

How to Identify Key Language Knowledge and Skills in ELP Standards and Aligned Materials: A Practitioner Guide

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This guide focuses on helping teachers identify the essential language knowledge and skills embedded in English language proficiency (ELP) standards (e.g., language functions, language modalities, language processing levels, and pragmatic arrangements) and, by extension, academic content standards and other aligned pedagogical materials. This practitioner guide will be useful to school-site English learner (EL)¹ coordinators and district English as a second language (ESL) staff for use in professional learning aimed at supporting general education teachers with the academic learning and language development of multilingual learners.

Our goals with this guide are five-fold:

1. to inform teachers about the concept of *alignment* as an underlying principle and useful framework to support the equitable education of culturally and linguistically diverse students,
2. to report findings from our analysis of academic content and ELP standards using four key language features,



3. to provide a framework (with examples from ELP standards) for language and pragmatic review of academic content and ELP standards (and, by extension, curricular materials such as textbooks, teacher-created tasks, and assessment materials),
4. to raise awareness for thinking about language with a broad appeal to both general education/content teachers and ESL teachers, and
5. to provide recommendations to school-site EL coordinators and/or district-level professional learning facilitators for carrying out guided practice through a professional learning community (see Appendix A for a sample agenda that facilitators can adopt).

Increasingly, general education teachers, not only language teachers, are expected to be able to extract the language requirements entailed in standards documents so these language features might be explicitly matched in combination with academic content standards and supported during, for example, class discussions, activities, and tasks. To meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in any classroom, teachers are also encouraged to integrate these standards-based language features in their lesson plans and articulate them to students as learning objectives.

Teacher candidates who take the widely used edTPA (a performance-based assessment of teaching used as a licensure component) are now required to demonstrate the ability to identify a key language function (e.g., explain a procedure, describe a setting) and the vocabulary demands (e.g., key words) these functions generate in the tasks that the candidates prepare for their example lesson plans. Additionally, teacher candidates must identify one other language

Understanding how well the language demands in classroom materials align to the grade-level ELP standards can lead to a more equitable and systematic approach to teaching language.

demand in either the syntax or discourse domains as relevant to their lesson plans. This practitioner guide can aid teacher candidates and in-service teachers alike in learning to identify language demands in standards and in other classroom materials.

The recommendations and language features framework we suggest here are informed by our experience with the development of language complexity protocols for the William T. Grant Foundation–funded research project, *An Investigation of Language Demands in Standards, Assessments, and Curricular Materials for English Learners* (Investigation of Language Demands project, for short). With the overall goal of reducing inequities in the educational experiences of multilingual learners, this project endeavored to characterize the language complexity in academic contexts (textbooks, formal testing, teacher talk and tasks) and the language demands explicitly and implicitly expected of students in ELP and academic content standards in Grade 5. Throughout the guide, we draw from the experiences of current fifth-grade classroom teachers and ESL specialists who were part of the Investigation of the Language Demands project. During focus group sessions, the teachers and ESL specialists provided their perspectives on standards, language features, and instructional strategies (see the Teacher Experiences sidebar² on page 12).

As part of the efforts to promote fairness in instruction and assessment for culturally and linguistically diverse students, we intend this guide to provide a research-based lens for the professional learning of both ESL specialists and general education teachers as they identify crucial features of language in ELP standards and academic content standards documents as well as instructional materials (e.g., curricular materials, ELP assessments, district interim assessments, quizzes, and tasks).

What is standards alignment and why is it important?

In standards-based education, standards guide what to teach and what to assess. Strong alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards in terms of their content and rigor is important in order to support equitable education and learning outcomes for all students including multilingual learners. Under this premise, educators' clear understanding about the knowledge and skills in standards is crucial to promote alignment. A tight connection among standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment can help ensure that teachers are providing students with grade-level educational experiences. Language demands (language features and, where appropriate, their levels of complexity) found in pedagogical materials, including commercially available materials (e.g., district

SELECTED FINDINGS FROM THE INVESTIGATION OF LANGUAGE DEMANDS PROJECT

- Content and ELP standards contained a variety of language functions (e.g., analyze, argue, describe, evaluate, exemplify, explain).
- Standards integrated language skills (e.g., listening and speaking combined, speaking based on reading, or speaking then writing about a topic).
- Density of multiple language functions in a single standard indicated the complexity of standards in terms of both language and cognitive demands.
- ELP standards set expectations for students to use a wide range of dialogic configurations (e.g., talking in dyads, small group, whole class).
- Focus group general education teachers at the fifth-grade level were not familiar with or trained on the ELP standards; they might not see it as their job to support language development due to how EL support is set up (e.g., pullout English language development instruction).

interim assessment or textbooks), and the tasks or activities teachers themselves create for their students should align with language demands found in ELP standards.

Having an awareness of how well the language demands in materials being used align to the language demands of the grade-level ELP standards while teaching multilingual learners can lead to a more equitable and systematic approach to teaching language and to knowing when to provide necessary linguistic supports (e.g., modeling sentences, providing word walls or visual cues) during academic content instruction.

