

Refining Our Thinking: Serving English learners throughout the instructional day

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There is an exciting convergence moving our collective thinking forward. With new ELD standards expanding on and building from the work of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and other content standards, we are encouraged – obligated! – to think about how we equip English learners with the language they need for all aspects of their academic day.

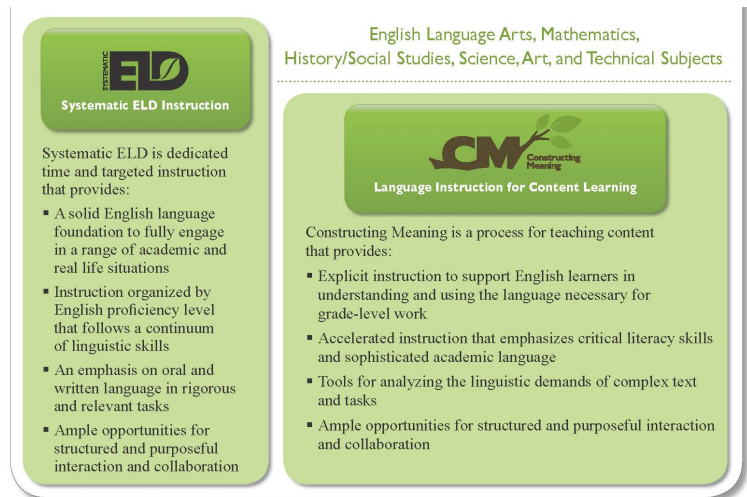
We have evolved beyond the limited notion of “sheltering” instruction to considering how we **integrate ELD into content instruction** so students learn the language needed for subject-matter demands.

The field has also clearly acknowledged that English learners deserve a daily, **dedicated ELD block** that builds foundational knowledge of English into and through the content.

This refined approach to providing language support for English learners aligns beautifully with E.L. Achieve’s *Blueprint for Serving English Learners Throughout the Instructional Day*.

Our research-based and Title III compliant model illustrates how school systems can structure the day to ensure English learners receive explicit language instruction for these two related, but distinct, purposes:

- **Integrated English language development** within content instruction (Constructing Meaning), and
- **Designated ELD** (Systematic ELD) to grow students’ proficiency in English.



Integrated ELD – Learning to use English while learning content in English

Let’s start with the glossary definition from the California English Language Arts / English Language Development Framework.

Integrated English language development. English language development instruction provided throughout the day and across the disciplines. Teachers with English learners use the English language development standards in addition to their focal English language arts / literacy and other content standards to support the linguistic and academic progress of English learners.

This means that we must explicitly teach English learners how to use English to comprehend text and express their thinking, orally and in writing. The goal is for English learners to develop an understanding of English so they can readily call upon their linguistic resources for the task, purpose, and audience at hand.

What is meant by integrated ELD? (Constructing Meaning)

Common misconception #1: All content teachers are now ELD teachers

The term “integrated ELD” can be misconstrued to suggest that content teachers are now also ELD teachers. In fact, analyzing and teaching the language of the content does not shift our focus away from content, but rather toward a more robust teaching of it. Constructing Meaning infuses language learning to bolster comprehending and expressing content knowledge. That is, **language learning in subject-matter classes is in the service of rich content understanding**. Without the firm stance that the language we teach is to scaffold rigorous content learning, we run the risk of relegating English learners to a watered-down education.

Common misconception #2: It’s just sheltering

The truth is we must move beyond sheltered instruction as the sole approach to content instruction for English learners. While sheltered instruction emphasizes critical elements that are fundamental for student learning –

particularly the use of comprehensible input techniques such as graphic organizers and visuals to scaffold instruction – it has typically been silent on the role of language in content learning.

Integrated ELD (Constructing Meaning) adds what has often been missing: the explicit teaching of language to support the understanding and expression of content learning.

