2017

STRENGTHENING STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

English Language Arts Menu of Best Practices and Strategies

http://www.k12.wa.us/SSEO/pubdocs/ELAMenu.pdf

Specialized Literacy Instruction for English Learners (ELs) *

Specialized literacy instruction for English Learners (ELs) is a research-based practice. Many students can benefit from specialized literacy instruction, but since ELs are learning two language registers, native language at home and English at school, they require specialized instruction to become proficient listeners, speakers, readers, and writers in English. Specialized literacy instruction for ELs relies on assessment-based planning to differentiate and individualize student literacy instruction based on the student's English proficiency level. LAP can support ELs who have not yet met ELA Standards.

Dual Language (DL) instructional models for ELs are considered core instructional models, and for the purpose of this menu, could be selected as a strategy for K–4 schools with more than 40 percent of students not meeting standard. When ELs become literate in both their native language and English they outperform peers in English-only instruction on standardized tests in English.

LAP funds supporting ELs can include determining instructional support, differentiated instructional practices, and educator training to support the development of foundational literacy skills. LAP can also provide additional ELA support for students enrolled in DL programs. LAP can support professional learning opportunities and ongoing coaching for educators to implement EL strategies since the ultimate goal is to help ELs meet content standards in ELA. (Title III funds can also be used for professional learning to build capacity for staff members serving EL students.) When LAP funds are used to support EL students, it should be in addition to Basic Education funding and TBIP funding, not in place of those funds. As a reminder, under statute, LAP is for students struggling to meet standard in ELA and/or math.

Practice Possibilities—Ideas to Consider When Planning

- Train all staff in EL literacy strategies and academic language to support EL language development.
- Develop language and content objectives for each lesson and explicitly share with students.
- Coordinate professional learning and instructional supports for ELs to integrate content instruction with English language development with the EL specialist pushing-in or co-teaching rather than providing isolated interventions.
- Use the English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards to provide meaningful access to content for ELs. The ELP standards scaffold instruction by grade level and content with differentiation examples to support ELs at various levels of English language proficiency.
- Implement a two-way dual language core instruction program to build upon the bilingual assets of ELs.

- Hire certificated staff with an EL or Bilingual Education endorsement to design and provide language instruction for ELs. Whenever possible, hire biliterate teachers who are qualified to provide instruction in the student's native language and English.

Demographic Considerations—Student Factors to Consider When Planning

- English Learner is a classification that encompasses a wide range of English language proficiency. Identify the EL's proficiency level and use the Achievement Level Descriptors to understand the student's English language skills.
- ELs who are dual-served with special education benefit academically when there is intentional, systematic collaboration between the classroom teacher, EL specialist, and special education teacher.
- ELs progress rapidly from beginning to middle levels of proficiency (levels 1-3) and often progress more slowly or plateau, from middle to advanced levels of proficiency (levels 3-5).
- ELs generally required 4-6 years to achieve early advanced proficiency (level 4).
- Students with EL designation for more than five years (long-term ELs) benefit from additional one-on-one and small group instruction on oral language and academic language development.
- ELs come from a variety of rich cultural and linguistic backgrounds and benefit from primary language development and scaffolds to develop literacy in English.

Implementation Success Factors—Options to Consider When Planning

- Use the students home language to promote learning, this includes using native language texts, primary language thinking partners, and scaffolds to build English literacy skills.
- Engage students in learning activities that build background knowledge and native language literacy skills to make personal connections to the text.
- Explicitly teach metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies to support academic growth.
- Explicitly teach English academic vocabulary and language skills.
- Allow students to negotiate meaning and clarity in primary language.
- Use cognates, words with the same linguistic origins, from the student's native language when teaching vocabulary.
- Provide ample opportunities for ELs to use, and be exposed to, new vocabulary through authentic task-based practices that foster comprehension and skill transfer.

