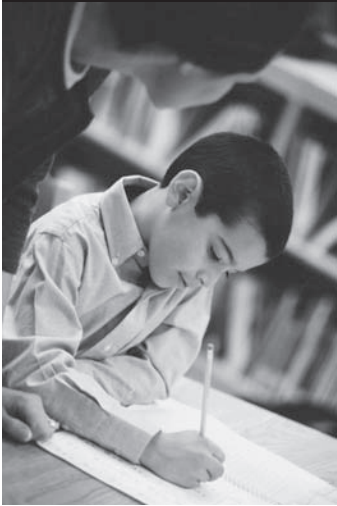


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Structuring effective ELD instruction

Imagine you're a student, no matter what age, in China. You are required to attend school each day. You sit in a classroom where your teacher lectures—in Mandarin—about an important mathematical, scientific, or historical concept. At the end of the lecture, you're asked to complete a series of questions. Your response must be in Mandarin.

You don't speak Mandarin.

What would you do? How would you feel? Would you know enough Mandarin to ask the student next to you for help—or would you look at what other students were doing and try to imitate them? Would you be able to complete the assignment? What would happen when the teacher called on you? Do you think you'd want to go back to school the next day?

These are the types of situations English-language learners face every day in Sonoma County schools. While some students know enough English to appear fluent, they're faced with the daunting challenge of trying to reach full linguistic proficiency while learning complex skills and concepts in a language they don't fully comprehend—and they're failing.

Now that we understand the difficulty, what can we do for them? By providing high-quality English Language Development (ELD) instruction, schools can help

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This publication is based on a presentation made at the 2007 ELL Administrator Conference hosted by the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE). As part of its Aiming High initiative, SCOE is providing this resource to teachers in Sonoma County.

students meet this significant challenge. ELD gives English learners the time and structure they need to practice and hone their new language skills. This is absolutely essential for these students to succeed in our schools—and it is an essential part of our efforts to close the achievement gap.

The “subject” of ELD instruction is English, although it is often presented in the context of science, social science, or reading-language arts. This practice grows from a wide body of research about how language is used in academic tasks. At the ELL Administrator Conference held in April 2007, educational consultant Tonya Ward Singer presented a strategy for ELD instruction that uses non-fiction texts to build students’ academic language proficiency. Her ideas are incorporated in this *Aiming High Resource* publication.

What is it? Why do they need it?

The state of California mandates that all students who are identified as English-language learners receive English Language Development instruction until they are reclassified as English-proficient. Students generally receive 30-45 minutes per day of ELD in the elementary grades and at least one period per day in middle and high schools. Because there are many ways to structure ELD instruction, schools must have a clear plan for the time they devote to it.

The purpose of ELD is to teach English-language learners to understand, speak, read, and write English. Teachers delivering ELD should provide *explicit instruction* to develop students’ academic language proficiency in a variety of settings and contexts. By contextualizing ELD instruction, teachers can help students meet the double challenge of learning English and academic content simultaneously.

Teaching in English is very different from teaching English Language Development. The focus of teaching a subject in English is the *content*. In well-designed content area instruction for English learners, there may be an underlying language objective that

Characteristics of high-quality ELD instruction

- Targets instruction to each student’s language proficiency level
- Incorporates varied opportunities for students to interact using English
- Develops students’ academic language skill
- Creates a supportive learning environment
- Recognizes the role of primary language
- Aligns with state ELD standards
- Follows a developmental scope and sequence of language instruction, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills
- Provides instruction in the semantic, syntactical, and grammatical aspects of language
- Assesses student progress in English proficiency on an ongoing basis

connects student understanding of a topic with the language used to talk and write about it.

In contrast, the goal of English Language Development is to teach students the *language* that will enable them to reach academic and linguistic

parity with their English-only peers. ELD instruction should be provided to all English-language learners, including those at the advanced level and in mainstream classrooms.

The main objective of every ELD lesson is to engage students in thinking about and using the English language. Activities that require students to talk, read, write, and practice target vocabulary and language are key. To structure this type of engaged participation, teachers must employ instructional strategies that move students from casual, everyday uses of English to formal, academic uses.

Not all English-language learners are alike, yet they are often “lumped together” for ELD instruction. Schools with a small number of English learners may

It’s important to ask questions that are geared to each student’s stage of language acquisition

have limited opportunities to do otherwise, but even schools with sizable English learner populations often treat these students as a group rather than as individuals.

