## 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 3: Purposeful & Authentic Interaction**

*Instruction promotes students’ ability to use English for academic, social, and instructional purposes across modes of communication (listening, speaking, reading, & writing). It makes language visible, focusing on vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse practices within rich, authentic interaction with peers and teachers.*

***Connections:***

* Blueprint for EL Success:
  + [Pillar 3 (Opportunity and Support), Building Block 2 (Academic and Linguistic Supports)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/pillar3/p3b2-classroom.html)
* [Standards of Effective Practice](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/standards/default.html): II-A-3, II-B-2

**Element 3A: Facilitating Authentic Academic Discourse**

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| * *Educators… facilitate frequent and intentional opportunities for student-to-student and student-to-adult discourse, using flexible student groupings and facilitation strategies, to promote authentic interaction for students at all proficiency levels.* | * *Students…actively participate in high-quality conversations with peers and teachers (in pairs, small groups, and whole-group activities).* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Structure frequent, varied opportunities for authentic discourse** **across modes of communication** (e.g., organize discussions around essential questions, design collaborative tasks, facilitate academic conversations, incorporate student interests and real-world topics) * **Implement effective discussion protocols** (e.g., Socratic seminars, structured debates, reciprocal teaching, restorative circles, small group configurations) * **Provide targeted language supports** (e.g., model academic conversation moves, provide feedback, offer sentence frames and supports for various proficiency levels, use visual aids, think-pair-share, provide students with opportunities to prepare ideas prior to engaging in discussions) * **Monitor and adjust interaction structures** (e.g., vary grouping strategies, differentiate support based on proficiency levels, gather formative feedback on participation) | * **Engage in sustained academic discussions** (e.g., participate in meaningful peer and educator dialogues, contribute to content-focused conversations, discuss real-world applications with peers and educators) * **Demonstrate strong discussion skills** (e.g., build on peers' and educators’ ideas, support claims with evidence, ask probing questions to classmates and educators, engage confidently in academic discourse) * **Use language with increasing confidence** (e.g., employ content vocabulary appropriately in discussions with peers and educators, utilize discussion scaffolds effectively, clarify and elaborate ideas when speaking to educators and classmates) * **Show growing independence in discussions** (e.g., transition between group configurations smoothly, support peers in conversations, self-monitor language use, initiate and sustain discussions with educators,) |

Resources:

* [Oral Language Development in the ESL Best Practices Quick Reference Guide from the Next Generation ESL Toolkit](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/tools-resources/best-practices/oral-language.docx) (MA DESE)
* [Oral Language in the Classroom](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusBulletin-Oral-Language-Classroom.pdf) (WIDA)
* [Meaningful Classroom Talk: Supporting English Learners' Oral Language Development](https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/journal-meaningful-classroom-talk-supprting-english-learners-oral-language-development) (NCELA)
* [Principle 4 of High Leverage Principles of Effective Instruction for English Learners](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570911.pdf) (Neri et al, 2016)

**Element 3B: Extended Language Use**

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| * *Educators… encourage students to elaborate on their responses and use target language forms and features, with appropriate scaffolds as needed.* | * *Students… engage in daily opportunities for extended practice with target language forms and features to communicate across language domains (listening, speaking, reading, & writing).* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Teach key language systems explicitly** (e.g., model phonology, morphology, and syntax; deconstruct mentor texts; analyze genre, word parts and sentence structures; explore language at discourse, sentence, and word/phrase dimensions) * **Design authentic opportunities to use target language** (e.g., facilitate grade-level content discussions, debates around big ideas, substantive conversations). Include cooperative learning activities, collaborative projects, and real-world writing tasks. * **Guide analysis of discipline- specific language** (e.g., examine text structures, vocabulary, and discourse patterns specific to content areas, compare formal/informal language) * **Teach literacy strategies explicitly** (e.g., model reading comprehension strategies, guide writing process, demonstrate text analysis, facilitate academic discussions around complex texts, teach vocabulary in context) | * **Apply language systems purposefully** (e.g., consider purpose, audience, and context of language use; use vocabulary and grammar with growing precision; self-correct language errors; make meaning from complex texts) * **Participate in extended discussions** (e.g., engage in substantive discussions around big ideas, sustain academic conversations, elaborate on ideas, support claims with evidence, respond to and build on peers' contributions, collaborate meaningfully on projects) * **Use discipline-specific language**(e.g., engage with grade-level disciplinary text, employ content vocabulary and text structures, adjust language for different academic purposes, analyze language patterns) * **Apply literacy strategies with growing independence** (e.g., use reading comprehension strategies with complex texts, apply writing process to different genres, analyze texts critically, use academic vocabulary appropriately in context) |

