Ensuring access to rigorous and intellectually rich learning opportunities is essential for raising multilingual learner achievement. It is essential to disrupt inequitable outcomes with high expectations, strategic scaffolds, and collective efficacy to ensure programs and instruction accelerate, not remediate, learning.

Imagine a fifth-grade science class in which ESOL teacher Ms. Perry co-teaches with Mr. Leonardo, a fifth-grade classroom teacher. Over the past two weeks, students have been learning through many hands-on activities how plants get the materials they need for growth chiefly from air and water. Ms. Perry has been previewing the science concepts and academic vocabulary with the ELs, adding in supports in their home languages, so ELs feel prepared to engage in classroom discussions. Ms. Perry and Mr. Leonardo have integrated several graphic organizers into their instruction and have been chunking the grade-level text so that ELs can engage with the complex science text and content concepts. Now it’s students’ turn to write an essay, using evidence from two texts to support an argument that plant matter comes mostly from air and water, not from the soil.
During their scheduled planning meeting, Ms. Perry suggests ways to group students for the task so that one EL with emerging English proficiency can discuss the academic concepts with a peer who is fluent in his home language before applying those ideas to write in English with sentence frames. The teachers strategically pair the other six ELs, who have higher English proficiency, with fluent English speakers to do the task. During the lesson, all thirty students engage in extended partner discussions about the best text evidence to use to support their arguments. They refer to the text they have annotated and collaborate to paraphrase important ideas from the two texts into the graphic organizer in preparation for writing their essay.

THE URGENCY

To excel with rigorous academic content, English learners need access to rigorous academic learning experiences. Engagement in daily opportunities to listen, speak, read, and write about grade-level content topics, concepts, and complex texts is essential for learning both grade-level content and the academic language of school.

Unfortunately, however, many English learners across the nation are routinely pulled out of core content, tracked into lower-level courses (Arias, 2007; Gandara & Orfield, 2010), and/or given only simplified texts and low-level tasks instead of access to what they need to thrive academically and build the academic language for career and college success. As a result, many ELs experience a “watered-down” curriculum that remediates, rather than accelerates, their content and language learning. When ELs are tracked into lower-level courses, they lose access to grade-level content and miss opportunities to learn the academic language that is central to rigorous tasks and texts. By high school, such tracking can result in students missing the courses they need to access higher education, or lacking the credits they need to graduate, causing them to “time out” by becoming too old to qualify for public school.

Even in the optimal program design in which ELs have both access and embedded supports to successfully engage with rigorous core learning and additional language support services, there is another challenge: empowering every teacher with strategic pedagogy to be effective with ELs. By every teacher we mean EVERY teacher, not just EL, bilingual, or ESOL specialists. ELs spend the majority of their instructional time in core classrooms and thus learn best when every general education teacher has the mindset and efficacy to serve ELs. Of equal importance are administrators understanding the issues and leading with the high expectation that every teacher challenges his or her ELs in a strategically supportive environment.

It’s an urgent imperative that every teacher knows how to effectively scaffold content and language learning in the context of rigorous academic learning. Default practices of lowering expectations or simplifying texts and tasks for ELs may seem like a support in the moment, but over time these practices add up to significant gaps in ELs’ opportunities to learn content and
language. Simplified texts, for example, “offer no clue as to what academic language sounds like or how it works” (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012, p. 2). ELs need to work with complex texts to build the meaning-making skills essential for working with such texts and the academic English proficiency to excel across the curriculum. ELs need opportunities to engage in high-level thinking tasks to thrive with such tasks throughout their lives, not be put on a path of simplified, watered-down learning toward failure.

Scholars and practitioners already have the knowledge and skills to advance the achievement of ELs. Schools can and do disrupt inequitable EL outcomes by providing English learners with access to high-level content and language learning with quality teaching and strategic supports. For example, an Education Trust-West analysis of 276 districts serving 100+ ELs found that the highest performing districts share mindsets of expecting excellence from ELs and valuing EL assets, and design programs and teaching to ensure ELs’ access to rigorous coursework. These districts “avoid the mistake of oversimplifying their instruction and materials with the intent of helping ELs” (Education Trust-West, 2014, p. 25).

While many educators have what they believe are good intentions in providing simplified instruction and materials for ELs, these practices are actually highly detrimental to ELs’ equity and eventual success. Decades of acting on “good intentions” in this manner have given rise to some alarming patterns of disparity, for example:

- Low EL graduation rates. Nationwide, in the 2013–14 school year, 82.3% of all students graduated, while only 62.6% of ELs graduated (NCELA, 2018). There were six states in which fewer than 50% of ELs graduated during that same time frame.
- ELs in some EL programs performing at a lower level than ELs who opted out of support services. (Callahan, Wilkinson & Mueller, 2008)
- Underrepresentation of ELs in Gifted and Talented programs. While 2% of ELs were enrolled in Gifted and Talented programs, 7% of non-ELs were enrolled (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2014).
- High percentage of Long-Term ELs (LTELEs) in many school systems. For example, in CA, one of the few states to track Long-Term EL data, 74% of ELs in secondary schools are Long-Term ELs who have been in U.S. schools for six or more years yet don’t have the English proficiency to reclassify to fluent.

