Introduction to the Next Generation ESL Project: Model Curriculum Units

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# 1 Introduction to the Next Generation ESL Project: Model Curriculum Units



## 1.1 Project Review

### 1.1.1 About Next Generation ESL Project: Model Curriculum Units

**Foundational Beliefs**

* Schooling should help all students reach their highest potential, encouraging critical thinking and agency so that all students can participate more directly in the societal processes that affect themselves, their families, and their communities.
* Schooling should incorporate an asset-based approach that values the languages, cultures, and experiences that students bring to our schools.

**Demographics and Impetus for Project**

The population in Massachusetts public schools is changing quickly. In the past 15 years, the number of children who arrive at our schools speaking languages other than English has nearly doubled. In fact, English Learners (ELs) are the only student population subgroup that is growing. Strengthening teaching and learning for ELs is central to raising achievement, and a key goal of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE). Currently, ELs experience the largest achievement gaps and have the highest dropout rate of any student subgroup in the Commonwealth.

The Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners ([RETELL](http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/)) initiative is a multifaceted, comprehensive approach designed to give ELs access to effective instruction and close the current achievement gap. As part of the RETELL initiative, Commissioner Chester named the development of a model English as a second language (ESL) curriculum as one of his priorities and established a formal project that began in late May 2014. The Commissioner set forth the charge to:

* Produce recommendations on ESL curriculum development
* Create model curriculum units (MCUs) for the use of educators in the state
* Share the process itself for future use by districts and schools

In response, the Office of Language Acquisition ([OLA](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/)) led the field-based “Next Generation ESL Project: Model Curriculum Units” in a key partnership with the Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages ([MATSOL](http://www.matsol.org/)), along with [Northeast Comprehensive Center](http://www.northeastcompcenter.org/)/[WestEd](http://www.wested.org/), and the support of other organizations such as the Center for Applied Special Technology ([CAST](http://www.cast.org/)) and [WIDA](https://wida.wisc.edu/). The project included participation of over 30 districts across the state, as well as collaborations and consultations with state and national curriculum experts.

The work began with the establishment of a district-based advisory Planning Committee with members from districts serving over 65 percent of ELs in the state. The Planning Committee was composed of a cross-disciplinary mix of stakeholders in various roles.

It included ESL and content teachers, EL program directors, state education collaboratives, language consultants, and representatives from higher education and the special education field. Planning Committee members, OLA staff, and collaborating members of key partner organizations also worked closely with ESE’s Center for Curriculum and Instruction—specifically two offices, Literacy and Humanities and Science, Technology/Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). The project also included teams of educators charged with writing, piloting, and revising the MCUs. All in all, the project, ultimately incorporated educator input and feedback from over 30 districts with a range of high-, mid- and low-incidence EL populations from various regions of the state. As this makeup shows, the Next Generation ESL Project embodies a long-term vision for strengthening relationships and supporting collaborative practices on behalf of student learning at all levels: classroom, school, district, and state.

Project deliverables include:

* **Definition of the Focus of ESL Instruction in Massachusetts.** A document—included as this guide’s Section 2.2–clarifying what is currently expected of the ESL educator given the changing roles of ESL and content educators (TESOL International Association, 2013) in light of current standards ([WIDA](https://www.wida.us/standards/eld.aspx) and the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html), henceforth referred to as “Frameworks”) and state regulations.[[1]](#footnote-1) The *Definition* also incorporates careful consideration of how federal and state law, policy, guidance, and local conditions (e.g., local program structure, EL population and needs) affect teaching practice.
* **Collaboration Tool (see Section 3.2).**A multi-layered, multi-purpose tool designed to help curriculum writers operationalize WIDA Standards in conjunction with the Frameworks. The goal of the Collaboration Tool is to support curricular planning with the intentional, simultaneous development of language and the analytical practices embedded in the Frameworks. It highlights the need for collaboration between language and content educators and helps teachers prioritize and strategically plan around [Key Uses of Academic Language](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Can-Do-Descriptors-Key-Uses-K-12-FAQs.pdf)[[2]](#footnote-2) in the context of [key academic practices](http://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/VennDiagram_practices_v11%208-30-13%20color.pdf) (Cheuk, 2013) common across content area Frameworks. The Collaboration Tool and related processes are planning resources that, among other uses, can help educators prepare to create clear, standards-based language learning goals for developing curricula using the ESL unit template (see Section 4.1).
* **ESL MCU unit and** [**lesson plan**](#AnnotatedUnit) **templates**.Documents outlining key considerations for developing collaborative next generation ESL units following the Project’s curricular design approach. Annotated versions of the unit (see Section 4.1) and [lesson](#LPTemplate) (see Section 5.1) templates provide critical-thinking prompts as additional support for educators developing ESL curricula at the unit and lesson levels.
* [**ESL MCUs**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/mcu.html)**.** 12 units spanning grades K–12. The ESL MCUs focus on systematic, explicit, and sustained language development within the context of the Frameworks. Each ESL MCU connects to key linguistic demands from an [existing core academic MCU](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/mcu/) (in the English language arts [ELA], math, social studies, or science content area), but the primary purpose of these ESL units is focused and dedicated language study.

