

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

BRIEF 2

Evidence-Based Tier 2 Intervention Practices for English Learners



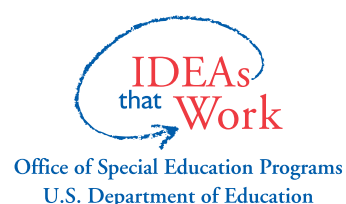
English Learner Literacy Intervention
Programs and Strategies
ENSURING SUCCESS



MTSS for ELs

Support

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Multitiered Instructional Frameworks

When implemented effectively, multitiered instructional frameworks support educators in providing high-quality culturally and linguistically responsive instruction for English learners, including those in need of supplemental instruction in language and literacy. Further, when a multitiered system of supports includes assessment procedures that are linguistically aligned and informed by educators' knowledge of the language-acquisition process, students with disabilities are accurately identified.

In this second brief in the series, three model demonstration projects describe their work implementing multitiered instructional models for English learners with and without disabilities in grades 3 to 5 and introduce key issues to consider.

Overview

This is the second brief in the series *Meeting the Needs of English Learners With and Without Disabilities*. It features the work of three model demonstration projects whose interventions support the language and literacy needs of English learners (ELs) in grades 3–5, specifically through supplemental intervention (Tier 2) that is culturally and linguistically responsive.



Who Should Read This Brief?

This series of briefs is for school leaders, educators, and policymakers charged with implementing and supporting multitiered instructional frameworks that respond to the needs of ELs. It provides support in the following:

- Design and delivery of Tier 2 intervention for ELs with and without disabilities
- Data analysis and instructional decision-making
- Criteria for identifying students who need Tier 2 intervention

Structure

We begin this brief with an introduction to multitiered instruction for ELs within a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) framework. We pose some initial questions that educators, leaders, and policymakers should consider as they plan for implementation. We discuss the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive instructional practice and note oral language considerations, including the need for oral language assessment. And, finally, we outline evidence-based intervention practices.

Rather than describing or promoting any particular intervention program, we aim throughout this brief to discuss evidence-based practices that can be applied across Tier 2 interventions. To demonstrate how practitioners can implement the evidence-based strategies described, three model demonstration projects also provide "In Action" examples of the work at their respective model demonstration sites. These examples illustrate how a specific set of Tier 2 strategies can be implemented systematically within the unique contexts in which educators work.

Introduction

In the fall of 2016, there were nearly 5 million ELs in U.S. public schools.¹ This represents 10% of U.S. public school enrollees, up from 8% in 2000. In the fall of 2017, 14.3% of all ELs were also identified as having a disability.² About half of ELs with disabilities are identified with a specific learning disability and about a fifth are identified as having a speech or language impairment.³

Tier 2 intervention is provided to ELs who perform below grade-level benchmarks and demonstrate significant and persistent needs. When considering which ELs require supplemental intervention, teams should reflect on the following questions:

- Is core instruction differentiated to the unique language and literacy instructional needs of ELs?
- Do data indicate that a disproportionate number of ELs need Tier 2 intervention?
- Does core instruction include a rigorous native language and/or English oral language development component?
- Is oral language proficiency monitored regularly and are data used to inform language and literacy instruction?
- Are Tier 2 interventions culturally and linguistically responsive?
- Is the language of intervention aligned with the primary language of core instruction?
- Are literacy progress monitoring assessments valid and reliable for ELs and are they used regularly?

Overview of Tier 2 Intervention for ELs

Tier 2 intervention is typically provided to students who score in the lowest 20% on screening assessments. Ongoing assessment results guide the design and implementation of developmentally appropriate evidence-based best practices that address the needs of these students. Interventions, provided in small groups, integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in explicit, strategic instructional practices. Students are provided guided and independent practice with corrective feedback. Intervention may be provided through evidence-supported programs or evidence-supported practices that have been validated and show strong evidence of effectiveness for ELs.⁴

Effective Tier 2 intervention for ELs

is characterized by

- differentiated, high-quality language and literacy instruction with varying levels of intensity;
- a focus on social and academic language development;
- educator knowledge of the second-language acquisition process and the role of native and English language proficiency in reading achievement; and
- data-informed, appropriate instructional adjustments.