Again, we need to reinforce that these data are not a reflection of EL competency. When ELs are offered appropriate supports and challenges by educators who share high expectations and value the inherent assets of their students, they are capable of achieving at very high levels. Educators can and do disrupt these data trends when we collaborate to shift from watering down EL instruction to challenging ELs with assets-based teaching and strategic supports.
Watering down often happens as a default, despite the best intentions of educators and administrators working hard for ELs to succeed. We invite readers into humble inquiry into ways we can get stuck, and specific actions we can take courageously together to shift our mindsets, programs, and practices. Watering down happens for a variety of reasons including the following three we emphasize in our calls-to-action throughout this chapter:

1. **Mindsets about ELs.** Low expectations and deficit thinking about ELs can lead to program design and/or instruction that remediates rather than accelerates content and language learning (Singer, 2017; Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017; Walqui, 2011). Even with the very best program design, ELs will rise or fall to the level of individual teachers’ expectations. Assets-based thinking and high expectations are foundational in leading the shift from watering down to challenging ELs.

2. **Program design.** With the good intention of providing EL supports, oftentimes the design of EL programs themselves creates barriers to EL achievement. For example, if ELs are placed into low-level classes or routinely pulled out of core learning for isolated language services, their instructional schedule sets them up for watered-down instruction. (When ELs are given a one-size-fits-all pathway to placement that doesn’t account for their diverse prior schooling experiences, academic strengths, and proficiency levels in English and other languages, they are scheduled to stagnate by program design.)

3. **Strategic scaffolding in everyday teaching of ELs.** The caliber of everyday teaching in core classrooms and aligned EL services makes or breaks EL achievement. It’s not enough to simply ask for high expectations and put ELs in challenging courses. We must also support teachers with relevant, job-embedded professional learning that helps them make high-level learning accessible without watering down expectations—a feat requiring a nuanced interplay of effective culturally relevant teaching, essential mindsets, and acumen to build language with academic learning.

Shifting from watering down to challenging requires courageous collaboration across all roles and levels of our schools, districts, and states. It requires humble inquiry and critical questioning about what isn’t working in current mindsets as well as equitable programs, policies, and practices so we can remove barriers that hinder the progress of our ELs and realize the true potential of every child.

**THE VISION**

As we see in the fifth-grade classroom featured in our opening vignette, it is indeed possible for ELs to excel in challenging content while they
simultaneously acquire academic language. Our vision from watering down to challenging consists of three components: (1) shifting all educators’ mindsets so that they operate from an assets-based perspective and set high and attainable expectations for ELs, (2) positioning ELs for success by creating programs and schedules that facilitate ELs’ access to challenging content, and (3) ensuring all teachers use (and lose) scaffolds strategically to appropriately support and challenge ELs.’ Courageous collaboration, built upon a framework of humility, curiosity, and openness to keeping the focus on our students, is necessary across all three components in order for them to be fully realized.

**Shifting all educators’ mindsets.** Our vision first involves teachers as well as administrators operating from an assets-based perspective of ELs and setting high expectations for ELs. Gone are the days of putting ELs in the back of the classroom with a computer program while other, more fluent students work on challenging content and interact with their peers. ESOL teachers or EL specialists being regarded as the only teachers whose responsibility it is to teach ELs is a remnant of the past. We’ve witnessed such classrooms where ELs are excluded from meaningful instruction and interaction with their peers and have found that this deficit-based practice usually results from teachers not believing that ELs can acquire challenging content as well as not having a toolkit of effective strategies and scaffolds to draw from. In addition, this practice can result from teachers not being afforded meaningful collaboration with their peers to constantly receive and give support to one another in order for their ELs to thrive. While teachers need to have high expectations for their ELs, they should also be cognizant of the length of time it may take for ELs to acquire English and recognize the dynamic strengths inherent as ELs acquire proficiency in English. Using “I can” language objectives that emphasize next-level language learning for ELs according to their proficiency levels, such as WIDA’s Can-Do Descriptors (https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/can-do), is one way for teachers to recognize the linguistic assets ELs bring in reading, writing, listening, and speaking and that teachers can build upon at each level of English proficiency.

All educators who touch ELs’ lives in a school or district must recognize they are all teachers of language as well as content (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Further, it falls on all educators to shift the narrative from falling into the deficit think trap of noting the challenges ELs may bring to instead beginning with a sense of their students’ strengths and abilities. In the words of author M. K. Asante (2008), “when you make an observation, you have an obligation.” This grounding mantra especially applies to EL education. We believe that when an educator notices that a colleague is focusing on an ELs deficit, the onus is on that educator to actively shift the narrative to focus on ELs’ assets and, further, to also offer solutions and support.

For example, an EL specialist who is aware of a grade-level teacher struggling with ELs who aren’t comprehending grade-level text may share how those ELs may come with a strong foundation of oral language in their home
language and also offer to provide that teacher specific, tangible supports for that student. Such support could be in the form of a teacher encouraging a Spanish-speaking EL to draw from her knowledge of cognates to figure out unknown words, strategies for drawing from students’ background knowledge, or integrating a graphic organizer so that those ELs can acquire academic language and content simultaneously (Staehr Fenner, 2014; Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Similarly, an administrator who overhears teachers expressing frustration at teaching newcomers grade-level content can offer time for content teachers and ESOL teachers to collaborate on lesson planning or on observing each other’s instruction to gain new strategies to support their ELs. We believe that small changes in shifting the narrative to an assets-based mindset about ELs at the individual teacher-to-teacher or administrator-to-teacher level can create a groundswell of positive changes at the school or district levels, paving the way for high expectations of ELs and, with them, higher EL achievement and equity.

This vision is also one in which ELs’ assets are recognized and are brought to life through their teachers’ assets-based perspective as well as high expectations, which then translate to ensuring ELs’ meaningful access to challenging content. As Gándara notes (2016), ELs are especially resilient and tend to come from families with strong beliefs in the positive impact of education success. Considering these assets instead of focusing on perceived EL deficits can foster positive learning outcomes. Our vision of an assets-based mindset as the basis for all EL learning cannot come to fruition without courageous collaboration, which must be prioritized, supported, and modeled by administrators.