They encourage a contingent pedagogy that is responsive to student needs and learning, and the simultaneous development of language, standards-based concepts, and analytical practices. In response to educator request, the units were designed for ELs at the foundational levels—WIDA English language proficiency (ELP) levels 1 to low 3—but they showcase a curriculum development process that can be used to design units for ELs at all language proficiency levels. As exemplars of teaching practice, the ESL MCUs were developed within a [continuous improvement cycle](#ContImprvmnt) including iterative, often messy, stages of development, implementation, feedback, and revisions. They are intended to be used as “living documents” that highlight how effective instructional design must always adapt to changing conditions and student need. The ESL MCUs illustrate how a flexible but practical process of careful planning and delivery of effective instruction is essential in addressing the complex challenge ELs face when simultaneously learning English and demanding, grade-level academic content.

* **Resource guide.** This document, which provides:
	+ Information about the project’s context, the curriculum design framework, and how to use that framework to develop additional ESL units.
	+ Description of a continuous improvement cycle prompting critical questioning and strategic decision-making that can be used to improve instructional design.
	+ A collection of collaborative tools, processes, protocols, and resources used in the development of ESL MCUs (e.g., Collaboration Tool, unit template, unit lesson plan template, language unpacking tools, unit and lesson-level protocols, etc.).
	+ Resources for professional learning communities (PLCs) to support collaborative ESL curriculum development.
	+ Information about other key topics related to the project, such as text complexity, Universal Design for Learning, guidance related to instruction and assessment of dually identified students (ELs with a disability), and other significant components of effective ESL curriculum.
* **Unit rubrics (see Section 4.5).** Two rubrics (K–2 and 3–12)for reviewing the quality of ESL curricula to ensure that developed units are aligned to standards and curricular shifts embedded in the WIDA Standards and the Frameworks.
* [**Professional development and additional supports**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/profdev.html)**.**ESL MCU Facilitator Training (ESL MCU FacT) incorporating foundational professional development created for the project’s Planning Committee, writing teams, and piloting teams. ESL MCU FacT sessions are available to educators across the Commonwealth starting in the summer of 2016.[[3]](#footnote-3) FacT participants will be equipped to facilitate the collaborative ESL curriculum development process used to develop ESL MCUs in their home districts.

### 1.1.2 Situating the Project within the Context of Massachusetts’ Language Programs

*The Next Generation ESL Project* is situated within the larger context of federal and state laws regarding EL instruction. According to federal and state law, ELs have a right to an equal educational opportunity.[[4]](#footnote-4) The law recognizes that, to succeed academically, ELs need instruction that is appropriate for their individual language proficiency levels, allows them to develop English language proficiency, and affords them equal access to rigorous content area instruction and academic achievement.

At the state level, current interpretation of the law states that, with limited exceptions, districts are required to provide sheltered English immersion (SEI)[[5]](#footnote-5) to ELs until they are proficient in English. Other language development programs in Massachusetts include Two-Way Immersion (TWI)[[6]](#footnote-6) and Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE). Regardless of the program model (SEI, TWI, TBE, etc.), districts must provide EL students with both grade-level academic content and ESL instruction that is aligned to WIDA and the Frameworks as outlined in [state guidelines for EL programs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance/).

It is important to highlight that in Massachusetts, SEI programs must include two instructional components that are both necessary for comprehensive, effective instruction of ELs: sheltered content instruction (SCI) *and* ESL.



**Figure 1: Components of programs serving ELs in Massachusetts**

Within the Massachusetts SEI program model, SCI offers access to grade-level content as well as development of discipline-specificacademic language; ESL offers systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction in the context of the Frameworks. The focus of ESL instruction in Massachusetts is defined in more detail in Section 2.1 of this document.

