



10 Key Policies and Practices for Teaching English Language Learners

—with strong evidence of effectiveness from high-quality research—



Having an asset-based perspective, rather than being deficit-focused, is the underlying foundation for effectively teaching English language learners (ELLs). Educators must hold an inherent belief that all students bring a richness of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and experiences to the learning environment. Teaching ELLs is the responsibility of all teachers. With some adaptations to regular teaching routines, as described in the recommendations below, all teachers are capable of providing high-quality instruction that leads to ELLs achieving rigorous standards.

1. Educators understand that there is wide variability in the ELL population and consider individual students' linguistic abilities, literacy skills, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds when planning instruction.

ELLs vary considerably in factors that significantly affect learning. These factors include language and literacy proficiency in students' native languages and in English. Educators should learn about individual students' development of first and second languages. Cultural and experiential factors also influence learning. For example, educators may notice differences between ELLs whose parents are U.S. born and those whose parents are recent immigrants. Family routines and communication practices shape the knowledge and experience that students bring to the classroom. Such differences are not deficits. Despite difficulties with learning in a nonnative language, ELLs are not struggling thinkers. Rather than treating all ELLs the same, educators must understand that no one strategy or adaptation will work for all students because they do not all have the same strengths and needs. It is important for teachers to consider each student's language development, background knowledge, and literacy skills in planning instruction that is rich in content with ample opportunities for language development.

2. Teachers analyze the language demands of the lessons they teach and provide support for ELLs to understand both the language and the content of the lesson.

4. Teachers provide explicit instruction that includes clear directions, teacher and peer modeling, practice with detailed feedback, and ongoing review.



Explicit instruction is important for all students across grades and subject areas; for ELLs, explicit instruction is crucial. Explicit instruction should occur in three phases: modeling, guided practice, and independent practice. These phases are often referred to as “I do it,” to indicate that students should watch and listen carefully as the teacher explains and demonstrates; “We do it,” to indicate that students will try it together as the teacher watches and provides feedback; and “You do it,” to indicate individual student practice. In the modeling phase, effective teachers of ELLs use language that is comprehensible. This means choosing words carefully, avoiding complex sentences, and breaking down processes into simple steps. During the guided practice phase, teachers provide immediate feedback for discrete tasks, such as spelling a word or calculating in mathematics, but may briefly delay feedback for complex tasks to allow ELLs additional time to think through the process. Explicit instruction also moves systematically through the steps of a process and maximizes engagement in the task. ELLs may need more read-alouds and interactive discussions of concepts.

<p>The teacher provides explicit verbal instruction while demonstrating the process and using simple, comprehensible language.</p>	<p>Ms. West explains the concept and steps of two-digit multiplication while calculating a problem on the board.</p>
<p>The teacher walks the group through the steps of the process, giving the same verbal instructions while students perform the task. The teacher watches students carefully and offers praise and feedback. This step may be repeated several times until the teacher feels the students are ready to perform the task independently.</p>	<p>After a thorough explanation, Ms. West asks students to perform the two-digit multiplication task step-by-step while she guides them with verbal instructions. Ms. West watches carefully, giving feedback and offering suggestions as needed. She asks students to verbalize the process to check for understanding.</p>
<p>Students perform the task several times on their own, asking questions if needed. The teacher walks around, checking students' accuracy and understanding and giving praise and feedback to individuals.</p>	<p>Ms. West gives students a worksheet with 10 problems to complete, rotating around the room to check in with students, give feedback, and offer suggestions. Ms. West checks on ELLs to offer additional support.</p>

5. Teachers strategically use ELLs' native language when possible to support their conceptual understanding.

Effective teachers of ELLs are resourceful in drawing on students' native language to help them understand a concept or process. For example, teachers may find that pulling in words, concepts, and examples from a native language aids comprehension. Even if teachers do not speak a student's native language, it is helpful to know how concepts and ideas are expressed in the native language. Latin-based languages such as Spanish have cognates, or words derived from the same Latin roots with similar word parts in English and Spanish (e.g., "acceleration" and "aceleración"). A study of textbooks and science standards showed that 85.5% of biology terms were Spanish-English cognates, though many words occur with low frequency in conversation. Using cognates in instruction will help ELLs to grasp key words, as long as they are familiar to students in their native language. Concepts that are unfamiliar in both the native language and English need elaboration.