1 de Brey et al., 2019

2 NCES, 2019

3 U.S. Department of Education, 2019

4 Kearns et al., 2014

In Action:

Culturally Responsive Practice

Starting on page 10, learn how teachers in three model demonstration projects implemented CRP in their classrooms.

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practice

Culturally and linguistically responsive practice is an essential feature of multitiered instructional frameworks for ELs. It is based on the understanding that all learning is shaped by the specific sociocultural context in which it occurs (e.g., home, community, school) and involves integrating students' cultural and linguistic knowledge in the learning process.

Linan-Thompson and colleagues (2018) identified four culturally responsive practice (CRP) domains to consider: **instructional** (evidence-based instructional strategies to support EL learning), **language** (teaching that respects ELs' native language), **social** (strong relationships with students and a supportive learning environment), and **cultural knowledge** (deep knowledge of students' cultural, ethnic, racial, and social identities). These CRP domains should be integrated into all aspects of teaching, from planning core instruction and supplemental interventions to instructional delivery, to provide optimal learning conditions.⁵

ELs, in particular, may struggle or disengage when there is a disconnect between teaching practices and the sociocultural practices of their home and community. Disengagement can resemble symptoms of learning disabilities, such as attention issues, poor comprehension, and low academic achievement. Therefore, Tier 2 intervention should feature equitable and appropriate learning opportunities that are evidence-based and deemed valid for ELs. That includes preteaching vocabulary, activating background knowledge, and helping ELs make connections to cross-curricular topics. In fact, ELs' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can be integrated into Tier 2 intervention to bridge learning.

Culturally and linguistically responsive Tier 2 intervention engages ELs through

- an asset-based approach to instruction;
- the validation and use of native language;
- an affirmation of students' identities and cultural knowledge;
- strong home-school communication;
- and diverse opportunities for family engagement.

Oral Language Considerations

In a response to intervention (RtI) approach to multitiered intervention, instructional planning is guided by results of universal screenings, benchmark assessments, and curriculum-based progress monitoring measures. Because oral language assessments are not routinely included in RtI for ELs, teachers may not have enough information about native language and/or English proficiency to deliver lessons that support oral language development and to determine whether students are making expected progress. ELs with age- or developmentally-appropriate native language skills have a good foundation for acquiring English; those with communication difficulties in their native language are likely to have difficulty acquiring English. There is also substantial evidence that a child with low language abilities will have difficulty becoming a reader and writer.⁶

⁵ Linan-Thompson et al., 2018

⁶ Catts et al., 2006

Oral language assessment. In daily communication, ELs use their native and English linguistic skills, separately and together, to meet their communication goals. Oral language assessments should capture the full range of students' language abilities, in each language as well as cumulatively, across languages. For example, students who know 10 words in English and 10 different words in Vietnamese should be given credit for knowing 20 words; assessing vocabulary skills in each language independently underestimates their linguistic abilities, which can, in turn, lead to the inaccurate conclusion that students have limited vocabulary skills. Even when students are being taught entirely in English, efforts should be made to document knowledge of other languages (e.g., by asking parents about their perceptions of their child's native language abilities or by having bilingual professionals observe and document the student's abilities).

Teachers can assess conversational and academic language skills by using a variety of instruments and procedures such as language samples, checklists, rating scales, observations, and anecdotal notes. For instance, language samples provide a measure of how well students understand and speak in their native language and English, and story retelling combined with dictation tasks (receptive measures) or cloze tasks (expressive measures) can be used to analyze students' academic language proficiency.⁷ Parent and/or family input is an important part of the language assessment process because it provides valuable information about children's language acquisition and communication effectiveness at home and in the community. Ultimately the goal is for ELs to develop proficiency in their native language and/or in English, depending on the program model in which they are served (e.g., bilingual education or ESL). Students who are proficient have age- and grade-appropriate social and academic oral language skills. Those who are bilingual demonstrate linguistic dexterity and can adjust dual language use according to task and context demands. For example, they can navigate between and across languages and respond in the language in which tasks are presented.⁸ Progress in the native language and/or in English should be continuously monitored.