The structure of the SEI program in Massachusetts acknowledges that ELs acquire language while interacting in all classrooms as they engage with [key academic practices](http://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/VennDiagram_practices_v11%208-30-13%20color.pdf), analytical skills, and conceptual development embodied in the Frameworks. It recognizes that effective language instruction in all academic classes can benefit both ELs and proficient speakers. It also highlights that SCI and content accessibility alone does not provide enough dedicated focus, support, or assistance toward developing the language and literacy instruction ELs need to reach the kind of linguistic complexity demanded by the Frameworks. This is especially true of ELs at foundational levels (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013; Council of the Great City Schools, 2014), whose additional language needs are clearly different from those of proficient English speakers.

Dedicated ESL instruction in Massachusetts, as redefined by the Planning Committee, is designed to give ELs the additional linguistic support they need through systematic, explicit, and sustained focus on language and literacy within the rich context of the Frameworks.[[7]](#footnote-7) Educators can support students’ English development to advanced levels by raising their consciousness about language, drawing their attention to particular language choices and uses, and providing opportunities for explicit learning about language, also known as metalinguistic knowledge (Schleppegrell, 2016). This metalinguistic and metacognitive knowledge that results from explicit language instruction attends to higher-order thinking skills and crosses academic disciplines.

Thus, the SEI program in Massachusetts includes both language and content as important instructional considerations for planning ESL instruction and SCI.[[8]](#footnote-8) Although each component of the program has a different driving instructional focus, both must incorporate language and content (in different ways, informed by the different levels of expertise and qualifications of corresponding educators). As a result, both components of the SEI system in Massachusetts (ESL and SCI) contribute to ELs’ academic success despite having different primary purposes.

Similarly, TWI and TBE programs in Massachusetts include components with different foci that contribute to ELs’ academic success. These programs include development of each target language, SCI in target languages, as well as explicit and intentional bridging (Beeman & Urow, 2013) between both languages where the educator strengthens students’ dual and cross-linguistic repertoires. Therefore, all programs serving ELs in Massachusetts contain both language and content components to support student achievement, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2: Language and content key components of programs serving ELs in Massachusetts**

Finally, it is important to highlight how ESL, as defined in this guidance, does not happen *instead* of instruction devoted to content but *in addition* to core content instruction across all program models. The Next Generation ESL Project’s curriculum framework and related guidance acknowledge the need for effective integration of language and content within each program instructional component so ELs can develop academic language across a variety of academic and social contexts.

### 1.1.3  Situating the Project within Changes in the Education Landscape

The 2011 adoption of [Common Core State Standards](http://www.corestandards.org/) (CCSS) into the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) made it necessary to update the state’s ESL standards as well as annual summative ELP assessment. ESE made these changes to comply with [federal mandates](http://www.ed.gov/essa) specifying that both (ESL standards and assessment) must be aligned with state academic standards.[[9]](#footnote-9) Thus, in 2012, Massachusetts joined the [WIDA](https://www.wida.us/index.aspx) Consortium and adopted its large-scale ELP assessment, [ACCESS](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access). Several other state-level initiatives such as a new [Framework for Educator Evaluation](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/) and content area assessments (MCAS 2.0) were also being implemented at the time, creating a ripple effect that changed the landscape for educators across the Commonwealth.



**Figure 3: Recent education initiatives in Massachusetts**

Given the context of a shifting educational landscape and multiple competing narratives regarding educators’ roles and responsibilities, one of the first questions the Planning Committee addressed was how to define the role, responsibility, and scope of work of the ESL teacher in Massachusetts. The Committee’s discussion was necessarily framed within several non-negotiable items, including:

* Local Massachusetts law, policy, and regulation around ESL, such as the [*Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance/)*,* August 2015.
* The [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html).
* [WIDA](https://www.wida.us) English Language Development Standards
* New [RETELL](http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/) SEI endorsement for content educators.
* New [license requirements for ESL educators](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html).
* [*Guidelines for the Professional Standards for Teachers*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edprep/advisories/TeachersGuidelines.pdf).
* The [Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/).

The first task of the ESL MCU Planning Committee involved clarifying ESL in the context of all of these standards, guidelines, and requirements. The result was new, clear guidance defining the focus of ESL instruction. The new *Definition of the Focus of ESL Instruction in Massachusetts* can be found in Section 2.1 of this guidance.