**Programming and scheduling to benefit ELs.** In addition to a shifting mindset that ensures a focus on assets of and high expectations for ELs, purposeful, informed programming and scheduling must be in place for ELs to thrive and their teachers to draw from their own full professional expertise and strengths. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) mandates a report every two years of the number and percentage of “ELs who have not yet attained English language proficiency within five years.” This report helps bring ELs’ progress to the spotlight and holds schools and districts accountable for all their ELs, especially schools with newer and growing populations of ELs who may not have paid attention to their ELs’ acquisition of English and academic success. Further, the Office of English Language Acquisition’s English learner Toolkit states that school districts “must limit the segregation of ELs to the extent necessary to reach the stated goals of an educationally sound and effective program” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2017, Chapter 5, p. 1). Programs must have language support services in place to not only limit segregation but also ensure ELs are fully integrated into their schools.

Ample research has shown that ELs in dual language programs reach proficiency in English at higher rates than ELs not in dual language programs (e.g., Steele et al., 2017; Collier & Thomas, 2017). In addition, the number of dual language programs is increasing across the nation (U.S. Department
of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2015). Ideally, districts should provide dual language programming when student demographics warrant the inclusion of such programs, but we recognize this ideal may not always be immediately attainable. Within the realm of what is possible within educators’ sphere of influence, educators do have the agency to make programmatic decisions that will position their ELs for success with challenging content (Staehr Fenner, 2014). For example, we suggest co-teaching programs over solely pull-out, isolated instruction of ELs, which regularly takes them out of their core classes (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). However, shifting from a watering down to a challenging framework does not end with choosing a program. Within the programs chosen for ELs, schools must carefully create schedules that are conducive to maximizing their ELs’ learning and increasing their access to challenging content including the same college and career options available to fluent English speakers.

Our vision for program design is one in which schools and districts think strategically and engage their creativity to determine: (1) how they provide ELs language support services and (2) how they schedule ELs within those programs. We envision program design and scheduling being a collaborative, inclusive process so that voices of diverse students, families, teachers, support staff, and administrators are all heard and that all of these stakeholders are at the table when these important decisions are made. As we share our vision, we also recognize that staffing roles will have an effect on how these programs and schedules are realized, but we wish to emphasize our vision is for systems to be in place that facilitate all ELs’ equity, excellence, and achievement.

In order for programming and scheduling to be effective, schools must have a structure in place so that teachers can work together in a systematic and ongoing way and share their expertise with one another (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). When these systems and structures are in place, teachers’ use of strategic scaffolds and supports for ELs will have a greater impact.

All scheduling for ELs should be designed to ensure that ELs have full access to the required time per day for all content-area instruction, as well as appropriate supports for them to engage with this instruction in order to ensure they receive the same opportunities that fluent English speakers have in accessing core content. In terms of scheduling,† we recommend the following:

- ELs should always be integrated meaningfully into whole-group core instruction and never removed from core instruction for separate language support services.
- ELs’ participation in specials (e.g., art, physical education, etc.) must be regarded as crucial as a way for them to acquire academic and social language across all areas as well as develop skills and interests outside the core content areas.
- Master schedules must be developed with common, recurring planning time for grade-level or content teams, and this planning time
needs to include an ESOL or bilingual teacher, when such a position exists in the school or district.

- Administrators must hold co-planning time sacred and must also provide the support, structure, and guidance for EL-specific supports and planning to be realized.

Scheduling decisions should be tailored to the size of the EL population in a given school. Figure 3.1 outlines suggestions for scheduling ELs based on the size of the population.

**FIGURE 3.1 EL Scheduling Considerations Based on Size of EL Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of EL Population</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Suggestion for Scheduling ELs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Approximately 10% ELs or fewer</td>
<td>Cluster the few EL students together with one classroom or content teacher who has either ESOL certification or successful experience teaching ELs. ELs should not be “sprinkled” over numerous teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Approximately 11–30% ELs</td>
<td>Cluster the EL students together with 2 or 3 teachers, who have either ESOL certification or successful experience teaching ELs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Approximately 31% ELs or greater</td>
<td>Elementary level: Hire grade-level teachers with dual certification in ESOL and general elementary education. Secondary level: Hire content teachers with dual certification in ESOL and content areas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF SCAFFOLDS AND SUPPORTS**

We know that teachers can “keep rigor of tasks and texts high while providing appropriate scaffolds and supports to engage ELs in building concepts, skills, and language to thrive on a path toward college and career success. When a student struggles, a teacher who expects excellence knows the struggle is temporary, and the student has the capacity for growth” (Singer, 2018, p. 29). Further, instruction in academic language and language skills helps build a bridge so that ELs can access challenging, grade-level content (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). A meta-analysis of research on educating ELs in PreK–12 by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017) found multiple promising and effective practices for educating
ELs. These practices include developing academic language during content instruction; providing visual and verbal supports to make core content comprehensible; and capitalizing on students’ home language, knowledge, and cultural assets.

