

# PCG's ELL Instructional Framework:

Ensuring Academic Success for English Language Learners



The education of English language learners (ELLs) is an area of increasing urgency in this country. ELLs are the fastest growing student population in the nation. Nearly five million ELLs in classrooms are disproportionately underserved and underachieving across the U.S. As a result, Public Consulting Group (PCG) is responding to the heightened and complex challenges that schools are facing to ensure that ELL students receive a high-quality, equitable education.

As the number of ELLs in the U.S. increases, teachers must be prepared to support their learning effectively. A study conducted by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) in 2014 shows that 75 percent of elementary teacher preparation programs fail when it comes to readying future teachers to work effectively with ELLs. As a result, schools are faced with building their own ELL teaching capacity. General education classroom teachers, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, school specialists, and administrators benefit from professional development that leads to improved academic outcomes for this increasingly diverse student population. Recognizing this need, PCG has adopted the six key principles for ELL instruction from Stanford University's Understanding Language as the underlying framework for its ELL practices. The Six Key Principles for ELL Instruction were developed under the guidance of Dr. Kenji Hakuta and serve as PCG's framework for teaching second language learners. These principles are the premier body of work being used as a guide for educating ELLs and while new, they capitalize upon decades of research about language development. Building on that foundation, PCG has developed 10 literacy practices that exemplify the necessary linguistic supports to ensure ELLs are successful across the curriculum. Together with the six key principles, the 10 language and literacy practices form PCG's ELL Instructional Framework.

## Summary

PCG's ELL Instructional Framework offers guidance to teachers and practitioners through

- 6 key principles for ELL instruction, and
- 10 literacy and language practices.

**Purpose:** PCG's ELL Framework is designed to provide instructional direction to classroom teachers and practitioners. The framework expands on Stanford University's Understanding Language Six Key Principles for ELL Instruction and offers additional guidance on scaffolding instruction, as well as giving school leaders a set of practices to support general education and English language development (ELD) classrooms.

## Six Key Principles for ELL Instruction

As described in Stanford University's Understanding Language policy series English Language Learners must meet rigorous, grade level academic standards. The principles guide teachers, coaches, ELL specialists, curriculum leaders, school principals, and district administrators as they work to develop academic standards aligned instruction for ELLs.

### Key Principles for ELL Instruction

(Understanding Language, Stanford University, 2013)

1

Instruction is focused on conceptual understanding and language competence

2

Instruction leverages home language and culture

3

Instruction is standards-aligned

4

Instruction takes into account English language proficiency levels

5

Instruction fosters ELLs' autonomy

6

Instruction incorporates diagnostic tools and formative assessment

**1 Instruction focuses on providing ELLs with opportunities to engage in discipline-specific practices, which are designed to build conceptual understanding and language competence in tandem.**

Learning is a social process that requires teachers to intentionally design learning opportunities that integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening with the practices of each discipline.

**2 Instruction leverages ELLs' home language(s), cultural assets, and prior knowledge.** ELLs' home language(s) and culture(s) are regarded as assets and are used by the teacher in bridging prior knowledge to new knowledge, and in making content meaningful and comprehensible .

**3 Standards-aligned instruction for ELLs is rigorous, grade-level appropriate, and provides deliberate and appropriate scaffolds.** Instruction that is rigorous and standards-aligned reflects the key shifts in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Such shifts require that teachers provide students with opportunities to describe their reasoning, share explanations, make conjectures, justify conclusions, argue from evidence, and negotiate meaning from complex texts. Students with developing levels of English proficiency will require instruction that carefully supports their understanding and use of emerging language as they participate in these activities.

**4 Instruction moves ELLs forward by taking into account their English proficiency level(s) and prior schooling experiences.** ELLs within a single classroom can be heterogeneous in terms of home language(s) proficiency, proficiency in English, literacy levels in English and students' home language(s), previous experiences in schools, and time in the U.S. Teachers must be attentive to these differences and design instruction accordingly.

**5 Instruction fosters ELLs' autonomy by equipping them with the strategies necessary to comprehend and use language in a variety of academic settings.** ELLs must learn to use a broad repertoire of strategies to construct meaning from academic talk and complex text, to participate in academic discussions, and to express themselves in writing across a variety of academic situations. Tasks must be designed to ultimately foster student independence.

**6 Diagnostic tools and formative assessment practices are employed to measure students' content knowledge, academic language competence, and participation in disciplinary practices.** These assessment practices allow teachers to monitor students' learning so that they may adjust instruction accordingly, provide students with timely and useful feedback, and encourage students to reflect on their own thinking and learning.