Oral language intervention. Teachers should use assessment data to establish baseline levels of language proficiency in the native language and/or English and evaluate progress in oral language development in relation to instruction. Students who do not progress as expected or do not meet oral language objectives, despite access to effective core instruction, should be provided Tier 2 intervention to support language development. The intervention should be in the same language as core instruction. If intervention is provided in English, it should incorporate scaffolds to ensure that students understand lesson content. For example, at the beginning stages of English proficiency, students need more visual supports and opportunities to give nonverbal or

In Action:

Oral Language Instruction

Read about how educators in three model demonstration projects implemented oral language instruction in their classrooms starting on page 10.

short answers, or they need to use their native language (full linguistic repertoire) to demonstrate comprehension. ELs with intermediate proficiency may need specific support developing metalinguistic awareness in their syntax, morphology, and pragmatic skills, and they need instruction in discipline-specific vocabulary. Those with advanced proficiency may have grade-appropriate language skills and need little language support to perform most academic tasks; yet, they may still need targeted instruction for their continued oral and written language development.

7 Ortiz & Robertson, 2018

8 Otheguy et al., 2015

Building students' receptive and expressive language skills is an important focus of Tier 2 intervention. Students must develop the language skills needed to communicate their thoughts and ideas and share what they have learned. They must be able to use language that fits the context and is coherent, logically sequenced, and structurally correct. Within the oral language domain, ELs commonly experience difficulties with vocabulary and grammar; teachers should explicitly target these skills.⁹ To teach skills such as these, teachers should group students with similar language needs, but they should also structure groups to provide students with language difficulties access to peers who can model age-appropriate language skills.

Tier 2 intervention for language development incorporates strategies that target the vocabulary and language structures used for higher-level purposes such as describing, explaining, summarizing, analyzing, predicting, synthesizing, and evaluating. Teachers and interventionists should model discipline-specific language and elaborate on students' responses by, for example, paraphrasing and providing affirming feedback. They should also engage students in structured academic discussions of the content being taught and provide multiple opportunities for them to use language, including summarizing key vocabulary and concepts they have learned.¹⁰ Students should be empowered not only to respond to teacher talk, but also to initiate talk, and they should be able to express themselves meaningfully and respectfully, supporting their ideas with evidence from text and other data sources. To that end, teachers can have ELs talk about lesson content with partners and groups, using a variety of think-pair-share variations (e.g., think-draw-pair-share; mix-pair-share). These strategies give students time to formulate their responses before sharing them with peers. Teachers can also provide sentence frames (e.g., I would conclude that ... ; In my opinion ... ; This makes me think about ...) to help students think about and structure what they will share. In summary, Tier 2 intervention planning should be guided by results of oral language assessments that identify vocabulary and language structures that students have yet to master. Because students have not learned these structures incidentally, teachers should specifically target these skills in their lessons.

Essential Components of Tier 2 Reading Intervention

Tier 2 intervention is provided to students based on assessed needs in reading. In grades 3–5, ELs typically struggle with vocabulary and comprehension, underscoring the need to develop academic language. Tier 2 intervention strategies include building comprehension, developing vocabulary, developing fluency, and advancing language development. However, some may also need support to develop phonological awareness, phonics skills, and fluency. Implementation of the following components are guided by regular review of data and are adjusted in response to students' progress and instructional needs.

Flexible grouping. Tier 2 small groups comprise four to six students experiencing similar difficulties. Strategic grouping is essential because it supports students at their instructional level, addresses specific skill need, and facilitates appropriate pacing of instruction. Grouping formats should include attention to language of instruction and students' language proficiency levels to ensure access to instruction.

