Professional Development Guide

Part 1: Helping School Leaders Design Professional Development

The first part of this guide helps school leaders design professional development for all teachers. Ideally, this professional development could be provided by the TESOL professional on staff. This resource is simply an outline of what a day of professional development on meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) could look like. All the issues are addressed at length in the various chapters in this book, referenced for each topic.

Language Levels (see Chapter 6)

1. ELLs at different language levels require different programs.
2. Beginning ELLs, those who do not yet have the English language skills to communicate even on very basic topics, require English language development, usually provided through ESOL classes. The older the beginning ELL, the less likely he or she will be best served in learning basic English by being immersed in regular classrooms for the majority of the school day.
3. Intermediate to advanced ELLs can best develop the academic language that they need by remaining in regular classes where teachers are well-equipped to teach content and language learning.

Concepts About SLA (see Chapters 4 and 5)

1. It is a myth that children simply pick up languages easily. Teachers need to understand the reality that English language acquisition is a long and difficult process, regardless of the age of the learner.
2. Social language and academic language are very different. Cummins (2000) has labeled these different types of language as basic interpersonal communication skills, which take 1–2 years to develop, and cognitive academic language proficiency, which can take 5–7 years to develop. A child who sounds very fluent on the playground may still not have developed much academic language, and may still be in need of focused English language development.
3. All children benefit from maintaining and continuing to develop their native language. Teachers should always encourage parents of ELLs to maintain their first language at home, and to actively work to help their child develop this language, for example, by reading books in the first language at home.
4. The native language is a needed and helpful tool in acquiring the new language of English. Translation, bilingual books, labels and charts, and conversations with classmates in the native language can all assist students on the path to learning both English and academic content. It is rarely appropriate to ban the use of the native language in school.

Culture and Affect (see Chapters 1–3)

1. Everyone in the school benefits from an environment that is multilingual and multicultural in nature. ELLs are an asset for the whole school community, as they can raise awareness and broaden perspectives on language and culture.
2. Affect plays a significant role in language acquisition. Students need to feel acceptance in their new school environment, and demonstrating appreciation for new cultures and languages can increase feelings of acceptance and lower stress.
3. ELLs experience stress on many levels when coming into a new school environment in a new language. Some stressors may include testing, hours spent in classrooms where nothing is understood, and disapproval of the use of the native language. We know that stress reduces language learning potential. Therefore, steps should be taken to reduce stressors wherever possible.

The Two Learning Goals of the ELL (see Chapters 5 and 6)

1. First, ELLs must acquire the English language in school. They do not acquire full proficiency in English *before* they can begin to learn content through the medium of English. However, it is important not to underestimate the importance of acquiring a foundational level of English as quickly as possible, upon arrival in an English-medium school.
2. The majority of the ELLs' time in our school, he or she will be learning academic content while simultaneously continuing to learn the English language. It is for this long-term task that all classroom teachers need to be well prepared.

Sheltering Academic Content (see Chapter 6)

1. Sheltering academic instruction is the concept of providing content in a way that is accessible for students who do not yet have full command of the English language. All teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms need to have a basic skill set for doing this.
2. Basic skills that all teachers need in order to shelter instruction include:
    a. The ability to convey concepts through multiple means, such as graphics, photos, experiments, reenactments, and role-plays.
    b. The ability to design effective interactive learning tasks, and the understanding of where to place ELLs in order to maximize their learning through pair and small group work.
    c. The ability to speak slowly and clearly, and understanding the importance of conveying information in more than one way, such as by writing, saying, and modeling instructions.
    d. The ability and willingness to modify texts and assignments as needed, in view of the ELL's language level.

Teaching for Language and Content Learning (see Chapter 5)

1. All teachers need to view themselves as language teachers. Native-English-speaking students are developing academic language through regular classes, just as ELLs are. So, it is helpful for all teachers to consider how they can help all students develop in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, through their subject area.

2. Teachers need specific strategies for helping intermediate and advanced ELLs to develop academic language (cognitive academic language proficiency) in their regular classes. Some of these strategies include:
    a. Adding language objectives to lesson plans. The regular addition of this component to all lesson plans will help all teachers to begin thinking about how they are overtly seeking to develop language skills in their classes.
    b. Identifying language items that are uniquely well-suited for development in a given content area, and then including these language items in learning tasks. For example, the content area of history provides many opportunities to comprehend and use various past tense forms. Math classes might provide opportunities for learning to use *if-then* structures, as they appear frequently in word problems.
    c. Providing ample time for students to use academic language in speech. ELLs, in particular, need opportunities in pair or small group work to formulate and speak complex sentences, aided appropriately by their peers.
    d. Understanding the need for both fluency and accuracy in language development. The additional talk time suggested above can help to develop fluency. Where accuracy is concerned, it is often appropriate for classroom teachers to work with ELLs for a few minutes in class individually, while other students are occupied with a task, to increase accuracy. For example, a student who says "I live in United State" may benefit from having a teacher work with him to elicit the correct statement "I live in **the** United State**s**."
3. Schools should acquire resources to help teachers identify specific ways that they can help ELLs learn both language and their specific content. There are texts and other resources that are content specific, such as books on teaching social studies or math to ELLs. There are also more broadly applicable lesson design resources, such as cognitive academic language learning or the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol.

