## 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 1: Learning Environment**

MLs have equitable access to clean, safe, well-organized learning spaces that promote development of positive learning communities.

Classrooms with abundant reading materials feature resources that honor students' cultural and linguistic identities, support classroom expectations and routines, and encourage meaningful engagement in learning.

***Connections:***

* [Standards of Effective Practice](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/standards/default.html): II-A-3, II-B-1
* Blueprint for EL Success:
  + [Pillar 1 (School Culture) Building Block 1 (Shared responsibility for English learner success)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/pillar1/p1b1-classroom.html)
  + [Pillar 2 (Access to Educators), Building Block 1 (Effective, well-prepared, and culturally responsive educators)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/pillar2/p2b1-classroom.html)

**Element 1A: Physical Space & Organization**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * *Educators… provide a physical learning space that is clean, safe, organized, and includes the resources necessary to support a welcoming learning community including linguistically and culturally diverse resources.* | * *Students… utilize a variety of resources in the classroom, including displays, books and print material, multimodal texts (e.g., books, videos, audio, images), learning tools such as bilingual dictionaries, etc.* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Maintain an organized learning environment** (e.g., adequate lighting, clear sight lines, clean spaces) * **Create accessible systems for materials** (e.g., labeled storage at student eye-level, resources in multiple languages, clear organization) * **Design flexible learning spaces** (e.g., individual work areas, small group zones, collaborative spaces) * **Establish clear traffic patterns** (e.g., defined pathways, visible learning areas, easy access to resources) | * **Navigate the learning environment purposefully** (e.g., move between areas such as learning stations smoothly, transition efficiently, access spaces appropriately) * **Use materials independently** (e.g., locate resources, select appropriate tools, return items properly) * **Maintain organized workspaces that support learning** (e.g., manage materials, follow care routines, keep areas tidy) * **Engage effectively in various learning configurations** (e.g., work independently, collaborate in groups, participate in whole class activities) |

Resources:

* [Creating a Welcoming Classroom](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/learners/welcoming-classroom) (WIDA)
* [Five Strategies to Welcome Newcomers into Your Classroom](https://wida.wisc.edu/news/five-strategies-welcome-newcomers-your-classroom) (WIDA)
* [The Classroom Checkup](https://classroomcheckup.org/) (Classroom Checkup)

**Element 1B: Routines and Norms for a Positive Learning Community**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * *Educators… effectively implement classroom routines, expectations, and shared norms for a positive learning community that fosters mutual respect and encourages students to take academic risks; routines are clear and accessible to students.* | * *Students… take ownership and demonstrate investment in the classroom's routines, expectations, and shared norms to support their learning and participate in the classroom community.* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Foster a positive, inclusive climate where all students feel safe and valued** (e.g., greet students, use inclusive language, acknowledge each student’s identity, incorporate student input into learning experiences, learn about student interests) * **Maintain clear routines and expectations** (e.g., consistent entry/exit procedures, protocols for academic discussions, structured feedback processes, organized transitions between activities) * **Foster a culture that supports risk-taking and promotes psychological safety** (e.g., frame errors as a natural part of the learning process) * **Integrate SEL competencies throughout the day** (e.g., model respectful behavior and skills for managing emotions and relationships) * **Support and celebrate the use of home languages and dialects as valid forms of expression in speaking and writing** (e.g. during checks for understanding, in discussions) | * **Feel safe, supported, and a sense of belonging and ownership of their own learning** (e.g., take risks in learning; practice speaking in front of the class, ask for clarification or elaboration, engage with teacher and peer feedback, experiment with new skills without fear of judgment) * **Build positive identities as independent learners through interactions with peers, teachers, and resources** * **Demonstrate self-awareness and relationship building skills** (e.g., engage in collaborative work; ensure all voices are heard; offer compliments, encouragement or assistance to peers; resolve conflicts) * **Embrace behavior, participation, and engagement expectations** (e.g., raise hands, wait turns, use respectful language) * **Use home language** (e.g. during inquiries, demonstrate understanding) |

Resources:

* [Next Generation ESL Instructional Delivery Approaches Quick Reference Guides](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/fundamentals/delivery-approach/default.html) (see the learning space look fors) (MA DESE)
* [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/) (National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments)
* [Blueprint for EL Success Quick Reference Guide: Social and Emotional Supports](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/qrg/313-p3b3-classroom.pdf) (MA DESE)
* [Social and Emotional Learning in Massachusetts](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/sel/default.html) (MA DESE)