Some ELLs speak languages that are not similar to English. Teachers can look up native language equivalents to target words to help these ELLs understand terminology in English. It is easy to find translations for words using online resources. However, it is important for teachers to do a little research to make sure the translations are accurate. Consulting more than one source, including native speakers in the community, may aid teachers in finding appropriate key word equivalents.

Mr. Eaves teaches social studies in middle school. In one class, he has three ELLs whose native language is Spanish and one ELL whose native language is Somali. In today's lesson, he is explaining "product," a key vocabulary term in the current unit of study about international commerce. For his three Spanish-speaking students, Mr. Eaves says aloud, "A product is something that is offered for sale. This word, 'product,' is similar in Spanish. Can someone think of a similar word in your native language?" (If no response, he would add a prompt: "Some of you know the word 'el producto' in Spanish, which means the same thing.")

Mr. Eaves then gives Asad, a Somali refugee who is learning English, a tablet with the word "product" called up in an online translator. He points to the translated word, "taran," and asks Asad whether he understands. Mr. Eaves has learned that "taran" literally means "the result of manufacturing" (taran(es) Asad, e

[Redacted content]

7.

- Set clear expectations for group participation that encourage all students to contribute via turn-taking routines. Teachers may choose to assign roles, such as question reader, note-taker, and time-keeper.
- Select passages that are compelling enough to spark a discussion.
- Use a discussion protocol or routine that includes the following:
 - A prompt that clearly states the expected outcome of the group discussion—the task should address a higher-order question to prompt deep thinking, problem-solving, or differences of opinion
 - Additional probing questions to use as scaffolds to guide the discussion and provide support for challenging tasks
- Establish and provide clear directions for feedback routines. Feedback should focus on the task, state positive aspects, make suggestions for improvement, or ask a question. For example, “I like your idea about _____. One question I have is _____.”

- Provide a prompt for a brief “turn-and-talk” discussion.
- Give clear directions for Partner 1 and Partner 2. (Optional: Establish Partner 1 as the peer with slightly more developed language proficiency to serve as a model for Partner 2.)
- Ask Partner 1 to go first most of the time. Partner 2 should listen and respond.
- Structure Partner 2 responses, such as in the following:
 - Partner 2: “My partner, Alex, said that _____.”
 - Partner 2: “I [agree/disagree] with Alex that _____ because _____.”
 - Partner 2: Partner 1 states the concept and Partner 2 provides examples from the text or from experience.
 - Partner 2: Partner 2 provides more detail to what Partner 1 said.
- Establish peer feedback routines. Give clear directions regarding feedback so that it focuses on the task, states positive aspects, and makes suggestions.

1
(Vocabulary word to preteach: “mention”)

With your group, find in the story where Alex _____ to his father that he signed up for the basketball team. Read it aloud and write the page number. Then, find where Alex’s father plans a family trip on the date of the big game. Read it aloud and write the page number. Then, discuss these questions and be ready to talk about your answer with the class:

- Why is Alex’s place on the basketball team in danger?
- What could Alex have done differently to avoid the problem?

2
(Vocabulary word to preteach: “approach”)

Will Alex _____ his father about the basketball team? Answer in a complete sentence and use our focus word, _____.” Give three pieces of evidence from the text to support your answer.

9. Teachers use visual aids to scaffold instruction for ELLs.

Using visual representations of key concepts and processes is generally an effective teaching strategy. Tools such as graphic organizers, video clips, timelines, process charts, story maps, and diagrams are

2018-2019 School Year

Month	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
August				
September				
October				
November				
December				
January				
February				
March				
April				
May				
June				
July				