## 10 Language and Literacy Practices to Support Second Language Learning Across the Curriculum

These literacy practices show the day-to-day scaffolding supports for teaching language in tandem with content. Aligned with the six key principles from Stanford's Understanding Language, they amplify language opportunities across the curriculum by facilitating meaningful conversation, building teaching skills through contextualized instruction, developing vocabulary through authentic experiences, activating schema, and increasing background knowledge. These language and literacy practices involve listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They allow ELL students to participate in challenging grade-level tasks when students are supported at their English proficiency level. Examples of the 10 practices are available for K-12 classrooms. These literacy practices are enumerated for clarity, and while there is obvious overlap within and across practices, each practice is pedagogically sound, in and of itself.



**1 Develop oral language through instructional conversations and authentic experiences.** Oral language is the foundation of literacy: a predictor of reading and writing and a main tool for learning and interacting in both academic and social settings. Natural exposure to, as well as planned experiences with, oral language facilitates increased expression and understanding of the second language. Oral language also supports vocabulary development in context, paving the way for better comprehension and production. Exposure to rich oral and written language environments is vital for developing literacy and language skills in all content area classrooms.

**2 Teach targeted skills and meaning-making strategies.** Teaching foundational and reading comprehension skills through contextualized and explicit instruction will give ELLs access to critical literacy skills. Contextualized instruction provides students with relevance, extra language support, and meaningful literacy interactions. Explicit and in-depth teacher instruction targets reading skills and strategies through daily scaffolded routines to comprehend increasingly complex literacy demands. Building these meaning-making strategies provides students with a toolbox to approach future learning challenges. Meaning-making strategies vary from helping students comprehend text to various strategies students can use to understand English-dependent lessons. Teacher modeling, an essential component of contextualized and explicit teaching, provides students with appropriate literacy behaviors and resources to be autonomous learners.

**3 Build academic language through authentic and meaningful experiences.** Developing and deepening students' understanding of new words in a systematic and deliberate manner is essential for ELLs. Through literature and informational text, and across academic disciplines (e.g., science, mathematics, social studies), students can experience authentic ways to build academic language and vocabulary. Establishing vocabulary routines and implementing them across a number of days through a variety of planned instructional activities and through multiple modalities will increase the chances of students owning new words and integrating them into their language use and literacy experiences. Vocabulary building is a lifelong process, and the goal should be for students to learn independent ways to approach and incorporate new and challenging words into their daily literacy interactions.

**4 Build and activate prior knowledge.** Learning is based on establishing neural connections in the brain, drawing on previous experience, background knowledge, as well as prior and current environments. It is the job of both the teacher and the students to facilitate these connections to construct meaning and understand new ideas and concepts while expanding on their own world knowledge. Actively fostering these connections will enable students to more easily interpret their surroundings and assign meaning to new concepts while expanding their own experiences.

**5 Develop language through writing.** Students need daily opportunities to write in order to develop effective written language skills. Writing is a developmental process for ELLs; those who are at early levels of English proficiency will benefit initially from writing about personal experiences and interests (narratives) while concurrently responding to the demands of grade-level

writing standards. They can take risks exploring language and build fluency because topics are familiar and relevant. Through narrative writing, ELLs can build their confidence as they move and expand into other types of writing (such as opinion and informative/explanatory text) with prompting, guidance, and support from adults. As students' English proficiency strengthens, their writing skills and abilities are more closely aligned with grade level English Language Arts writing and language standards.

**6 Develop and support home language.** There is undeniable and growing evidence that supporting the home language of ELLs is of considerable benefit to their overall academic success. In some schools the goal is to create bilingual, bi-literate students who graduate with balanced literacy skills in two languages. In other schools, English is the sole medium of instruction with English proficiency being the singular goal. Regardless of the type of program services, it is important to know the value and impact of the students' home language in becoming English proficient and the role it plays in their school success.

**7 Use ongoing classroom-based assessment.** Classroom-based assessment of ELLs requires measuring student progress in learning English and academic content. Such measurements can be accomplished using the English language development standards and the academic content standards to plan for instruction on a daily basis. Ongoing assessment tasks must take into consideration the students' English language proficiency level. Irrespective of their stage of English language development, with proper linguistic support, ELL students can indeed perform advanced thinking tasks.

**8 Establish rituals and routines.** ELLs benefit from learning in a predictable environment that increases focused learning time. Rituals and routines help teachers and students use time efficiently by establishing processes and procedures for "how things get done" in the class. When appropriate routines and rituals are in place, time can be devoted to instruction and learning, minimizing distractions and disruptions.

**9 Create classrooms with environmental supports.** Environmental supports can increase the effectiveness of instruction for ELLs and promote independent learning. ELLs need many ways to access language and content relevant to what they are learning. Developing support for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations means taking advantage of every moment and opportunity for teaching and learning. A well-organized, carefully planned classroom environment benefits ELLs as they count on an environment with visual cues to help them make sense of the new language and new content.