Committee members also identified key beliefs and programmatic expectations that served as the foundation and vision of the Next Generation ESL Project:

* ELs at all proficiency levels have the same ability as native and proficient speakers to engage in cognitively complex tasks.
* When ELs receive appropriate support to access ideas, texts, and concepts expressed in English, we are able to strategically work toward the simultaneous development of language and of key academic habits of thinking expected at the students’ particular grade levels.
* In order to succeed, ELs must engage with well-designed curricula that are aligned to WIDA and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
* Motivation and engagement are crucial to learning and should be considered in curriculum development.
* Teaching is a complex and dynamic act; effective teaching is essential to student success.
* All educators are responsible for students’ language development and academic achievement. Collaboration and shared responsibility among administrators and educators are integral to student and program success.
* All instruction (content area and ESL) is provided by highly qualified educators who are licensed in their respective fields.
* ESL educators and administrators are fully integrated in district and school decision-making processes, initiatives, and professional development.
* ESL educators have opportunities to regularly participate in building and district-based quality professional development. Such professional development is differentiated, sustained, embedded with supports, and focused on all aspects of professional growth of the ESL educator, including subject matter as well as content and collaborative practices.
* ESL educators regularly attend grade-level and content area team meetings.
* Administrators and educators use multiple data points (student achievement, performance, growth, demographics, sociocultural aspects, equity measures within the school, etc.) to inform scheduling of classes, services, and supports.
* ELs have schedules that permit both ESL instruction and supported, grade-level curriculum instruction (provided through SCI).

### 1.1.4 Developing a Curricular Structure

To develop the structure and process for the design of the ESL MCUs, the Planning Committee undertook the following tasks:

1. **Choosing a curricular structure.**The Committee examined various examples of ESL curricula at state and national levels, researched curriculum development theory and practices,[[10]](#footnote-10) and consulted with state and national experts in order to identify key components the MA ESL model units should contain.
2. **Designing an ESL MCU template integrating Understanding by Design (UbD).**One project requirement was alignment with the pre-existing ESE initiative for content area [MCUs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/mcu/). Accordingly, the Planning Committee modeled curricular thinking processes dedicated to systematic language development using the [UbD](http://www.ascd.org/research-a-topic/understanding-by-design-resources.aspx) framework. UbD’s “backward” instructional design approach immediately presented two questions:
* How and where does the WIDA framework merge and integrate with the UbD process and the existing MCU template?
* How can educators create clear learning Focus Language Goals (FLGs) (see Section 3.3) for Stage 1 of the UbD process?

To answer the first question, the Planning Committee reviewed, revised, and developed various iterations of the UbD template (including a model developed in a MATSOL-Brockton initiative) in consultation with Jay McTighe. The final ESL MCU unit template is available in Section 4.1 of this guide, followed by with an annotated version of the template in Section 4.2.

The second question posed a greater challenge. Given the broad, generative, and dynamic nature of the WIDA Standards, how does the ESL educator create clear, concrete, and measurable language learning goals for Stage 1 of the UbD process? The Project’s approach to developing these goals is explained in Section 3.3 of this guide.

1. **Addressing challenges related to implementation of the WIDA Standards.** The [WIDA Standards](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld) are dynamic and generative, and can be aligned to whatever content standards a particular state has adopted. This offers great flexibility, but members of WIDA’s research team have noted that “the ambiguous and generative nature of the WIDA [English Language Development] standards adds another layer of work to create [another] set of standards which forces teachers to create shortcuts” (Westerlund, 2014, p. 134). WIDA researchers also suggest that “the standards do and will continue to have important limitations….

The abstractness and flexibility that characterize them are a significant drawback to their use by many ESL and most general education teachers” (Molle, 2013, p. 13). Other noted researchers in the field of language acquisition concur that while the WIDA Standards framework has some strengths, it does not offer “the descriptions of linguistic and discourse features with the degree of specificity necessary for teachers to create [English language development] curricula” (Bailey & Huang, p. 359).

The Planning Committee, whose members represent districts with the largest EL and ESL educator populations in Massachusetts, acknowledged that WIDA offers many useful tools to the field, but also reported that many of the Commonwealth’s educators feel that the current WIDA framework is not streamlined enough to provide concrete, user-friendly ways to develop ESL curriculum using the Massachusetts standards-based UbD planning model. This model includes [S.M.A.R.T.](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/implementation/) goals and has implications for district-determined measures ([DDMs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/QRG-Measures.pdf)) and [educator evaluation](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/). It was precisely this challenge of using the WIDA framework for curriculum planning in Massachusetts public schools, a challenge faced by the larger field of ESL educators across the state, that led to this project.

Although WIDA continues to develop new resources for educators and refine its framework based on ongoing research, implementation across multiple consortia contexts, and feedback from Consortium members, the Planning Committee decided to focus on this challenge as a key area of the project.

