use or follow. These packages and programs include comprehensive sets of lessons, activities, texts, materials, and assessments all organized around a standards-aligned scope and sequence that are meant to be used together—with detailed Teachers’ Guides and resources.

DIFFERENTIATION

Intentionally, explicitly, and systematically tailoring instruction to be responsive to the range of student differences, interests, and learning needs. It is the process of adapting and responding to student needs within a lesson, unit and curriculum, and presenting the same content concepts and information in different ways and at different levels as needed for student learning and participation. Educational equity can only be achieved for ELs if they have an opportunity to learn the same rigorous academic content as native English speakers. The best way to achieve that goal is through differentiated instruction that considers their English language proficiency and other factors. While the standards and content objectives remain the same for all students, the differentiation occurs in the pacing and nuanced support students receive to make sense of the content, and how they demonstrate what they have learned. Content may be modified for students who need additional practice with essential elements before moving on; however, the expectation is that modifications in other areas will ultimately allow all students to master the same key content. Providing ELs with alternative ways of accessing key content (e.g., charts, books written in their first language, simplified text written by the teacher, discussion, visuals, etc.) allows them to learn the same material as other students as they continue to develop their English language skills. Differentiation for ELs also can supplement the content by focusing on background knowledge that a U.S.-born native English-speaking student would already know and have, or supplementing the content with culturally relevant material that supports meaning and relevance. Differentiation is based upon assessment that informs the teacher of English proficiency level (how much English they comprehend and can use), observation of student needs and student interests, and student readiness based on their prior exposure and preparation for learning specific information or skills.

DUAL LANGUAGE/BILITERACY EDUCATION

An umbrella term that encompasses bilingual programs and various models of academic programs that are taught in two languages with the goals of biliteracy, cross-cultural understanding and skills, and mastery of grade level content in two languages. These models include bilingual programs designed specifically to serve ELs developing proficiency in their home language and in English and engaging in academic study in two languages, and two-way bilingual immersion, or dual language immersion programs which serve both ELs and native English speakers together in developing biliteracy. Depending on the specific model being used, Dual-language/biliteracy curriculum is typically presented bilingually and is divided into distinct blocks of time in what is termed “language allocation,” that specifies the amount of time to be spent in each language—e.g., day one in English, day two in Spanish, day three in English, or 90% of the day in Spanish, 10% in English, etc.—and which content will be taught in which language. Instruction does not include straight translation from language to language, and curriculum is strategically coordinated and aligned so material is not taught in both languages but rather what is taught in one language builds on what was taught in the other. For this reason, dual language programs require aligned curriculum planning and materials in both languages.

ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELS)

Students who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who are not proficient in English, and who require specialized or modified language instruction in order to participate and gain equal access to the curriculum and who require second language development to become English proficient, are known by a variety of names in the education community: English language learners (ELLs), Multilingual learners (MLs), Dual language learners (DLLs), limited English proficient (LEP) students, non-native English speakers, language-minority students, and either bilingual students or emerging bilingual students.

INTEGRATED AND DESIGNATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (ELD)

The basic comprehensive program for all ELs includes “Designated ELD” curriculum used during a protected time of the school day with English learners and focused on the ELD standards, as well as “Integrated ELD”, or language development and comprehension strategies integrated into the teaching of all academic content focused on content standards but drawing upon the ELD Standards. Integrated ELD occurs in all content courses (all disciplines, across the curriculum) as teachers draw upon the California ELD Standards in tandem with content standards to guide their lesson planning, support students during instruction, and evaluate student work. The primary focal standards for Integrated ELD are the content standards, and the purpose of the ELD Standards is to ensure that EL students are supported to participate in and be successful with core content learning. Integrated ELD is focused on content with language support, while Designated ELD is focused on language skills using content for examples, application, relevance, and context. Integrated ELD focuses on supporting students to learn the language needed for subject-matter demands and participation during content instruction. Designated ELD is a daily specific ELD block of time that builds foundational knowledge of English in and through the content.

FAQS	Integrated ELD	Designated ELD
WHEN?	Occurs in all content areas throughout the day.	A protected time during the regular school day.
WHO TEACHES?	All teachers with EL students in their classes, authorized in content and trained in use of ELD standards.	In Secondary: qualified teachers who are authorized and trained in teaching ELD.
STUDENT GROUPING?	EL students integrated with proficient English speakers in regular heterogeneous classes.	EL students are grouped, to the extent possible, by their English proficiency levels, and at times by "typology" (e.g., newcomer, LTEL, SLIFE), and where possible through formative assessments to identify common language needs.
STANDARDS USED?	The regular content standards are the focus, with the ELD standards used for planning how to scaffold learning and support language use and participation.	ELD Standards are the focus, used in ways that build into and from content instruction to response to the linguistic demands of the content.
WHY?	Promoting the development of grade level content knowledge and increasingly advanced levels of academic English – and supporting the participation and engagement of ELs in learning activities related to acquiring content knowledge.	Promoting the development of proficiency of English, including critical English language skills needed for successful learning throughout the curriculum.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The term assessment refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students. Just as academic lessons have different functions, assessments are typically designed to measure specific elements of learning—e.g., the level of knowledge a student already has about the concept or skill the teacher is planning to teach or the ability to comprehend and analyze different types of texts and readings. Assessments also are used to identify individual student weaknesses and strengths so that educators can provide responsive and specialized academic support.

Formative assessments are evaluations of student learning typically administered by teachers at multiple times during a unit, course, or academic program. The general purpose of formative assessment is to give teachers in-process feedback about what students are learning or not learning so that instructional approaches, teaching materials, and academic support can be modified accordingly. Formative assessments are usually not scored or graded, and they may take a variety of forms, from more formal quizzes and assignments to informal questioning techniques, observations, and in-class discussions with students.