In order to provide this type of support that will enable ELs to access core instruction and grade-level content, teachers and administrators need to have a sense of what scaffolds are, know how to use them and when to remove them, and be involved in ongoing professional learning opportunities to hone their skills in supporting ELs. A scaffold is a temporary support a teacher provides to students that allows the students to perform a task they would not be able to perform on their own (Gibbons, 2015; National Governors Association for Best Practices, CCSSO, 2010). Scaffolds can be grouped into three main categories: materials and resources, instruction, and student grouping (WIDA, n.d., as cited in Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017). In our work with teachers, we have found that most think of scaffolds only as materials and resources (or things that are provided to students), including graphic organizers, visuals, and sentence frames. We envision teachers expanding their scaffolding repertoire to include instructional scaffolds (or things the teacher does to support students), such as pre-identifying and pre-teaching vocabulary, building background knowledge, and modeling tasks for students. Finally, it is our hope that teachers also provide scaffolding through the ways in which they group students, such as flexible grouping so that students with the same home language can support each other during instruction or structured pair work (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017).

Effective scaffolds for ELs intentionally address the language demands of tasks. Teachers analyze the academic language demands of the tasks in which they are asking students to engage in order to align specific scaffolds with tasks (e.g., sentence starters for supporting an argument). In collaboratively planning lessons, teachers should consider creating an academic language objective and mapping scaffolds to students’ English language proficiency levels.

Effective scaffolds also ensure access to rigorous learning. When selecting and developing materials, teachers should consider how they may need to enhance texts and materials given to students so that ELs can access them, for example by providing them video clips in students’ home languages or adding a graphic organizer to help students comprehend texts in English. Finally, teachers should always reflect on the efficacy of their lessons and may need to rethink how they scaffold instruction for ELs. We encourage teachers to collaborate and observe one another’s lessons to ensure they are in a cycle of continuous improvement and inquiry.

As with the previous two components of our vision, collaboration is essential to support the integration of scaffolds and supports. We suggest drawing from Edwards’s (2011) framework of distributed expertise to foster effective collaboration. This framework underscores that “building and using common knowledge is an important feature of the relational expertise required for
working across the practice boundaries on complex tasks” (p. 33). When all types of teachers successfully collaborate by determining which strengths each type of teacher brings to the task of designing and implementing instruction for ELs, they are able to better support ELs’ acquisition of academic language and content knowledge.³

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE: MASON CREST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mason Crest Elementary School in Annandale, Virginia, embodies all three elements of our vision. Brian Butler, the former co-principal of Mason Crest—a Title 1 school whose students speak more than thirty languages at home—writes: “The responsibility to ensure that every single student learns at high levels cannot be placed on the shoulders of an isolated teacher. To be frank, that practice is a recipe for failure. It has to be a coordinated, purposeful, and embedded process of adult professional development and learning” (Butler, in Buffum & Mattos, 2015, p. 52).

**Mindsets.** Grade-level teachers as well as core content teachers, ESOL, and special education teachers develop lessons collaboratively to ensure that all students, including ELs, are supported during instruction. In this way, the mindset has been established that all teachers have something beneficial to bring to their context and teachers leverage each others’ expertise. This mindset affirms that teachers approach lesson planning from a strengths perspective, ensuring that ELs’ assets provide a central focus of instruction.

**Program and Schedule.** One way that Mason Crest ensures that all teachers are responsible for ELs’ success is through creating an effective, inclusive master schedule. DuFour and DuFour (2012) implore principals to be creative to provide time for teachers to collaborate without losing significant amounts of instructional time. Butler (2015) suggests that there need to be specific structures in place in a school’s master schedule to provide teachers uninterrupted time for teamwork and collaboration. At Mason Crest, Butler invited teams to participate in developing the instructional block schedule, ensuring representation from core content, ESOL, special education, specials classes, library, gifted and talented, and technology. Three “non-negotiables” outlined the master schedule development: (1) two hours of daily uninterrupted language arts instruction, (2) ninety minutes of daily uninterrupted mathematics instruction, and (3) one hour of common planning time at least four days per week. ESOL and content teachers co-teach and flexibly group students so that teachers can leverage their expertise and also so that most ELs aren’t pulled from their content classes. Teachers are also provided times to observe each other using an observation form or checklist.

**Scaffolds.** During their common planning time, teachers use a common lesson planning format for every content area with integrated scaffolds
for ELs and other students who may need extra support. Lessons begin with linking to prior knowledge, then deliver new content, provide guided practice differentiated for different students’ strengths and needs, and offer an opportunity for students to reflect on new content and make a connection to future learning. As an extra support to ELs, an academic language goal is included in each lesson to help ELs access grade-level content.

THE CALL FOR ACTION

To disrupt inequitable outcomes for ELs, we must transform our mindsets, our programs, and our practices. Shifting from watering down to challenging ELs is not a technical challenge with a quick-fix solution to implement at scale, but an adaptive challenge that requires we collaborate deeply to unpack what isn’t working and transform our approaches to realize the true promise and potential for every child. It truly takes every shift detailed in this book to move our systems from the old paradigm of EL education to one in which every EL builds on their cultural and linguistic assets to excel with rigorous academic learning in every classroom every day.

Three specific areas of action we emphasize in this chapter are

1. Mindsets—Collaborate to Raise Expectations for ELs
2. Program Design—Ensure Access to Rigorous, Grade-Appropriate Learning
3. Instruction—Scaffold Strategically Without Lowering the Bar

In this next section, we emphasize the why and the how with specific actions you can take right away to move from theory to action.

ESSENTIAL ACTION: COLLABORATE TO RAISE EXPECTATIONS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Why? Students rise or fall to the level of teacher expectations. Research clearly indicates a strong correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement as well as a correlation between teachers’ racial biases and expectations of students of color (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015; Peterson, Christine, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016). When we have high expectations, we can help students grow toward those expectations. When we have low expectations for students, we limit the impact of our teaching to that low level (Singer, 2018, p. 29).

