USING CCSS, NYS SHIFTS, AND NLAPS AS ENTRY POINTS TO PLAN FOR ELL ACHIEVEMENT

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ESOL teachers are no strangers to curricular change. Over the years, they have ridden many waves of pedagogical initiatives. Now, with the mandate of the Common Core State (CCSS) Standards, ESOL teachers are faced with another impact on curricular planning (Fenner, 2013). The goal of this report is to provide guidance to ESOL and classroom teachers as they work to meet the learning targets of the CCSS. These learning targets have been aligned with the new design goals of the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), and are planned to help ensure that ELL students are prepared for the NYSELAT- and the NYS Common Core-based ELA Regents exams (Metritech, Inc., 2015). Successful integration of the Standards is possible in several steps: (a) careful planning, using the New Language Arts Program (NLAP) to zoom in to grade-level learning targets or to zoom out to focus on the NYS Common Core Shifts; (b) correlating targets with student proficiencies; and (c) holding rich conversations with partner teachers to ensure that student needs are at the center of all planning (New York State Education Department, 2014–2015).

When the NYS State Learning Standards came out in 1996, our first groups of ESOL students approached the NYS content area tests—and we realized they weren't prepared. One high school student took the ELA Regents exam five times before she finally passed by half a point. She was 21 years old and out of time. If she hadn't passed the test, she would have given up her dreams of going to college. At the time, we were concerned about many students like her, who struggled to succeed once the local diploma was taken out of the realm of possibilities. To lessen that concern, ESOL teachers spent the next 15 years adapting practices to integrate content standards into our instruction in order to prepare students for the NYS assessments.

Because the stakes were higher with the Common Core Standards, general education teachers grew increasingly concerned about their students being pulled out for 36–72 minutes of ESOL at the elementary level; they felt responsible for their students' success on the assessments, regardless of whether the ESOL teacher was teaching ELA or other content-based curriculum. Many ESOL teachers found it necessary, if not actually more advantageous, to push in for instruction whenever possible for two main reasons: (a) it was on-the-job training to get a thorough understanding of what teaching to the Standards looked like in a classroom of diverse students who may or may not have been able to meet them; and (b) they could base their instructional support on first-hand assessments in the classroom.

At the high-school level, ESOL teachers became content area teachers/tutors for their students when pushing in. For example, one group of students taking ninth-grade algebra was supported by the ESOL

teacher pushing in and co-teaching. In this example, the role of the ESOL teacher was to collaborate with that content area teacher by identifying the linguistic demands of each lesson and in creating scaffolds to support their students' understanding of algebraic concepts.

As a result of pushing in, ESOL teachers became skilled at modifying curriculum to help students develop an understanding of concepts and to practice skills in small groups to support the classroom teacher's instructional goals. Thus, students didn't have to lose time from credit-bearing classes in order to receive ESOL services, and younger children had the opportunity to learn content and English from completing learning activities with their grade-level, English-speaking peers. The ability to adapt and modify content was the hallmark of ESOL teachers, who became adept at chopping, chunking (breaking down difficult text into more manageable pieces), and reconstructing texts to make them accessible to ELLs.

Now with the Common Core State Standards, ESOL teachers are again rising to the challenge. With guidance from the CCSS and the NLAP, there is no more guesswork. The level of specificity in linguistic demands required to fulfill performance tasks in content areas has led to even deeper and more frequent collaborative conversations between ESOL and classroom/content teachers.

Central to our current planning is the role of text complexity (Liben, 2010). We are no longer able to substitute grade-level texts for more accessible versions that rely on rich text features, such as illustrations and sidebar information with a focus on content, but that lack complex language structures. Thus, these supplemental texts, though they play an important role in developing content and enhancing student understanding of concepts that are integral to the grade-level texts, are not meant to be replacements for them (Liben, 2010).

In fact, NYSED is standing firm on the directive that teachers may "change the task but not the target" and that we must use grade-level texts to get our newcomers, who may or may not be students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), to meet the CCSS learning targets. Teachers now must find ways to scaffold central texts by providing embedded vocabulary and idiosyncratic language instruction, chunking the grade-level text, using read-alouds prior to students' independent attempts, and supporting the learner's understanding by building background knowledge.

Meeting the CCSS might seem challenging enough if ESOL students received services based on their grade level and proficiency levels, but the majority of ESOL teachers teach more than one grade level at a time, and the proficiency levels of students within a group may run the gamut between Entering and Commanding, according to the NLAP; see Appendix, Figure 1.

