

LARRY FERLAZZO • KATIE HULL SYPNIESKI

# Navigating the Common Core *with* English Language Learners

Practical Strategies to Develop  
Higher-Order Thinking Skills



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He has won numerous awards, including the Leadership for a Changing World Award from the Ford Foundation, and was the grand prize winner of the International Reading Association Award for Technology and Reading.

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She is the coauthor (with Larry Ferlazzo) of *The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide* and has written articles for the *Washington Post*, *ASCD Educational Leadership*, and *Edutopia*.

Katie lives in Sacramento with her husband and their three children.





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# Introduction

The Common Core Standards, and the standardized tests tied to them, are now being implemented in most states. And the few states that have not adopted them have created their own very similar ones.<sup>1</sup>

This transition offers school districts, schools, and teachers an opportunity to pause and reflect on their practices and consider how to ensure that students, including English language learners, are developing the skills necessary to thrive in our changing world. Transitions are often breeding grounds for anxiety and fear of the unknown. However, they can also be a doorway leading to growth and new possibilities.

We know many parents, teachers, and students are feeling anxious, especially around the new Common Core assessments. We share those concerns, especially since we think there are more pressing issues facing our schools and students than a need for new Standards, such as the need for increased school funding, family services, institutional commitment to—and advocacy for—ELL students, and time for teacher collaboration, to name just a few. Nevertheless, we live in the world as it is, not as we'd like it to be. Therefore, we are committed to facing change in ways that create the most positive outcomes for our students. *Navigating the Common Core with English Language Learners* is written in this spirit of adaptation and openness.

We have taken the four years since the publication of our previous book, *The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide*,<sup>2</sup> to reflect on, and review, our practice in light of the Common Core and apply what we consider to be its positive elements—particularly its emphasis on higher-order thinking—to improve our teaching. Though most of the content in our first book is certainly compatible with the Standards, and we still apply the practices described there in our classrooms,



we have also developed new and refined older ones to make them even more effective for our students and more aligned to the new Standards.

Readers will find that at least 90% of the content in this book is new material not found in our previous one. Even though the word count of this book has strained the outer limits of our publisher's guidelines, it is by no means exhaustive. Each domain—reading writing, speaking/listening, language—and each subject—math, social studies, science—deserves its own book. However, we don't have the time to write them and we know few teachers who would have the time to read them!

You will also find that, though many of the lessons we discuss in these chapters are applicable to Beginning English language learners, more are written with Intermediate and Advanced ELLs in mind.

We believe that teachers of ELLs and non-ELLs alike will find our Social Emotional Learning lessons, our clear analyses of the Standards, and our classroom recommendations helpful.

Our students, their families, and we as educators face some very big challenges ahead. We hope that this book can help make those challenges a little more manageable for all of us.



For downloadable versions of all lesson plans and student hand-outs found in this book, go to the “Downloads” section of this book's web page at [www.wiley.com/go/navccss](http://www.wiley.com/go/navccss). In addition, you will find two “bonus” book chapters on that page: One is on using Art with English Language Learners while meeting Common Core Standards, and is written by high school English and Art teacher John Doolittle. The second chapter is on how school counselors can assist both English Language Learners and their teachers as they work to meet Common Core Standards. This second chapter is written by Leticia Gallardo, a high school counselor.



## CHAPTER ONE

# English Language Learners and the Common Core: An Overview

*Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.*

—John F. Kennedy<sup>1</sup>

Change is a constant in life, and this is especially true in education. When faced with change some people cling strongly to the past, others dive in headfirst without question, and some take a more measured approach by evaluating both past and present as they move forward.

In terms of education, it is important to look to past research on effective teaching and learning, but not to cling to outdated, ineffective practices. It is also important to be in the present, the era of “Common Core,” and to try new strategies, while not ignoring what we already know about good teaching practice.

When teaching English Language Learners, we need to evaluate current standards and consider how to teach them in light of what has already been learned about language acquisition. In our classrooms, we acknowledge our students for who they are in the present—getting to know their interests, assessing their current proficiency levels, and identifying their academic strengths and challenges. But, we also look to their past—inviting them to share the prior knowledge and rich experiences they bring with them.