### 1.1.5 Looking Forward

As curricular material developed by the Next Generation ESL Project is released to the public and educators across the state participate in professional development about the project’s curricular approach, the ESL MCU team is well aware that more research is needed on K–12 academic language development for ELs (Anstrom et al., 2010). Nevertheless, classrooms are brimming with ELs now: educators must use current research and continue experimenting, learning, developing, and improving tools to support each other and the students they serve.

Notwithstanding limitations to the research base, English language development researchers Bailey and Huang have recommended that augmenting a limited set of key standards with detailed learning progressions for specific aspects of academic English “could have the potential to powerfully aug­ment existing standards so that students can access them for their learning needs and teachers for their instructional and assessment goals” (Bailey & Huang, 2011, p. 360). The ESL MCU team hopes that the collaborative curriculum development approach developed through this project and related tools, processes, and protocols highlighted in this guidance serve as a useful framework for language-driven curriculum design to support both educators and ELs.

## 1.2 Theory of Action and Characteristics of a Next Generation ESL Curriculum

As described above, the Planning Committee began the Next Generation ESL Project by seeking a consensus and a collective vision about the focus of ESL instruction in the Massachusetts context. The Committee also needed to design a model curriculum development process and exemplars leading to agreed-upon outcomes. This meant the Committee needed to establish a theory of action based on a deep understanding of current research on language development, standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment for ELs.

Over the course of a year, the Planning Committee met to collaboratively establish an actionable theory that would guide development in year two of the Next Generation ESL Project. During that first year, they:

* Reviewed data and outcomes for ELs.
* Evaluated and clarified current policies and guidance for ESL.
* Conducted a literature review on the research to date regarding academic language development for ELs in K–12 settings.
* Discussed this academic language development research.
* Surveyed district realities, needs, and existing resources.
* Shared multiple perspectives and visions for the role of ESL instruction within the variety of language programs in Massachusetts.
* Studied ways in which newly adopted standards shifted expectations for language and content learning, and the intersection of language and content within Massachusetts program models for ELs.
* Reviewed models, components, and characteristics of effective ESL curricula, and created new models and possible approaches.
* Culled and merged expertise and feedback from practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.
* Articulated the vision, theoretical basis, and outcomes for project deliverables.

The theory of action presented below, and the specific characteristics of next generation ESL curricula, emerged as a result. The theory of action provides a core set of priority beliefs, supported by research, that can be operationalized in development of curricula, instruction, and assessment for ELs that is representative of the state’s *Definition of Focus of ESL Instruction*. It has guided the development of model ESL units, tools, processes, and resources. Moreover, it has been refined throughout the curriculum development and pilot implementation phases, with sustained review and reflection from the Planning Committee, illustrating the importance of a continuous improvement cycle in the curricular design process.

Together, both the theory of action and explicitly stated characteristics of a next generation ESL curriculum can guide educators toward the outcomes of college and career readiness, student engagement in their schools and communities, and future participation in a civic democracy.

This dynamic ESL curriculum offers students opportunities to develop their linguistic and cultural resources and apply them to solve real-world problems, impact issues important to them, and make choices for themselves and their future roles in the world within the context of developing language, engaging in meaningful academic and social contexts of schooling, and building critical lenses to promote individual and community agency.

#### Theory of Action

* **Shared responsibility, expertise, and collaboration leads to EL achievement.** By coordinating and collaborating in planning ESL and content curricula, educators will support one another, share unique fields of expertise within curriculum planning, and take collective responsibility for EL achievement.[[11]](#footnote-11)
* **Educator inquiry, curricular innovation, testing, and reflection cycles lead to continuous improvement and stronger implementation of curricula.** By engaging in a process of continuous improvement as they develop and revise next generation ESL curricula, educators will collaboratively and continuously lead, evaluate, and improve curriculum development (Metz, 2016). This will result in scaling-up of evidence-based practices for ESL in classrooms and schools across the state.
* **Learner assets serve as important teaching resources.** By capitalizing on the experiences, prior knowledge, languages, cultures, and backgrounds ELs bring to learning,[[12]](#footnote-12) and by using their linguistic and cultural profiles in curricular design,[[13]](#footnote-13) educators can instruct students more responsively, resulting in increased student agency, understanding of multiple perspectives, and stronger critical lenses with which students can evaluate and advocate important issues.
* **Language is action (Van Lier & Walqui, 2012; Walqui, 2012) within each unique sociocultural context.** Next generation ESL promotes development of language as action.