How? We raise expectations for ELs in the context of also shifting other mindsets about ELs that are the emphasis of other chapters in this book. Read Chapter 1, “From Deficit-Based to Assets-Based,” and Chapter 8, “From Monolingualism to Multilingualism,” to build a strong foundation in the shared agreement that
children’s multilingualism is not a disability or detriment, but rather an asset in a global world and a strength they can build on daily as they learn content and English. (Read also Chapter 4, “From Isolation to Collaboration,” and Chapter 9, “From Nobody Cares to Everyone/Every Community Cares,” to build shared ownership among ALL educators for the success of ELs.) From this assets-based perspective of shared agency, collaborate across all roles to get specific about what we mean by high expectations so administrators, teachers, and students all have clarity about the goals they are trying to achieve.

It’s not enough to morally agree on high expectations for ELs; we make this theory a reality when we collaborate to make our expectations visible to ourselves and our students. Here are specific job-embedded professional learning activities you can take with a colleague, a team, a school, or district staff to make high expectations a reality. The following activities are easy to facilitate at your school site either with the entire site together seated in teams, in team collaboration time, or as a two-person activity for teachers co-teaching who serve ELs in the core.

**HOW TO COLLABORATE TO CLARIFY AND CALIBRATE EXPECTATIONS**

Teacher clarity about our goals is critical for achieving them (Hattie, 2012). Making expectations visible together is a powerful way to calibrate expectations to align with grade-level standards and competencies essential for career and college success. Choose a site-wide specific area of emphasis, and then within teams collaborate to clarify together the following:

- What are our content goals for student learning? What aspects of language must students understand and use to excel with these goals?
- What are my success criteria in content and language?
- How will students demonstrate success?
- What does success look like?

See Figure 3.2 for collaboration tasks aligned to each question.

**Tips for Administrators to Make These Job-Embedded Professional Learning Activities Possible and Powerful:**

*Structure Time for Collaborative Job-Embedded Professional Learning.* Calibrating expectations only happens when you structure time for this work. In the Mason Crest example, one non-negotiable was that all staff receive one hour of common planning time at least four days per week. Go-to strategies to make time for job-embedded professional learning include (1) moving logistical communication out of staff meetings and into digital communication so staff meetings can be used to improve teaching and learning, and
### FIGURE 3.2 Job-Embedded Professional Learning to Clarify and Calibrate Expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Teacher Collaboration Tasks to Clarify and Calibrate Expectations</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| What are our goals for student learning?      | Collaborate to choose the standard(s) that most closely align with your priority goals. Important tips:  
  *Prioritize and synthesize* 1–3 standards at the intersection of your goal. For example, if your local initiative is to elevate academic conversations about academic texts, choose both a listening/speaking standard that details expectations for conversations, and a priority content standard such as making and justifying inferences from a text.  
  *Expect Beyond the Standards* Don’t limit yourself to what’s written in the standards if your goal goes beyond academic standards. For example, if your top priority is to build students’ agency as self-directed learners, collaborate to define together what that means.  
  *Identify Aligned Language Standards* Use your local language proficiency standards (e.g., WIDA) to identify language objectives that align with your specific goal. Align these to the success criteria as an excellent reference to differentiate across proficiency levels. |
| What aspects of language must students understand and use to excel with these goals? |                                                                                                                                  |
| What are our success criteria for content and language? | Using the priority standard(s) or goal identified above, collaborate to write student-friendly success criteria in the form of “I can” statements. Make sure to include all expectations represented in the standards. When a standard is vague or states a goal that you know from experience requires many sub-goals to master, co-create those sub-goals in the form of “I can” statements. |
| How will students demonstrate success?         | Co-design active engagement tasks through which students will demonstrate success with the goal. A task is what students will say and do (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and/or writing) to demonstrate success and/or instructional needs with the specific goal. It should be an opportunity for students who thrive with the goal to demonstrate their success, and also a great task for you to gather formative data about what instruction students need.  
  Reflect together:  
  * What will students need to do at the end of the year to demonstrate their success with this goal?  
  * If we use this task now, will it give us insight into what they already know and can do specific to our goal?  
  * Does our task align with the grade-level expectation (and not a watered-down sub-skill related to the goal)? |
| What does success look like?                   | Collaborate to create (or chose from exemplary student work) an exemplar of what success looks like with your goal and your success criteria. Simply choose the task you planned above and collaborate to write a model response. Reference both your content and language success criteria to ensure the exemplar demonstrates success with both your expectations for content and language.  
  Reflect, does this exemplar reflect our shared understanding of what success will look like when students excel with this goal? |

*Source: Singer (2017).*
(2) schedule regular collaboration time for job-alike teams by creating an early release schedule, aligning prep blocks of job-alike colleagues, and/or strategizing ways to use your resources creatively to create collaboration time beyond the instructional day.

*Focus and Align This Work with Priority Initiatives.* These activities can be used to calibrate expectations about ANY goal, but no one has time to do this for EVERY goal. These are most powerful when you focus on a very ambitious and urgent goal as a school that aligns with your top priority initiatives and data-driven needs. A school-wide focus helps teams go deep, rather than be scattered to scratch the surface of many competing initiatives. Lead the work of calibrating expectations with a very specific focus relevant to your top priority goals for student growth. Build from your shared vision to align all collaboration to raise expectations to very specific learning outcomes for students that are your top priority to move together. For example, in a school focused on increasing the caliber of peer-to-peer academic conversations with high-level thinking tasks, each team should focus on calibrating expectations about academic conversations with high-level tasks. In a secondary school focused on academic argument, each team should focus on specific standards (e.g., content and language) and high-level tasks that integrate the expectations for academic argument with their content learning goals.