It is this balance—looking at both past and present in order to shape the best future—that we hope will be apparent in this book, and particularly in this chapter. We start with an overview of general information related to teaching ELLs. While many of the topics in the first few pages are similar to those in our first book, *The ESL/ELL Teacher’s Survival Guide*,<sup>2</sup> the information has been updated with recent

research and demographics. Of course, the biggest change since we wrote our first book 4 years ago is the implementation of the national Common Core standards and new state English Language Proficiency standards occurring throughout the country. While many of the strategies outlined in our last book are compatible with Common Core, we've learned a lot in the past 4 years.

In this book, we will explain how we've used the Common Core standards to improve some of the ideas from our last book while also laying out new strategies we are using to help our students meet the challenges of Common Core. Obviously, it is not realistic for early Beginners to meet grade-level Common Core standards. However, the strategies for Beginning ELLs described in our first book and further developed in this book, lay the groundwork for them to do so as quickly as possible. For example, the pattern-seeking strategies in the Picture Word Inductive model<sup>3</sup> help prepare them for the pattern-seeking needed in the close reading required by Common Core. The use of Text Data Sets helps students develop preliminary essay writing skills as they organize and summarize categories. In addition, the dialogues we use with Beginners prepare students for the communicative tasks in the Speaking and Listening Common Core Standards, and the many vocabulary activities described for Beginners in our first book set the stage for the acquisition of the academic vocabulary required in the Language standards.

## ELL Population Growth

It is hard to find a school or district in this country that doesn't have an English Language Learner population, and in many states, it is hard to find a classroom without any ELLs. English Language Learners represented nearly 10% of the total K-12 student population with 4.85 million ELL students enrolled in public schools during the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>4</sup>

California has the highest percentage of ELLs at 24% of enrollment in public schools, about 1.1 million students, followed by Texas with 832,000 ELLs comprising 17% of public school students.<sup>5</sup> In Nevada and New Mexico, ELLs represent nearly one in five students (18% and 17%, respectively). ELL students account for 17% of the student population in Colorado, 10% in Florida, and 9% in both New York and the District of Columbia.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that the number of ELL students across the nation continues to steadily grow. However, some states, including South Carolina, Kentucky, Nevada, Delaware, Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Virginia, and North Carolina, have experienced huge increases in their ELL populations. According to the Annenberg Institute, "while the U.S. ELL population has grown 18% from 2000-2001 to 2011-2012, which is a significant increase, these states have experienced ELL growth ranging from 135% in North Carolina to an astonishing 610% in South Carolina."<sup>7</sup>

## Languages Spoken by ELLs

While English language learners in the United States speak roughly 400 languages, the majority (approximately 80%) are Spanish-speakers.<sup>8</sup> In 2011, Latinos represented 24% of public school enrollment and are projected to be 30% by 2023.<sup>9</sup>

As of 2013, more than two-thirds of ELL students in 45 states and the District of Columbia spoke Spanish. In 19 states, including Texas and California, more than three-quarters of all ELL students spoke Spanish. Other states, like West Virginia, Minnesota, and Ohio among others, were less homogeneous and their ELL populations spoke a diverse set of languages such as Vietnamese, Chinese, Somali, Hmong, and Arabic.<sup>10</sup>

## How Are English Language Learners Described?

ELLs are a diverse, dynamic group, which is evident in the large number of “labels” used to describe them. Here are some of the most common:

**ELL, or English language learner:** ELL (or EL) is the most current term used in the United States to describe students who are in various stages of acquiring English. The U.S. Department of Education defines an ELL (or EL) as:

An individual who, due to any of the reasons listed below, has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language to be denied the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in the larger U.S. society. Such an individual (1) was not born in the United States or has a native language other than English; (2) comes from environments where a language other than English is dominant; or (3) is an American Indian or Alaska Native and comes from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency.<sup>11</sup>

**LEP, or limited English proficiency:** LEP is still used by the U.S. Department of Education for ELLs, age 3–21, who have not yet demonstrated proficiency in English, and for whom this affects their ability to perform on state standards and assessments, to access classroom content, and/or to participate fully in society.<sup>12</sup>

**DLL, or dual language learner:** A child between the ages of 0 and 8 who is in the process of learning English in addition to his or her home language(s). These children may or may not also be considered ELLs by their schools, depending on their performance on English language proficiency assessments.<sup>13</sup>

**ESL, or English as a second language:** The term *ESL* was formerly used as a designation for ELL students, but is more commonly used now to refer to “a program of instruction designed to support ELL students” and is often still used at the postsecondary level to refer to multilingual students (National Council of Teachers of English,<sup>14</sup> 2008).