**10 Maximize student-grouping opportunities.** Grouping students in different configurations promotes opportunities for linguistic and academic development through interactive discussions in various settings. Students build classroom community, gain multiple perspectives, learn to collaborate, and have opportunities to practice language in a low-risk learning environment. Homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping includes organizing students in different ways based on language proficiency in English, content skills, or other characteristics. Groups should be fluid and flexible depending on the task involved.

---

## About Public Consulting Group

Public Consulting Group's (PCG) Education division offers consulting and technology solutions to schools, districts, and state education agencies across the U.S. and internationally to strengthen student achievement and improve organizations' instructional and operational capacity. In partnership with clients, PCG designs and delivers training and technical assistance to build strong leaders, increase educators' ability to improve instruction, develop standards-based curriculum, and meet the needs of diverse learners along the pathway to college and career readiness. PCG supports practitioners at all stages of standards implementation and school improvement. More information is available at [PublicConsultingGroup.com/education](http://PublicConsultingGroup.com/education).

## About the Author

Gloria Rodriguez is a Senior Associate with PCG's Education Consulting (EC) team and is an ELL and bilingual subject matter expert. Gloria works closely with teachers and school administrators to guide and support the development of ELL programs and curriculum that lead to culturally and linguistically responsive school systems.

## References for PCG's ELL Framework

Ruiz Soto, A. G., Hooker S., & Batalova, J. (2015). States and districts with the highest number and share of English language learners. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/states-and-districts-highest-number-and-share-english-language-learners>

Greenberg, J., Walsh, K., & McKee, A. (2014). Teacher prep review report 2014. Washington DC: National Council on Teacher Quality. Retrieved from [http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Teacher\\_Prep\\_Review\\_2014\\_Report](http://www.nctq.org/dmsStage/Teacher_Prep_Review_2014_Report)

Stanford University, Understanding Language. (2013, January 11). Six key principles for ELL instruction. Retrieved from <http://ell.stanford.edu/content/six-key-principles-ell-instruction>

## References for the Six Key Principles

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common core state standards, English language arts standards. Washington DC: Authors. Available from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

NGSS Lead States. (2013). Next generation science standards: For states, by states. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Available from <http://www.nextgenscience.org/>

## References Related to the 10 Language and Literacy Practices

### 1. Develop oral language through instructional conversations and authentic experiences.

Kinsella, K. (2012). Cutting to the common core: Communicating on the same wavelength. *Language Magazine*, 12(4), 18–25.

National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. (2015). The big five, the big picture: Oral language and vocabulary. Washington, DC: Office of Head Start. Available from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/big-5.html>

Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2009). How to start academic conversations. *Educational Leadership*, 66(7), 70–73.

### 2. Teach targeted skills and meaning-making strategies.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (2010). Effective English literacy instruction for English learners. In F. Ong (with V. Aguilá) (Eds.), *Improving education for English learners: Research-based approaches* (pp. 209–237). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

Cappellini, M. (2005). *Balancing reading & language learning: A resource for teaching English language learners, K-5*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Dutro, S. (2003). Rethinking English language instruction: An architectural approach. In G. Garcia (Ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. (2015). The big five, the big picture: Book knowledge and print concepts. Washington, DC: Office of Head Start. Available from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/big-5.html>

August, D. (2014). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A resource guide for English language arts. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from <https://www.engageny.org/resource/scaffolding-instruction-english-language-learners-resource-guides-english-language-arts-and>

Goldenberg, C. (2013, Summer). Unlocking the research on English learners: What we know—and don't yet know—about effective instruction. *American Educator*. Retrieved from <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Goldenberg.pdf>

Wong-Fillmore, L., & Fillmore, C. (2012). What does text complexity mean for English learners and language minority students? Invited paper for the Understanding Language Initiative, Stanford University, Stanford CA.

### 3. Build academic language through authentic and meaningful experiences.

Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M. J., Linan-Thompson, S., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school (2014–4012). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from: [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications\\_reviews.aspx](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications_reviews.aspx)

Dutro, S., & Helman, L. A. (2009). Explicit language instruction: A key to constructing meaning: Research-based instruction in grades K-6. In L. A. Helman (Ed.), *Literacy development with English learners: Research-based instruction in grades K-6*. (pp. 40–63). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Schleppegrell, M. J. (2012). Academic language in teaching and learning: Introduction to the special issue. *The Elementary School Journal*, 112(3), 409–418.

Valdés, G., Bunch, G., Snow, C., & Lee, C. (2005). Enhancing the development of students' language(s). In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 126–168). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Press.