Just as with all other students, teachers need to know each English learner's individual needs in order to help him/her become proficient. Once those needs are known, students can be grouped appropriately for ELD instruction. Key ideas for grouping students are outlined in the box below.

Reaching out to new English learners

Students at the beginning and early intermediate levels of English language proficiency bring a special challenge to classrooms across Sonoma County. These students need intensive support to acquire English, yet they spend a good portion of their school day in mainstream classrooms where intensive support just isn't available. Engaging these students in daily instruction takes special effort, but it is possible to include them in classroom activities—and to develop their facility with the English language at the same time.

When instructing beginning and early intermediate students, teachers need to focus on building functional and basic academic vocabulary through both ELD and content instruction. Here are some ideas for reaching out to students with very little knowledge of English:

- Visuals and graphic organizers double the message—use them extensively.
- Mistakes are a necessary part of language learning, so create a safe learning environment where students can make mistakes without embarrassment or repercussion.
- Let other students help beginning English learners access and practice language.
- If possible, use the student's primary language as a bridge to English.
- Find out what students know and are able to do in their home language and use this information to guide instruction in English.
- Identify words that are essential to basic understanding of topics, themes, and stories, then teach this vocabulary explicitly.

Teachers can use ELD time to help beginning and early intermediate students practice and make connections between new words in core academic lessons and

texts. Using a graphic organizer is one way to help students understand and learn new words.

For example, in the third-grade Houghton Mifflin story *The Lost and Found*, the characters explore a lost and found box. In this story, students need to understand words related to people, places, and things in the school. After using pictures from the text to identify key vocabulary, students can sort and practice the words by putting them in appropriate categories (see illustration, next page). They can work in pairs with word cards to identify the items, place them in the correct category, and give a brief reason why the item was placed there. As an

Key ideas about grouping students for ELD

- **Group students with like-proficiency** levels together—beginners with beginners and intermediates with intermediates. If there are small numbers of EL students, group two consecutive levels together—for example, beginners with early intermediates.
- **Don't group more than two consecutive** levels; it can negatively impact student learning. This is because students who are more proficient tend to dominate practice and response times, leaving the less-proficient students with less time to practice their new language.
- **Consider grouping across classes** or grades to better target instruction to proficiency levels.
- **Use small groups** to give students more interaction time, which can be especially important at the lower proficiency levels.
- **Specifically target instruction** to each group's proficiency level.
- **Focus group work** on tasks that require the use of English and encourage students to practice communicating their thoughts, ideas, and understandings in that language.
- **Design tasks** that require students to stretch into the next proficiency level.
- **Use instructional assistants** for follow up or to support the main ELD instruction, which is provided by the teacher.
- **Use language assessments** and teacher observations to move students between groups.

extension, students can use the word/picture cards and do an open sort, determining their own categories.

<i>People</i>	<i>Places</i>	<i>Things</i>
teacher	classroom	pencil
student	office	paper
principal	playground	book
office manager	cafeteria	food tray
cafeteria lady	hallway	ball
crossing guard	nurse's office	stapler

Posing questions that students can answer

By asking tiered questions, teachers can engage students at the lowest levels of English proficiency in learning activities. During classroom discussions, it's important to ask questions that are geared to each student's stage of language acquisition. Students at the beginning level of English proficiency have minimal comprehension and may not be able to verbalize responses. Expect nods and head shakes as answers to yes/no questions—or pose questions that can be answered by circling a picture or pointing to an object.

Students at the early intermediate level still have limited comprehension, but they may be able to respond verbally to yes/no questions and questions that require one- or two-word answers. Here is an example of how questions might be tiered for students at the different levels of language proficiency:

<i>Beginning</i>	Point to the ball. Can you circle the pencil? Is this a teacher?
<i>Early Intermediate</i>	What is this? Is this a paper or pencil? What do you do with a book?
<i>Intermediate</i>	What were the students looking for in the lost and found? Why?
<i>Early Advanced</i>	Why did the students think they wouldn't get lost?
<i>Advanced</i>	Can you retell the story in your own words?

When posing tiered questions, it's important to engage students where they are, but also to push them to the next level. For example, if beginning students are getting good at pointing, help them advance to short verbal responses. If intermediate students are providing short sentence answers proficiently, guide them in forming longer and more complex sentences.