*Team Strategically.* When facilitating these activities with many educators, make sure each team shares a common goal for supporting ELs and ideally a common grade-level or content area. For example, team job-alike colleagues such as teachers who teach the same grade level (e.g., third grade) or same content area (e.g., secondary English) together. Also have ESOL/EL specialists, literacy specialists, content specialists, intervention specialists, and other specialists or leaders integrate with a team focused on a grade-level or content-area goal, so teams benefit from cross-role sharing of expertise in clarifying the intersection of content and language learning expectations.

*Build From High Expectations to Inquiry for Impact.* These activities are a natural starting point for data-driven, job-embedded professional learning through which teams engage in continuous improvement to realize an ambitious goal. With that said, don’t stop with clarifying expectations. Next have teams co-plan, co-teach, co-assess, and co-analyze student work as a basis for refining instruction until ELs, and all students, achieve the goal.

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**ESSENTIAL ACTION: DESIGN EL PROGRAMS TO ACCELERATE, NOT REMEDIATE**

Effective programs for ELs ensure both access to rigorous content learning and aligned language development essential for success. Moving from “watering-down” to challenging is not just about improving the quality of instruction for ELs in each classroom. It also requires that we look
critically at how we design our programs for ELs, including answers to the following questions:

- What are our policies and practices for hiring and staffing classrooms that serve ELs? Do all staff who serve ELs have high certification or training as well as the mindset to be effective with ELs?
- How do we identify ELs? When an EL is identified, what services do they receive?
- What are our policies for placement of ELs into services? What success criteria determines entry into and exit from EL services?
- Do our placement policies and EL services create unnecessary segregation or track EL students in ways that hinder their success with challenging content or academic language?
- How do we monitor progress over time to ensure the services we design for support actually result in higher levels of academic and language learning for ELs?
- What are our criteria for reclassifying to fluent-English proficient? Do we analyze our data to see where students who have not reclassified within a reasonable time frame need the extra support? Does this data analysis drive the supports students receive?

There is no one approach to EL program design, and the approach that’s right for each district will vary according to local resources, EL population, and staffing. As we detail in our vision and in Chapter 8, dual immersion programs have a strong track record as the most effective program model for ELs even when measuring impact via standardized assessments in English. The added benefit is ELs and participating fluent English speakers become biliterate in two languages. The most powerful programs by design build from elementary to secondary and qualify students for a seal of biliteracy on their high school diploma, a recognition now official in many districts and also in 36 American states.

The vast majority of schools and districts, however, are working within the English contexts and have the dual challenge of providing access to rigorous content WHILE students learn the language used for content instruction. Monolingual English programs can also be successful when intentional about creating high challenge, high support environments for ELs. No matter your program design, collaborate in inquiry about the impact of instruction on ELs. Analyze student growth data and disaggregate EL data to identify your impact. If ELs aren’t thriving, reflect with key stakeholders: How can we change our programs and practices to ensure ELs succeed?

Dare to ask tough questions about policies and practices for assessment, placement, scheduled supports, and curriculum so that you can unpack together any possible barriers to EL achievement. To ensure your programs are not watering down by design, especially look for the following barriers.
Unnecessary Segregation:

- Do your program practices and policies lead to segregation of ELs and/or removal from core learning?
- Are ELs tracked into low-level courses, or scheduled into a multiyear path of lower-level learning?
- Do placement policies and practices result in inequitable placement of ELs into low-level secondary classes, or exclusion from courses they need to graduate with access to higher education?

Supports Replace Access to Core:

- Do EL services in your context result in ELs doing low-level, skill-based activities? “There is a particular danger in teaching diverse youth and particularly ELs by only focusing on discrete tasks, basics, vocabulary, mechanic and language errors, minimizing attention to content knowledge development” (Athanases & Oliviera, 2014, p. 286).
- Is English language taught as discrete skills in isolation from the linguistic demands of academic tasks and texts? “One of the biggest roadblocks to learning is (ELs) never get a chance to work with complex texts” (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012, p. 2).

Inequitable Staffing: Do ELs learn from teachers with mindsets and qualifications to effectively teach ELs?

Culturally Irrelevant Curriculum: Do our materials, texts, and pedagogy affirm students’ linguistic, cultural, and racial identities, or do they devalue or demotivate ELs and students of color?

Involves students and parents as partners in co-evaluating your programs. Seek to understand EL students’ perspectives and experiences, whether positive or negative, with the school community, with rigorous classes, and with the level of supports for language and content learning. When researcher Shawna Shapiro interviewed high school ELs, she found many wanted and appreciated challenging curricula. One student “described how her ELL English teacher had talked constantly of her academic future: ‘The teacher was always reminding us . . . ‘You need this in college. These are the kind of things they’re gonna ask you.’ This student was proud to report that her ELL class was actually harder than the mainstream English class she took in her senior year” (Shapiro, 2014, p. 400). Another student critiqued ELL exclusion from high-level math, “Students of color are, like, they’re in Algebra I, and below that. . . . You have seniors that are taking ELL math. That’s not right” (p. 396).

It is courageous work to lead changes in program design as humans get comfortable with business as usual. Collaborate with all stakeholders to
ensure multiple perspectives are at the decision-making table. Collaborate across departments, not in a silo of only the educators with EL or bilingual in their job title. Ensuring every student excels is everybody’s business. Every teacher and every leader and every stakeholder in our school community is part of the solution. Unify around the compelling vision that every student deserves access, opportunity, and excellence. Use your data including the perspectives of EL students and families to establish a compelling urgency for change.