**ELD, or English language development:** ELD is often used to describe instruction and programs for ELL students that focus on developing English language proficiency in the domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.<sup>15</sup>

**TESOL, or teaching English to speakers of other languages:** TESOL is widely used to describe both TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) and TESL (teaching English as a second language). In general, “TEFL emphasizes aspects of teaching English in countries where English is not widely used in daily life and the term TESL tends to emphasize the needs of learners who will use English in their daily lives, in addition to their mother-tongue. TESOL encompasses both.”<sup>16</sup>

Along with many educators and researchers, we prefer to use the term ELL because it emphasizes students as *active learners* of English, rather than as being limited or deficient in some way.

## Adolescent English Language Learners and Long-term ELLs

The adolescent English learner population in this country is growing fast and contains students from a variety of linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

Newcomer or refugee students represent a small, but highly vulnerable subgroup of the adolescent English learner population.<sup>18</sup> While some of these students come with high literacy skills and content knowledge, many have had interrupted formal education in their home countries. These students enter U.S. schools with limited educational experiences and lower levels of literacy in their home languages.

A larger number of adolescent ELLs were born in the United States, are second- or even third-generation immigrants, and have been enrolled in U.S. schools since kindergarten.<sup>19</sup>

One out of every four children in the United States is an immigrant or the U.S.-born child of immigrants.<sup>20</sup>

Nationwide 82% of current ELL students in grades K–5 are native-born, and 55% of ELLs in grades 6–12 were born in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Researchers have identified secondary ELL students who have attended school in the United States for 6 years or more,<sup>22</sup> but who continue to require language support services in school as long-term English language learners, LTELs, or LTELLs.<sup>23</sup> Many of these students have developed high levels of oral proficiency, but lack academic language and literacy skills needed to master subject matter.



They often remain “stuck” at the intermediate level of proficiency and face disproportionately high dropout rates.<sup>24</sup> LTELs comprise approximately one third of all secondary ELLs in both New York City public schools and Chicago Public Schools. In Colorado, 23% of secondary ELLs are LTELs, and 59% in 40 school districts in California are considered LTELs.<sup>25</sup> However, despite the large number of these students in many schools and districts across the country, LTELs often represent an “invisible population” because of a lack of research on their particular experiences and a lack of programs in schools designed to meet their specific needs.<sup>26</sup>

California researchers, educators, and legislators have been in the forefront of calling attention to the needs of LTELs, particularly the organization Californians Together, led by Dr. Laurie Olsen (<http://www.californianstogether.org>). According to Californians Together, three out of four (74%) English learner students in grades 6–12 have been in California schools for 7 years or more and have still not attained proficiency in English. Of this group, 19% of secondary ELLs meet the state’s multiple criteria that designate them as Long-term English Learners (7 years or more in California schools, scoring Far Below Basic or Below Basic on the state academic exams in English Language Arts and failing to progress on the state’s English language proficiency exam).<sup>27</sup>

In 2010, Californians Together published *Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California’s Long Term English Learners*, which contains a wealth of research, recommendations, and resources on LTELs.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of new legislation passed in 2012,<sup>29</sup> California is making an effort to identify students who are currently long-term ELs and those who are “at risk” of becoming LTELs in order to provide them with the educational support they need. The law also requires that the Department of Education provides school and district level data annually on those students who are, or are at risk of becoming long-term ELLs.<sup>30</sup>

## ELL Research Basics

Just as the number of ELLs has continued to grow, so does the research base on how ELLs acquire language and how this affects instructional practices and policy. While we will cite current ELL research throughout this book, in this section, we will first highlight a few foundational concepts of language development research.

