Introduction to the Model Unit Exemplars for ELLs

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 ushered in a new stage for the standards based movement by proposing to close the achievement gap (NCLB Act, 2002). Closing the achievement gap by focusing on outcomes shifted educational policy and raised the expectations for English Language Learners (ELLs). However, just creating the standards has not been enough. Oftentimes, the linguistic needs of ELLs are not reflected in the curriculum, consequently, administrators, general education and ESL teachers may lack the guidance on how to provide access to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Specific measures to connect the standards to the classroom context are needed. This document of unit exemplars at each grade level, created by a special cadre of New Jersey ESL, bilingual teachers and supervisors, hopes to fill that need.

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Process

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A Universal Design for Learning was the basis for planning and creating these units. In this way, all students benefit even though they are specifically designed for ELLs. While several individual teachers and districts have created curriculum units, the Title I Office of the New Jersey Department of Education decided to develop model unit exemplars. These exemplars encompass CCSS-ELA and WIDA English Language Development (ELD) standards while acknowledging the appropriate expectations at various English proficiency levels. These cohesive units were designed by utilizing criteria established in the Evaluating Quality Instructional Programs (EQuIP) rubric, which was developed in a collaborative process by Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York with support from Achieve. The EQuIP rubric gauges the quality and alignment of lessons and units to the Common Core

State Standards. In addition, the New Jersey ELL Scaffolding Model Curriculum project guided the supports and differentiation suggested in each lesson.

These units were planned with general education, ESL, and bilingual teachers in mind who deliver services in self-contained, push-in or pull-out program designs. In this way, all teachers deliver lessons based on the same Student Learning Objectives connected to the Common Core State Standards. At the middle and secondary levels, the units were developed as English Language Arts replacement classes.

One of the main goals of this project was to model the process used and the essential components needed for ELLs to achieve the CCSS and WIDA ELD standards. Several recent documents related to raising expectations (Council for Great City Schools, 2014) and scaffolding instruction for ELLs (August, Staehr Fenner, & Snyder, 2014) also informed the project.

Unit Overview

Each unit begins with an overview of what is covered. The unit authors specify guiding questions and enduring understandings in addition to all of the standards addressed in the unit (Common Core, WIDA ELD, Next Generation Science, or NJCCC in Social Studies). These standards are then posted next to each objective in the ensuing lessons, thereby connecting each objective to the appropriate standard(s). In order to provide insight into the selection of texts, the authors identified not only the central texts to be used but also the rationale for the selection of those texts. The unit overview concludes with a performance task for students to complete. In some grade levels, teachers created a matrix, where students can choose various ways to demonstrate their knowledge. The matrix allows for students at various levels of proficiency and across multiple intelligences to show what they know.

Starting Point

Each lesson is composed of the same features based on current research and practices. Kinsella (2005) found that English learners need to engage in fluent, wide reading on the same topic in order to successfully develop academic language. She stated that *"exposing students only once to something new is not a realistic pattern in terms of college or the workplace"* (Kinsella, 2005). At the same time, ELLs may not have the background knowledge needed to comprehend the text. Pondiscio (2014) compares comprehension of text to a tower of blocks. Each block represents *"a vocabulary word or a piece of background knowledge. Pull out two or three blocks, and the tower still stands. Pull out too many, and it collapses"* (Pondiscio, 2014, p 99). Based on these facts, the unit authors created lessons which embed the second language acquisition process into a theme-based unit.

Using a backward design, the unit authors first examined the Unit assessments in the NJ Model Curriculum framework to identify a theme. In choosing the theme, the unit authors also considered how they could weave grade-level appropriate, interdisciplinary lessons throughout the unit. This factor, then influenced the selection of materials. While most unit authors chose to focus on one unit assessment, in some instances, the theme dictated that standards from two units were included. Using the assessed standards and the topic of the text, the teachers created the lessons with the following overarching features: the background knowledge and academic vocabulary needed to comprehend the topic; appropriate instructional practices for ELLs at various English proficiency levels; and ample opportunities for interaction and development of the language needed to access the CCSS and other content standards. These instructional practices reflect some of the

recommendations cited in the Institute of Education Sciences publication (Baker, et al., 2014):

Recommendation 1: Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.

Recommendation 2: Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching.

Recommendation 3: Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written *(and oral)* language skills. *(emphasis component added)*

As a result, the unit authors identified WIDA Performance Indicators across all four domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Following the 2012 Amplification of the WIDA standards model, the unit authors also identified key vocabulary needed for all students, and then differentiated additional vocabulary for combined ELP levels 1-2 and combined ELP levels 3-4. The corresponding WIDA ELD, CCSS and NJCCC standards were then matched with each performance indicator.