Part 2: A Resource to Help Teachers Engage in Professional Development to Meet the Needs of ELLs

The second part of this guide is written for teachers. It simply lists ways that classroom teachers who are not trained in TESOL can create an optimal language and content learning environment for ELLs.

Dispositions

1. **Genuinely care about your ELLs.**

   Why:

   - Students are more motivated by a caring teacher than any other factor.
   - It is part of who we are and what we do as teachers.

   How:

   - Use their names (and say them correctly!)
   - Greet them in their native language(s).
   - Find out the cause of any "abnormal" behavior, such as not wanting to go to lunch (perhaps the student doesn't like American food) or not having homework done (perhaps the student has to take care of younger siblings at home).

2. **Build a classroom culture that appreciates linguistic and cultural diversity.**

   Why:

   - All students will benefit from a multicultural perspective.
   - ELLs will feel more like a part of the class, and more valued.
   - Native English speakers will get a glimpse of the difficulty of learning a language, and develop more empathy.
   - ELLs will benefit by learning some content vocabulary in their native language.

   How:

   - Encourage greetings and some other usages of the ELLs' native languages. (E.g., Let the ELL teach the class numbers in Chinese in a math class, and use the Chinese numbers when referring to exercises or pages; routinely use greetings and partings in other languages.)
   - Use other languages and cultural symbols on the walls. (E.g., Have maps of the various countries of the students in the class; give ELLs a place to post key academic words in their native languages alongside the posting in English.)

3. **Develop empathy for ELLs: Truly place yourself in their shoes.**

   Why:

   - Just caring about a student does not automatically result in empathy.
   - It is not easy or natural to understand people who are very different from us; it requires conscious thought processes.
   - We cannot adequately meet the needs of students whom we do not understand.

   How:

   - Ask yourself, "Would I understand this if it were in Spanish?"
   - Ask yourself, "How would I feel if I spent all day in another language?"
   - When giving homework, ask yourself, "Would I be able to do this in a foreign language that I don't know well?"

Perspectives

4. **Understand language levels: Beginning, intermediate, and advanced ELLs all have vastly varied language abilities.**

   Why:

   - Comprehension of any content provided through language requires "comprehensible input"—language that is at a language level that a student can understand.
   - When ELLs are treated as a homogeneous group, typically the beginning and advanced students do not receive what they need—teachers tend to teach to the middle. The beginners often understand very little, and content learning suffers; the advanced students do not get the upper level language development they need, and never achieve college-ready language proficiency.

   How:

   - Use the TESOL *PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards* (2006) to know what the ELLs in your class can do, and don't expect more or less than they are capable of.
   - Watch the ELL. Look for signs that he or she is not receiving comprehensible input:

- ☐ Silence—not talking in class
- ☐ Copying from a neighbor; plagiarism
- ☐ Falling asleep or a posture of apathy
- ☐ Overreliance on dictionaries or electronic translators
- ☐ Misbehavior

- Talk to ELLs; have them show you how much they understand through specific tasks such as underlining all the words they don't know in a paragraph, or telling you how much time a homework assignment took them. This requires good rapport with the student, so he or she doesn't fear losing face, and will provide honest feedback.
- Respect the "silent period" of beginning ELLs. Students typically need to listen for several months before they are ready to speak.

5. Know the difference between social and academic language.

Why:

- ELLs can sound very fluent and communicate successfully in social contexts, and yet have very low academic language skills. (On the other hand, some international students may have greater control over academic language, and need to develop social language skills.)
- Both social language and academic language are needed in order for ELLs to participate in the school community and flourish academically. When either is lacking, teachers need to address the gap.
- Typically, social language develops in 1–2 years, while academic language can take 5–7 years.

How:

- Don't assume that students who sound fluent have equivalent language capabilities as native speakers.
- Use a Universal Design (See the Universal Design for Learning website: http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl) approach to teaching, so that ELLs who are still acquiring academic language can access the content.
- Continue to differentiate homework and assessments for students who sound fluent.