### BICS AND CALP

Jim Cummins, a professor at the University of Toronto, first introduced the distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP

**Table 1.1** BICS and CALP

<b>BICS</b>	<b>CALP</b>
Listening and speaking skills that are acquired quickly in a new language in order to communicate in social situations	The academic language and more cognitively demanding skills required for academic success
Usually acquired within the first couple of years	Often takes longer to develop, between 5 and 7 years, or longer for students with less proficiency in their native language
Context-embedded (meaning is accomplished with the assistance of contextual cues such as pictures, body language or intonation)	Context-reduced (meaning must be constructed without the benefit of contextual cues and literacy demands are high)
Example: Asking someone for directions or talking with friends on the soccer field	Example: Responding to an essay prompt or summarizing a chapter in a textbook

(cognitive academic language proficiency). His research has had a major impact on policy and practices in second language education.<sup>31</sup> Table 1.1 summarizes Cummins's distinctions.

In more recent research, CALP has been expanded to include three dimensions of academic English: Linguistic (knowledge of word forms, functions, grammatical elements, and discourse patterns used in academic settings), Cognitive (higher-order thinking involved in academic settings), and Sociocultural-psychological (knowledge of social practices involved in academic settings).<sup>32</sup>

Instruction based on CALP is still widely accepted as best practice. Many researchers agree upon the need to focus on academic language proficiency in order for ELLs to be successful in school.

### **ACQUISITION VERSUS LEARNING**

There is general agreement among researchers that there is a distinction between acquiring a language and learning a language.<sup>33</sup> Acquisition involves being able to easily and naturally use the language to communicate in a variety of situations, both academic and social. Language learning requires a more conscious approach and



**Table 1.2** English Proficiency Level “Labels”

<b>Traditional Labels</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Early Intermediate</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Early Advanced</b>	<b>Advanced</b>
WIDA	Entering	Emerging	Developing	Expanding	Bridging
ELPA 21	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
California	Emerging — — — — — → Expanding — — — — — → Bridging				
New York	Entering —→ Emerging —→ Transitioning —→ Expanding				

might include being able to correctly complete a grammar worksheet. However, this does not mean the two are mutually exclusive.

Much debate over the place of explicit grammar study has occurred throughout the years. Recent research points to a balanced approach—that second language instruction can provide a combination of both explicit teaching of language features such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and implicit learning stemming from meaningful communication in the second language.<sup>34</sup>

This type of language instruction—using meaningful input and contexts to help students develop proficiency while also teaching specific language features and functions in context—is critical in helping ELLs meet the Common Core standards.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS**

Researchers agree that ELLs progress through general stages of language acquisition. These stages have traditionally been divided into five levels of English proficiency: Beginning, Early Intermediate, Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced. More recently, consortiums made up of states and organizations, who are working on new ELD standards and assessments aligned to Common Core, use different descriptors for each level. We will be discussing these groups and their work later in this chapter.

Table 1.2 illustrates how these different proficiency level labels correspond. In this book, we will use Beginning–Advanced because that is how our school district classifies ELL students.

Of course, students’ language acquisition often doesn’t progress in a linear fashion within and across these proficiency levels. Students may demonstrate higher levels of proficiency in one domain versus another (e.g., listening versus writing) and may demonstrate different levels of proficiency within a domain depending upon the task. It is important to remember that a label of “Level 1” or “Beginner” *doesn’t*

*identify the student*, but identifies what a student knows and can do at any stage of English Language Development.

## **Common Core and English Language Learners: A Summary**

In 2009, an effort to develop the Common Core State Standards was launched by state education leaders in 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, through their membership in the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).<sup>35</sup> The Common Core State Standards were released in June 2010 with the intention of establishing what students at each grade level need to know and be able to do in math and English Language Arts in order to graduate from high school ready to succeed “in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.”<sup>36</sup>

Upon their release, states began their own processes of reviewing and adopting the new standards. Public controversy over the development and implementation of the Common Core emerged, and many questions, particularly about how to effectively implement and assess the standards, were brought to the forefront by parents, students, teachers, researchers, and policy makers. Many educators worried that the national standards were being touted as a silver bullet. They questioned whether the resources to train teachers in the new standards would be there or if the training would result in any value for their students. Other concerns were raised about how these standards would be assessed and the links to big profits that publishers and testing companies were sure to make. At the same time, other educators, including the leadership of major teacher unions, voiced their support for the new standards. They supported Common Core’s focus on critical thinking and deeper learning instead of drills and memorization, and felt that the standards provided room for teachers to use professional judgment in implementing them.<sup>37, 38</sup>

