

Key Principles for ELL Instruction

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January 2013

Understanding Language | Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas

Understanding Language aims to enrich academic content and language development for English Learners (ELs) by making explicit the language and literacy required to meet *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* and *Next Generation Science Standards* <http://ell.stanford.edu> .

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR ELL INSTRUCTION

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics as well as the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) require that English Language Learners (ELLs) meet rigorous, grade level academic standards. The following principles are meant to guide teachers, coaches, ELL specialists, curriculum leaders, school principals, and district administrators as they work to develop CCSS-aligned instruction for ELLs. These principles are applicable to any type of instruction regardless of grade, proficiency level, or program type. Finally, no single principle should be considered more important than any other. All principles should be incorporated into the planning and delivery of every lesson or unit of instruction.

1. **Instruction focuses on providing ELLs with opportunities to engage in discipline-specific practices which are designed to build conceptual understanding and language competence in tandem.** Learning is a social process that requires teachers to intentionally design learning opportunities that integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening with the practices of each discipline.
2. **Instruction leverages ELLs' home language(s), cultural assets, and prior knowledge.** ELLs' home language(s) and culture(s) are regarded as assets and are used by the teacher in bridging prior knowledge to new knowledge, and in making content meaningful and comprehensible.
3. **Standards-aligned instruction for ELLs is rigorous, grade-level appropriate, and provides deliberate and appropriate scaffolds.** Instruction that is rigorous and standards-aligned reflects the key shifts in the CCSS and NGSS. Such shifts require that teachers provide students with opportunities to describe their reasoning, share explanations, make conjectures, justify conclusions, argue from evidence, and negotiate meaning from complex texts. Students with developing levels of English proficiency will require instruction that carefully supports their understanding and use of emerging language as they participate in these activities.
4. **Instruction moves ELLs forward by taking into account their English proficiency level(s) and prior schooling experiences.** ELLs within a single classroom can be heterogeneous in terms of home language(s) proficiency, proficiency in English, literacy levels in English and student's home language(s), previous experiences in schools, and time in the U.S. Teachers must be attentive to these differences and design instruction accordingly.

5. **Instruction fosters ELLs' autonomy by equipping them with the strategies necessary to comprehend and use language in a variety of academic settings.** ELLs must learn to use a broad repertoire of strategies to construct meaning from academic talk and complex text, to participate in academic discussions, and to express themselves in writing across a variety of academic situations. Tasks must be designed to ultimately foster student independence.
6. **Diagnostic tools and formative assessment practices are employed to measure students' content knowledge, academic language competence, and participation in disciplinary practices.** These assessment practices allow teachers to monitor students' learning so that they may adjust instruction accordingly, provide students with timely and useful feedback, and encourage students to reflect on their own thinking and learning.

These principles are based on papers and discussions from the January 2012 Understanding Language Conference at Stanford University. In developing these principles, the Understanding Language District Engagement Subcommittee drew directly from theory, research, and professional knowledge related to the education of ELLs and the papers presented at the conference. These principles explicitly reference the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, and a Framework for K-12 Science Education: Practices, Cross-cutting Concepts, and Core Ideas.