Wong-Fillmore, L. (2009). English language development: Acquiring the language needed for literacy and learning. *Research Into Practice: Reading*. Pearson Education. Retrieved from [http://umaine.edu/projectreach/files/2012/06/For-Tuesday\\_WongFillmore.pdf](http://umaine.edu/projectreach/files/2012/06/For-Tuesday_WongFillmore.pdf)

Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2009). How to start academic conversations. *Educational Leadership*, 66(7), 70–73.

### 4. Build and activate prior knowledge.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Fenner, D. S. (2013, February, 7). Background knowledge: A key to close reading with ELLs. [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/blog/background-knowledge-key-close-reading-ells>

National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. (2015). The big five, the big picture:

Background knowledge. Washington, DC: Office of Head Start. Available from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/big-5.html>

Robertson, K. (2014, March 12). Accessing students' background knowledge in the ELL classroom [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/accessing-students-background-knowledge-ell-classroom>

### 5. Develop language through writing.

Bunch, G. C., Kibler, A., & Pimentel, S. (2012). Realizing opportunities for English learners in the common core English language arts and disciplinary literacy standards. Paper presented at Understanding Language Conference, Stanford University School of Education, Stanford, CA.

Gibbons P. (2002). Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning, teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

National Center for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. (2015). The big five, the big picture: Alphabet knowledge and early writing. Washington, DC: Office of Head Start. Available from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/big-5.html>

Mora-Flores, E. (2009). *Writing instruction for English learners: A focus on genre*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Samway K. (2006). When English language learners write: Connecting research to practice, K-8. Portsmouth, NH. Heinemann.

### 6. Develop and support home language.

Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2009). *Educating English learners for a transformed world: Dual language education of New Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: Fuente Press.

Espinosa, L. M. (2013, August). PreK-3rd: Challenging common myths about dual language learners (PreK-3rd Policy to Action Brief No. 10). New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Challenging%20Common%20Myths%20Update.pdf>

García, Ofelia. 2009. *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Irujo, S. (2005, May/June). Promoting native language and culture in English-only programs. *The ELL Outlook*. Amesbury, MA: Course Crafters, Inc.

Snow, M. A. (2005). Primary language instruction: A bridge to English language development. In California State Department of Education, *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretico-practical framework* (3rd ed., pp. 119–160). Los Angeles, CA: California State University Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center.

Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

### 7. Use ongoing classroom-based assessment.

Alvarez, L., Ananda, S., Walqui, A., Sato, E., & Rabinowitz, S. (2014). Focusing formative assessment on the needs of English language learners. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

Gottlieb, M. (2006). *Assessing English language learners: Bridges from language proficiency to academic achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press

Heritage, M., Walqui, A., & Linquanti, R. (2013, May 1). Formative assessment as contingent teaching and learning: Perspectives on assessment as and for language learning in content areas. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

### 8. Establish rituals and routines; and

### 9. Create classrooms with environmental supports.

Connell, G. (2014, January 15). 12 steps to creating a language rich environment [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2014/01/12-steps-creating-language-rich-environment>

Howell, J., & Reinhard, K. (2015). *Rituals and traditions: Fostering a sense of community in preschool*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Center for Responsive Schools, Inc. (2015, June 15). Is your classroom organized for learning? Retrieved from <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/is-your-classroom-organized-for-learning/>

Center for Responsive Schools, Inc. (2014, May). Responsive classroom efficacy study. Retrieved from [https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/pdf\\_files/RCES\\_summary.pdf](https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/pdf_files/RCES_summary.pdf)

Wilson, B. M. (2010). What every 2nd grade teacher needs to know about setting up and running a classroom. Turners Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools, Inc. Excerpts available from <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/product/what-every-2nd-grade-teacher-needs-to-know/>

Wilson, B. M., & Anderson, M. (n.d.). What every teacher needs to know K-5 Series. Turners Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools, Inc. Available from <http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/product/what-every-teacher-needs-to-know-k-5-series/>

### 10. Maximize student grouping opportunities.

Commins, N. L., & Miramontes, O. B. (2005). *Linguistic diversity & teaching*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

De Jong, E., & Commins, N. (2006). How should English language learners be grouped for instruction? In E. Hamayan & R. Freeman, (Eds.), *English language learners at school: A guide for administrators*. (pp. 118–121).

Dotson, J. M. (2001, Winter). Cooperative learning structures can increase student achievement. Retrieved from Kagan's Articles, Research & Rationale [S. Kagan] [http://www.kaganonline.com/free\\_articles/research\\_and\\_rationale/increase\\_achievement.php](http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/research_and_rationale/increase_achievement.php)

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. B. (2000). *Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis*. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis: Cooperative Learning Center

Kinsella, K. (2002). *Language strategies for active participation and learning: A rationale for systematically teaching classroom language and functions*. New York, NY: Scholastic RED.

To learn more about PCG's ELL Instructional Framework, contact us today.

[info@publicconsultinggroup.com](mailto:info@publicconsultinggroup.com)

PCG | Education