Despite the controversy, 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS.<sup>39</sup>

The remaining states are developing their own set of “college and career ready” standards that seem to be very similar in intent to Common Core, but with different wording.<sup>40</sup> They are also similar to international college and career readiness standards, and the authors of the CCSS state that the standards are “informed by other top-performing countries to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society.”<sup>41</sup>

For us, based on our years of teaching, we would have identified many other problems facing our students and schools as higher priorities over the lack of national standards. We are all for having our students be “college and career ready,” but we’re not sure that the socioeconomic infrastructure is there yet to support students, teachers, and schools in meeting the Common Core standard’s definition of that state of readiness. But, we live in the world as it is, not as we would like it

to be, and therefore we feel the need to develop strategies to make Common Core standards work for our students, their families, and our schools.

### COMMON CORE ASSESSMENTS

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education awarded grants to two consortia of states to develop new assessments aligned to the CCSS. PARCC—Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (<http://www.parconline.org>) and SBAC—Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org>) both received four-year grants to develop new content assessments that follow the guidelines below:

- Be valid and reliable
- Support and inform instruction
- Provide accurate information about what students know and can do
- Measure student achievement against standards designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace.<sup>42</sup>

Federal law requires that ELLs participate in these state assessments annually in English language proficiency, reading/language arts, and mathematics.<sup>43</sup>

ELL students in their first 12 months of attending school in the United States are entitled to a one-time exemption from the state’s English/language arts assessment, but not the math or science assessments.<sup>44</sup> However, a number of states have sought waivers that would extend the “test-free” period to two years.<sup>45</sup> At the time of this book’s publication, Florida and Connecticut were the only states whose waivers were approved.<sup>46, 47</sup> In December, 2015, Congress passed The Every Student Succeeds Act to replace No Child Left Behind. At the time of this book’s publication, the new law’s impact on these regulations was still unclear. Updated information will be available at Larry’s blog under *The Best Resources for Learning about the Next Generation of State Testing*.<sup>48</sup>

No matter what exemptions may or may not be granted, the reality is that the vast majority of English Language Learners in this country have already taken or soon will be taking these new assessments. An important requirement of the grants to create these assessments was to include testing accommodation policies for ELLs and students with disabilities. The new assessments from both PARCC and SBAC, which were operational for the 2014–2015 school year, were mostly administered by computer and did contain technology-based accommodations, such as pop-up glossaries, audio captions, and text-to-speech and speech-to-text options. Other, nonembedded accommodations include the use of bilingual, word-to-word dictionaries, test directions being read aloud or in a student’s native language, smaller testing environments, and extended time.<sup>49, 50</sup>

As teachers, we know in real life that even with testing accommodations these assessments can be a source of frustration and anxiety for our ELL students. It is important for both teachers and students to remember the “end game”—that acquiring language and content in meaningful ways is the goal, not learning how to score higher on a state test.

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS**

Common Core standards lay out the academic concepts and content that students need to know in different academic subjects. Teachers and students use language to teach and learn these subjects. In order for teachers to effectively provide scaffolds for ELLs so they can learn the academic content specified in Common Core, they must know how language develops across proficiency levels and be aware of the specific language practices students need in order to access this content. English Language Proficiency standards are one resource teachers can use to gain that knowledge.

Several major efforts have been undertaken across the United States in the past few years to develop these types of English Language Proficiency standards that align to Common Core. In terms of helping English Learners to meet the Common Core, very little guidance was provided in the original publication of the standards. Basically, it was left up to each state to determine how to best align their English Language Proficiency Standards with the Common Core.<sup>51</sup> What follows is a good faith and nonexhaustive summary of some of these major efforts with links to more information about each one.

