## Deep Dive: Instructional Practices to Support Multilingual Learners (MLs)

DESE Instructional Planning and Observation Tools Collection

## *About this Tool*

This Deep Dive supports educators in implementing promising practices for multilingual learners (MLs). It brings

the [Multilingual Learning Look-for Tool](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/tool.docx) to life through concrete classroom examples that show clear connections between teacher actions

and student outcomes. By providing specific, observable indicators of success, the Deep Dive helps educators recognize and implement promising

practices in their classrooms.

Aligned with the [DESE Educational Vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/vision/default.html), [MA Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html), and [Standards of Effective Practice](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/standards/default.html), these evidence-based practices apply across all ML instructional contexts. Whether in sheltered content instruction, ESL classes, or bilingual/dual language programs, and regardless of ESL delivery approach (push-in, pull-out, standalone, embedded, or co-teaching), educators will find practical strategies to support ML success.

**Section 2: Assets Orientation**

*Instruction leverages students’ home languages, cultures, experiences and interests, and connects to students’ life outside of school. It builds on what students can do and is carefully planned and adjusted in real time based on student progress and an understanding of language acquisition.*

***Connections:***

* Blueprint for EL Success:
  + [Pillar 1 (School Culture), Building Block 3 (Asset-Based Teaching and Learning)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/pillar1/p1b3-classroom.html)
  + [Pillar 3 (Opportunity and Support), Building Block 1 (Meaningful and rigorous learning opportunities that build on English learner's assets)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/pillar3/p3b1-classroom.html)
* [Standards of Effective Practice](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/standards/default.html): II-A-3, II-B-3, II-D

**Element 2A: Promoting Bi/Multilingualism and Bi/Multiculturalism as a Resource**

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| * *Educators… promote bi/multilingualism and bi/multiculturalism as a resource for learning (e.g. promoting translanguaging practices (i.e., using multiple languages flexibly), providing home language support, identifying connections between languages like cognates, etc.).* | * *Students… use a range of linguistic resources (in home language and/or English) to explore new concepts and engage with peers and teachers.* * *Students… use all their language knowledge, including home language, to learn English (e.g. translanguaging, identifying cross-language connections like cognates, etc.)* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Explicitly prompt students to use their full linguistic repertoire** (e.g., discuss benefits of multilingualism, encourage use of home language during discussions, model translanguaging, share strategies for home language development, highlight opportunities like Seal of Biliteracy) * **Make explicit connections between languages** (e.g., highlight cognates, compare grammatical structures, analyze word parts across languages, use contrastive analysis for sentence patterns) * **Model metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies** (e.g., think-alouds, guided practice with language analysis, goal setting for language development, reflection, self-assessment, peer feedback) * **Draw on and affirm students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds** (e.g., integrate cultural funds of knowledge, validate identities, connect learning to students' experiences, display multilingual/multicultural materials) | * **Build cross-linguistic awareness** (e.g., identify patterns between languages, use cognates to expand vocabulary, transfer knowledge across languages, apply linguistic patterns independently) * **Develop metalinguistic awareness** (e.g., self-monitor language choices, reflect on language use in different contexts, set personal language learning goals, provide peer feedback on language use) * **Engage in translanguaging and code-switching to deepen learning** (e.g., use multiple languages to explore complex concepts, draw from home language to enhance understanding, participate in bilingual discussions) * **Strengthen bilingual/bicultural confidence and identity** (e.g., share cultural perspectives in learning tasks, use multiple languages across settings, take pride in bilingual abilities, pursue biliteracy opportunities) |

Resources:

* [A Guide to Translanguaging in the Classroom](https://wida.wisc.edu/news/guide-translanguaging-classroom) (WIDA)
* [Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/language-symbols/languages-dialects/) (CAST)
* [Translanguaging Strategies in ELA](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5b43fc97fcf4773f14ee92f3/5cca8e1dbfa8f118e41c578a_Translanguaging%20Strategies%20ELA.pdf) (English Learner Success Forum)
* [Translanguaging Strategies in Math](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5b43fc97fcf4773f14ee92f3/5cca8e10ba3e4f612e9cdc9f_Translanguaging%20Strategies%20MATH.pdf) (English Learner Success Forum)

**Element 2B: Drawing from Student Assets and Prior Knowledge**

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| * *Educators… implement carefully sequenced and structured activities that draw from students’ prior knowledge, cultural and linguistic resources, and skills.* | * *Students… connect new concepts to their prior knowledge and cultural assets.* |
| *If educators…* | *Then students are more likely to…* |
| * **Structure learning activities based on identifying student strengths and experiences, including prior knowledge and students' home languages and cultures** (e.g., assess prior knowledge systematically, identify entry points for new concepts, sequence tasks to build on existing skills) * **Plan deliberate progression of learning tasks** (e.g., incorporate culturally relevant materials, validate linguistic/cultural practices, activate prior knowledge). Break down complex skills and sequence activities from concrete to abstract, align supports with student readiness. * **Monitor and adjust instruction in real time** (e.g., check for understanding frequently, pause for self-assessment). Modify supports based on student responses and provide targeted scaffolding. * **Scaffold up rather than simplify content** (e.g., maintain high expectations, provide targeted supports, adjust strategies based on student progress and what students can do) | * **Connect new concepts through their assets and experiences**(e.g., draw from cultural/linguistic knowledge to understand new content, share relevant prior experiences, recognize connections between known and new concepts) * **Demonstrate growing mastery through carefully planned progressions** (e.g., build understanding step by step, transfer familiar skills to new contexts, show increasing confidence with complex tasks) * **Engage actively in the learning process** (e.g., communicate learning needs, use feedback effectively, adjust learning strategies as needed) * **Rise to high expectations with appropriate support** (e.g., tackle challenging content successfully, show productive struggle, demonstrate growth toward mastery) |