INSTRUCTION

The process of teaching and engaging students with content. While curriculum is the organized content and plan for engaging students with specific knowledge and skills, instruction is how a teacher organizes time and activities in implementing that content and plan.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

Educational programs designed to support ELs in becoming English proficient, and that provide instruction to ELs on the academic content and ELD standards thus providing access to the full curriculum for students facing an English language barrier to equal educational opportunity. Written into California Education Code, language acquisition programs provide instruction to pupils on the academic content and ELD standards, through Integrated and Designated ELD. Language acquisition programs may include, but are not limited to, all of the following: Dual language immersion, transitional bilingual, developmental bilingual, and Structured English Immersion (SEI).

LINGUISTIC DEMANDS

Refers to the language ELs need in order to be able to participate in learning tasks and to engage with content knowledge. This includes English words (vocabulary), phrases and language structures, including receptive language skills (comprehending what they hear and what they read), as well as the productive language domains of speaking and writing. Embedded in receptive and productive language skills are words and phrases, syntactic structures, semantics, and key vocabulary. ELs need support in learning these aspects of language in order to access the curriculum content. When planning an academic task, it is important that teachers consider the language they will use when teaching students the content concepts of the lesson. This is often expressed as language objectives (e.g., “Students will be able to use compare and contrast language structures”). Teachers then support ELs in developing the language needed, and deliver instruction in a way that is comprehensible to the students given their English proficiency levels.

Using visuals, taking time to focus on vocabulary, and providing contextual definitions, wherein key vocabulary and academic language is defined in context, is one way to make high levels of academic language more comprehensible. To be successful, ELs need explicit instruction in the specific vocabulary, phrases, structures, and grammatical features to accomplish the particular task related to the content concepts and skills. To address this need, teachers need to plan Designated ELD lessons that teach aspects of the English language to ELs that native English speakers already know and that are core to understanding the academic content and participating in learning activities. Without analysis of and attention to the linguistic demands of the content and learning activities, ELs are unable to access and participate in learning.

LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNER (LTEL)

A formal educational classification given to students who have been enrolled in American schools for more than six years, who are not progressing adequately toward English proficiency, and who are struggling academically due to their limited English skills. Given that these students are typically identified after six or more years of enrollment in formal education, LTELs are most commonly enrolled in middle schools and high schools. While some LTELs come from immigrant families, the majority are American citizens who have lived most or all of their lives in the U.S. Generally speaking, LTELs struggle with reading, writing, and academic language—the oral, written, auditory, and visual language proficiency and understanding required to learn effectively in academic programs—and consequently they have fallen behind their English-speaking peers academically and have accumulated significant learning gaps over the course of their education.

NEWCOMER

An umbrella term for foreign-born students who have recently arrived in the U.S. Newcomer students may include, but are not limited to, asylees, refugees, unaccompanied youth, undocumented youth, migratory students, and other immigrant children and youth. Newcomer students come from many different countries, are diverse economically, educationally, and culturally. These students come to school with various levels of educational experiences and speak a variety of languages, which may or may not include English. As newcomer students enter into a new education system, they often experience different academic, language, and social-emotional challenges from those of U.S.-born students. All newcomers face the challenge of adjusting to a new culture, and those who are newly arrived grapple with culture shock and benefit from special orientation and transitional support. Served in special newcomer classes or programs, or placed into regular classrooms, newcomers require curriculum that addresses their needs for cultural orientation and basic survival English. Newcomer students are protected under federal laws to access a free, accessible, and appropriate public education, regardless of home language or immigration status.

PEDAGOGY

Refers to the art, science, and profession of teaching. It describes the philosophy, approach, and method a teacher applies to teaching. It may, for example, be student-centered and constructivist pedagogy in which teachers create the learning conditions, establish guiding questions related to standards, and provide students materials and support for students to follow their interests. Or, the teaching pedagogy may be very teacher-centered and transmission-oriented where the teacher delivers instruction. Because packaged curriculum sets out a scope and sequence of skills and knowledge development, recommends learning activities, and provides materials, there is always an internal implied pedagogy related to the role of the teacher and degree of professional judgment and flexibility allowed. It is always important for purchasers and users of curriculum to consider the implied pedagogy.

SCAFFOLDING

A teaching strategy that uses progressive steps to move students towards increased independence in the learning process. The teacher begins with understanding what a student is able to do independently and what supports they need at that point, and then designs successive levels of temporary support which are removed when the student no longer needs them. Scaffolding is widely considered to be an essential element of effective teaching for all students and is specifically an element of effective teaching of ELs. When teachers scaffold instruction, they typically break up a learning experience, concept, or skill into discrete parts, and then give students the assistance they need to learn each part. For example, with ELs, the teacher may offer a sentence frame or sentence starter to help the student express themselves in English; the student would supply some key words, but not yet be responsible for constructing a whole sentence. Or, the teacher may describe or illustrate a concept, problem, or process in multiple ways including visuals and examples to ensure understanding for ELs.

STANDARDS

The concepts, knowledge, and skills to be mastered for specific subjects and disciplines by grade level. They are statements of outcomes, such as "Students will be able to...." or "Students will understand....". The outcomes expressed in standards are determined by national, state, professional, or disciplinary determinations of what is important for an educated person to know and do. Standards are considered an antidote to watered-down and inequitable expectations for some groups (including ELs). Without standards defining desired and expected outcomes, there are uneven and often inequitable offerings in what students will get from schooling. Ensuring all schools are focused on the same outcomes through the adoption of common standards is considered a matter of equity and quality. Standards do not, however, determine the specific topics, sequence, learning tasks, or pedagogical approach that are used to instruct students towards achievement of the standards.

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

sobrato.org