

Designated English Language Development Fundamentals

Introduction

The fundamental role of Designated (also known as Standalone or Targeted) English language development is to support multilingual learners in expanding their linguistic resources to communicate effectively within a variety of contexts and purposes, both in and out of school.

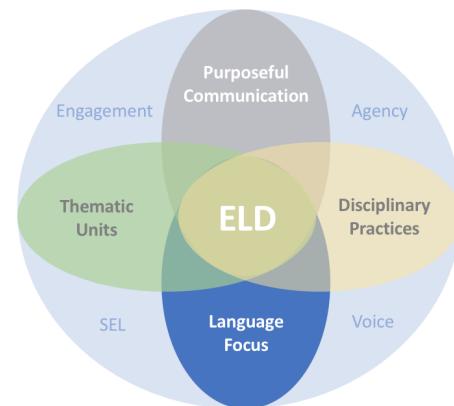
An ongoing challenge in grades 4 through 12 continues to be the development and use of high-quality curriculum for English Language Development (ELD) instruction. A significant number of ELD “curriculums” tend to be (a) grounded in weak or antiquated language pedagogy; (b) a set of supplemental materials added on to support the ELA curriculum; (c) a repurposed reading intervention program; and/or (d) a random collection of materials, resources, and lessons that teachers have pieced together over time.

To address these needs, Understanding Language has identified four designated ELD fundamentals that can lead the way for substantive changes in ELD curriculum. These fundamentals provide guidance as to what curriculum makers, teachers, and instructional coaches should keep in mind as they either develop or enhance their own curricular units to build on the strengths and meet the needs of their multilingual learners. They are intended for multilingual learners at any level of English language proficiency.

Each unit, where possible, should be part of a semester- or year-long curriculum that consists of units that reinforce each other and revolve around a central disciplinary focus or theme and language practices. To create depth rather than breadth, units should (a) incorporate disciplinary practices from multiple content areas and (b) encourage students to work toward the creation of meaningful performances and tasks, (c) include opportunities for students to use language and develop communicative competence and (d) expand students’ linguistic “toolkit” by analyzing how language works within rich, engaging texts.

Purposeful Communication

Teachers embed purposeful communication into their instruction when their students work together on topics meaningful to themselves and their community. They engage in these topics by collaboratively arguing with each other, building up ideas, exploring ideas and evidence, informing each other, etc., orally and in writing, in both informal and formal settings.



Communication-driven units culminate in authentic performances and products that are shared with their peers, families, and communities, and the world.

For example:

- Students work in pairs to identify arguments and evidence for a subsequent Socratic seminar on the causes of the achievement gap in public schools.
- In groups, students read about different historical pandemics, identifying the strategies that helped societies mitigate the effects of the virus. They then create a video public service announcement to help protect their community.
- Students attend one of two virtual “field trips” in which they visit different community organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls clubs, health clinics, libraries). They share what they learned with their peers and where possible, visit one of these organizations with their families. They provide an oral report of their visit to the class.

In order for purposeful communication to occur, units must be infused with large amounts of:

Disciplinary Practices

Effective ELD instruction does not just focus on supporting ELA (English Language Arts) curriculums. Rather, it helps students develop cross-cutting disciplinary practices that students in turn can apply in their content classes. (This does not suggest that designated ELD teachers must become content area experts.)

Developing these practices and the language needed to engage in these practices necessitates ELD curriculum to call upon a wide variety of oral and written multidisciplinary texts.

Learning activities are based on these multi-modal (e.g., websites, illustrations, graphs/charts, videos, social media posts, speeches) texts across different disciplines. The activities strategically weave together activities which require students to read, write, listen, speak, converse, represent (e.g., art), interpret (e.g., symbols, graphs) in order to maximize students' conceptual understandings, language use, and socioemotional growth.

For example,

- In a unit on pandemics, students analyze charts and graphs to understand hospitalization growth rates during COVID and compare that to the information provided in speeches by local and state politicians.

- Students read and listen to podcasts of first-hand accounts of prison life. They compare current and historical crime rates with incarceration rates and learn about the history of incarceration and rehabilitation.
- Students examine historical weather data and listen to scientists discuss the implications of climate change. They develop arguments for steps that local and state governments can take to address these changes and they create videos on the issue to share with their communities.