**Element 1C: Displays That Support Learning**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * *Educators maintain classroom displays (posters/charts/visuals) that provide social, instructional, and subject-area language examples. These displays support access to grade-level content, showcase student work, and promote student interaction.* | * *Students…build their own positive identities as independent learners in the classroom through interactions with peers, teachers, and resources.* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Model disciplinary language through displays** (e.g., content vocabulary, sentence frames, writing exemplars, cross-linguistic connections) * **Post disciplinary specific language structures** (e.g., thinking routines, discussion protocols, process guides, claim-evidence-reasoning frames, problem-solving steps) * **Create interactive reference tools** (e.g., interactive bulletin boards where students post questions and answers, anchor and process charts, student-created resources) * **Display annotated student work** (e.g., highlighted language functions and language features, success criteria) | * **Use language supports independently** (e.g., reference models, apply structures, follow guides) * **Monitor their language progress** (e.g., check work against exemplars, use success criteria, self-correct) * **Apply academic language appropriately** (e.g., use vocabulary, follow discourse patterns, engage in discussions) * **Transfer skills across contexts** (e.g., apply strategies, adapt language use, make connections) |

Resources:

* [Inclusive Practice Tool: Self-Assessment Tool](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/2d-teacherselfassess.pdf) (MA DESE)
* [Inclusive Practice Tool: Massachusetts Classroom Teacher Rubric Resource](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/2a-rubric.pdf) (MA DESE)
* [Language and Culture](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusBulletin-Language-Culture.pdf) (WIDA)

**Element 1D: Culturally Affirming Materials and Resources**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * *Educators… utilize a wide range and abundance of books, print material, and multimodal texts that honor students’ backgrounds, promote cultural and linguistic diversity, and provide windows, mirrors, and doors.* | * *Students…engage with peers respectfully and support one another's learning so that all members of the learning community feel comfortable taking risks.* |
| ***If educators…*** | ***Then students are more likely to…*** |
| * **Curate diverse multimodal materials** (e.g., texts, visuals, artifacts) representing diverse cultures, identities, and experiences (e.g., texts by authors from students' cultural backgrounds, content examples from various cultural contexts, authentic materials from students’ communities) * **Ensure multilingual access** (e.g., resources in home languages, bilingual materials, translation tools) * **Display varied perspectives** (e.g., student work samples, cultural artifacts, community contributions) * **Incorporate cultural resources** (e.g., family stories, community knowledge, cultural traditions) and reflect on own cultural biases to ensure cultural respect, humility, and openness | * **Gain insights into diverse perspectives** (e.g. engage with diverse texts, collaborate with diverse peers, discuss authentic texts from various cultural contexts) * **Connect learning to their experiences** (e.g., relate content to their lives, recognize relevance) * **Leverage home language and culture with confidence to deepen understanding** (e.g., access bilingual materials, transfer knowledge across languages, share cultural knowledge, contribute resources) * **Build positive academic and cultural identities, seeing themselves as capable learners in all content areas** (e.g., see themselves in materials, take academic risks, pursue challenging content) |

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)
* [Next Generation ESL Curriculum Modules: Monitoring and Elevating Student Voices](https://www.doe.mass.edu/rlo/ele/esl-curriculum-modules/index.html#/lessons/amlzN23OYKQpV9L2SM5OhwBLfTMuSeIE) (MA DESE)
* [Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-sustaining/default.html) (MA DESE)
* [Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/language-symbols/languages-dialects/) (CAST)

## 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 leverage them for success. In contrast, deficit-based approaches highlight problems and inadequacies of students and educators.
3. **Assets:** Strengths or funds of knowledge that 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. **Culturally Responsive:** Cultural responsiveness means educators and the system actively draw on individuals’ diverse backgrounds, strengths, and challenges to deepen learning. Culturally responsive educators adapt instruction to incorporate strategies that connect to and value each student.
8. **Culturally Sustaining**: Practices, actions, and policies that foster and support individuals' diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges. For instruction, this means connecting learning to histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities and to the histories of neighborhoods and cities ELs are a part of. This is the highest level of cultural responsiveness on the Massachusetts Cultural Responsiveness Continuum.
9. **Discipline- Specific Language:** language used in distinctive ways within each discipline or field English *(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 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.).

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