- Use songs, chants, rhymes, poems, texts with repetitive frames and read-alouds to facilitate phonemic awareness, the practice of language structures, and develop content knowledge.
- Use realia (objects or activities that bring real life to classroom learning), visuals, non-verbal support, and highly contextualized text to develop comprehension and academic vocabulary.
- Focus phonological awareness instruction on English phonemes that are not present in the student's native language.
- Provide increased one-on-one and small group time to guide ELs through miscues and explicit phonological processing instruction.
- Deconstruct complex text and focus student's attention on grammatical and rhetorical structures to develop academic language.
- Create opportunities for guided oral language practice with peers and adults who can model content-based discourse, participate in storytelling, and/or question-of-the-day oration activities.
- Use anchor charts to support oral and written discourse.
- Use a holistic, well-rounded, approach to literacy and assess the EL's literacy in English and their native language to identify gaps for targeted instruction.
- Identify groups based on the EL's native language proficiency levels.
- Provide ELs with opportunities to practice literacy strategies using age-appropriate, high interest texts (in English) that align with the student's English language proficiency level.
- Use materials that were initially written in the student's native language rather than translations from English as this will often change the reading level of the text.
- Develop metalinguistic charts with students to identify similarities and differences between English and the student's native language, with additional instruction on the language differences to facilitate skill transfer to English.

Resources—Tools for Planning

- Institute of Education Sciences/Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory: Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School and the Professional Learning Communities Facilitator's Guide for Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School with handouts and videos

- OSPI Online Professional Learning to Support ELs: Academic Language Toolkit, Dual Language Toolkit, Funds of Knowledge and Home Visits Toolkit
- English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards with Correspondences to K–12 ELA, Mathematic, and Science Practices, K–12 ELA Standards, and 6–12 Literacy Standards
- U.S. Department of ED: English Learner Toolkit & Newcomer Toolkit
- Professional learning modules and recommendations for scaffolding instruction for ELs; Center for Applied Linguistics
- Resources and tools for developing EL literacy skills; Center for Teaching for Biliteracy
- Professional learning modules and tools to build classroom-based assessments in the student's native language; Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition
- Dual Language Washington

Supporting Research

Specialized literacy instruction for ELs provides a framework for instructional design and collaboration to support ELs through the complexity and increased cognitive load of learning two language registers (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007) and becoming proficient in English. An English Learner (EL) acquires primary listening and speaking skills in a language other than English. These students encounter greater challenges in school because they are faced with the challenge of simultaneously acquiring English and learning academic content. High school graduation rates of ELs are lower than their non-EL peers (Huang, et al., 2016). To address this challenge, educators need to understand the different levels of language acquisition within oral and language domains.

To the greatest extent possible, students' primary language and cultural background should be integrated into instructional practices to enhance comprehension and conceptual development. When feasible, bilingual instruction programs should be offered to strengthen students' literacy skills in both English and their primary language. Recommendations for success for secondary English learners also highlight the importance of student identity, identity groups, and the creation of a community of learners [aka Funds of Knowledge] (Faltis & Coulter, 2008; Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Walqui, 2000).

Recognizing the student's native language skills as an asset is fundamental to designing effective literacy instruction for ELs. Assessing the student's native language literacy opens the door to using and developing these skills as they transfer to and can accelerate learning in English (Escamilla et al., 2013; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005). Educators can use students' home language to support academic learning even when instruction is primarily in English. This results in both academic and non-academic benefits in the classroom (Goldenberg, Hicks, & Lit,

2013). Additionally, when native language scaffolds are used, ELs develop greater brain density in areas related to language, memory, and attention which increase comprehension in English (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). When students learn to read in their home language, it benefits them as they learn to read in English (Goldenberg, 2013).

Research has shown that instruction in the essential elements of reading will have a greater impact on decoding and fluency for ELs than on comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2006; Lesaux, Crosson, Kieffer, & Pierce, 2010) requiring intentional oral language support to develop this critical aspect of literacy. Difficulties with reading comprehension compromise learning academic language and can lead to achievement and opportunity gaps for ELs beginning as early as mid-elementary (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Providing instruction in oral language development in the student's native language and English builds a foundation and a bridge for the student's English literacy development (Beeman & Urow, 2013). As ELs are learning phonemes in their native language and in English, they benefit from increased time and instruction focused on phonological processing. Providing instruction on the similarities and differences in discourse structures in English and in the student's native language enables the EL to effectively transfer their native literacy skills to English literacy skills (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Educators must be aware of how oral language and literacy skills develop across different contexts (both in and out of school) as well as across the different academic content areas. Input, interaction, and output experiences are essential components of language acquisition (Zhang, 2009). Language proficiency levels vary greatly, both across grade levels as well as within the same age/grade level. Given these understandings, educators need to create learning environments where students are taught and have opportunities to use the content and academic vocabulary of the grade level curriculum (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014). EL students need ample opportunities for verbal interaction with the target language, and they require learning opportunities that integrate language across subject areas, thus increasing both depth and frequency of language use (Saunders, et al., 2013).