Teaching important academic words

Students at the intermediate level of proficiency need to extend their use of vocabulary and basic language structures and transition to increasingly more formal and academic communication. Teachers should continually ask students to say it another way; ask why, how, or what if; and require students to connect words, phrases, and short sentences into compound sentences that represent their ideas and thoughts.

When working with intermediate students, teachers should identify the words that are most important to the text and topics in the curriculum (and refrain from highlighting unusual or incidental words). They should also teach words that provide direction to students—words like *identify*, *describe*, *sequence*. Students should be actively engaged in using these key words as they talk, read, and write. Making connections between words, looking at how words are formed, and understanding how word meaning may vary according to context is also important.

For example, a teacher might identify the words *decay*, *remains*, and *ancient* as important to the lesson at hand. After providing a “student-friendly” definition and some concrete examples, the teacher should use various engagement techniques to facilitate deeper understanding of the target words. Using a cooperative learning strategy, students could then work in groups to find answers to the questions posed:

- Where would you find something decayed?
- How long would it take for a redwood tree to decay?
- Can you think of two other words that are associated with decay?
- She said, “Do not eat that rotten apple because ...”

It's also important for students to keep a written record of important words. After working with the words in pairs or small groups, students should enter the words in their vocabulary notebooks along with pictures, definitions, and examples.

Developing writing skills

For English-language learners to acquire writing skills, instruction must be more explicit and formal than what's usually provided in mainstream classrooms. An effective writing cycle for English learners might include these steps:

- **Building Background**—Ensure that students have sufficient knowledge about the topic they’re being asked to write about by using questions, conversations, and shared activities to learn about students’ prior experience with the topic.
- **Modeling**—Analyze texts and model similar writing to ensure students are familiar with the purpose, structure, and linguistic features of the assignment.
- **Joint Construction**—Compose text with the students to illustrate the process of writing and how both content and language must be considered.
- **Independent Writing**—Have students write their own text.
- **Effective Feedback**—Analyze student writing to highlight strengths and determine the focus for future instruction.

This cycle will take time to complete and should be repeated many times throughout the year. As they go through the writing process, students will need support or scaffolding for tasks that are new. For young students and those with very limited English language skills, it’s a good idea to have them begin by composing a personal recount and to provide sentence frames that structure their use of language. For beginning and early intermediate students, encourage writing in their first language and provide a translation on another page.

To develop students’ persuasive writing skills, educational consultant Tonya Ward Singer has helped teachers focus on the words and phrases that are used in this type of writing. She suggests using the writing cycle outlined above, but breaks the procedure of writing into smaller steps and connects the steps to the language required in each phase. For example, students

Academic language of persuasive writing	<i>Language challenge</i>	<i>Sample words and frames</i>	<i>Examples</i>
	Verbs and adjectives for stating an opinion	<i>Sample verbs</i> suggest recommend advocate strongly disagree agree urge should benefit	All students <i>should</i> be able to bring cell phones to school.
		<i>Sample adjectives</i> inaccurate inappropriate harmful unwise beneficial effective excellent responsible	It is <i>inappropriate</i> to let students bring phones to school.
	Cause-and-effect words and phrases to justify an opinion	because since so due to will help you ... supports the argument that ...	<i>Due to</i> the distraction of ringing cell phones, many students will have trouble concentrating.
	Conditional tense for giving examples	If ..., would ...	<i>If</i> students brought cell phones to school, the bells and ring tones <i>would</i> interrupt classes all day long.
	Phrases to acknowledge and address counter arguments	<i>To acknowledge</i> People may ... I realize ... I understand ... I can see why ... You might think ...	<i>While people may argue</i> that cell phones are necessary for emergencies, they should consider that every classroom already has a regular phone.
		<i>To counter or contrast</i> while although however yet contrary to but	
	Words for drawing conclusions	in conclusion thus therefore	<i>In conclusion</i> , cell phones should be banned from schools.

Build background, then engage all language domains

When teachers access what students already know about a concept and expand on that knowledge, it's known as building background—and it's a very effective strategy to use in ELD. When building background with English learners, teachers should use multiple forms of input to construct “virtual experiences” with a concept.

For example, a teacher might build background in preparation of reading a non-fiction text about Alaskan bears by giving students opportunities to collect information about bears. They could work with picture books and other references, talk to each other about what makes bears unique and whether or not they've ever seen one, and organize their ideas about bears—what color they are, how big, how many legs, etc. By focusing on the use of visuals, interaction, and multi-leveled questions, students can connect their previous knowledge of bears to new language and ideas.