Findings from the Investigation of Language Demands project

In the Investigation of Language Demands project, we developed a protocol and taxonomy to characterize the language demands in ELP standards and in academic content standards documents in English language arts and mathematics currently adopted by many U.S. states (Bailey, Wolf, & Ballard, 2022; Bailey, Wolf, Ballard, & Pogossian, 2022; Wolf et al., 2022). We also examined the language features and complexity in curricular materials and assessments. In this project, a team of coders were able to reliably identify these language features after training over a period of some months. This training need is important to highlight because reviewing documents for language features is an acquired skill and it takes time and ample discussion for someone to become confident in their selection of language features. As we found with a sample of teachers who participated in focus groups for the project, teachers will benefit from guidance and practice in this work.

The project also found that different sets of ELP standards emphasized different language features, which in turn

were reflected on corresponding standardized ELP assessments. The ramifications of this finding mean that teachers in different parts of the country, depending on which standards their state has adopted, will experience the review and identification of language demands quite differently. Some features of language were emphasized more than others, depending on which standards were being reviewed (Bailey, Wolf, & Ballard, 2022; Bailey, Wolf, Ballard, & Pogossian, 2022; Wolf et al., 2022).

We also found that the standards descriptions were sometimes ambiguous and dense, requiring a systemic method to unpack the language knowledge and skills implicated in each standard description. Drawing from previous literature including functional linguistics, sociocultural theory, and academic language (i.e., the language of schooling), we selected key language features to help teachers identify the language demands in standards. The majority of teachers in the project focus group placed an emphasis on academic vocabulary as a major language demand for multilingual students in achieving the standards. However, when the teachers became aware of the multiple dimensions of language demands and the taxonomy of language functions used in this project, they engaged in deeper analysis of example standards and articulated various language features embedded in those standards.

Unpacking standards to reveal language features and possible demands

Each standard statement can be reviewed and the presence of the selected language features can be determined. These features may constitute a demand on students' linguistic capabilities depending on their opportunity to learn and practice English and the

Teachers can and should be trained to identify language features in their curriculum.

language supports provided to them. We use “language features” as a purely descriptive term but view “language demand” more narrowly as the interaction between language and each individual learner and whether learners are challenged by the language they encounter in speech and texts. (See Appendix B for a chart of the four features with guiding questions and possible choices for each feature.)

The language features we focus on in this practitioner guide are as follows:

- Language functions. The purposes of language as students engage with academic content learning (including the content of their English language development [ELD] instruction). For example, students use language to describe, explain, compare, and analyze academic content. (Appendix C provides a list of language functions encountered in the Investigation of Language Demands project.)
- Language modalities. The discrete language modalities (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) or integration of two or more language modalities a student is expected to use to carry out the activity or task described in a standard (e.g., listening and speaking about a topic followed by writing about it)
- Language processing levels. The level of language skill needed to fulfill a standard (or complete a

task or assessment item). These skills are organized into three broad, holistic levels that are a best estimation of the processing required of students:

- Using foundational language skills (e.g., processing or producing sounds, decoding, simple phrases, or sentence fragments)
- Understanding or producing a text or speech, including elements of cohesion and coherence (e.g., links within or across sentences such as pronouns referring to nouns and discourse markers such as *first*, *then*, *next* for ordering longer sequences). Understanding is restricted to literal meaning of texts.
- Applying higher order language skills in processing and production (e.g., inference, evaluation, integration/synthesis). Understanding beyond literal textual meaning is required.
- Pragmatic arrangements. The particular interactive contexts in which language knowledge is put to use. For example, interactions in the standards' descriptors can involve:
 - Communicative modes: using different language in collaborative (i.e., discussing and negotiating with others), interpretive (i.e., making sense of texts and oral input), and productive (i.e., giving an oral presentation, writing a response to reading) language situations
 - Audience types: different language knowledge and skills for interacting with a range of different people (e.g., self, students, teachers)
 - Participant configurations: different language knowledge and skills for interacting with a range of group sizes (e.g., one-on-one, dyads, small groups, whole class)
 - Initiating or responding practices: different language knowledge and skills for initiating or responding to questions, especially during interactions (e.g., rules for turn-taking in tasks)
 - Registers: adapting to the anticipated language demands of different social situations, such as formal and informal interactions
 - Explicit expectations for the use of linguistic resources and supports (e.g., labeled charts, bilingual glossaries) and nonlinguistic resources and supports (e.g., graphic organizers, pictures)

On many occasions, these language features may not be explicitly specified in the standards descriptors and will be difficult to surmise. In other instances, we have noted that the implied audience and or participant configuration is "self" (i.e., the student). In such instances, it is clear from the context that the audience and/or participant configuration is intended to be the student (i.e., student carrying out a task/solving a problem using language to work something out

Teachers will experience review and identification of language demands differently, depending on what standards their states have adopted.



independently rather than to interact with others). The presence of these uses of language is also important to note so teachers can support a more overt role for language in students' metacognitive strategies, learning objectives, and so on.