Systematic instructional approach. Tier 2 reading intervention should be implemented in an explicit, sequential, and systematic manner. Differentiation should be provided at the group and individual levels. Addi-

⁹ Cavazos & Ortiz, 2020

¹⁰ *ibid.*

tionally, scaffolds for language and reading should be provided as needed. Instructional pacing should correspond to student learning.

Language scaffolds. Many Tier 2 evidence-based reading strategies for struggling learners have also been found to be effective for ELs when language scaffolds are incorporated into the instruction. The use of visuals, animations, and gestures can assist ELs' vocabulary development. Without the added language scaffolds for ELs, evidence-based strategies are less effective. Teachers should be trained in how to use scaffolds that support native language and/or English development.

Appropriate pace. Supplemental intervention should be carefully planned to support individual skill gaps. The selected intervention should be sequenced at an appropriate rate to achieve mastery of the targeted skills. If all group members are progressing steadily, teachers should maintain a brisk pace.

Explicit teaching of vocabulary strategies. Teachers should select words to teach that are both considered basic words (including those with different meanings in different contexts; i.e., the word "run") and academic words (content learning). ELs will need to learn the various meanings through examples and nonexamples. Academic words are often conceptually complex, challenging to describe, but useful for understanding text. It is important to also teach word-learning strategies to ELs who struggle with vocabulary knowledge. Two effective word-learning strategies for ELs are cognate awareness and morphemic awareness. Cognate awareness is the ability to determine if words exist in both languages and use the known definition to learn new words in the target language. It is important for teachers to model cognate awareness routines so students can learn this strategy and generalize it when reading text. Similarly, morphemic awareness is the ability to identify word parts such as prefixes, roots, and suffixes and use them to learn new words across both languages. These word parts have meaning and can represent cognates that assist ELs in expanding word knowledge. Explicitly teaching these strategies will help students apply them independently and increase their academic vocabulary.

Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies. ELs who struggle with reading comprehension will require explicitly taught systematic comprehension strategies to become active and strategic readers. Teachers must explicitly teach higher-order comprehension strategies (e.g., inferencing, drawing conclusions, cause and effect, summarizing, synthesizing, making predictions) that ELs can use across varying text genres. Evidence-based strategies for ELs include explicitly teaching how to use metacognitive strategies (think about what is being read), visualizing, making connections to the text, and asking clarifying questions. Teachers should model and practice the strategies with their students using the gradual release of responsibility approach (I do, we do, you do). Explicit, affirming, and corrective feedback and interactive, structured academic discussions are also recommended to support in-depth understanding of words through listening, speaking, reading, and writing and to deepen comprehension. ELs also benefit from learning how to self-monitor their comprehension and check for understanding. Question answering and question generation are routines that can also aid comprehension and develop oral language. Collaborative learning and peer support are also recommended strategies for ELs that facilitate learning and help to lower ELs' affective filter or learning anxiety.¹¹ They create the conditions for ELs to feel comfortable taking risks with language and learning without fear of making mistakes.

Progress monitoring in oral language and reading. Teachers should use reliable and valid progress-monitoring tools that reflect the language of instruction and progress toward targeted oral language and reading

11 Krashen, 1985

objectives. Progress-monitoring should be conducted bimonthly to determine student growth, any necessary instructional adjustments, and whether to discontinue Tier 2 intervention. Teachers should ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently). Informal formative assessments and frequent diagnostic checks are also recommended.

Equitable Access to High-Quality Intervention

If language arts instruction is in a students' native language, Tier 2 intervention should also be in that language. If interventionists do not speak the students' native language, bilingual education teachers may have to assume responsibility for teaching target skills in the context of daily instruction. This may require creative strategies such as grouping students with similar difficulties across classrooms during small group reading. Teachers can also suggest ways that parents and siblings can support ELs at home (e.g., talking to them, telling stories, talking about what they are reading in school). If appropriate, monolingual interventionists can use ESL strategies and focus on teaching skills that support cross linguistic transfer of oral language skills (e.g., teaching vocabulary skills to communicate concepts they have already acquired in their native language). School leaders must actively seek ways to ensure that ELs, like their non-EL peers, have access to highly qualified interventionists with expertise in bilingual language development.

