

## **Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for ELLs** **Rebecca Freeman Field ([rdfield@casloninc.com](mailto:rdfield@casloninc.com))**

### **Session Description**

This session is for mainstream and ESL teachers who have ELLs in their classes, and for the ESL coordinators who are responsible for the professional development of all educators who work with ELLs. It draws on the WIDA ELP Standards, and shows teachers how to select appropriate instructional and assessment strategies for their ELLs at different English language proficiency levels. We also consider how other important factors (e.g., literacy in the first language, prior education, cultural differences) inform a teachers' efforts to differentiate instruction for the ELLs in their classes.

### **Agenda**

#### **Before**

- Content and language objectives

#### **During**

- Essential questions for reflective practitioners
- Student can-do descriptors
- Student profiles
- Strategies for differentiating instruction and assessment

#### **After**

- Taking it to your classrooms → What stood out? What did you learn? What can you use?

### **Content Objectives**

Participants will...

- Describe what students at different ELP levels can be expected to do with R/W/L/S in English
- Identify factors beyond ELP level that influence an ELL's participation and achievement in class
- Explain how to use essential questions for reflective practitioners to guide selection of instructional and assessment strategies
- Identify appropriate instructional and assessment strategies for different ELLs that we find in our classrooms

*Note: Content objectives are about the big ideas and should be more or less the same for all students.*

### **Language Objectives**

Participants will...

- Use content-obligatory and content-compatible vocabulary orally and in writing
  - WIDA standards
  - Student can-do descriptors
  - ELP levels: Beginning, developing, expanding, bridging
  - Conversational fluency/BICS; Academic language proficiency/CALP
  - Differentiated instruction
  - Differentiated assessment
- Use oral and written language to *identify, describe* and *explain*.

*Note: Language objectives should be differentiated to address the language and literacy needs of students in the classroom.*

### **Essential Questions for Reflective Practitioners**

1. Who are my ELLs?
2. What are my goals and objectives?
3. What is challenging about this unit/lesson/activity for the ELLs in my class?
4. What instructional strategies can I use to enable my ELLs to participate and achieve in this activity/lesson/unit/class/program?
5. What assessment strategies can I use to collect evidence of my ELLs' learning?

### **Level 1 Entering**

**Corina** is a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student who has just arrived from Guatemala and enrolled in an urban middle school. In the classroom, her teachers note that she often keeps to herself with downcast eyes. She does not communicate verbally with classmates or the teacher, though she will sometimes respond to some commonly-used classroom verbal cues that are visually supported. Teachers are concerned that when presented with a textbook, Corina is unsure of how to hold or open the book. She is unable to write her name or even hold a pencil.

**Fajar** is another 7<sup>th</sup> grader who has just begun to attend the same urban middle school, though he is from Indonesia. He, too, is silent in class, but teachers immediately notice that he seems ready to try to engage with print materials. Though he can only respond to basic verbal commands at this point, Fajar can write his name and can copy writing from the textbook and other print materials.

### **Level 2 Beginning**

**Bayan**, who wears a headscarf, is a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student from Iraq. She is a recent Kurdish refugee and has observed violence toward her family. She did not attend formal school in Iraq. She seems sad and withdrawn; some of her teachers suspect she has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her family arrived without basic belongings and lives well below the poverty level. In terms of language, Bayan answers formulaic questions with memorized statements and can participate in academic conversations only minimally. She often uses incomplete sentences and phrases orally to convey complete thoughts, but is only able to write with considerable effort since she is not literate in Kurdish.

**Estefania** is a 10<sup>th</sup> grade immigrant student from Costa Rica who has arrived with her parents, who are professionals in a large international company, and her younger brother. She is from the capitol city and enjoyed the benefits of private schooling there, where she performed on grade level. She is an outgoing, fashion-conscious student who is happy to be attending her new high school. Estefania seeks opportunities to interact with classmates in social and academic contexts. Though her language production is limited, she has begun to use some general academic words and phrases, even in her writing.