By focusing next generation ESL curricula on the developmental[[14]](#footnote-14) and functional[[15]](#footnote-15) nature of language learning within a range of academic and social contexts[[16]](#footnote-16) through authentic, interactive learning experiences and real-world transfer and application, the implementation of these units will help students understand their own language development as being more than a set of forms and features. Instead, students will learn to see their developing language as growing sets of tools for meaning-making leveraged through action to achieve their own goals.

**Characteristics of a Next Generation ESL Curriculum**

A next generation ESL curriculum developed as part of this project has the following features:

* **Is planned and dynamic.** Planning using backward design (McTighe & Wiggins, 2011, pp. 3–4) around FLGs with independent performance outcomes, and incorporating dynamic formative assessment opportunities and contingent feedback cycles during instruction (Metz, 2016) will align curriculum, instruction, and assessment components to better promote language development, support content achievement, and respond to students’ individual needs.
* **Is explicit and visible.** Implicit or hidden expectations are often misunderstood.When they are explicit and visible instead, students’ engagement and ownership of learning will increase and ESL instruction will become more responsive to student needs (Birch, Hattie, & Masters, 2015).
* **Is rigorous and integrated.** By creating a range of contexts for developing Key Uses of Academic language and by integrating language with standards-based analytical practices[[17]](#footnote-17) within ESL curricular design,[[18]](#footnote-18) educators can simultaneously increase students’ higher order thinking skills[[19]](#footnote-19) and attend to the depth of knowledge and rigor expected for grade-level academic achievement.
* **Is differentiated.** By developing a curriculum that is intentionally, explicitly, and systematically designed to be responsive to student differences (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014), and to overcome potential learning barriers, an educator can more effectively address a range of instructional needs and implement supports during instruction to help scaffold language learning[[20]](#footnote-20)
* **Is collaborative and dialogic.** Through an authentic, language-rich curriculum that provides opportunities for collaboration, interactive discussion, and language practice, ELs will increase both their language proficiency and conceptual understanding (Dalton, 1998; Dalton & Tharp, 2002).
* **Explicitly teaches language and thinking.** By incorporating an explicit focus on metacognitive and metalinguistic skills in ESL instructional design, educators can support language and concept development at advanced levels. These skills raise students’ consciousness about language by focusing attention on thinking processes and language choices in particular contexts, and by providing opportunity for dedicated discussion about language, about language learning, and about thinking processes (Schleppegrell, 2016) essential to academic achievement and language development.

## 1.3 Purpose and Description of Next Generation ESL MCU Curriculum Resource Guide

This resource guide seeks to provide Massachusetts educators with the best available research and expertise for addressing current challenges related to designing curriculum for ELs. ELs need systematic and sustained language-driven instruction, with a curriculum that reflects those priorities and is also aligned with current state standards.

This resource guide is not meant to be a full course on each aspect of unit design. It brings together multiple frameworks and processes needed to create quality ESL curricula, but it is not intended to teach all aspects of curricular components from beginning to end, such as a full understanding of academic and language standards, UbD, assessment frameworks, differentiation methods, UDL, revision cycles, etc. This guide points to various areas of needed expertise to create strong next generation ESL curricula, and offers model thinking processes and examples to bring these multiple areas into a coherent whole.

Educators are encouraged to examine their own professional learning continua to identify individual areas for potential growth, and professional development providers need to determine where this work fits in the larger continuum of development of each particular audience.

This resource guide offers English language educators evidence-based recommendations and a process for creating ESL curriculum units in grades K–12 at all proficiency levels. It pulls together current research in the field of English language development, provides strategies to translate it to the classroom, and shares practices as learned by the Planning Committee, field-based cross-disciplinary writing teams, and piloting educators in ESL classrooms across the state. Guided deeply by the UbD framework, this guide walks educators through a process of creating ESL curriculum units that can support them on their path toward effective planning and delivery of ESL classroom instruction.

This guide also provides instructional recommendations for ELs that content and language educators can implement in conjunction with existing content and language standards. It can be useful for both sets of educators as they think critically about English language demands in content area and ESL classroom tasks and texts. ESL educators, in collaboration with their content area colleagues, can use the guide when planning ESL and SCI units.

In addition, administrators and professional development providers can use this guide to inform and improve evidence-based instruction, align instruction with state standards, and prompt educator discussion about curriculum design for ELs in PLCs.