#### **CCSSO**

To address the lack of guidance on how to support English Language Learners meeting the Common Core standards, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) published the *English Language Proficiency Development Framework*, to support states with the process of aligning their ELP standards to CCSS and the Next Generation of Science Standards that were published in April 2013.<sup>52</sup> This framework was developed by leading ELL researchers and educators and was published in September 2012.<sup>53</sup> Many states, along with educational organizations, have looked to this document to inform their creation or revision of English Language Proficiency standards that align to Common Core.

#### **WIDA**

WIDA formerly stood for World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, but no longer uses this as an acronym. It still uses the name WIDA, and is a nonprofit cooperative group whose purpose is to develop equitable standards and assessments for English Language Learners. In 2012, WIDA published

a revised version of their ELD standards titled *The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards*. This new edition of amplified ELD standards are aligned to Common Core and represent “the social, instructional, and academic language that students need to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in schools.”<sup>54</sup> Currently, 36 states belong to WIDA (see <https://www.wida.us/membership/states/> for a list) and have adopted the WIDA standards. Educators in other states and around the world find the WIDA standards—along with WIDA’s Can-Do Descriptors (specific descriptions of the language students should be able to understand and produce at various levels of proficiency)—to be helpful resources ([https://www.wida.us/standards/CAN\\_DOs/](https://www.wida.us/standards/CAN_DOs/)).

### **ELPA21**

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Understanding Language Initiative at Stanford University, and the 10 states who are part of the ELPA21 consortium (see <http://www.elpa21.org/standards-initiatives/ells-elpa21> for a list) worked with WestEd, an education research and consulting organization, to develop a set of *English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards* in April 2014.

These ELP Standards focus on what students *do* with language to accomplish content specific tasks (language functions) and on the vocabulary, grammar, and discourse specific to a particular content area or discipline (language forms) as they work to meet college and career ready standards.<sup>55</sup>

### **CALIFORNIA ELA/ELD FRAMEWORK**

In 2012, California adopted ELD standards that align with Common Core.<sup>56</sup> These standards recognize that ELLs have a linguistic challenge, not a cognitive challenge. The ELD standards are designed to help teachers, students, and their families evaluate ELLs’ language growth as they simultaneously develop the skills set forth in Common Core.

In 2014, California released the ELA/ELD Framework,<sup>57</sup> which provides guidance for both ELD and content-area teachers on how to integrate the ELD and Common Core standards and how to maximize the opportunities for ELLs to develop language within content practices. It is considered by many to be an innovative document that lays out a considerable amount of current research and instructional theory along with vignettes providing “glimpses of instruction” in ELA and ELD.<sup>58</sup>

### **NEW YORK STATE BILINGUAL COMMON CORE INITIATIVE**

In 2012, New York, under its Bilingual Common Core Initiative,<sup>59</sup> began developing new English as a Second Language and Native Language Arts Standards aligned to the Common Core. While the development process continues, they have released



“language progressions” for their Common Core learning standards at each grade level. The “New Language Arts Progressions” are for students learning a new language (e.g., students in English as a Second Language or Language Other than English classes) and the “Home Language Arts Progressions” are for students developing a home language (e.g., students in Native Language Arts or language classes for speakers of that language).<sup>60</sup>

There’s some debate about how useful all of these new English Language Proficiency standards are to teachers working day-to-day in their classrooms. However, teachers will need to familiarize themselves with the ELP standards that their students will be assessed by. These standards also offer a “shared language” that ELD and content teachers can use to collaborate on effectively meeting the needs of ELLs in all classes.

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS**

English Language Proficiency assessments are being developed based on these new ELP standards. These tests are separate from the Common Core assessments given in each state. They will replace older versions of both diagnostic and summative assessments currently being used by states for placement, monitoring, and reclassification of ELLs. The U.S. Department of Education provided grants to two state-led consortia to develop these “next generation of ELPD assessments.”