### **Level 3 Developing**

**Toua**, a Hmong 3<sup>rd</sup> grader born in a refugee camp in Thailand, is the son of parents from Laos. His family arrived in the U.S. two years ago and he initially struggled in school, partly because he had received no formal education prior to his arrival. As such, he had no experience with reading and writing in his first language. In the past two years, Toua's parents have become gainfully employed and reestablished their network with the Hmong community here in the U.S. In terms of language, Toua quickly developed social language and his teachers wonder why he struggles academically since he appears to be fluent. His reading and writing are below grade-level, but his teachers think he might just be lazy.

**Aung**, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader from Myanmar (formerly Burma), was also born in a refugee camp. Before arriving in the U.S. last year, Aung attended school in the camp and was taught in English by missionaries. His parents do not speak English at all and have had difficulty locating employment. Aung frequently misses school when he is excused to translate at the clinic for his parents. Aung's language skills allow him to communicate well in social situations and, especially when contextualized and supported visually, classroom instruction is meaningful to Aung. Since his teachers in the camp paid particular attention the conventions of writing, Aung perfectly forms the English alphabet and works very diligently to create accurate written products, though his work is below grade-level. He also struggles to make sense of grade-level reading materials.

#### Level 4 Expanding

**Mariella**, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student, was born in El Salvador and was adopted as a second grader by a native-English speaking family. She now has a sister who is also in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and a brother in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Mariella did not learn to read or write Spanish prior to arriving in the U.S. because she was unable to attend school due to poverty. However, she has made quick progress in learning English because her new home environment immerses her in the English language and American culture. In addition, Mariella's sister tutors her in class work. Mariella regularly reads lower reading-level books to her brother, though she can read some 5<sup>th</sup> grade text if it is well-supported with visuals and context clues. Her writing has been advantaged by the fact that she and her sister and their friends regularly "text" each other on their cell phones. Her entire family has been very supportive and encouraging of Mariella's English language development, as well as the retention of her first language and culture. They have demonstrated consistent patience as she has had a rocky adjustment to classroom routines, due to her lack of socialization in school. Her inappropriate behavior in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade caused her teachers to refer her for special education.

**Rafael**, another 5<sup>th</sup> grade student, came to the U.S. from Mexico with his uncle and two young cousins, in first grade. Rafael was on grade-level in his Mexican elementary school and surpassed many of his peers in reading ability in Spanish. His speedy acquisition of English caused his ESL teacher to refer him for gifted and talented programming, but he could not earn a high enough score on the standardized test to qualify. While at school, Rafael is an engaged student. He completes scaffolded/supported grade-level assignments when given class time, though not when assignments are given as homework. He happily participates in group work, getting along well with his peers both in the classroom and on the soccer field. Though his English is not perfect, his errors rarely hinder understanding. He wants to play the trumpet, but his uncle cannot afford to purchase an instrument for him.

#### Level 5 Bridging

**Minh**, a Vietnamese boy who recently arrived as a 9th grader through immigrating with his family, was an excellent student in Vietnam. In fact, he was the top student in math and in English at his school. However, since Minh's instruction in English focused on reading and writing, he had few opportunities to interact and develop his listening and speaking abilities. His family now lives together with his uncle. Minh is very motivated to study and hopes to attend a state university to major in electrical engineering. At his high school, he has stunned his math teachers with his ability to complete computations that are far beyond his grade level. In writing, Minh produces extended discourse, although he seems to struggle with listening and speaking. His English placement test indicates that he is Level 1 in speaking, Level 2 in listening, and Level 5 in reading and writing.

**Pabitra**, a 9th grade girl from Nepal, arrived in the U.S. in 8th grade with her parents and brother. They had lived in a refugee camp in Nepal all of her life. While her native language is Nepali, the language of instruction in the refugee camp school was English. Her English placement test revealed that she is Level 5 in listening, speaking, and reading and Level 4 in writing. However, she has consistently struggled with math since she arrived. Through an interpreter, her parents confirm that Pabitra was unsuccessful in math in the camp school and has difficulty wherever mathematical concepts are needed. Her math and ESL teachers suspect that she should be entitled to special education services because of her mathematics difficulties. However, the school principal believes that English language learners should not be placed in special education programs until they have either exited the ESL program or have been in the U.S. for three years.