Resources:

* [Expanding and Strengthening Vocabulary and Word Knowledge](https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/resource-snapshot/expanding-and-strengthening-vocabulary-and-word-knowledge) (WIDA)
* [WIDA Focus on STEM Discourse: Strengthening Reasoning, Strengthening Language](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-STEM-Discourse.pdf) (WIDA)
* [WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld) (Proficiency Level Descriptors) (WIDA)
* [The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Features of High-Quality ESL Instruction](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/fundamentals/hq-instruction--full-def.docx) (MA DESE)

**Element 3C: Language for Meaning-Making**

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| * *Educators… balance the teaching of disciplinary-specific language forms and features with activities focused on meaning-making and authentic communication.* | * *Students… select appropriate scaffolds (as needed) and multimodal resources to engage in purposeful communication with peers and teachers, work through understanding with complex texts and tasks, and learn grade-appropriate content.* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Design multimodal learning experiences** (e.g., integrate speaking, listening, reading, writing, and visual representation; provide interactive activities across modes; incorporate multimedia resources; use varied text types and genres) * **Guide analysis of language choices** (e.g., examine how language varies by purpose and context; explore different sentence structures and vocabulary choices; analyze language features in model texts and deconstruct subject-specific language patterns) * **Connect language forms to meaning** (e.g., balance form and function; link language structures to content understanding; demonstrate how language choices impact communication; explain disciplinary language conventions) * **Facilitate authentic communication** (e.g., create opportunities for meaningful interaction around content; engage students in real-world applications; promote critical discussions of complex texts; encourage cross-linguistic connections) * **Use language objectives to guide the integration of disciplinary-specific language into instruction** (e.g. identify daily language objectives that align to the driving language demands of the content objective; introduce objectives at start of lesson; use objectives as criteria for formative assessment of language development) | * **Select communication modes purposefully** (e.g., choose appropriate ways to demonstrate understanding; combine different modes effectively; create multimodal presentations; engage through various channels) * **Make intentional language choices** (e.g., adjust language for different audiences and purposes; use discipline-specific language appropriately; select effective language structures; apply language patterns strategically) * **Connect language forms to meaning** (e.g., understand how language choices affect meaning; use language structures to convey ideas clearly; analyze how language works in different contexts; employ academic language purposefully) * **Communicate authentically** (e.g., engage in meaningful academic discussions; negotiate understanding of complex texts; express ideas across contexts; use language for real purposes) * **Use language objectives to monitor language development** (e.g. reflect on learning in relation to objectives; monitor language use throughout the lesson) |

Resources:

* [WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld) (Section 2: Understanding the WIDA ELD Standards Framework and Section 4: Key Language Uses: A Closer Look) (WIDA)
* [Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/) (Design options for Language & Symbols) (CAST)
* [Comprehensive Overview: The Collaboration Tool](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/ele/comprehensive-overview-collaboration/index.html) (MA DESE)
* [Next Generation ESL Language Objectives](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/tools-resources/language-objectives.docx) (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. **Authentic Interactions:** Interactions characterized by consistency, accountability, responsibility, transparency, nurturance, sensitivity, and sincerity *(Source: Strengthening Partnerships, 2020)*.
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. **Discipline-Specific Language:** language used in distinctive ways within each discipline or field English *(Source: WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020)*.
8. **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 English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020)*.
9. **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)*.
10. **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)*.
11. **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 the language of learning in the moment.
12. **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.).
13. **Target Language:** primary language used for instruction, practice, and communication within the context of the lesson.
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)