Often, linguistic complexity features can only be determined with any confidence using close analysis of samples of verbatim speech or texts that address a standard. Consequently, we do not include the linguistic complexity dimension in the language features framework that applies in unpacking the standard descriptions³ (see also expressive language samples and annotated examples of texts in the WIDA ELD Standards).⁴

A language features framework

Table 1 presents key language features that can be identified in ELP standards (as well as academic content standards, assessments, and other curricular materials) accompanied by definitions and example excerpts from Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO; 2014) ELP standards and WIDA (2020) ELD standards. These standards together have been adopted by more than 45 U.S. states and territories. The examples of language features found in the sets of standards in Table 1 are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, they are intended to provide accessible and useful initial illustrations of ELP standards—and, by extension, aligned assessment and curricular materials—that EL coordinators, ESL specialists, and general education teachers can use to collaboratively build their knowledge of the language demanded of students.

TABLE 1: Language features framework (standard identifying information in parentheses)

| LANGUAGE FEATURES | DEFINITION | CCSSO EXAMPLES ^a | WIDA EXAMPLES ^b |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS | Purpose that language serves | An ELL can... explain how an author or speaker uses reasons and evidence to support or fail to support particular points. (CCSSO, ELP4-5.6) | Multilingual learners will... Construct language arts arguments that • introduce and develop a topic clearly; state an opinion... (WIDA, ELD-LA.4-5.Argue.Expressive) |
| LANGUAGE MODALITIES | Discrete and integrated receptive (listening, reading) and productive language (speaking, writing) | An ELL can... speak and write about grade appropriate complex literary and informational texts and topics. [Discrete modalities] (CCSSO, ELP4-5.3) | Multilingual learners will... Construct mathematical explanations that • Introduce concept or entity • Share solution with others • Describe data and/or steps to solve problem [Discrete speaking and/or writing modalities, and “describe data” also inherently integrates a receptive (i.e., reading) modality]. (WIDA, ELD-MA.4-5.Explain.Expressive) |
| LANGUAGE PROCESSING LEVELS | Holistic estimate for levels of language processing skills (processing level denoted in square brackets after examples) | An ELL can... determine the meaning of words and phrases in oral presentations and literary and informational text. [...] • determine the meaning of some frequently occurring words, phrases, and expressions in simple oral discourse, read-alouds, and written texts about familiar topics... (Proficiency Level 2, grade 4-5 cluster) [Processing level 1: Foundational language skills] • determine the meaning of figurative language (e.g., metaphors, similes, adages, and proverbs). [Processing level 3: Applying higher order language] (CCSSO, ELP4-5.8) | Multilingual learners will... Construct informational texts in language arts that • Introduce and define topic and/or entity for audience • Establish objective or neutral stance • Add precision and details to define, describe, compare, and classify topic and/or entity • Develop coherence and cohesion throughout text. [Processing level 2: Processing/producing, including cohesion and coherence. Restricted to literal meaning] (WIDA, ELD-LA.4-5.Inform.Expressive) |

TABLE 1 continued

| LANGUAGE FEATURES | DEFINITION | CCSSO EXAMPLES ^a | WIDA EXAMPLES ^b |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>PRAGMATIC ARRANGEMENTS</p> | <p>Interactive contexts in which language knowledge is being put to use (individual types denoted in square brackets after examples)</p> | <p>An ELL can...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [respond] to peer, audience, or reader comments and questions... participate in extended conversations and discussions. [Participant configurations] (CCSSO, ELP4-5.2) • summarize key ideas and information in detailed and orderly notes, with graphics as appropriate. [Non-linguistic resource/support] (CCSSO, ELP4-5.5) • pose and respond to relevant questions; add relevant and detailed information using evidence [Initiating and responding practices] (CCSSO, ELP4-5.2) | <p>Construct language arts narratives that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient audience to context [...] • Engage and adjust for audience [Audience types] (WIDA, ELD-LA.4-5.Narrate.Expressive) <p>Construct mathematics arguments that [...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate others' arguments [Collaborative Communicative mode] (WIDA, ELD-MA.4-5.Argue.Expressive) <p>Construct language arts arguments that [...]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a formal style.... [Register] (WIDA, ELD-LA.4-5.Argue.Expressive) |

Note: ELL = English language learner; CCSSO = Council of Chief State School Officers; ELP = English language proficiency; ELD = English language development. Standard identifying information is presented in parentheses. All CCSSO (2014) excerpts were taken from the highest proficiency level (5) of the Grade 4–5 cluster, unless otherwise noted. All WIDA (2020) examples are irrespective of proficiency level. Bolding was added for emphasis. ELL is used as an abbreviation by CCSSO.