Common misconception #3: Give ‘em a few sentence frames

Some educators have interpreted explicit language support as providing English learners with sentence frames. Perhaps because sentence frames can be simple to use, they tend to be overused and too frequently misused in ways that are counterproductive. This happens when frames are not really frames but rather “fill-in-the-blanks” that give away too much content learning or limit students to a single way of completing a thought. Some frames lack a language pattern that supports a grammatically correct response, leading students to misuse phrases in convoluted writing. Other frames are so narrowly specific to the assignment that the language is not transferable or portable to various assignments. Such frames are not based on a functional purpose such as articulating cause and effect relationships, citing evidence, or stating an analysis.

Each of these pitfalls can be avoided if we remember that the goal of weaving language instruction into content teaching is to equip students with a lived understanding of how English works – meaning they learn to adeptly use language to communicate their subject-matter thinking and convey ideas with clarity and confidence, like a scientist or historian or writer.

To help students understand how English works, we teach and practice language patterns that are high leverage, flexible, and portable. Teachers must model how language patterns can be manipulated and varied to express sophisticated thinking, and most importantly, must expect their students to do the same. Sentence frames provide one way of modeling and practicing language patterns; they need to be used along with other tools such as sentence construction charts, word and phrase banks, and templates with lots of options – all of which must be thoughtfully constructed with a clear purpose in mind.

Designated ELD – Developing awareness of how English works

So what is meant by **designated ELD**? The California ELA/ELD Framework provides a most helpful description:

“Designated ELD is a protected time during the regular school day when teachers use the CA ELD standards as the focal standards in ways that build **into and from content instruction** in order to develop critical English language skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for content learning in English. Designated ELD is not separate and isolated from ELA, science, social studies, mathematics, and other disciplines; rather, it is an opportunity during the regular school day to support ELs in developing the discourse practices, grammatical structures, and vocabulary necessary for successful participation in academic tasks in all content areas. During this protected time, ELs are actively engaged in collaborative discussions in which they build their awareness of language and develop their skills and abilities to use language.”

What is meant by “into and from content instruction” during designated ELD?

Common Core State Standards and new ELD standards focus on equipping students with thinking skills. For example, consider a couple of key Kindergarten Reading Literature standards:

- **RL.1** *With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.*
- **RL.2** *With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.*

The CCSS content is *retelling and asking and answering questions about details of the text*. The CCSS and CA ELA Framework do not specify topics or materials schools must use to teach. They articulate the thinking work students must do. The thinking work itself is the content. Therefore, one teacher may opt to use *The Three Little Pigs* as a vehicle for teaching and practicing that content. Another may choose *A Birthday for Frances*. The story itself is not the content; a myriad of stories can be used to teach the thinking skills of the standards.

By approaching specific thinking skills from several different angles, students have the opportunity to truly integrate and apply their language learning in different contexts.

An eighth grade example is **RI.8.1** *Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text*. The thinking work is *citing evidence to support the understanding of a piece of informational text*. This requires students read and extract the main ideas of the text that are explicitly stated, to make connections to concepts that are alluded to but not directly stated in the text, and to

select quotes that support those understandings. Any middle school teacher would agree that teaching these skills takes lots of practice with multiple pieces of text. The *topics* of the texts is not the content; the *thinking work is the content*.

Common misconception #1: We must teach the same topics in ELA and ELD

Some educators have interpreted “into and from content instruction” to mean that if students are involved in a unit about “heroes” during English language arts (ELA) time, designated ELD lessons should teach that same topic. As we see in the example above, this misses the point of the thinking work called for in the CCSS. Retelling, asking and answering questions about plot, describing character relationships or motivations, comparing two characters’ adventures or two versions of the same story, acknowledging differences in the points of view of characters, making connections among themes, etc., are not dependent on a specific topic or text. In fact, it is only when students can apply those literacy skills to any unit of study that they truly know the standards. Specific topics are vehicles for teaching CCSS standards; they are a means, not an end.

Common misconception #2: We must teach the same thinking skill or genre in ELA and ELD

Sometimes, “into and from content instruction” is thought to mean that if we are working on a specific thinking skill or genre during ELA, we should address the same thinking skill or genre during designated ELD. But designated ELD is meant to “develop critical English language skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for content learning in English” (CA ELA/ELD Framework). It is not meant to replace content instruction.