Summary

In summary, when planning Tier 2 intervention for ELs, culturally and linguistically responsive practice with an emphasis on oral language development must be embedded within instruction. Without the oral language strategies and scaffolds, the intervention will not be effective for ELs. In addition, the essential components of Tier 2 interventions ensure learning (flexible grouping, explicit instructional approach, use of evidence-based strategies validated on ELs, and appropriate instructional pacing). Teachers benefit from continuously adding evidence-based reading strategies for ELs to their toolkits. To augment the vocabulary and comprehension strategies featured above, please see recommended strategies listed for each project. Regular, frequent, valid, and reliable progress monitoring for ELs' language and reading development is required to determine the effects of the intervention on student learning and to make instructional adjustments as needed. It is important to ensure equitable access to Tier 2 intervention for ELs, which includes highly qualified professionals who use asset-based approaches to meet the language and literacy needs of ELs.

In Action: Three Model Demonstration Sites Implement Tier 2 Reading Intervention

In this section, three model demonstration projects share how they have implemented or enhanced supplemental intervention for ELs. Through classroom vignettes, each project demonstrates different strategies that were used to meet the language and literacy needs of students receiving Tier 2 intervention. The examples show how strategies align with different instructional models, including bilingual education and ESL programs.

Project LEE (Lectura para Excelencia y Éxito)

Project LEE partners with three K–5 elementary schools in a metropolitan area of the Pacific Northwest: two dual-language immersion schools and one with English-only instruction with English language development services. The partnering district serves over 12,000 students, and ELs represent 22% of their K–12 students (ELs make up 20–34% of the student body at the project schools). Although the majority of the ELs are native Spanish speakers, students in the school district speak more than 80 languages.

Project LEE partner schools use evidence-based intervention programs to serve students in Tier 2. Because the majority of English intervention programs are not designed for ELs or have not included ELs in their research base, Project LEE supports teachers in enhancing Tier 2 intervention to address the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students. Intervention teachers use the PLUSS framework to enhance intervention lessons for ELs. At the end of lessons, teachers use the PLUSS rubric as a self-reflection tool.

Strategies in Action: A Classroom Vignette

In this vignette, a Project LEE teacher provides evidence-based Tier 2 reading intervention to ELs.

The students are preparing to read a story about dune buggies. The teacher preteaches vocabulary words (i.e., *fuel*, *fumes*, *cruise*, *dune*) using gestures, pictures, and student-friendly definitions. The teacher and students preview the text and illustrations. The teacher shows students a sentence frame, “I predict that we will read about ____” and models making a prediction. She pairs the students (using intentional partnership and explicit tasks) and

The PLUSS Framework

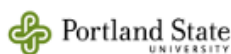
To ensure Tier 2 supplemental interventions are culturally and linguistically responsive, Project LEE uses the PLUSS Framework to enhance existing intervention programs. Research on evidence-based practices for effective instruction for ELs was synthesized to develop the PLUSS framework, which involves

- **P**reteaching critical vocabulary and priming background knowledge,
- **L**anguage modeling and opportunities for practice,
- **U**sing visuals and graphic organizers.
- **S**ystematic and explicit instruction, and
- **S**trategic use of native language and teaching for transfer.

partners take turns sharing their predictions (using controlled alternation, or turn taking, for a specific period of time so each partner gets to talk and has a clear role) with each other before sharing with the whole group.

To establish how well students read the unpracticed text, students independently read the story and graph the number of words they read correctly in one minute (called a “cold read”). Students then read the text and highlight words they could not read and or did not understand. The teacher then leads an echo reading activity, reading a phrase or sentence and having the students repeat it. Students then raise a finger when they come to a word they have highlighted, and the teacher provides a quick definition to ensure comprehension without interrupting the story. Students practice reading the story chorally to develop their rate and phrasing. Finally, the students read the passage independently and track the number of words read and graph their fluency. The teacher checks the students’ comprehension with an activity like summarizing the text and has them discuss what they liked about the story. By using the PLUSS enhancements, the teacher notes that students increased their story comprehension and engagement.