**Source:** Fairbairn, S., & Jones-Vo, S. (in press). *Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners*. Philadelphia: Caslon.

**Task: Use the essential questions to select instruction and assessment strategies for ELLs.** Use the notemaking guide on the last page to scaffold and support your work.

**Step 1: Who are the students?** Working in groups of three or four who teach at the same grade level (K-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-12), select one pair of focal students from page 2-3 above who have the same English language proficiency level (you can change their grade levels to match the grade level your grade group teaches, but adapt the profile accordingly). Using the student can-do descriptors on the next page, discuss what these students can be expected to do with reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English. Identify any other factors that may contribute to their participation and achievement in school, and explain how those factors might matter. Fill in the notemaking guide (page 8), question 1: Who are the students?

**Step 2: What are the goals and objectives?** Pick an assignment from the following list. Working with your group, identify the specific goals and objectives of this assignment and fill in the notemaking guide, question 2.

- Assignment 1: Students must write a 5-page report about a country.
- Assignment 2: Students must give a 3-5 minute presentation about a current event.
- Assignment 3: Student must read a chapter in a textbook (your group can pick the content area and subject) and answer the questions at the end of the chapter.
- Assignment 4: Based on an experiment done in class, students must write a detailed lab report encompassing the scientific method.
- Assignment 5: Students must collect data through interviews, construct a bar line or graph, and present their findings.

**Step 3: What is likely to be challenging about this assignment for these students?** Be specific, and identify the concrete content, language, literacy, and/or cultural challenges the assignment is likely to present. Fill in the notemaking guide, question 3.

**Step 4: What instructional strategies should you use to address those challenges?** Look at the instructional strategies on page 6, and select strategies that your group believes are appropriate for your learners.

**Step 5: What assessments can you use to collect evidence of your student learning?** Look at the assessment strategies on page 7, and select strategies that your group believes are appropriate for your learners.

## Student Descriptors by English Language Proficiency Level

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<p><b>Listening:</b> Begins to recognize often-heard words and phrases that are supported contextually; requires frequent restatement or paraphrasing, and begins to develop awareness of the sound system of English</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> Possibly silent; produces often-heard words, memorized phrases, or self-generated language to express meaning or ask questions; supports communication with nonverbal cues; begins to produce the range of sounds of English</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Gains meaning primarily from visual support (e.g., pictures, graphic organizers, icons); if literate in the first language, may start to transfer those skills to English when provided with high-quality, visually supported reading instruction; preliterate students may begin to develop reading skills in English when provided with high-quality, visually supported reading instruction</p> <p><b>Writing:</b> May draw; copy written text; or write or dictate individual letters, words, or phrases (or approximations thereof) to convey meaning</p>	<p><b>Listening:</b> Develops ability to respond to frequently heard language with continued dependence on context, paraphrasing, and repetition; begins to build content and academic vocabulary</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> Uses phrases and simple sentences, likely omitting key words, to communicate about common experiences and situations; begins to produce content and academic vocabulary; errors often inhibit communication</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> May recognize and read words and phrases frequently encountered; gains meaning from simple and familiar text with visual support (e.g., pictures, graphic organizers, icons)</p> <p><b>Writing:</b> Dictates phrases and simple sentences, writes phrases and simple sentences with occasional content and academic vocabulary when supported, errors often obstruct meaning</p>	<p><b>Listening:</b> Interprets meaning of sentence-level communication in social and general academic contexts; understands main ideas of more complex oral discourse, particularly when supported visually; continues to build repertoire of content and academic vocabulary and sentence structures</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> Generates simple sentences with minimal errors, though more complex sentences contain errors that may inhibit communication; may appear fluent because of near mastery of social language, whereas content and academic language continues to develop related to concrete and abstract concepts; uses more precise and specific content and academic vocabulary and increasingly complex grammatical structures</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Derives meaning from increasingly complex sentence- and paragraph-level text, but requires visual and teacher support; draws upon background knowledge and previous experiences to make sense of longer text</p> <p><b>Writing:</b> Writes increasingly complex sentences with a wide range of social vocabulary and a developing range of content and academic vocabulary related to concrete and abstract concepts; errors sometimes obstruct meaning</p>	<p><b>Listening:</b> Understands social and academic discourse of differing lengths and levels of complexity; comprehends a wide variety of social and content/academic vocabulary related to both concrete and abstract concepts, particularly with visual or contextual support</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> Generates grammatically varied speech in a wide variety of social and academic contexts using content/academic vocabulary related to concrete and abstract concepts, errors do not typically obstruct meaning</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Comprehends increasingly complex text on known topics, while unknown topics continue to require visual or contextual support</p> <p><b>Writing:</b> Produces social and academic text using increasingly precise content/academic vocabulary and increasingly complex grammar and mechanics related to concrete and abstract concepts; errors do not typically obstruct meaning</p>	<p><b>Listening:</b> Comprehends a broad spectrum of social and academic discourse, attends to language with an increasing amount of linguistic complexity, understands most grade-level content/academic vocabulary, approaches the range of grade-level performance exhibited by English-proficient peers</p> <p><b>Speaking:</b> Produces a broad spectrum of extended discourse with increasing linguistic complexity and vocabulary mastery; approaches the range of grade-level performance exhibited by English-proficient peers</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Comprehends text of increasing linguistic complexity and vocabulary related to a variety of grade-appropriate subjects and genres; approaches the range of grade-level performance exhibited by English-proficient peers</p> <p><b>Writing:</b> Writes text varying in length, complexity, vocabulary mastery, and level of academic discourse; approaches the range of grade-level performance exhibited by English-proficient peers</p>