In order for students to decode a wide variety of oral and written texts and to create their own texts for a variety of authentic purposes, lessons must include activities which have an explicit, scaffolded and embedded....

Language Focus

Unlike traditional ELD instruction which often focuses on decontextualized grammar and vocabulary exercises (e.g., grammar worksheets, vocabulary flashcards), an effective ELD curriculum focuses on developing language for authentic purposes. Language is studied *in situ*, within texts that students use as part of their work within larger curricular units, and not as isolated, stand-alone texts that serve no purpose beyond the teaching of grammatical forms and/or structures. Explicit focus on language instruction centers on modeling how texts (oral and written) work at both the micro (e.g. word choice, use of cohesive ties) and the macro level (e.g. text organization). Vocabulary and grammar are always taught in context and for communicative purposes that contribute to student performances.

Oral language development centers on teaching students a variety of ways that they can build on each other's ideas, construct explanations, and participate in oral argumentation using evidence. Support for student writing includes building students' content knowledge, modeling the text type students are to produce, and co-constructing a sample text before students write independently.

For example,

- Students use a balance scale visual to organize evidence on both sides of the issue: *Should 4th graders be allowed to use cell phones in school?* The teacher models and scaffolds the use of evaluation language such as 'Even though that web page says that...., this other source is more credible, and it says....' This evidence outweighs the...because...I value and that's why I think that this side is heavier."
- As a whole class, students co-construct an article on how social distancing contributes to a decrease in viral infections. The class takes into account the appropriate structure of the article and the word choices that effective writers make. They then write their own article on the value of wearing masks.

- As students read about the origins of Japanese internment during World War Two, they identify the causal phrases (e.g. “due to”, “stemmed from”, “as a result of”) embedded in the text and use these phrases later in a speech on the ongoing historical tension between individual liberty and national security.
- Students analyze several sentences from a scientific article about viruses to unpack the way in which science writers use nominalization to create semantically dense sentences. Students use this technique when they write their own scripts for their public service announcement.

In order for students to derive benefit from instructional sequences that have an explicit focus on language, they must always be in the service of and developed by Purposeful Communication.

Thematic Units

Even though the term “thematic” has a wide range of definitions, for this project it means that a set of lessons are grouped together and maximize students’ growth in language, based on the following:

- Driven by inquiry-based questions
- Variety of oral & written interconnected texts
- Present big, complex and interesting ideas with multiple perspectives
- Relevant to students’ past, current, and/or future lives
- Motivate students with engaging final products & performances that communicate their ideas to others

For example,

- What does it mean today to lead a healthy lifestyle?
- What role does one’s family play in influencing who we become? What other parts of our lives influence who we are?
- What do we know about the impact of climate change on our world? Should we change how we live to prevent big environmental problems?
- Lots of important people and events never make it into history books? Why? Who and what should be included?

Foundational Layer: Engagement, Agency, SEL, & Voice

Underneath the four fundamentals is a foundational layer of engagement, agency, social-emotional development, and student voice. Units can be powerful drivers for these things when they inspire and engage students in constructing meaningful ideas. These foundational components stem from the following:

- Interesting themes that motivate and guide learning in a unit. Throughout each unit, students make meaning of and connect ideas across interrelated oral and written texts to spiral and deepen their conceptual understandings and language use.
- Engaging questions that are provided (e.g., What are the benefits and potential dangers of artificial intelligence? How can we protect ourselves and our communities from current and future pandemics? How do we protect our privacy in the age of technology?) and/or welcomed from students
- Valuing student ideas and developing ways of communicating to others and to themselves.

Units cannot just be “fun” support for ELA. They also can and must be effective at helping students thrive in other content areas, by cultivating these.

In summary, in our work with teams of ELD teachers, coaches and leaders, we have seen how these EL Fundamentals support educators in creating or enhancing ELD units. They provide guidance on how educators might reframe what and how designated ELD should be taught. Finally, several ELD leaders have noted that while these fundamentals focus on designated ELD, they have implications for what takes place during content area instruction (integrated ELD) as well. We look forward to seeing how the field uses these fundamentals to re-envision instruction so that it harnesses the strengths and interests of multilingual learners while providing the supports needed in these children’s academic, linguistic and social-emotional development.

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