Time Frame

Each unit is expected to occur over a five week span. Therefore, the lessons in the unit are planned for three to five day implementation depending on class period and students' levels. Each lesson is divided into the following sections: 1) key vocabulary, key language forms and conventions; 2) preparing the learner by activating prior and/or building background knowledge; 3) interacting with text which includes close reading of excerpts from text and analyzing complex sentences; 4) extending understanding and 5) a formative assessment either infused in the lesson or completed at the end of the lesson. This design adapts and integrates features from various current initiatives: Understanding Language curriculum unit *Persuasion Across Time and Space* (2013); instructional conversations focused on a complex sentence from the academic text (Wong-Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012);

EngageNY model units with ELL Scaffolding (August, Staehr Fenner, & Snyder, 2014); recommendations from Institute for Education Sciences (IES) publication (Baker, et al., 2014).

Early Grades Kindergarten - Second

In the early grades, even though, a systemic foundational skills program is essential for comprehensive literacy instruction for ELLs, it is not enough (Liben & Liben, 2012). If reading comprehension is the ultimate goal, then, background knowledge and academic language (which includes specific language forms and conventions as well as technical vocabulary) are also essential for ELLs (Wong-Filmore and Snow, 2000; Bunch et al., 2012; Hirsch, 2006; as cited in Liben & Liben, 2012). For these reasons, kindergarten, first and second grade units, specifically address the general background knowledge and academic language that ELLs need in order to build knowledge and vocabulary. Consequently, these units are an extension of the literacy block; reading foundational skills are included but not emphasized in this portion of the lesson. Also at this level, "close read" refers primarily to teachers reading aloud to students.

Grades Three - Twelve

In grades 3 -12, the topic or theme is connected to excerpts to be read in the unit assessment since ELLs need multiple exposures to vocabulary and concepts (Kinsella, 2005). Reading the text "cold" is virtually building a tower of blocks with a significant number of blocks missing. Therefore, unit authors included lessons, questions and activities that built background knowledge most likely missing with children from other cultures (e.g., cowboys, NASCAR driving). In all grade levels, the first lesson is connected to a topic that is familiar to the students and the subsequent lessons systemically build toward the new content

knowledge needed to comprehend the text, all the while addressing CCSS and ELD standards along the way.

Lesson Components

Each section of the lesson amplifies components and strategies which are proven to be effective teaching tools for ELLs. The first section identifies the language needed to understand the content. Teachers selected *Key Vocabulary* for ALL students (typically Tier 2 academic language) and additional vocabulary for the different ELP levels. Teachers also analyzed the text and pinpointed recurring forms or conventions that students would need to understand. In the second section, *Preparing the Learner*, teachers crafted activities that either made connections with what students already knew or filled in gaps of background knowledge needed to understand the text. Teachers also created various ways for students to *Interact with the Text*. Typically, teachers first read aloud parts or the whole text or students view a video clip. Using these techniques, teachers can guide students in understanding the main idea and some key details through scaffolded questioning. Then, students reread the text alone or with a partner continuing to answer questions. On the second close read, teachers guide students to identify the author's purpose and rationale for using certain words or sentences (August, Staehr Fenner, & Snyder, 2014). Vocabulary development, both explicit and implicit, is an integral focus in all lessons. Most importantly, teachers developed text dependent questions based on the unit assessment model in order to provide students with ample opportunities to practice answering questions in this format.

The fourth segment of the lesson *extends the understanding* of the unit in various ways. Some lessons extend the practice of vocabulary or language forms and conventions while other lessons may extend the understanding of the concepts. Teachers have the option

to individualize by re-teaching or enhancing the information presented in the lesson. Oftentimes, the formative assessment may be incorporated into this segment. The final segment, *formative assessment*, provides the teacher information about the students' comprehension and performance. The outcomes are differentiated by ELP level so that students can demonstrate what they know in accordance with their appropriate linguistic developmental stage.

Throughout the lessons, though, ELP levels 1 and 2 are combined as are ELP levels 3 and 4. In the *Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for ELLs* (Council for Great City Schools, 2014), the authors state that:

> *Materials must be responsive and accommodate varying levels of English proficiency.… They*
>
> *should highlight instructional practices for working with groups with diverse levels of language*
>
> *proficiency, <u>but must avoid tagging instructional practices to specific levels of English</u>*
>
> *<u>proficiency.</u> Linking specific instructional practices or expectations to specific English proficiency*
>
> *levels creates a very rigid approach to teaching that can lead to ELLs being labeled and taught*
>
> *on one level instead of progressing along a continuum. Materials should give students the*
>
> *opportunity to strive upwards.*

Peregoy and Boyle (2013) also support this approach:

> *no activity should be withheld from any particular student solely on the basis of perceived*
>
> *English language proficiency. It is all too easy to misjudge a child's language competence because*

language performance varies across situations and from week to week as a result of the dynamic

and context–specific nature of language proficiency. Moreover, motivation tends to stretch a

child's performance.

For these reasons, the differentiation for ELLs is combined at two overarching levels:

beginning ELP 1-2; and intermediate ELP 3-4.

In Closing

This document demonstrates examples of how to develop units which address both

the CCSS and WIDA ELD standards. As educators endeavor to improve achievement of the

ELLs in their schools, it is hoped that they will find valuable information about the process

and the essential elements needed to support the achievement of ELLs.

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