Figure 1. Self-Observation and Reflection Protocol



PROJECT LEE Teacher Self-Observation Protocol: **PLUSS** Features



Teacher: Ms. Sosa

Grade: 3-4

Date: N/A

Language: Eng

Model: (TWI) English

Teaching and Language Goal: Students will read story with 95% accuracy. Students will be able to retell the story with 100% accuracy.

PLUSS Feature	Highlight any instructional strategies you saw utilized to support the ELs*	Note how ELs were supported, responses (or opportunities to improve support)	Not in place	Partially in place	Fully in place
Pre-teaching vocabulary and priming background knowledge	Addresses vocabulary & background knowledge : • fast mapping unknown vocabulary • using system to ID unknown words • pre-teaching difficult vocabulary words • pre-teaching necessary background knowledge	• Flagging unknown words with finger • Highlight with colored highlighters • Pre-taught: fuel, fumes, cruise, dune • To teach concept of “cruising” used TPR	0	1	(2)
Language use & modeling	Opportunities for students to practice targeted language skills : • sentence frames • opportunities to talk/write	• Orally used sentence frame: “I predict we will read about _____.”	0	(1)	2
Using visuals & graphic organizers	Uses visuals and graphic organizers in lesson sentence strips: • pictures, realia • motions or TPR (Total physical response)	• Picture of dunes on phone • TPR: fumes & cruise	0	(1)	2
Systematic & explicit instruction	Includes systematic and explicit instruction modeling : • guided practice with feedback • partner and independent practice	• Body of intervention lesson • Echo read • Choral read • Independent read (students graphed words read per minute)	0	1	(2)
Strategic use of native language	Addresses student’s native language needs : • provides additional practice on skills relevant to student’s native language and culture	• No native language (L1)	(0)	1	2

*Not all strategies need to be used in every lesson; teachers should select the most appropriate supports for their student population and lesson content.
This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Award Number H326M16008). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education.
Brown & Sanford, 2019

For ongoing enhancement of intervention, teachers can use the self-observation protocol to assess their implementation of the PLUSS features and plan lessons.

Project ELLIPSES

(English Learner Literacy Intervention Programs and Strategies: Ensuring Success)

Project ELLIPSES partners with three K–5 elementary schools in South Texas near the Texas-Mexico border. Of the nearly 1,900 students in these schools, 99% are Hispanic and 51% are ELs. The participating district uses an early exit transitional bilingual (English/Spanish) education model. English is the primary language of instruction by third grade. All school staff members at the three participating schools are bilingual in English and Spanish. Therefore, language supports for ELs are provided throughout the school day.

Following a district-level MTSS framework, the participating schools monitor students' academic progress every 2 to 4 weeks using curriculum-based measures. Students not meeting grade-level standards in reading are grouped by academic need for Tier 2 supplemental instruction provided by the classroom teachers. Supplemental curricular materials from the textbook adoption series and additional resources, such as trade books, are used to address skill gaps.

During a designated Tier 2 block, teachers simultaneously target reading skills and oral language development. They guide students through a recursive cycle of strategy application designed to develop conceptual understanding and improve reading comprehension. Linguistic support (e.g., preteaching vocabulary, visuals and manipulatives, sentence frames) is provided to accommodate students' differing levels of English proficiency. Teachers also provide native language support as needed (e.g., by previewing the lesson or explaining concepts in Spanish) and allow students to respond in their native language as a bridge to English.

Project ELLIPSES provided job-embedded professional development to ensure teachers had a repertoire of evidence-based strategies for Tier 2 intervention. Professional learning included modeling and demonstration of strategies using a gradual release model, coaching and feedback, support with lesson planning, follow-up observations, and anytime learning through professional development training and resources available on the project website.

Strategies in Action: A Classroom Vignette

In this vignette, a Project ELLIPSES teacher provides evidence-based reading intervention to fourth-grade ELs.