## 1.4 Key Project Considerations

**Collaboration and Co-Planning Expectations for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment of ELs**

Each district has unique populations, communities, and resources (linguistic, academic, social, extra-curricular, etc.) and so each language program across the state has a distinct philosophy, community values, and attitudes that reflect these differences. Regardless of the type of program that any district offers, a coordinated effort among all district and school levels is necessary to provide ELs with high-quality education that is both culturally and linguistically responsive.

The Next Generation ESL Project is built on this basic premise of collaboration.[[21]](#footnote-21) To provide an effective and coherent program for ELs—through SEI, TWI, or TBE—content and language educators must have common planning time (CPT), regular opportunities to interact in PLCs, and dedicated professional time for shared planning of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for ELs. This type of co-planning and collaboration between content and language is not a luxury but a priority, a necessary expectation of any comprehensive program serving ELs. Educators working in isolation cannot meet all of the challenges involved with giving ELs the high-quality curricula they are entitled to and deserve (WIDA, 2016b, p. 8). This is because several educators are often responsible for the different instructional components of a program that addresses ELs’ linguistic and academic needs, yet they are collectively responsible for the success and outcomes of the whole, comprehensive instructional program. In order for different teachers-of-record (content or language) to effectively, intentionally, and coherently plan instruction for ELs, collaboration and co-planning time must be dedicated, systematic, and supported in schools.

This fact was a crucial part of MCU development for the Next Generation ESL Project. Our curricular design process begins with a collaborative conversation and sharing of expertise, guided by our Collaboration Tool (see Section 3.2). Unit writers were largely district-based educator teams, and always included a mixture of language and content expertise. Each educator brought expertise and knowledge from her/his own subject matter and field, as well as firsthand knowledge of EL performance in his/her classroom. This joint expertise (language and content) and ongoing sharing of data was a significant factor in the successful development of ESL MCUs and is a primary part of the infrastructure supporting responsive, effective instructional design for EL achievement and success.

**Continuous Improvement through Innovation and Implementation Science**

According to the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), an “implementation” is a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions. How we implement an innovation in education has great effect on whether changes will yield positive results. Effective adoption of new initiatives requires effort on the part of the educators who must be willing to adopt, implement, and scale up evidence-based practices seen as providing students with the best chances of success (Detric, 2013).

ESL MCUs developed through the Next Generation ESL Project are an education innovation. Beginning in the spring of 2014, the project’s Planning Committee and writing teams created draft model units and accompanying development tools. A year later in 2015, several units were piloted across the state. As educators implemented units, they gathered evidence and provided feedback to inform several layers of the curricular revision process.

The iterative MCU design process is a good illustration of how fluid curricula is. Because educators design instruction to help students reach specific goals, and meet specific student needs, a curriculum must be a flexible, living document able to adapt to changes. As the world keeps changing, educators must regularly ask themselves: “Is what we do still considered a best practice?”

As our students keep changing, educators must keep asking: “What needs do the students in front of me have? How do I help my students go from where they are to where the standards, and college and career expectations, require?”

This project supports educators as explorers, researchers, and intellectuals, and hence the choice for field-based development of the work as opposed to the hiring of an external publishing company. The *process* of knowledge-making with our students in our classrooms, from the perspective of curricular design, does not necessarily need to reside outside of ourselves. In public education, and in *specific and local* contexts, no one is better positioned to know student strengths and areas of potential growth than the teacher in front of them, and we (as teachers) need to be comfortable with choice-making in curricular design processes. In figuring out the best that we can do for our students, we are ourselves engaged in productive struggles to solve problems of practice, and to continue developing our own knowledge about the most effective ways to educate our students.

As the ESL MCUs are released to the public, the Planning Committee, ESE staff, and educators who have collaborated on this project want to continue questioning, testing, and updating the existing curriculum. The ESL MCU processes and models exist within particular sociocultural contexts and classroom realities of inherent continuous change, adjustment, and improvement as curricula are enacted through instruction and assessment. ESL MCUs emerged directly from Massachusetts classrooms: they reflect particular educators, classrooms, groups of students, and priorities in planning. The models reflect common philosophies, foundations, processes, and approaches to curriculum development that integrate reflection and improvement, but they are not comprehensive examples of all possibilities for effective instruction.

Therefore, the model units themselves should not be viewed as static, “perfectly” finished products, but as representative of the learning continuum that educators engage in as they support learning for all students. When implementing the ESL model units, educators will need to make modifications to address their students’ needs. They should always attend to their students’ age, educational background, socio-emotional needs, learning disabilities, and other factors that influence learning.