Let’s take a look at how the English language skills and knowledge students learn in designated ELD support ELA content work. In one Systematic ELD unit, students take a virtual field trip to a city museum. They learn a range of adjectives to describe places and a range of verbs to describe actions. They build background knowledge needed to understand and discuss similarities and differences between life in a town and a city. The unit language is high leverage and portable because describing places and actions is foundational; it can be built upon and applied to other thinking work. In ELA, the same students are discussing cause and effect relationships using a nonfiction piece. Learning to talk and write about *The Story of Ruby Bridges* with a statement like, “*Many people in the town did not want Ruby to go to their school so they stood outside yelling and threatening her,*” is much easier with an internalized basic vocabulary that includes **town, school, outside**, a range of past tense verbs and verb phrases, and knowledge of sentence formation. Students frequently apply their growing command of English to other contexts effortlessly. Naturally, this process of making connections and building meta-linguistic awareness (being aware of what you know about how to use language) is exponentially accelerated when teachers intentionally weave these skills into both designated and integrated ELD instruction.

As stated in the CA ELA/ELD Framework, designated ELD is the time to “develop the discourse practices, grammatical structures, and vocabulary necessary for successful participation in academic tasks across the content areas.” In short, designated ELD must focus on building a solid foundation of language learning for the thinking work that grade-level learning requires.

Common misconception #3: Designated ELD is a preview or review of literacy learning

A third confusion is that designated ELD can serve as pre-teaching or an extension of literacy instruction. This leads to a troubling question: If we believe designated ELD must be drawn directly from students’ other lessons, does that mean we believe dedicated ELD is a form of remediation? As the ELD standards clearly state, designated ELD is a protected time for English learners to learn the language and build proficiency along a continuum from emerging to expanding to bridging. If students are limited to echoing vocabulary and language patterns from subject-matter classes, their only dedicated time to use language along an identified scope and sequence is undermined. Allowing literacy goals to drive designated ELD time necessarily puts language learning in a secondary position, trumping its purpose. This approach leads to de-emphasizing or even ignoring the proficiency-level needs of English learners and creates gaps in their language knowledge.

Finally, if we allow designated ELD to either front-load or remediate ELA instruction, it may lead teachers to assume they have adequately addressed their students’ language needs and neglect to plan for addressing the linguistic demands of literacy instruction via integrated ELD. The result would be contrary to the intention of prioritizing both integrated and designated ELD in the instructional day.

What should be taught during designated ELD time?

A continuum from emerging through bridging

The language learning for designated ELD must build across proficiency levels and up through the grades. That is, it needs to be organized according to a research-based scope and sequence that includes grammatical structures, vocabulary, and cognitive functions mapped to grade-appropriate expectations.

Beyond academics – building a language foundation

Rather than replicate topics from any single ELA program, designated ELD should intentionally address themes that cover broad areas of foundational content knowledge. This incorporates general language that is frequently assumed to be common knowledge, but that English learners must gain in order to access academic content instruction. It also allows us to teach some of the everyday language and registers that most native English speakers bring to school, but that can trip up English learners. English learners deserve to explore the English language using fresh topics. This makes designated ELD an exciting place for English learners to push the boundaries of what they know and grapple with learning to communicate their thinking.

Oral to print

The Framework states, “during designated ELD, there is a strong emphasis on oral language development. Naturally, designated ELD instruction will also involve some level of reading and writing tasks as students learn to use English in new ways and develop their awareness of how English works in both spoken and written language.” Writing tasks should help students transfer what they can say into written text. Based on what we know from the research on guiding principles of effective ELD programs, writing and reading instruction should take place during language arts time. In dedicated ELD, reading and writing are infused, but they are not the focus of the lessons.

Bridge to Achievement

There is a powerful convergence of CCSS, state ELA/ELD Frameworks, and the work of E.L. Achieve. The high-leverage and portable language taught in **designated ELD** bridges English learners’ access into the thinking work of the content (CCSS) by building from the linguistic demands embedded within the content. The functions taught in designated ELD come to life across content areas. **Integrated ELD** equips students to meet both the linguistic and academic demands of subject-matter learning. Together, integrated and designated ELD form a trustworthy bridge enabling English learners to gain the language mastery needed for academic achievement.