Figure 2. Project ELLIPSES Classroom

A group of six ELs are struggling with the concept of cause and effect. The teacher explicitly explains the concept (this happened because of this) and provides several examples illustrated with large cause and effect posters (e.g., *Muddy Troubles*, depicting children playing in the mud and their mother reprimanding them).

She uses the posters as anchors/prompts and allows each student the opportunity to identify the cause and effect relationship shown on the poster. She connects the lesson to students' lives, asking them if they had

ever been in a similar situation or been reprimanded by their mothers. Students share being in very similar situations. She helps students make connections with the lesson and engages them in the learning. Using turn

and talk as a linguistic scaffold, the students discuss in pairs. The teacher monitors the partner discussions and affirms or corrects their responses as needed. She provides native language support for a student with low English proficiency, explaining the concept of cause and effect in Spanish and using cognates (*cause/causa*) to support conceptual understanding. By the end of the lesson, every student is able to explain cause and effect and share examples. Then the group reads a short text that features cause and effect and are successful in using the cause and effect strategy (this happened because of this). The teacher ends the lesson with each student turning to their partner to explain cause and effect (the effect is what happened, and the cause is what made it happen). Students voice this simple description multiple times to ensure they understand the difference between the two concepts. The teacher's instruction is culturally and linguistically responsive, as evidenced by her affirming feedback, connections made between learning and students' lives, multiple opportunities to use language, and linguistic support.

Evidence-Based Strategies for Instructing ELs

Project ELLIPSES provided job-embedded professional development featuring the following evidence-based strategies.

Implement an explicit evidence-based reading intervention.

- Use results of screening and benchmark assessments.
- Target strengths and needs.

Use evidence-based reading strategies.

- Address the academic language demands of the lesson.
- Build/activate background knowledge.
- Integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains.
- Provide ample opportunities for student participation through extended oral discourse.
- Involve structured peer collaboration.
- Use the gradual release of responsibility approach (I do, we do, you do).

Focus on oral language development.

- Differentiate for varying language proficiency levels.
- Use a variety of scaffolds (visual, language, and concrete).
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to engage in discussion with peers around content.
- Plan structured academic discussions for multiple group settings.

Preplan supports for vocabulary.

- Preteach vocabulary.
- Teach vocabulary strategies targeting morphemic awareness, multiple-meaning words, cognates for crosslinguistic transfer, and contextual analysis.
- Use semantic mapping.

Monitor language and literacy skill development.

- Schedule regular formative and summative assessments.
- Use frequent informal diagnostic checks to determine the effects of the intervention.
- Make instruction adjustments when needed.

Project ELITE² (English Learner Institute for Teaching and Excellence)

Project ELITE² partners with three K–5 elementary schools in Central Texas that implement one-way dual language programming (Spanish/English) for ELs in the primary grades. For the majority of ELs served by our partner schools, grades 3–5 represented students’ transition to majority-English instruction (some in third grade, some in fourth grade). In these grades, ELs were served by both dual-language instructional models and ESL/sheltered instruction models, depending on the campus.

Project ELITE² has worked with schools to raise educators’ knowledge of how to modify Tier 2 interventions to meet the specific instructional needs of ELs. In collaboration with practitioners, we developed and refined an instructional model that educators used to enhance both core (Tier 1) and targeted supplemental instruction (Tier 2), with a focus on the six practices below.

Six Practices for Enhancing Tier 2 Instruction for ELs

Relevant content. Teachers integrate instructional content and reading texts that reflect features of ELs’ cultural backgrounds, linguistic knowledge, ethnicities, and lived experiences.¹²

Students’ prior knowledge and lived experiences. Teachers understand and activate students’ prior knowledge, and they facilitate connections between academic content and students’ lived experiences when constructing knowledge and meaning from texts. Teachers facilitate use of students’ full linguistic repertoire (home language and English) during instruction.¹³

Active and equitable participation. Teachers establish “intellectually safe” environments, meaning that teachers provide equitable opportunities for all students’ active participation, and students feel comfortable practicing the language(s) they are developing.¹⁴

