

Pedagogical approach

Amplify has met the CA ELA/ELD Framework’s call for an integrated approach to English Learner (EL) instruction with a tightly connected set of core ELA units aligned to the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy and a parallel set of ELD/ELA units aligned to the CA ELD Standards. The five themes of ELA instruction guide this close interaction between the two programs.

Meaning making

The core units are designed around rich texts, and students are challenged to read and reread to figure out what the author means as well as to figure out how to use textual evidence to explain what the author means. The ELD lessons pick up on this focus by bringing in excerpts from these rich texts and challenging students to contextualize them, and then unpack them by reading them even more closely. In doing so, they develop expertise in these small focused parts of the core curriculum that they can bring back to the core classroom discussion.

Language development

The CA ELA/ELD Framework states that the ELD standards should emphasize “developing language awareness and flexible use of English across disciplines, topics, audiences, tasks, and purposes.” Explicit vocabulary study in the core curriculum insists that all students, including those who are proficient in English, purposefully build their banks of words to become more powerful readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. The ELD lessons extend English Learners’ opportunities to build their banks of words and give them much more practice in speaking these words out loud and writing them in shorter pieces, comparing their usage with their peers’. There is a similar parallel with grammar instruction. The core curriculum works toward a comprehensive understanding of grade-level syntax, particularly focusing on how students use that knowledge in their writing. The ELD lessons extend the English Learners’ opportunity to practice those concepts with more granularity, discuss them as they appear in the texts they are reading and use them even more often in their own writing.

Effective expression

The core units include a wide range of Learning Experiences (described in Section 2, which deals with the Amplify ELA pedagogy and Universal Design to help students understand language in such a way as to allow students working at different levels of English learning to work together on the same task. These highly collaborative experiences mean that, for example, English Learners are discussing complex text with proficient speakers, and acquiring some of the phrases they need from these discussions to express the insights they have shown visually using digital tools. In another common experience, all of the students in the core lesson share their writing together, learning how to discuss the impact of particular moves a writer makes. Optional sentence frames support the English Learner as he or she participates in this discussion with students at a wide range of levels of proficiency. The ELD lessons provide the same English Learner with more purposeful opportunities to practice additional words and phrases in the context of writing about that text, comparing

his or her usage with peers and getting feedback from the teacher, not just on how to use that word, but more precisely, on how to use that word in comparison to a number of related words—and not just in the text, but also in familiar conversation.

Content knowledge

The text selection strategy behind the design of the core units, as described in Section 2, helps students use the core reading to build the background knowledge that will then support future reading, in Amplify ELA and beyond. The lessons in the core units value building content knowledge and also do not take it for granted, providing whatever information is necessary to understand a text, and making it explicit to teacher and student which information students are expected to glean from the text in order to show comprehension. This puts English Learners on an equal playing field with students who are proficient in English. English Learners do not have to be mind-readers (or cultural anthropologists) to figure out the knowledge set that they are expected to know or to learn. And the assumption that each student is seeking to increase his or her knowledge of the world puts the EL's work into the context of lifelong learning, curiosity, and knowledge building that applies to all students. The ELD lessons often begin with a short passage from a longer text that the teacher asks the students to contextualize. This practice in offering background knowledge—even within the world of a text—is important practice for students learning to describe a coherent whole in a new language. The ELD teacher can work together with the teacher of the core lessons to support the English Learners' access to knowledge by helping him or her access the Amplify Research Collections, the broad range of texts in the Amplify Library, and the game world, Lexica, which is set in a virtual library.

Foundational skills

The core units pay particular attention to foundational skills because so many middle school readers struggle with fluency. An important element of the Amplify ELA Universal Design are the Learning Experiences: Working With Text Out Loud and Working With Text as Theatre. Both of these Learning Experiences are designed to work for students of all reading abilities, because of the quality of the actors' readings and because of the quality of the theater exercises through which students are expressing their own interpretations of the text. Throughout these exercises there are extensive opportunities for the teacher to make sure that any student who needs fluency training utilizes them for that purpose (see Section 2, Rigorous instruction for all students: Differentiation strategies). Further, the core lesson teacher has formative assessments in the form of reading comprehension checks that will let the teacher know if students are not understanding the text—and will provide the teacher with information that he or she (and the ELD teacher) need to intervene with another level of support for English Learners. The ELD teacher has his or her own formative assessments that will indicate whether the fluency training in the core ELA lessons is enough or whether the student needs to spend additional time, listening to the audio recording of the text in the eReader, or practicing and presenting short pieces of the text out loud. Both the vocabulary program and grammar program in the core units have strands that go down to the third-grade level, and English Learners working at the Emerging level will certainly benefit from access to some of that content during the core lessons. The CA ELA/ELD Framework notes that at the secondary level, foundational skills need to be taught in an accelerated time frame, and so it is particularly important for the core teacher and the ELD teacher to work together to help each English Learner master the foundational skills he or she needs to move on and work on grade-level work.

The ELD lessons provide the following additional support:

The CA ELD Standards require instruction for middle school English Learners who need foundational skills at the K-2 level. The final part of this section explains how Amplify addresses foundational skills for these students within the ELD designated lessons and by offering access to a supplementary program for those requiring an intervention.

1. The Get Started sub-unit in the ELD lessons teaches newcomers the language and the rationale behind the routines and structure of the Amplify ELA lessons in much more explicit detail than the core Get Started sub-unit. The idioms used in that unit are discussed and practiced in this sub-unit, and students are introduced to and given additional practice in the instructional modes key to success across all Amplify ELA lessons.
2. The first day of every 6-Lesson Cycle focuses on oral language. Throughout these lessons, the teacher will find linguistic notes such as:
 - a. It is crucial to enunciate carefully the word “chores” and to instruct students to listen for and pronounce the /ch/ sound. The /ch/ sound may not exist in your students’ home languages or it may be interchangeable with the /sh/ sound, so they may pronounce it as /sh/ or in some other way. Explain that in English /ch/ and /sh/ are different sounds, and, with the same ending, create two words with different meanings—chores (household jobs) and shores (along the ocean, river, or lake), so it is very important to differentiate and pronounce the sound carefully.
3. Additionally, in these speaking lessons, teachers will find particular points called, “Tips for (teaching) Newcomers,” such as:
 - a. The expectation that children contribute at home by performing chores differs from family to family and may be tied to cultural expectations. It is important that we realize that newly arrived students may have very different experiences with the type of chores, tools, and products currently used in the United States for completing household chores. For example, families who have lived in rural regions, where certain devices or appliances are unavailable, may have a different set of chores, tools, and products they are familiar with. It is important to accept a variety of responses and not treat them as oddities, but rather as a growing body of knowledge about global diversity.
4. Additional support for more basic foundational skills for the English learner can be found at Amplify’s free foundational skills website, www.freereading.net, or by accessing the Amplify supplementary intervention program, Burst:Reading.