^aFrom *English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards With Correspondences to K–12 English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science Practices, K–12 ELA Standards, and 6–12 Literacy Standards* by CCSSO, 2014 (https://ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/Final%204_30%20ELPA21%20Standards%281%29.pdf). Content is licensed under use of CC BY 4.0. ^bFrom *English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition: Kindergarten-Grade 12* by Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2020 (<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>). Copyright 2020 by Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

Examples of unpacking ELP standards

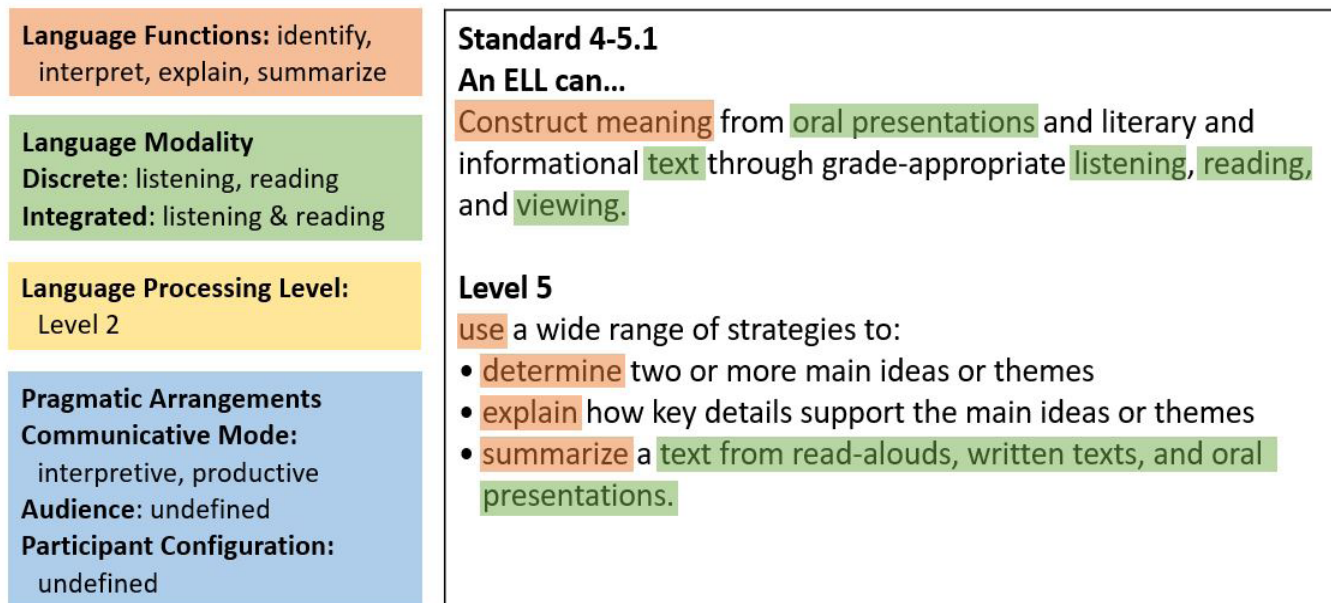
In the following figures, we have reproduced excerpts from individual ELP standards expressed at the highest level of ELP. (The ELP standards are formatted for the full range of ELP levels. For example, the CCSSO ELP standards place the highest level at Level 5.) For each, we have

- identified the presence of the key language features,
- added further description of their characteristics where greater specificity can be derived, and
- noted, when appropriate, where we see potential ambiguity in the standards in terms of what language demands are being asked of students.

While standards may be organized or labeled by their authors as requiring certain overt modalities, we remained alert to the possibility that additional modalities were also being invoked (e.g., an expectation for writing skills may actually require reading or listening to texts before responding).

In Figure 1, in terms of language functions, we see that students in Grades 4 and 5 perform a range of tasks with language, from the relatively straightforward interpretation of meaning and identification of main ideas from aural and print input to the more demanding purposes of explaining details that support the main ideas and summarizing of information. We surmise that both discrete listening and reading modalities are accompanied by the integration of listening and reading skills in one task. The standard

FIGURE 1: CCSSO ELP Standard 4-5.1, Level 5



Note: CCSSO = Council of Chief State School Officers; ELP = English language proficiency; ELL = English language learner. Adapted from *English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards With Correspondences to K–12 English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science Practices, K–12 ELA Standards, and 6–12 Literacy Standards* by Council of Chief State School Officers (p. 18), 2014 (<https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/migrantbilingual/pubdocs/elp/wa-elp-standards-k12.pdf>). Content is licensed under use of CC BY 4.0.

appears to call for processing or producing a text or speech at the midlevel because understanding seems restricted to literal meaning of texts.

In terms of pragmatic arrangements, we noted the presence of interpretive and productive communicative modes, but no other pragmatic arrangements were defined (i.e., no mention of audience or number of participants in any interactions for explaining or summarizing information; no mention of initiation or response types, register, or linguistic and nonlinguistic resources). Additionally, we noted a lack of specificity in the standard's expectations for modality when it comes to students conveying their understanding of oral presentations and literary and informational texts. For example, the standard is silent on whether the explanation and summarization functions are

expected to be conveyed in speaking or writing modalities.

