


Chapter 10

Instructional Design With a Language Lens: Preparing Educators for Multilingual Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Classrooms are more diverse than ever before with increasing numbers of multilingual students who are developing English proficiency while simultaneously being expected to learn and perform in English in literacy and the content areas. In the context of the United States, previous efforts to prepare teachers for the heterogeneous population of students have led to simplified curriculum that limits children's equitable access to rigorous disciplinary learning. This chapter probes one project's efforts to build capacity in schools by holistically preparing educators across grades and disciplines to provide equitable instruction for students labeled as English learners. Using a framework that added a language lens to the understanding by design framework already used in partner schools, participants developed understandings and practices that facilitated curricular design that maintained focus on language across instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

In schools across the United States and around the world, a diverse array of students enters classrooms ready to engage in learning and exploration. Recent statistical data indicate that approximately 20% of students in U.S. public schools speak a language other than English at home (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). This results in a significant student sub-group that includes ample linguistic and cultural diversity. About half of these students, approximately five million or 10% of the kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade (K-12) student population, are considered *English learners* (ELs). *EL* is a formal label ascribed to students developing English proficiency as measured by standardized language tests of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Linquanti & Cook, 2013, NCES, 2021). Despite the opportunities provided by this diversity, the demographic shifts of recent decades have resulted in various challenges in disciplinary classrooms, where teaching and learning typically occurs in English (Bunch, 2013; Moschkovich, 2013; van Lier & Walqui, 2012). To ensure that students have equitable access to content instruction, educators must explicitly attend to language development in daily instruction (Commins & Miramontes 2006; Lucas et al., 2008).

Simultaneous with the diversifying demographics spanning urban, suburban, and rural regions of the United States, educational reform efforts have bolstered the emphasis on language. In K-12 classrooms, the shift to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has reinforced the language-rich nature of content areas like science and mathematics (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010; National Research Council [NRC], 2013). The language focus prompts instruction that merges listening, speaking, reading, and writing to build core practices, skills, and concepts and yield real-world problem solvers and communicators. At universities, the adoption of the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) has led teacher educators in many states to prioritize academic language in teacher preparation coursework (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity [SCALE], 2018). Shifting practices increasingly emphasize how disciplinary language develops simultaneous to learning and incorporating language development into instruction. These policy shifts have prompted the need for an approach to instructional design that promotes rigorous disciplinary learning *and* language development.

Understanding by Design® has been guiding educators' curricular design for the past two decades, prompting rigorous teaching and authentic learning in classrooms across the world (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). A flexible framework that spans disciplines and grades, Understanding by Design (UbD) prompts teachers to move beyond the coverage of curriculum to instead design instruction that creatively and authentically deepens students' understandings and prompts transfer of learning to other contexts. In this chapter, we describe adding a language lens to the existing UbD framework to prepare teachers to design instruction in increasing multilingual classrooms. Seeking to promote equitable access to rigorous disciplinary instruction for students labeled as ELs, this approach differs from traditional tendencies in the field, such as maintaining content and language as separate entities of teaching and learning or simply adding a box at the end of a planning template for a one-size-fits-all strategy. Instead, this approach responds to the changing demographics, policies, and practices in schools to prepare disciplinary teachers who can support students' language development to promote rigorous and meaningful learning in the classroom (Heineke & McTighe, 2018).

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