High-quality linguistic input and structured language practice. Teachers expose students to high-quality linguistic input, preteach key linguistic features of the languages students are developing, and provide opportunities to practice language through meaningful interaction.¹⁵

High-quality instructional discourse. Teachers facilitate text-based discussions using discourse practices that have been shown to promote higher-order thinking and reading comprehension.¹⁶

Instruction in all four language domains. Core and supplemental instruction include direct teaching of language and high-quality practice opportunities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

12 Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2018; Nieto, 2013; Powell et al., 2016;

13 Beeman & Urow, 2013; Cummins, 1996, 2000; Gay, 2010; Gutiérrez et al., 2001; Hammond, 2018; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Nieto, 2013; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015; Powell et al., 2016

14 Hammond, 2013, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2013

15 August et al., 2009; Baker et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2018; Shanahan et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2009

16 Klingelhofer & Schleppegrell, 2016; Michaels & O’Connor, 2015; Michener et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2009; Rydland, 2018; Soter et al., 2008

Strategies in Action: A Classroom Vignette

In this vignette, a fifth-grade teacher targets oral language development in Tier 2 instruction.

Over the course of a series of lessons, the teacher strategically creates reading groups of four to five students, selects culturally relevant texts that are appropriate for their reading and language proficiency levels, and divides the reading texts into chunks. Before students engage in independent reading, the teacher delivers a focused mini-lesson targeting vocabulary and comprehension development. For this particular text, *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, the teacher teaches the words *ranch*, *crochet*, *proposal*, and *strike* using student-friendly definitions, visuals, and nonlinguistic representations. She also targets a specific comprehension process, **using text evidence to support ideas**, explicitly teaching and modeling the process for students. Finally, the teacher reviews the criteria for successful text-based discussions she had taught in previous lessons and reminds students to use their language scaffolds (sentence-stem cards) as needed during discussions.

During the Tier 2 intervention block, the teacher provides guided support in the vocabulary and comprehension practices targeted during the mini-lesson. She engages in guided reading of the text, and guided practice with students in word-learning strategies. During reading students record additional new words they encounter in the text, compose a written summary of the chunk, and respond to open-ended comprehension prompts. The student workbooks serve as an organizer for their learning in preparation for group discussions. Next, students use what they have written to **engage in structured, text-based discussion to advance their comprehension of the text and practice language**.

Through observation of students’ interactions, the teacher **acknowledges and validates how ELs used language successfully** to negotiate meaning, demonstrate critical thinking, and present evidence to support their arguments and ideas. She provides positive feedback to one student for using the new vocabulary words *devious* and *dishonest* to support her argument about Tío Luis, a character in the book. She reinforces another student’s use of text evidence to build on his peer’s ideas and add an additional argument. She tells the group, “Amal knew that because of what she learned about Tío Luis’s character.” The teacher also models how to go back to the text and find text evidence to use in their writing. Students then practice communicating their arguments in writing.

In summary, the teacher integrates an oral language focus into her instruction by providing meaningful, structured opportunities for ELs to use and practice language while negotiating meaning from the text. The student workbook serves as tool for students to organize their thoughts and enhance their discussions. She incorporates CRP approaches into literacy instruction by validating and building on students’ connections to text and language practices, providing support in extending their speaking to writing.



Figure 3. Sample pages from Project ELITE² Text Talks Workbook

Conclusion

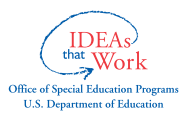
Practical recommendations and strategies to support Tier 2 interventions for ELs have been described. Literacy intervention examples from model demonstration projects are provided that underscore the use of evidence-based strategies and culturally and linguistically responsive practices for ELs. All three projects share similar MTSS frameworks and intervention practices that advance the language and reading development of ELs. The featured strategies are situated within Tier 2 intervention but have broad application to all levels of MTSS for ELs. A key takeaway is that oral language must be addressed with all instruction provided to ELs to help them access the general and special education curriculum.

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