In Figure 2, students in Grades 4 and 5 are expected to understand what is involved in language used in social studies explanations. These are articulated as the identifying, interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating functions. The use of the word “sources” implies the reading modality, but it is left sufficiently unspecified, so we did not rule out the possibility of the listening modality; sources in social studies could include recorded oral testimonies, for example. The standard calls for applying higher order language skills in processing and requires understanding beyond literal textual meaning when “evaluating disciplinary concepts and ideas that are open to different interpretations.”

FIGURE 2: WIDA ELD Standard SS.4-5.Explain.Interpretive

Language Functions: identify, interpret, analyze, evaluate

Language Modality
Discrete: reading, listening
Integrated: listening & reading

Language Processing Level:
 level 3

Pragmatic Arrangements
Communicative Mode:
 interpretive, productive
Initiating or Responding:
 answering questions
Audience: self
Participant Configuration:
 undefined

ELD-SS.4-5.Explain.Interpretive

Multilingual learners will...

- Interpret** social studies explanations by
- **Determining** different opinions in **sources** for answering compelling and supporting questions about phenomena or events
 - **Analyzing sources** for a series of contributing factors or causes
 - **Evaluating** disciplinary concepts and ideas that are open to different interpretations

Note: ELD = English language development; SS = social studies. Adapted from *English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition, Kindergarten—Grade 12* by WIDA (p. 126), 2020 (<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>). Copyright © 2020 by Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

TEACHER EXPERIENCES

Huma, ESL teacher: ***“I am covering across all the contents, so I have to be aware of and make use of [multiple] standards. When I’m planning lessons, I make sure I’ve included a content standard objective and also a language objective.”***

Robin, fifth-grade general education teacher: ***“I have never been formally introduced to the [ELP] standards and what I do know about them, they are hard to align with the curriculum.”***

Natalie, ESL teacher: ***“It is difficult to implement [these ELP standards] when you don’t know what’s expected of you. We need examples to clarify what standards mean. There’s no training to help teachers understand what they mean.”***

Huma, ESL teacher: ***“Last year [I started] coteaching, so that I am going in and teaching them some of the instructional strategies that they can use. [One of me] is not enough for 130 students. So, I’m hoping to start doing some more coplanning and coteaching and pushing into classrooms.”***

Nina, fifth-grade general education teacher: ***“I was doing a reading lesson and . . . our EL teacher was in the room. It was almost like a trainer, right there with . . . a totally different lens. [I could] be a better teacher in ESL because I had someone mentoring me.”***

In terms of pragmatic arrangements, we noted the focus on the interpretive communicative mode as well as the implied productive mode that is not overtly noted in the standard’s title. In particular, the productive mode is invoked by the need to respond to “compelling and supporting questions.” This standard provides an example of needing to identify language features that go beyond the features claimed by the standard’s writers. The audience for the language used in fulfilling the standard appears to be just the self; no other overt audience is referenced and no other pragmatic arrangements are defined (i.e., no mention of the number of participants in any other interactions; no mention of register or linguistic and nonlinguistic resources).

How to connect unpacking standards to current curriculum: A vignette

Teachers in our focus groups articulated the challenges they experienced in implementing the standards and with their existing curricula (e.g., not linguistically and/or culturally relevant for their students; wide range of English proficiency levels within their fifth-grade classrooms). They addressed this situation with adaptive teaching (i.e., the process of adjusting instruction and curriculum to the social, linguistic, cultural, and instructional needs and assets of individual students; Cerda, 2023). Adaptive teaching, or any orientation that supports modification and/or scaffolding for different students so that all students meet standards, is supporting the goal of educational equity.

Our coplanning vignette reveals how teachers made connections between their current curriculum and the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their multilingual students. In this vignette, the teachers discuss a series

of strategies to make the standards accessible for students and their plans to use formative assessment approaches to monitor their students' progress in more equitable and useful ways. The vignette shows how teachers unpacked ELP standards linguistically and in culturally sensitive ways to incorporate language features for culturally and linguistically diverse students within their current curriculum.

Recommended practices for supporting teachers in unpacking ELP standards

Teachers will need to review ELP standards to learn what to expect for specific students with different levels of English proficiency. Teachers can refer to ELP standards to understand the realistic expectations and products at different levels of ELP. The focus group teachers described two key collaborative practices that they felt assisted them with the work of understanding the language features embedded in standards.

- **Coplanning.** We recommend the kind of coplanning that is described in the coplanning vignette on page 14, where teachers can share across school-site faculty their past experiences and leverage any familiarity and expertise they may have developed with the ELP standards. However, this sharing should ideally involve coplanning among mixed groups of ESL specialists and general education teachers so that language features can be brought to the

fore and both language and academic content can be interwoven more seamlessly in instruction.