In this and all ELD lessons, the first step in the instructional process is to connect students to what they are learning. Assessing what students already know and are able to do—in terms of both language usage and content knowledge—is also critically important. Through background building, teachers can make explicit links to their students' experience, knowledge, and prior learning, then differentiate instruction based on students' language proficiency level.

If a group of beginning students is learning language associated with likes and dislikes, a teacher might provide simple sentence starters: *I like _____* and *I do not like _____*. Then, using pictures that represent previously learned vocabulary, the teacher can give a small group of students opportunities to practice new language by asking them to respond to prompts: *I like (apples, dancing)* and *I do not like (bananas, swimming)*.

Students at the intermediate level might be asked to talk about their likes and dislikes with a partner, then report about the partner's response using open-ended frames: *_____ enjoys _____ because _____, but dislikes _____ because _____*. These students could also make a chart comparing likes and dislikes.

During this type of activity teachers are learning not only what students like and dislike, but also about their ability to express themselves using structured responses. After orally practicing the language structures, these students could write a series of sentences about their likes and dislikes. The sentences could then be shared aloud or included in a class book. During this activity, students would have the opportunity to listen to each other, then express their thoughts in speech and writing. All four domains of language—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—would be utilized. ♦

in an intermediate ELD class for seventh-graders were asked to write persuasive essays about student use of cell phones at school. The students first learned about each part of a persuasive essay:

- State an opinion
- Justify your opinion
- Give 2-3 examples of why you hold that opinion
- Address counter arguments
- Draw conclusions

The chart on page 5 lists some of the language challenges of persuasive writing and suggests words and sentence frames that teachers can use to help students develop expertise in this genre. It's important to follow an instructional sequence that will:

1. **Build** background—for example, role-play scenarios where persuasion is used, like talking a teacher out of giving a test or convincing someone to buy an iPod.
2. **Model** the text by reviewing sample essays and examining the structures and language used.
3. **Engage** the students in writing with you—for example, write out student suggestions for the entire class to see.
4. **Ask** students to create their own persuasive essays.
5. **Create** opportunities for peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student feedback.

Broadening students' language choices

Students at the early advanced and advanced levels of English proficiency are moving toward full linguistic parity with their English-only peers. These students should be varying their use of academic vocabulary, responding appropriately in more formal academic settings, and

extending their academic language repertoire. Their speech and writing should reflect correct word choice, sentence construction, and verb usage.

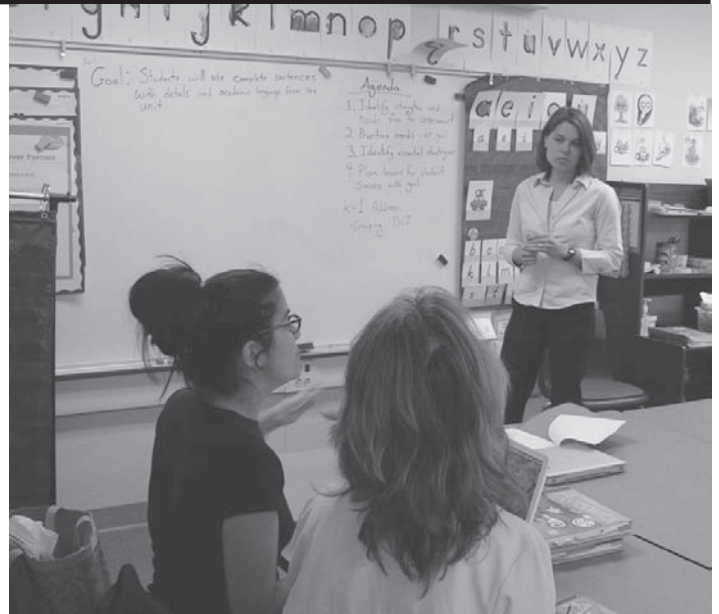
ELD instruction for these students should focus on broadening their language choices and increasing their understanding of how language may vary depending on where it's used and who is being addressed.

A group of teachers at Healdsburg Junior High identified and developed a strategy for extending students' use of language. They were refining a mathematics lesson about simplifying equations and realized that the English learners in their classes were having difficulty communicating the difference between an equation and an expression. While the English-only students were using modals (*I would have...*, *It should be...*) to express their thinking, English learners were not using language that allowed them to extend their understanding to new problems. The teachers surmised that language was interfering with students' ability to express what they knew and understood.