**ESSENTIAL ACTION: SCAFFOLD STRATEGICALLY WITHOUT WATERING DOWN**

Even with the optimal program design, it’s possible for ELs to experience watered-down learning via over-scaffolding in everyday teaching. Scaffolds, when used as temporary supports to help students excel in new ways, are an essential part of raising expectations in schools. By contrast, when scaffolding practices are based on deficit perspectives about students of color and ELs (Walqui, 2011), they can become a life sentence for low-level work. How we use scaffolds determines whether ELs stagnate or thrive. To scaffold strategically, we must shift from seeking to scale “silver bullet” solutions, such as adopting “one-size-fits-all” EL strategies and training teachers with a prescriptive approach, to implement those teacher actions with fidelity no matter what. To scaffold strategically, we must be flexible and responsive to students’ ever-changing assets and needs. This involves a focus on high-level goals, our students, and the ever-changing “just right” instruction between where students are now and where we want them to be.

We support strategic scaffolding collectively when we build a culture promoting courageous inquiry about our impact. Impact is the key word. No strategy or scaffold, no matter how many experts or research studies support it, is the right fit for the right student every time. If we think that using a specific strategy is the end goal for effective EL teaching (e.g., using sentence frames), we can arrive there quickly and continue with false confidence that we are doing the right thing while blindly unaware about the actual impact our scaffold is having on students’ thinking, language use, and self-directed learning. Administrators can use an observation checklist that focuses on teacher scaffolding and celebrate positive shifts in teacher action—without clarity about whether those teacher actions are positively or negatively impacting the results we seek. Avoid this common mistake by shifting your focus from nouns (e.g., curriculum and strategies) as the solution, to verbs as the essentials we must master to raise rigor and access for every learner. See Figure 3.3. for six essential verbs to teach for equity and EL achievement.
We must courageously shift at every level of the school system from expecting compliance with a set of teacher actions to leading a culture of learning in which we set ambitious goals and collaborate to:

1. **Value**: Ensure a strong sense of belonging for all students, and make intentional connections to assets students bring to learning.

2. **Expect**: Clarify expectations, using the activities in Figure 3.2 (see p. 59).

3. **Engage**: Engage students in rigorous tasks aligned with our goals.

4. **Observe**: Gather formative data about students’ assets and prior knowledge with our goals, and also instructional priorities for next-level learning.

5. **Support**: Choose and lose scaffolds as appropriate to specifically help students build on their assets to progress towards our ambitious goals.

6. **Reflect**: Reflect on the impact of our scaffolds and teaching. Did every learner engage? Did my scaffolds support student thinking and self-directed learning, or get in the way? What shifts will I make to my teaching to ensure all learners excel?

*Source: Singer (2018).*
These six verbs are core to effective teaching with high expectations and strategic scaffolds, and even more powerful when we collaborate with collective efficacy to enact these verbs in a cycle of collaborative teacher inquiry.

Collaborative teacher inquiry comes in many forms with many names (e.g., PLCs, Data Teams, Observation Inquiry, Lesson Study, Co-Teaching), but in any manifestation, encompasses these essential activities: We co-expect when we collaborate to calibrate expectations (use the activities in Figure 3.2). We co-engage when we co-plan or co-teach instruction. We co-observe when we collaborate to analyze student work, or to observe students in the classroom to identify assets, needs, and the impact of our teaching. We co-reflect when we reflect on the data before us and, rather than blaming factors beyond our control, have the courage to ask ourselves: what will we change about our instruction and practices and policies to ensure every EL succeeds?

Strategic scaffolding requires all of these six verbs in synthesis. We build our collective capacity to scaffold strategically when, in the context of high expectations and asset mindsets about ELs, we collaborate to analyze student work specific to our goals, and co-reflect to refine our impact. Co-analyzing expressive language (speaking and writing) especially gives us insight into student thinking, conceptual understandings, confusions, and also language use. Here’s the flow to collaborate in the process of using data to reflect and refine scaffolding together:

**Co-Engage.** Collaborate to plan how students will actively engage. Have students do a task aligned to your goals with the minimum level of scaffolds essential to understand and participate in the task. If teachers only have time to collaborate outside of task, each does this step in a classroom, then brings student work samples (e.g., writing or video of conversations) to share. When teachers can be in classrooms together, such as in co-teaching (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018) or peer observation inquiry (Singer, 2015), gather observation data during the lesson as one person facilitates the task and others observe.

**Co-Analyze.** Collaborate to analyze student work. With written response or video, you may opt to score with a rubric, and then collaborate to calibrate how you score so that you come to shared agreement about each level of learning. Another method is to cluster work in categories (1) at grade level, (2) approaching grade level, and (3) far below, and then analyze each cluster for strengths and instructional needs. No matter how you handle it, be sure you use the success criteria you developed for your goal to analyze the work.

With observation data, use a non-evaluative protocol such as observation inquiry (Singer, 2015) to collaborate to describe what you observed without judgement, organize the data, and make generalizations about the data aligned to your success criteria and goals.
**Co-Support.** Collaborate to build from this analysis to co-plan the next level of instruction for each identified level of performance in the class. Consider both which supports and scaffolds you will add to meet specific identified needs, and which supports and scaffolds you will remove to increase rigor and students’ self-directed learning.

Be intentional about using effective supports for ELs that don’t lower the challenge of the task, such as the following:

- Concisely build background in concepts, content, and/or language to equitably position ELs with their fluent English-speaking peers (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017).
- Draw on home language assets and students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) such as providing them video clips in students’ home languages.
- Structure peer conversations in English and/or primary language that call for high-level thinking about complex content in support of deeper learning.
- Support access to complex texts (e.g., chunk, annotate, structure peer conversations, use graphic organizers, and/or teach language structures) rather than simplify the texts.
- Provide just-right, just-in-time feedback aligned to your content and language goals.