- **Coteaching.** Moving beyond just planning together, coteaching (even if for short amounts of time) to garner new insights and feedback can be a tremendous help to teachers. In the teacher experience sidebar, Nina, one of the fifth-grade general education teachers, speaks of the effectiveness of having an ESL specialist work with her as a coach. Nina received immediate feedback from an ESL colleague on how she was supporting language development rather than taking the more traditional approach of the ESL teacher working separately with culturally and linguistically diverse students designated as needing English language support services.

Concluding remarks

Understanding the standards, that is, what students are expected to achieve at the given grade level, is a fundamental step to ensure the alignment among standards and other components of the educational system. In order to help establish a fairer educational experience for culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is of particular importance to understand the language demands entailed for students in meeting the ELP and ultimately academic content standards. We hope that the language features framework can offer some guidance for educators to utilize and expand when identifying the types of language demands in standards and other educational materials.

A deeper analysis of the standards can lead to awareness of major language demands beyond vocabulary.

Scaffolds are essential when unpacking the standards for students.

Bilingual resources support language awareness in the home language and English language.

COPLANNING VIGNETTE

Natalie, Anna, Caroline, and Huma, who all work as ESL specialists with their fifth grade general education colleagues, are planning a lesson around the following standard:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Reading Standards for Informational Text: Grade 5, Craft and Structure

Compare and contrast the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in two or more texts. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 14)

Natalie recommends they begin their planning session **by breaking up the standard into teachable parts** and models using metacognitive teacher moves, which in this case were a series of think alouds:

“Do students understand or know how to use this skill (e.g., comparing and contrasting, sequencing, problem solving)?”

“Maybe they should practice the skill with pictures before they apply it with text.”

She then proposes a task to address the standard: “I would take two big, colored pictures and show them. ‘Look at these two pictures; talk to your partner. What’s the same (and the same means compare). What’s different (and contrast means different.)’ Then have them start there. If they can **compare and contrast pictures, then you could slowly go to characters, events, and then settings, then you can go into two or more texts because if they understand the main idea which is compare and contrast, they can ease up to books.** The language demand is [that] they need to know the vocabulary.”

Her colleague Anna agrees: “We have to make sure that **we are scaffolding what they do not know with what they already know [prior knowledge], so they can accomplish what is being asked of them.**”

Bilingual, culturally responsive books support text-to-self connections.

Formative assessment is a meaningful and equitable form of assessment with culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Caroline provides **the rationale for a scaffold here: “Removing the reading that might be a barrier for some of them . . . because if you haven’t understood the content there, you’re not going to be able to make uh, sound comparisons or contrasts.”**

Natalie suggests **that incorporating the students’ home language will also help students build vocabulary in both the home and new language.** She recommends: “We need to strengthen the first language as well as the second language for [students] to fully understand [content]. **With bilingual books, we could plan a read-aloud with both languages, and it would be very wonderful for students to connect both languages. It’s very important.”**

Caroline takes up this suggestion with her own experiences with incorporating students’ home languages. “Sometimes in my group, I have the luxury that most of my students speak the same language. So when we’re doing something like this, if we’re doing it in small groups, they know that they don’t just need to discuss it in English. **If they need to discuss it in their first language first and then work with each other to share-out in English, that’s something that I do regularly in my class.** So, it kind of pull[s] away the language demands.”

Huma points out how allowing students “to code switch between both languages, to be able to understand it first in their language and then their partner or in their group, they could help each other be able to translate it into English.”

Huma also adds a nonlinguistic resource to the mix and proposes it become **their formative assessment for learning to help them understand which students have grasped the target notions of compare and contrast: “Like a Venn diagram to compare and contrast and then coming back together with sticky notes.** [We’d direct students:] ‘Everyone share [your] ideas and then discuss with each other why you have this and why you don’t and why it should be in the middle or, in the comparing part or the contrast part.’ Discuss with each other why you have this and why you don’t and why it should be in the middle or in the comparing part or the contrast part.’ And **[the Venn diagram] will also be our assessment to see their thinking, their thoughts, and their understanding.”**

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Appendix A: Suggested Facilitator’s Agenda for a Coplanning Professional Learning Community (PLC) Between English as a Second Language (ESL) Specialists and General Education Teachers

Unpacking English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards:

Who: EL coordinator and/or ESL teacher as facilitator*

- Fifth-grade general education teachers

What: To support coplanning of content lessons with culturally and linguistically diverse students

Preplanning: Select target ELP standards that may support the language demands in an upcoming grade-level lesson plan (e.g., the language features implied in content standards [ELA, math, science], learning objectives statements, textbook tasks, teacher created activities, classroom assessments)

Steps for Unpacking the ELP Standard(s):

Step 1: Review and discuss the target content standard/learning objective, and so on in the lesson plan; identify what aspects of language may be particularly challenging for the different proficiency levels of multilingual students in the participating teachers’ classrooms.

Step 2: Introduce the ELP standard(s) that may support the implied language demands in the lesson plan.

