
ELA/Literacy Professional Development Activity

Exploring Proficiency for English Learners

Overview

In this session, participants will examine a case study of one individual English learner (EL) student's responses to all the items in a performance task, and then relate the student's work to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) language standards as well as to the state's English Language Proficiency (ELP) and English Language Development (ELD) standards. Additionally, participants will look closely at the language standards and how they relate to performance tasks. Finally, they will discuss the instructional implications of both the standards and the student's performance on the task, including how to move the student toward proficiency through language-focused activities and lessons.

The activities are set up for grade-alike teams but could be easily modified to accommodate grade-span teams.

The pace of the session is intended to be fairly quick, with the activity serving as a starting point for deeper subsequent conversation and action within or across grade level teams.

Objectives

Participants will:

- * Analyze the work of an EL student on a performance task
 - * Examine and discuss the analysis of the student's work as well as the recommended next steps
 - * Analyze the language standards and draw connections to the student's work, as well as identify the instructional implications
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Time

ACTIVITY OPTION 1

- * 90 minutes

ACTIVITY OPTION 2 OR 3

- * 2–3 hours
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Activity Option 1

(90 minutes)

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION

Preparation:

- * Select a task that is appropriate for the grade level of the teachers in your group. You can view tasks on the English Learner page of Understanding Proficiency: <http://understandingproficiency.wested.org/ela/english-language-learners/>.
- * Select a case study for an EL student at the identified grade level. Case studies of EL students can be found for grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 in the Understanding Proficiency materials.
- * Prepare the following materials as separate handouts for each participant:
 - The performance task for the selected grade level; these can be found in the scoring guides on the grade-level ELA/Literacy pages
 - Selected case study
 - The CCSS language standards at the focus grade level
 - Your state ELP or ELD standards document
 - Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines:
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SmarterBalanced_Guidelines.pdf

FACILITATING THE ACTIVITY

Set the Stage

(5 minutes)

Presenter says:

Today we are going to look at a case study of how one student, an English learner, performed on a Smarter Balanced performance task. The case features the student's responses to the task's constructed response questions and essay, analysis of the student's performance, and suggestions for next steps. We will begin by reading through the performance task, reading the student's responses, and discussing the analysis and next steps. Then, we will look at the rubric, discuss how the student's work was scored, and think collectively about the next steps for this student as well as for EL students in your classrooms. Finally, we will look at the accommodations that the Smarter Balanced assessment system provides for EL students. Before we can look at the student's work, we need to familiarize ourselves with the task.

Activity Option 1 (continued)

Examine the Performance Task

(15 minutes)

Presenter says:

The first step is for us to examine the performance task and discuss the implications for students.

Ask participants to

- * Read through the performance task.
- * If time allows, attempt to answer the constructed-response questions and develop a thesis statement and outline for the full write.

Group Discussion

Pose the following questions:

- * What do students need to know and be able to do in order to perform well on this task?
- * What unique challenges does this task pose for EL students? (Possible responses: reading load, academic vocabulary, complex prompt)

Examining the Case Study, part 1, Looking at Student Work

(15 minutes)

Presenter says:

Now that you're familiar with the task, let's look closely at the case study.

Ask participants to:

- * Examine the student's responses to the performance task (ask participants not to read the scores and the analysis yet). Discuss with partner or small group:
 - What did the student do well?
 - How might you support this student in improving his/her performance on this task?

Activity Option 1 (continued)

Examining the Case Study, part 2, Looking at Scores and Analysis of Student's Performance

(15 minutes)

Presenter says:

Now we're going to look at the rubrics, the scores, and the analysis of the student's responses.

Give participants time to familiarize themselves with the rubrics if they haven't seen them before.

Presenter says:

Examine the scores and the analyses; then discuss the two questions with a partner or in a small group:

- * *What do the rubrics emphasize?*
- * *How might the student's performance improve?* (Possible answers include: familiarizing students with the language of the prompts and the rubrics, getting students accustomed to reading and synthesizing long texts, teaching different reading strategies to help students discern main idea, teaching different writing strategies that focus on comprehending the language of different text types, and using different language resources to craft short answers and essays).

Examining the Language Standards and Discussing Instructional Implications

(30 minutes)

Presenter says:

Now that you've examined the performance task, the student's responses, and scores, we're going to think about the instructional implications.

We're going to think about this in two ways: the instructional implications based on what you saw in the student's work, and the instructional implications that can be gleaned from analyzing the CCSS language standards and your state's ELD standards.

Ask participants to brainstorm lists of instructional implications and then share out with the whole group. If there is extra time, participants can create and present posters.

Ask participants to:

- * Look at the same CCSS language standards and the state's ELD standards. Discuss with a partner or small group:
- * What similarities do you see between the language standards and the rubrics?

Activity Option 1 (continued)

- * What are the instructional implications of the language standards?
- * Where might you begin? What is the level of English proficiency of each of your EL students (based on state data)? Given each of their proficiency levels and the guidelines specified in the standards, what are some ways you could support your EL students in working toward proficiency in the different domains of the rubrics we examined?

Examining Smarter Balanced Accommodations for English Learners

(10 minutes)

Presenter says:

Now that we've gotten familiar with the Smarter Balanced performance tasks, the rubrics, and the CCSS language standards, let's spend some time familiarizing ourselves with the Smarter Balanced Accommodations for English Learners.

Ask participants to:

Examine the Smarter Balanced Accommodations. Then discuss in groups:

- * What accommodations are provided during the assessment?
- * How do these accommodations compare with the scaffolds and supports you provide your students with throughout the year?
- * How might you move your students toward autonomy (away from the use of scaffolds)?

Activity Option 2 (3 hours)

If you have a 3-hour block of time, complete everything in the 90-minute activity and then repeat it for one grade span above or below the one you examined in activity 1. Discuss how the student work compares across grade levels:

- * What similarities do you see among different EL students' performances on the task?
- * What unique challenges does each student face?

Ideas for Next Steps

You could have teachers look at the language standards one grade-level above, asking

- * How do the standards differ from one grade to the next?
- * What do students need to be able to do by the end of the school year?

You could have teachers look at the California ELA/ELD Framework vignette collection:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/documents/elaeldvignettescollection.pdf>

Have them read the vignette for their grade, and then discuss in groups:

- * How are English learners supported in learning both language and content in your grade-level vignette?
- * How might you support your students in acquiring English: at the sentence level? at the paragraph level? at the whole-text level?