While there are times we may provide extensive scaffolds to address a specific student need that do have the collective impact of watering down a task, make sure this is a temporary state. Be intentional to build from the successes of a scaffolded moment to increase rigor and/or remove scaffolds in subsequent lessons.

**Co-Reflect.** Collaborate to reflect on what the data show us about how our supports impacted instruction. How did our instruction impact student learning for all students? How did it impact learning for ELs at different proficiency levels in the classroom? How did our scaffolds specifically impact students’ thinking and academic language use? What shifts will we make to our instructional choices and scaffolds to build from where students are now to higher levels of achievement?

**Co-Value.** Collaborate with a shared commitment to value multilingual students’ linguistic strengths, cultural assets, identities, life experiences, and communities. Asset mindsets about ELs are especially important when using data to co-reflect together. Educator mindsets make or break our capacity to use data to refine our teaching. Notice, when an EL struggles, do we blame the student, the EL status, the families? Or do we self-reflect to ask courageously, what will we change about our instruction to ensure our ELs succeed? Commit to shared ownership, asset mindsets, and high-expectations, and then help one another translate those theories into actions in the moment.
by reframing blaming or other deficit discourse about ELs to self-reflection and shared agency for change.

**Tips for Leaders to Scale This Shift**

*Lead a Culture of Learning* that values reflective data-driven practice over implementation of specific strategies at scale. Don’t expect every teacher to use the same specific supports for ELs; instead foster a school-wide culture of setting high expectations and being in inquiry about impact. This means that in classroom walkthroughs, you are not checking off specific strategies a teacher uses (e.g., Think-Pair-Share), but instead focusing on what students are saying and doing as evidence of the task, their learning, and language use. Focus your classroom “look fors” on student learning. Notice, what is the task? How does it align with grade-level expectations? Notice, what are students saying and doing? Who participates? Who doesn’t? What assets with content and language do ELs demonstrate in these tasks? What challenges do they demonstrate? Discuss together what you observed students saying and doing. Ask questions to foster teacher reflection and agency to adapt as needed to help students move toward your shared vision for student success.

*Integrate, Don’t Silo Professional Learning.* Align and synthesize initiatives to focus on an urgent, shared goal so that data-driven collaborative inquiry can be the central work of your school(s). Build teacher agency and efficacy for ELs within this context. Notice this is not a one-shot siloed workshop on EL strategies. Engaging in collaborative inquiry to co-clarify expectations, co-engage, co-analyze, co-support, and co-reflect is relevant to everyday teaching for ALL students. Within the context of this rigorous, data-driven collaboration, build teacher efficacy for ELs by deeply examining the intersection of content and language in your goals, in your analysis of student work, and in planning strategic scaffolds to reach every child. Get specific and humble about which scaffolds work and don’t work so you can continuously refine teaching to ensure ELs thrive. When you build the capacity of core teachers to serve ELs in this context, it’s relevant, it’s job-embedded, and it builds their agency to serve ELs as they differentiate to reach each unique individual they teach every day.

**Summary and Conclusions**

We all have the ability to make transformative shifts in our schools and our teaching so that ELs access challenging, grade-appropriate learning with strategic supports that ensure full access to college and career success. To do so, we must look at EL achievement through a systems perspective in which we thoroughly examine the system in which ELs are educated, instead of placing blame on individual ELs, and suggest making changes to the system to move from one that operates from a watered-down mindset to one that challenges ELs in a supportive environment. We recognize that enacting changes in the
way in which we approach and carry out educating ELs will require effort and dedication from the entire staff and community; equally, we offer that the rewards for this type of courageous collaboration will be great not only for ELs themselves but also for their educators and their community. To help you get started on your journey, Figure 3.4 provides a set of reflection questions for you and your colleagues to reflect on where you are with the three components we’ve outlined in this chapter and determine your next steps to implement the three components of our framework, so that all ELs can receive challenging instruction within a system that puts them on a path to success.

### FIGURE 3.4 Self-Reflection Questions and Next Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Self-Reflection Questions</th>
<th>Next Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mindsets About ELs</td>
<td>Does our school operate from an assets-based perspective about ELs? Y / N Do all administrators and teachers have and communicate high expectations for their ELs? Y / N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Program Design</td>
<td>Is our program designed in a way that ensures ELs’ access to rigorous, grade-appropriate learning? Y / N Is our program designed in a way that encourages ELs’ integration with fluent speaker peers? Y / N Are ELs scheduled in a way that is conducive to them receiving core content instruction and specials classes with their peers? Y / N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Strategic Scaffolding in Everyday Teaching of ELs</td>
<td>Are all teachers supported with relevant, ongoing job-embedded professional learning so that they provide supports for ELs to successfully engage with grade-level content? Y / N Does our school/district culture emphasize a shared commitment to continuous learning based on clear outcome goals for ELs over and above compliance? Y / N Do teachers and administrators prioritize ongoing collaboration among teachers to strategically support ELs with both content and language learning? Y / N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Seal of Biliteracy Map downloaded https://sealofbiliteracy.org/


**Notes**

* See also Calderón & Slakk, Chapter 6, for more information on moving from language to language, literacy, and content.

† Adapted from an infographic at https://getsupported.net/wp-content/uploads/Best_Practices_In_Scheduling_For_EL_Education.pdf.

‡ Adapted from an infographic at https://getsupported.net/wp-content/uploads/Best_Practices_In_Scheduling_For_EL_Education.pdf.

§ For more information on this topic, please see Chapter 4 by Dove and Honigsfeld.