Step 3: Unpack the ELP standard(s) by first allowing PLC members to work independently to identify the presence of language features in the standard(s) and then discuss the features nominated. Be sure to introduce features you (the facilitator) see that are not mentioned by any PLC members. (Use Appendices B & C as resources.)

- **Facilitator:** Have ready a list of language features you see present in the ELP standard.

Step 4: Discuss what kinds of instruction and additional in-class assessment will support the teaching and demonstration of the identified language features. Plan how to coteach the selected language features in conjunction with the ESL specialist.

- **Facilitator:** Prepare ideas you see for teaching and assessing the ELP standard. (Take a look at the annotated vignette in this guide for ideas.)

* Ideally the experience/skills the facilitator should have include in-depth knowledge of both the grade-level ELP and content standards, understanding of/familiarity with language features, experience with unpacking standards for content and language features, and the ability to select and prepare discussion of examples of standards for unpacking language features.

Appendix B: Language Features Information

| FEATURE | GUIDING QUESTION | OPTIONS |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS | What is the purpose of the language use involved in the standard (or task or assessment item)? | Analyze, argue, classify, compare & contrast, critique, define, describe, enumerate, evaluate, exemplify, explain, generalize, hypothesize, identify, infer, inquire, interpret, justify & persuade, label, negotiate, organize, predict, retell, sequence, summarize, synthesize Note: See also Appendix C for more information. |
| LANGUAGE MODALITIES | What (receptive) modality does the student need to use to understand the expectations in the standard (or the task or assessment item)? What (productive) modality does the student need to use to complete the expectations of the standard (or task or assessment item)? | Discrete receptive (Listening-L, Reading-R), or productive (Writing-W, Speaking-S) modalities, or modalities in combination (L+R, L+W, L+S, R+W, R+S, W+S, L+R+W, L+R+S, L+W+S, R+W+S, L+R+W+S) |
| LANGUAGE PROCESSING LEVELS | What level of language skills does the student need to fulfill the standard (or complete a task or assessment item)? | Using knowledge of basic language skills (e.g., processing or producing simple phrases or sentence fragments, knowledge of words in isolation, sound-print matching) Processing or producing a text or speech, including elements of cohesion and coherence. Understanding is restricted to literal meaning of texts. Applying higher order language skills in processing and production. Understanding beyond literal textual meaning is required (e.g., inference, evaluation, integration/synthesis). |
| PRAGMATIC ARRANGEMENTS | What knowledge and skills of social interactions does the student need to fulfill the standard (or complete a task or assessment item)? | Communicative modes: collaborative, interpretive, and productive language situations Audience types: interacting with teachers, peers, other adults (self) Participant configurations: interacting one-on-one (student and teacher, peer dyads), small group, whole class (self) Turn-taking practices: asking peers and others questions, responding to requests, etc. Registers: formal versus informal interactions. Linguistic (e.g., word walls, labeled charts) and nonlinguistic resources or supports |

Appendix C: Inventory of Language Functions

| LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS | DEFINITIONS | EXAMPLE TASKS, DISCOURSE MARKERS, AND NOTES |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| ANALYZE | To indicate parts of a whole and/or the relationship between/among parts of an action, event, idea, or process | Tasks that ask students to look for cause and effect generally belong to “analyze” |
| ARGUE | To present a point of view with the intent of communicating or supporting a particular position or conviction | e.g., In my opinion, it seems to me |
| CLASSIFY | To divide things into groups according to their type | Tasks that ask students to classify or categorize |
| COMPARE & CONTRAST | To examine or look for differences and/or similarities between two or more things | e.g., similarly, likewise, in contrast, instead, despite this |
| CRITIQUE | To review or analyze critically | Tasks that ask students to revise, edit, proofread |
| DEFINE | To express the meaning of a given word, phrase, or expression | Definitions are usually one sentence long or are phrases found within one sentence. |
| DESCRIBE | To express the attributes or properties of someone, something, some place, or some process | Tasks that ask students to describe places and objects |
| ENUMERATE | To name things separately, one by one | Tasks that ask students to provide a list |
| EVALUATE | To use critical reading and thinking to judge and assign meaning or importance to a particular experience or event | In general, “revise” would involve some kind of evaluation. NOTE: “Evaluate” in math standards means “to solve,” and it should not be automatically coded as “evaluate” as a language function. |
| EXEMPLIFY | To give examples | e.g., for example, such as |
| EXPLAIN | To offer rationales or reasons, sometimes by using evidence | Tasks that ask students to provide evidence for their reasoning, e.g., therefore, as a result, for that reason |
| GENERALIZE | To infer a trend, an opinion, principle, or make a conclusion based on facts, statistics, or other information | Tasks that ask students to take information about one thing and apply it to another |
| HYPOTHESIZE | To form an idea or explanation for something that is based on known facts but has not yet been proved | e.g., “Why do you think this happened?” |
| IDENTIFY | To recognize and name an object, action, event, idea, fact, problem, need, or process | Tasks that might request students to find, mark, or highlight information |