The units can also inform and guide educators in their own development, as they grapple with classroom realities and curriculum design challenges. One way educators implementing ESL MCUs can enhance existing units along with their teaching practice is to engage in cycles of continuous improvement within PLCs. District and school-based PLCs can also use resources provided by [NIRN](http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/) to support revision of current units and creation of new ESL units modeled after the Next Generation MCUs. NIRN provides access to free, self-paced online [modules and lessons](http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/modules-and-lessons) designed to promote knowledge and expertise in implementing and scaling up education innovations, such as the ESL MCUs, through continuous improvement cycles.

For example, one way to examine whether MCUs (or additional ESL units modeled after them) are being implemented effectively is to teach a unit, gather evidence of implementation, use that evidence to revise the unit, and teach it again to see whether the adaptations addressed issues identified during the first implementation. This process is described in NIRN’s [Module 5: Improvement Cycles](http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/module-5).

The Planning Committee encourages educators to use the model units, and to regularly examine how they can improve current units, expanding and scaling the reach of the curriculum project. Next Generation ESL Project developers firmly believe that by engaging in continuous improvement cycles when implementing the ESL MCUs, educators will be able to use their evolving knowledge and expertise to modify the curriculum in response to specific student needs. With a shared commitment to professional learning and growth in the process, and collaboration, leadership, and agency from EL educators, these models and processes will continue to improve as implemented across Massachusetts classrooms representing a range of student and local needs.

The 12 Next Generation ESL [MCUs](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/curriculum/mcu.html) are:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grade Band** | **ELP***Designed with this ELP in mind, but can be adapted to other proficiency levels* | **WIDA Standard** | **Unit Title** |
| K | ELP 1/2 | SIL | How Do I Feel?  |
| K | ELP 2/3 | LoMa | Language of Addition and Subtraction |
| 1–2 | ELP1/2 | LoSS | Justice, Courage, and Fairness |
| 1–2 | ELP 2/3 | LoSc | Animals and Where They Live |
| 3–5 | ELP 1/2 | LoSc | Weathering and Erosion |
| 3–5 | ELP 1/2 | LoSS | Historical Perspective  |
| 3–5 | ELP 2/3 | LoLA | Newspaper Interviewing and Reporting |
| 6–8 | ELP 1/2 | LoSS | Access to Clean Water |
| 6–8 | ELP 1/2 | LoLa | Personal Narrative  |
| 6–8 | ELP 2/3 | LoMa | Using Data to Advocate for Change  |
| 9–12 | ELP 1/2 | SIL | Exploring Topics in African American Civil Rights |
| 9–12 | ELP 2/3 | LoLA | Exploring Topics in Women’s Rights |

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Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner

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1. For more information about current guidelines reflecting state regulations, see ESE’s [*Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a paper on the Key Uses, see Center for Applied Linguistics (n.d.)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more information on current ESL FacT offerings, please visit the OLA [professional development page](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/profdev.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ASPIRA Consent Decree, 1974; *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Equal Opportunities Education Act, 1974; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974; and the U.S. Department of Education’s 2015 [English Learner Toolkit](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/index.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In Massachusetts, Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002, legislated in response to a public referendum popularly known as Question 2, mandates instruction for ELs be provided primarily in English, using sheltered English immersion (SEI). According to Chapter 71A of the Massachusetts General Laws (G.L. c. 71A), all students classified as ELs must be educated in an SEI program, unless a program waiver is sought for another program model. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more information, see ESE’s *Guidance for Defining and Implementing Two-Way Immersion and Transitional Bilingual Education Programs*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. WIDA Essential Action 5; includes consideration of how students develop first and second language and literacy skills at different rates and in different sequences (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 28–30). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. WIDA Essential Actions 4, 6, 11, and 14 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 25–27, 31–33, 46–48, 58–63). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html), Sections 1111 (b)(1)(F) and 1111 (b)(2)(G). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For more information about research foundations for the Next Generation ESL Project MCUs, see the [bibliography](#Bibliography) in Section of 7.3 of this guide. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. WIDA Essential Actions 14 and 15 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 58–66). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. WIDA Essential Action 1 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 14–16). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. WIDA Essential Action 3 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 20–24). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. WIDA Essential Action 5 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 28–30). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. WIDA Essential Action 10 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 43–45). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. WIDA Essential Action 11 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 46–48). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. WIDA Essential Action 2 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 17–19). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. WIDA Essential Action 4 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 25–27). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. WIDA Essential Action 8 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 37–39). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. WIDA Essential Action 12 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 49–51). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. WIDA Essential Actions 14 and 15 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 58–66). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)