Resources:

* [Next Generation ESL Curriculum Modules: Knowing and Supporting Your Students](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/ele/esl-curriculum-modules/index.html#/lessons/BW0xSxsdDumhXFLcXSb0bT47p73zFUVb) (MA DESE)
* [Building on Students' Cultural and Linguistic Assets](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/resource-snapshot/building-students-cultural-and-linguistic-assets) (WIDA)
* [Can-Do Philosophy](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/can-do-philosophy) & [Can Do Descriptors](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/can-do/descriptors) (WIDA)
* [WIDA Language Charts](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/Website/Misc%20Pages/revised-access/WIDA-Language-Charts.pdf) (WIDA)
* [WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors: Informing Expectations and Scaffolding](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/resource-snapshot/wida-proficiency-level-descriptors-informing-expectations-and) (WIDA)
* [Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-sustaining/default.html) (MA DESE)

## Glossary

1. **Academic Conversations:** Conversations where students use knowledge and language to build up ideas in a content area. In practice, educators help students go from simply choosing answers to posing questions, exploring different points of view, and building meanings with others*(Source: Zwiers, 2019)*.
2. **Asset-Based:** Approaches that build on the strengths and capacities that learners and educators bring to school, including their languages, cultures, and experiences, and leverages them for success. In contrast, deficit-based approaches highlight problems and inadequacies of students and educators.
3. **Assets:** Strengths or funds of knowledge students and their families can contribute to students' learning. These strengths come from cultural and linguistic backgrounds, previous academic and life experiences, etc. They include, among others: knowledge of different cultures and languages, daily routines (budgeting, childcare, maintenance/repairs, etc.), skills for developing social networks to gather and exchange resources, career-specific skills and knowledge (engineering, management, etc.), as well as traditions, moral knowledge, and ethics *(Source: Moll et al., 1992)*.
4. **Code-Switching:** alternating between two or more languages.
5. **Collaborative Learning:** Active learning group activities where students create new knowledge together. In these activities, students progress individually while working towards a common goal with other students. Success depends on students' individual strengths (everyone doing their part) and the ability of the group to bring those parts together *(Source: ResourceEd and WIDA, 2014)*.
6. **Cooperative Learning:** Group activities that involve 3-5 students working together to produce a quality piece of work. These activities focus on group performance: "If you win, I win!" so group members help, assist, encourage, and support each other's efforts to be accountable to one another. The teacher's role is to observe and intervene when necessary *(Source: Johnson et al., 2006; SEI Smart Card)*.
7. **Cross-Language Connections:** relationship and interaction between languages, including how elements of a language (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation) connects to or relates to elements of another language.
8. **Cognates:** words that have similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning across languages *(Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020)*.
9. **Metacognitive Awareness:** people's ability to consciously reflect on how they think and learn, including by examining learning strategies, what works and why, and adjusting strategies as needed *(Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020)*.
10. **Metalinguistic Awareness:** the ability to reflect about language and how it works, the choices one makes with language, how language influences and is influenced by context, as well as how language use creates meanings and enacts relationships among people and things *(Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020)*.
11. **Multilingual Learners:** Students who regularly interact with and use several languages. The term encompasses a variety of student groups including dual-language learners, newcomers, students with interrupted formal schooling, long-term ELs, ELs with disabilities, gifted and talented ELs, heritage language learners, and students who speak non-dominant/non-standard and indigenous varieties of English *(Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020)*.
12. **Scaffold:** A temporary support given to a student that enables the student to perform a task until such time that the student can perform this task independently. Scaffolding entails changing the quality and quantity of support provided to a student during a teaching cycle. The teacher adjusts the level of guidance to fit the student's current level of performance. This ties closely to the skill of contingent pedagogy and formative assessment. When scaffolding for ELs, educators must be able to monitor and understand, in the moment of teaching, the process by which students are making meaning of what is being taught, and their development and comprehension of language of learning in the moment.
13. **Supports:** Tools, services, or processes used to leverage the strengths English Learners (ELs), and their families bring and meet their needs to promote success. These may include instructional tools, services, and processes such as sketches, charts, and other visual aids, modeling, exemplars, sentence and paragraph frames, wait time, partners, etc. used to scaffold language and content learning. Supports also include tools, services and processes used to remove barriers to access and participation in schooling activities (transportation services, interpretation/translation services, childcare, etc.).
14. **Translanguaging:** The process whereby multilingual speakers, such as ELs, naturally draw from all the languages they know to communicate and learn *(Source: García, Ibarra Johnson & Seltzer, 2016)*

**Additionally, please see the** [**NGESL Interactive Glossary**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/fundamentals/glossary-terms.docx)**.**