The teachers asked the district's ELD teacher to focus on the use of modals. They also shared their observations with other teachers at the school. As a result, there was a strong schoolwide effort to help students use and practice language that would allow them to express their thinking.

Another example of how early advanced and advanced students can be supported in moving to the next level of language proficiency is outlined by Tonya Ward Singer.

She suggests teaching academic vocabulary and sentence structure in the context of reading, writing, and responding to academic texts. To prepare English learners for success with writing responses to literature, for example, it helps to explicitly teach the language of making a thesis statement about characters and story themes. In this scenario, the teacher would begin by talking about the elements of writing a thesis statement, identifying a book title and author, and making a statement about the character or theme. Next, the teacher would model different ways of writing a



▲ Tonya Ward Singer works with kindergarten and first-grade teachers at Flowery School. The goal of this session was to develop strategies to help students write in complete sentences using academic language.

thesis statement, as illustrated in the chart below—then facilitate short, structured writing activities and peer-to-peer talk to engage all students in using the modeled language.

Another method for helping students look at varying their sentence structure and word choice is outlined in the *Write... From the Beginning* program by Jane Buckner, Ed.S. Dr. Buckner suggests creating a graphic organizer to explore the elements of sentence

Writing a thesis statement	State story title and author—or title only, if author is unknown	State an inference about character change or theme
	<p>The story “title” by (author) ...</p> <p>“Title” by (author) ...</p> <p>In the story “title,” the author ...</p> <p>In the story “title” by (author), ...</p>	<p><i>Key phrases to communicate theme</i></p> <p>... is about ...</p> <p>... reminds us ...</p> <p>... highlights the importance of ...</p> <p>... demonstrates that ...</p> <p><i>Key phrases to show character change</i></p> <p>... (character name) learns ...</p> <p>... (character name) discovers ...</p> <p>... (character name) realizes ...</p>
	Examples	
	<p>The story “The Pecan Tree” is about the value of generosity.</p> <p>In the short story “The Alternative Speaker,” Daniel learns the significance of hope.</p>	

construction and having students note what they find in the sentences that form a paragraph. The chart below illustrates an analysis of a paragraph from *Pictures of Hollis Woods* by Patricia Reilly Giff.

Examining sentence structure for variety

An old woman sat at the ticket counter. Not as old as Josie, but still her hair was a bundle of braided cotton candy on top of her head, and when she smiled her teeth were butter yellow. Her thumb pointed at me. "What's her name, Josie?"

	Number of words	First four words	Verb	Ending Punctuation	Descriptive language
1.	8	An old woman sat	sat	.	old, ticket counter
2.	30	Not as old as	was	.	bundle braided cotton candy butter yellow
3.	5	Her thumb pointed at	pointed	.	
4.	4	What's her name, Josie	is	?	

After students analyze an example from an academic text, they can use the same graphic organizer to look at their own writing. The teacher can follow this exercise by asking students a series of questions: Are your sentences too short? Too long? All the same? How can you vary the beginning of your sentences? Can you create sentences that require different punctuation? Can you vary the

verbs? Can you "see" the language—that is, does the language make a strong, vivid picture in your head? Is the language well thought-out?

By providing language models like the ones suggested by Dr. Buckner and Tonya Ward

Singer, teachers can give early and advanced students a scaffold that will assist them in differentiating their language and making it reflective of the academic language expectations we hold for all students.

The English language is difficult to master. Students who are learning English in our schools need a focused time to study how the language is constructed and extensive opportunities to practice their newly acquired skills. Using ELD time to highlight elements of spoken and written discourse and to make connections to core academic learning will benefit students at all levels of language proficiency. ♦

Resources

- Jane Buckner, Ed.S., *Write... from the Beginning*. This is a developmental writing program for grades K-5 that uses Thinking Maps to develop a common, targeted focus and improved schoolwide writing performance.
- Pauline Gibbons, *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*, 2002. This book provides solid practical ideas for working with English learners to build listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in the mainstream classroom.
- Mary J. Schleppegrell, *The Language of Schooling: A Functional Linguistics Perspective*, 2004. This book provides the theoretical background for teaching using genres and explains the features of different types of genres taught in schools.
- Tonya Ward Singer (www.tonyasinger.com) is an education consultant who specializes in working with K-8 schools and districts to ensure that English learners succeed.

The main objective of every ELD lesson is to engage students in thinking about and using the English language

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