Action

6. **Use visuals.**

   Why:

   - ELLs do not have the cultural and linguistic background knowledge that native speakers have.
   - Pictures, charts, graphs, and other visuals or manipulatives can convey meaning without words, or can support the words that are used.
   - Visuals do not detract from anyone's learning; they make the classroom more enjoyable for native English speakers as well.

   How:

   - Always ask yourself, "Is there a visual that could support this word, phrase, or idea?" For example, if making a reference to George Washington, a quick picture on a PowerPoint, captioned "George Washington, our first president" would be helpful.
   - Think of possible misinterpretations that can be alleviated through visuals. For example, an ELL might hear "river bed" and be visualizing a bed in a river—a mental confusion that could result in the ELL missing the next several minutes of speech. However, if a picture of a river is shown as the teacher says "river bed," there is no confusion, and the ELL can focus on grasping the main idea of what is being said.

7. **Use pair and small group work.**

   Why:

   - ELLs can sometimes learn language and content better from their peers than from the teacher.
   - Positive small group experiences can help the ELL to fit in socially.
   - Small group work provides the ELL with much-needed opportunities to speak.

   How:

   - Teach all students how to do small group work. Don't expect them to automatically be able to work together in a multicultural group.
   - Provide specific roles and tasks for each person in the group.

- Ensure that the ELL has a valued role in the group.
- Minimize lecture in favor of discovery learning in small group settings. This kind of teaching benefits everyone.

8. View yourself as a teacher of content *and* language.

Why:

- Even if you only teach native speakers, you *are* a teacher of language and content. All students learn the majority of the academic language that is needed for college readiness in content-area classes.
- Actively teaching language does not detract from, but rather adds to, the learning of content. Understanding of content is greater the more accurately students can talk and write about important concepts and ideas. Even words that native speakers may not use incorrectly, such as definite and indefinite articles, can provide opportunities for critical thinking and language development for all.

How:

- Focus in class on language items that can benefit all. For example, a history teacher might pause after reading "Gettysburg was a turning point in the Civil War; nevertheless, the end had not yet come." The teacher could ask students to write this down, leading them to understand the punctuation required for words like "nevertheless." The teacher could then ask students to think of synonyms or substitute phrases for "nevertheless." This kind of language development is needed by all, not just ELLs.
- Focus individually, with the ELL, on language that can be learned through your content area. For example, a math teacher might point out the repeated words "if" and "then" in a series of word problems, helping the ELL to understand that this is one way we talk about cause and effect. Similarly, the following sentence in a textbook "The treaty was *a* concern, but it wasn't *the* major concern . . ." could be followed by a discussion with the ELL on the difference in meaning between "a" and "the."
- Use ELL writing as a means to further language learning through feedback and corrections. However, be careful to assess the ELL only on content knowledge, not language skill.

9. **Build oral skills.**

   Why:

   - Research shows that in language immersion contexts (where students learn a language through their schooling), oral skills are typically not developed sufficiently.
   - ELLs often do not have ample opportunities to speak in class—either to the class as a whole, or in small groups. Sometimes this is simply because they lack the confidence to speak out. Other times it is because they lack the language. Either way, it is a problem to be addressed. Language output is *required* for full language development.

   How:

   - Teach native-English-speaking students how to interact with ELLs in small group work. Teach them about concepts such as wait time (allowing sufficient time for another student to respond) and scaffolding (supplying words or phrases that an ELL may be lacking, but still allowing that ELL to speak).
   - Never ask "Does anyone have a question?" Instead, ask "What questions do you have?" Requiring everyone to have a question allows the ELL to ask a basic comprehension question while encouraging critical thinking for the native speaker.
   - Provide a question in advance for an ELL. For example, say "Tomorrow I will call on you in class to answer this question. . . . You can prepare your answer tonight."

10. **Encourage use of the native language.**

    Why:

    - Research shows that developing the native language *always* increases the potential for learning a second language.
    - It is incredibly exhausting to only use a language in which you lack full proficiency all day long, and to not use your native language at all. Ask yourself if *you* could do that!
    - Using the native language can help students understand content better.

    How:

    - If you have several students who speak the same native language, provide them with opportunities to talk through the content in their native

language. For example, they could reproduce a chart or a graph related to the content, in their first language.

- Encourage students to keep vocabulary lists of academic words, so that they can learn the new terms in their native language as well as in English.
- Add words, charts, graphs, and other visuals, in other languages, to bulletin boards and other spaces, alongside the English versions.

References

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy. Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. (2006). *PreK–12 English Language Proficiency Standards.* Alexandria, VA: Author.