Instructional Strategies				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide visual supports for every lesson (e.g., real objects, pictures, hands-on materials, non-verbal communication, oral directions supported by written directions)</li> <li>Teach students basic commands by modeling actions</li> <li>Build confidence by rewarding all attempts to communicate</li> <li>Invite students' participation by asking questions that require physical responses (e.g., "thumbs up", "thumbs down")</li> <li>Encourage students' participation in discussions through non-verbal and/or brief communications</li> <li>For literacy-related activities, use extensive visual support since Level 1 students cannot derive meaning from print</li> <li>Supplement grade-level content curriculum with high quality, age-appropriate, lower reading-level books that contain extensive visual support</li> <li>Promote the development of higher-order thinking skills by using graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, T-charts, concept maps</li> <li>Concentrate on students' meaning rather than on correctness of expression</li> <li>Use simplified, correct language, repeating and/or paraphrasing as needed</li> <li>Ensure that directions are clear and confirm that students understand them</li> <li>Allow sufficient wait time (like several seconds)</li> <li>Ask students to communicate through drawing</li> <li>Accept drawing and copying in lieu of grade-level writing expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide visual supports for every lesson (e.g., real objects, pictures, hands-on materials, non-verbal communication, oral directions supported by written directions)</li> <li>Build confidence by rewarding all attempts to communicate</li> <li>Scaffold student responses by modeling academic language and providing sentence examples/models</li> <li>Encourage students' participation in discussions through the use of phrases or short sentences</li> <li>For literacy-related activities, use extensive visual support since Level 1 students cannot derive meaning from print alone</li> <li>Supplement grade-level content curriculum with high quality, age-appropriate, lower reading-level books that contain extensive visual support</li> <li>Model higher-order thinking processes during oral presentations by simultaneously completing graphic organizers or concept maps</li> <li>Concentrate on students' meaning rather than on correctness of expression</li> <li>Use simplified, correct language, repeating and/or paraphrasing as needed</li> <li>Ensure that directions are clear and confirm that students understand them</li> <li>Allow sufficient wait time (like several seconds)</li> <li>Scaffold writing by providing visual support</li> <li>Incorporate shared and process writing activities</li> <li>Accept phrases or short sentences in lieu of grade-level expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide visual supports for every lesson (e.g., real objects, pictures, hands-on materials, non-verbal communication, oral directions supported by written directions)</li> <li>Scaffold students' language development by using increasingly complex language, paraphrasing as needed</li> <li>Scaffold extended student responses by providing a framework/model for high-quality academic discourse (i.e., teacher provides the sample format for complete student responses)</li> <li>Give student opportunities to produce extended discourse through activities such as reporting and mini-presentations</li> <li>For literacy-related activities, use high-quality, age-appropriate, lower reading-level books aligned with content curriculum that provides extensive visual support</li> <li>Provide students with graphic organizers or concept maps to facilitate and support higher-order thinking</li> <li>Concentrate on students' meaning to a greater extent than correctness of form</li> <li>Ensure that directions are clear and confirm that students understand them</li> <li>Engage students in writing activities that elicit expanded sentences of varying types</li> <li>Explicitly teach and require students to use increasingly complex academic vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide visual supports for every lesson (e.g., real objects, pictures, hands-on materials, non-verbal communication, oral directions supported by written directions)</li> <li>Provide opportunities for students to produce extended discourse expressive of higher-order thinking (e.g., evaluation, persuasion, implications)</li> <li>Provide students with graphic organizers or concept maps to facilitate and support higher-order thinking</li> <li>For literacy-related activities, use a combination of grade-level texts (with scaffolding) and high-quality, age-appropriate, lower reading-level books aligned with content curriculum that provide extensive visual support</li> <li>Engage students in grade level assignments/assessments with scaffolding and supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage students in the same tasks assigned to grade-level peers with diminishing scaffolding and support</li> </ul>