One assessment system, ASSETS—Assessment Services Supporting ELs through Technology Systems (<http://www.assets.wceruw.org>)—is being developed in collaboration with WIDA and several organizations, including WestEd, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the University of California, Los Angeles, along with 30 states. This assessment system builds on WIDA’s task assessments and will include diagnostic, summative and formative assessment tools. It should be fully operational in 2015–2016.<sup>61</sup>

Another grant was awarded to ELPA21—English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (<http://www.elpa21.org>), a consortium of states led by Oregon and in collaboration with CCSSO and Stanford University. As a first step in the assessment development process, ELPA21 developed new ELP standards that we described in the previous section. Subsequently they have designed assessments aligned to these standards. Their diagnostic/screener and summative assessments are intended to be fully operational in the 2015–2016 school year.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to being “valid, fair, and reliable,” these new assessments must meet the following additional criteria:

- Be based on a common definition of English language learner adopted by all consortium states
- Include diagnostic (e.g., screener, placement) and summative assessments

- Assess English language proficiency across the four language domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) for each grade level from kindergarten through Grade 12
- Produce results that indicate whether individual students have attained a level and complexity of English language proficiency that is necessary to participate fully in academic instruction in English
- Be accessible to all ELLs with the exception of those who are eligible for alternate assessments based on alternate academic standards
- Use technology to the maximum extent appropriate to develop, administer, and score assessments<sup>63</sup>

Other states, including California,<sup>64</sup> New York,<sup>65</sup> and Texas,<sup>66</sup> are not participating in either consortium and are developing their own ELP assessments.

Clearly these ELP assessments, as well as the Common Core assessments, will be challenging for our ELL students, especially if they are administered on a computer. We hope that the next generation of ELP assessments will deliver equitable assessments that teachers can use to inform their instruction.

## Key Shifts in Common Core

The Common Core State Standards place heightened content and language demands on all students. ELLs must meet these demands while also developing proficiency in English. Ensuring that students are able to accomplish this goal is a huge task for teachers. The Common Core State Standards document doesn't provide a curriculum or prescribe how teachers should teach; it lays out what students need to be able to do at each grade level.

There is a focus throughout the new standards on extensive language use, not just in English Language Arts, but also in math, history/social studies, and science. Thus, many researchers and educators are calling for a paradigm shift. In the past, ELA teachers have traditionally been charged with literacy instruction. However, teachers in all disciplines must be “language teachers” in order to help students meet the standards in each content area. This new reality makes collaboration among teachers a crucial piece in implementing the Common Core. In later chapters of our book, content area teachers share key Common Core shifts in math, Social Studies, and science and how to address these shifts in their subject areas.

### KEY SHIFTS IN ELA

In English Language Arts, the standards call for three key shifts that support college and career readiness, according to the Common Core State Standards Initiative.<sup>67</sup>



These “shifts” represent important differences from previous standards and have an impact on instructional, curricular, and assessment practices. We will begin by summarizing the Common Core shifts and then share four key shifts for ELLs.

**Shift 1: Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language.** The standards emphasize that students must read increasingly complex texts in order to be ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading. As they gain experience with a variety of complex texts they simultaneously build their reading comprehension skills and academic language. Academic language includes both general academic vocabulary that appears in a variety of content areas (such as “effect” or “correlation”) and domain-specific vocabulary that is specific to a discipline (such as “molecule” or “decimal”). This academic vocabulary is not only critical to comprehension, but also allows students to participate in academic conversations (both oral and written) across content areas and to be able to read increasingly complex texts on their own.

*In other words, students need to learn how to navigate the types of challenging texts they will see in college and beyond, and they need to acquire the academic language that will enable them to be successful readers, writers, and speakers.*

**Shift 2: Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational.** The reading standards focus on students being able to read and understand arguments, ideas, and information based on evidence in the text. Rather than answering questions based only on prior knowledge or experience, students must be able to answer text-dependent questions and make inferences supported by in-text evidence. In writing, there is a focus in the standards on evidence-based writing in order to inform or persuade.

*In other words, students need to learn how to identify evidence in a variety of texts and be able to use evidence in their own writing and speaking to support their points.*

**Shift 3: Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.** The standards emphasize the important role informational text plays in helping students develop content knowledge and vocabulary. The K–5 standards require a 50–50 balance between informational and literary reading. The 6–12 ELA standards place much more of an emphasis than in the past on informational texts, particularly literary nonfiction (nonfiction that contains literary elements like imagery or sensory details). The 6–12 literacy standards in history/social studies, science and technical subjects require students to learn how to build knowledge through reading and writing independently.

*In other words, students need to read more informational text than they have in the past in order to build content knowledge and to inform their writing.*