Appendix C continued

| LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS | DEFINITIONS | EXAMPLE TASKS, DISCOURSE MARKERS, AND NOTES |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| INFER | To express understanding of implied/implicit based on available information | e.g., “What’s the theme of the reading passage?” “What conclusion can you draw?” |
| INQUIRE | To seek information by forming questions | Tasks asking questions |
| INTERPRET | To decide what the intended meaning of something is | e.g., comprehend, understand |
| JUSTIFY & PERSUADE | To give reasons for an action, decision, and point of view for the purpose of convincing | Includes/subsumes explain, retell, exemplify |
| LABEL | To produce the term corresponding to a given definition | e.g., write the name of an object in a picture |
| NEGOTIATE | To engage in a discussion with the point of creating mutual agreement from two or more different views | Tasks that might say “work with a partner” |
| ORGANIZE | To give structure to something | Tasks explicitly asking for “structure” or similar |
| PREDICT | To express an idea or notion about a future action or event based on available information | Requests for students to imagine how a character might react to a situation or answer a question |
| RETELL | To relate or repeat information | e.g., paraphrase, present, share |
| SEQUENCE | To arrange or order things | e.g., first, second, third... |
| SUMMARIZE | To express the most important facts or ideas about something or someone in a short and clear form | e.g., in sum, in conclusion |
| SYNTHESIZE | To coherently express, describe, or explain relationships among two or more ideas | e.g., contain, entail, consist of, a part of, a segment of, a good number of, almost all, a few, hardly any |

Appendix D: Additional Suggested Resources

Dynamic Language Learning Progressions (DLLP) Project @ UCLA: Speech and writing samples annotated for language forms and functions elicited from K-6th grade students. <https://www.dllp.org/index.php/resources/tools/>

edTPA: The teacher candidate exam requires the ability to identify vocabulary demands and either syntax or discourse demands. Many online materials have been developed to support candidates taking the examination, for example. Understanding Academic Language in edTPA: Supporting Learning and Language Development produced by SCALE. A copy is posted at <https://uncw.edu/ed/edtpa/documents/edtpa/academic%20language/edtpa-al-ell.pdf>

MinneTESOL Journal: A fourth-grade sample text and lesson activities for illustrating language demands. <https://minnetesoljournal.org/journal-archive/mtj-2014-1/academic-language-demands-texts-tasks-and-levels-of-language/>

WordGen Elementary by the Strategic Education Research Partnership: Modules for supporting vocabulary and discussion skills for fourth- and fifth-grade literacy, science and math. <https://www.serpinstitute.org/wordgen-elementary>

10 Key Policies and Practices for Teaching English Language Learners: A report compiled by The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at the University of Texas Austin: Provides information on practices related to language features, language demands, scaffolds, and formative assessment to name a few. Also included: instructional scenarios, activities, strategies, and assessment tools for teachers. <https://meadowscenter.org/resource/10-key-policies-and-practices-for-teaching-english-language-learners/>

Colorado English Language Proficiency (CELP) Standards Resource Library, Colorado Department of Education: Is an online resource library for the CELP, but the resources are relevant to teachers of linguistically diverse learners teaching in other states. Topics/links include language and content, functional language, scaffold & support language, formative assessment, as well as CELP/WIDA basics and theoretical framework. Each topic/link provides links to other resources such as toolkits and research articles. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/celp-resourcelibrary

English Language Development, Teacher Resources, Culver City Unified School District, California: An interactive online teacher resource that provides teachers with a variety of examples and templates of instructional scaffolds organized by topic—speaking, writing, interacting, reading, and listening. https://www.ccusd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=705331&type=d&pREC_ID=1141858

Notes

- 1 English learners is the term used widely in federal and state educational agencies' official documents. It is also frequently abbreviated to EL and used with staff titles for those providing English language services (i.e., EL coordinator). However, different terms such as emergent bilinguals, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and multilingual learners are now frequently used to refer to students designated as EL students by their districts to highlight students' linguistic and cultural assets. In this paper, we refer to such students interchangeably as culturally and linguistically diverse students and multilingual learners.
- 2 Names are pseudonyms, and quotes were edited for clarity and length.
- 3 A special word about excluding linguistic complexity from the framework: It is extremely difficult to identify the linguistic complexity (i.e., simple to demanding formal features such as sentence structure types) inherent in standards descriptors. This is because standards generally do not provide sufficient specificity of how demanding the vocabulary, syntax, and discourse-level features (e.g., organization of a text) are for the associated tasks or activities that cover the standard. Indeed, many standards may be enacted with a range of linguistic complexities (e.g., being able to adapt language to different purposes and audiences can be achieved using simple sentences or complex sentence structures requiring clause embedding). ELP standards can consist of a "main" standard descriptor and then more specific instantiations of the standard at a variety of proficiency levels. See, for example, "Proficiency Level Descriptors for the Interpretive and Expressive Communication Mode" for Grades 4 and 5 from the *WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework* (WIDA, 2020, pp. 136-138).
- 4 <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf>

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