As ELs in the early grades are learning the foundational literacy skills alongside their native English-speaking peers, they are simultaneously developing the vocabulary, syntax, and constructs of an entirely new language system. As Pauline Gibbons notes, "many approaches and mainstream reading programs do not take into account the needs of ELs, since most are based on the assumption that learners are already familiar with the spoken form of the language" (2009, p. 83). For this reason, developing literacy with ELs must take into account the development of the student's oral language skills in English. Oral language is a foundational literacy skill. For literacy development, research has shown that reading interventions have a

minimal effect when time spent on oral language is not part of the intervention. A study by Klingner and Vaughn (1996) indicated "children with the potential to benefit most from the [reading] intervention had some initial reading ability and fairly high levels of second-language oral proficiency" (In August, et al., 2008, p. 163).

With close collaboration between the EL specialist and the classroom teacher, design language and content objectives for each lesson and explicitly share them with students (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2012) to magnify the connection between language, literacy, and content knowledge. Provide students opportunities to communicate orally about content in English to foster listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Lesaux, Crosson, Kieffer, & Pierce, 2010). To further support comprehension and skill transfer, provide ELs with context-embedded instruction and authentic task-based practices (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Models of Instruction

Strategies to support ELs are implemented in a variety of ways. Instructional models and programs can be implemented as English-only or Bilingual models. English-only models include *structured immersion* and *sheltered instruction* and are often used when EL student demographics in a building represent multiple languages. English-only models decrease the amount of native language supports as students develop their English language skills (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). Strategies in English-only programs include the use of background knowledge, graphic organizers, sentence frames, anchor charts, gestures, pictures, multi-media, and hands-on, interactive learning activities to develop academic skills and to build content knowledge (Goldenberg, 2013; Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). It is important to note that students in English-only programs can receive directions and support in their primary language as they work to develop their English language skills.

Bilingual models consist of *dual language* and *transition bilingual* models. These models differ in "intensity and length of time in which students participate" (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009, p. 7). The most effective bilingual model of instruction for ELs is to implement a two-way dual language program — classrooms with 50% ELs and 50% native English speaking students. This model leverages the bilingual assets of ELs, develops biliteracy for all students, and produces the strongest long-term academic outcomes for ELs and their English speaking peers (Swenson & Watzinger-Tharp, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Since students in dual language programs are learning in two languages, their literacy trajectory at 3rd grade is slightly slower in developing than peers in English-only instruction. However, in 5th grade and beyond, ELs in dual language programs outperform their peers on academic assessments in English (Escamilla et al., 2013; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Swenson & Watzinger-Tharp, 2012; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Similar results were reported in a recent longitudinal study of the dual language programs in Portland Public Schools where students had an average of seven months of additional reading skills in 5th grade and an additional nine months in 8th grade compared to their peers who received English-only instruction.

Both English-only and bilingual models focus on using effective instructional strategies. These strategies overlap with what is effective for all students and focus on (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009; Goldenberg, 2013; Saunders, et al., 2013):

- Oral language development,
- Cooperative learning,
- Explicit literacy instruction,
- Differentiated instruction,
- Actionable feedback,
- Graphic organizers to support comprehension, and
- Academic language.

Studies show that students in both English-only and bilingual program models benefit from additional time focused on explicit English language development instruction, specifically time devoted to listening and speaking increases oral language proficiency (Saunders, et al., 2013). When deciding which model to implement, "decision-makers should look both at the language of instruction (i.e., bilingual or English-only), and at an instructional program's specific elements to ensure that ELs receive the optimal instruction to facilitate their English language and literacy development as well as their academic success" (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009, p. 22). When schools and districts focus on EL academic success goals, EL students have higher levels of student achievement (Saunders, et al, 2013).

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