<b>Assessment Strategies</b>				
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 5</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the assessment process comprehensible by explaining the instructions orally and providing visual support (e.g., realia, icons, manipulatives, models)</li> <li>• Evaluate comprehension via student nonverbal demonstration (e.g., pointing thumbs-up/thumbs-down, sequencing pictures, matching). Written testing is not likely to be effective with Level 1 students.</li> <li>• Consider allowing students to demonstrate their learning in their first language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the assessment process comprehensible by explaining the instructions orally and providing visual support (e.g., realia, icons, manipulatives, models)</li> <li>• Evaluate comprehension via student nonverbal demonstration (e.g., pointing thumbs-up/thumbs-down, sequencing pictures, matching). Written testing is not likely to be effective with Level 2 students.</li> <li>• Consider allowing students to demonstrate their learning in their first language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the assessment process comprehensible by explaining the instructions orally and providing visual support (e.g., realia, icons, manipulatives, models)</li> <li>• Utilize performance-based and/or authentic assessments (e.g., demonstrations, dioramas, collages, journals, art projects, maps, models)</li> <li>• When traditional paper and pencil tests must be used, employ simplified English and visual support (clip art, graphs, etc.)</li> <li>• Language-related accommodations should be provided, as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the assessment process comprehensible by explaining the instructions orally and providing visual support (e.g., realia, icons, manipulatives, models)</li> <li>• Utilize performance-based and/or authentic assessments (e.g., demonstrations, collages, dioramas, art projects, maps, models)</li> <li>• When traditional paper and pencil tests must be used, employ simplified English and visual support (clip art, graphs, etc.)</li> <li>• Language-related accommodations should be provided, as appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize well-designed assessments that are aligned with grade-level academic content standards. (These are the same assessments used for nonELLs).</li> <li>• Minimal language-related accommodations should be provided, as appropriate</li> </ul>

**Source:** Fairbairn, S., & Jones-Vo, S. (in press). *Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners*. Philadelphia: Caslon.

Essential Questions	Notes for your Task
<p>1. Who are my students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic and cultural background</li> <li>• Level of English language proficiency (R,W, L,S)</li> <li>• Literacy in first language</li> <li>• Age and grade</li> <li>• Educational background</li> <li>• Interests, motivation, learning style</li> </ul>	
<p>2. What are my goals and objectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content and ELP standards</li> <li>• Content objectives</li> <li>• Language objectives</li> <li>• Other goals and objectives (personal, program, school, parental, community...)</li> </ul>	
<p>3. What is challenging about this unit/lesson/activity for the ELLs in my class?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Literacy</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	
<p>4. What instructional strategies can I use to address those challenges so that my ELLs can participate and achieve in my class?</p>	
<p>5. What assessment strategies can I use to collect evidence of my students' performance relative to my goals and objectives?</p>	