Coordinating Curriculum: Entry Points

The arrival of the NYS Common Core Standards reminds me of when I first started my career in ESOL, when all of my groups comprised multiple grade-level students and at multiple proficiency levels. I was teaching in a rural district, serving students in Grades K–12. It was immediately clear to me that I couldn't approach instruction by creating lessons at every grade level to meet everyone's needs, but what approach *would* work?

I found that to look at curriculum design in zoom-camera fashion, my entry point into the Standards had to be based on the variables presented in a multi-level group. This entry point would be the basis of the unit that I would develop for a particular group of students, which meant that I would start by looking at grade-level curriculum maps to identify common content area themes. Once I identified a theme, I would use backward design (goals before methods) to identify a compelling topic and an essential question to drive students' inquiry, with a culminating performance task to demonstrate what students learned. I would use the performance indicators described within each of the grade-level NYS Learning Standards in math, science, ELA, and/or social studies to zoom in a little more in order to identify skills that I could target through tasks that were designed to allow students to work on the theme at their ability level. Was it a lot of work? Definitely!

Student engagement, however, was incredible. They learned to work independently and were excited to present their learning at the end of the unit. The school staff and other students would see us outside with magnifying glasses, cameras, and black paper in the winter after reading *Snowflake Bentley* (Martin, (1998). Students would be drawing diagrams of snowflakes and noting their shape and viscosity (science vocabulary), using pre-identified and pre-taught adjectives to help them describe the flakes. We'd go around with student-made journals and clipboards and measure temperatures in Fahrenheit and Celsius and snowfall in inches and centimeters in different locations around the building, noting whether or not there was snow. We'd look at how the wind blew snow, and wonder about how snowdrifts were formed. In March, we would we would test Bernoulli's Principle using a variety of kite types and create our own kite. There was even a year that I had a kindergarten student who had just arrived from India, and we ended the weather unit with a celebration of Holi—a spring festival—because the child's mother mentioned how much he talked about missing the celebration he had known in India.

ESOL teachers have found that they are back to a place where many factors can be seen as influencing how we determine what to teach. In many ways, the CCSS are much more user friendly than the old NYS Standards, which were vague and often unmeasurable in their style and expectations; learning targets had to be developed by each teacher during unit planning. Now, at the K–2 and 3–5 levels, planning for instruction is spelled out by specific grade-level learning targets (see the example given in Figure 2 in the Appendix) and the shifts (Appendix, Figure 5). In fact, the learning targets are skills that students need to develop in order to continue their education into adulthood. The targets are built upon in each grade level, and students aren't expected to master the skills the first time they are exposed to them. This spiraling curriculum and layering of skills to meet the targets fits well with ELL instruction, as ELLs benefit from multiple opportunities to apply concepts they learn in order to build on to what they already know (Conley, 2011). And, it is worth noting that the learning targets in the Common Core are easier to measure.

Another fact that makes the Common Core user friendly is its level of specificity. Language skills, or language functions, that are required to attain each Standard are specifically prescribed; the learning targets can be taught in any order, and teachers can choose which to teach and assess based on the end-of-unit performance task.

ESOL teachers with multiple grade levels and multiple proficiency levels in pull-out groups cannot teach the NYS Common Core ELA curriculum lesson by lesson the way classroom teachers can. Many factors must be considered when planning for ELL instruction, in that it takes both art and experience to design a curriculum, based on the needs of students, that both fits classroom/content area instruction *and* is aligned with the Common Core Standards (Bailey, 2010; Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010). To meet this dual requirement, we suggest a telescoping method of planning that allows teachers to draw from a variety of entry points to coordinate curriculum by using either a big-picture view, such as by looking at the NYS instructional shifts or by zooming into grade-level learning targets, as described in the next section.

Grade-Level Targets

ELL teachers can zoom in and use the New York State grade-level learning targets outlined in gradelevel standards to design a unit of instruction (<u>https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-p-12-</u> <u>common-core-learning-standards-for-english-language-arts-and-literacy</u>), or they can zoom out and start by incorporating the NYS Instructional Shifts in ELA (<u>https://www.engageny.org/resource/common-core-</u> <u>shifts</u>) in order to begin unit planning.

Based on the specific criteria outlined in a Standard at each grade level, a unit could be developed with a common theme and essential questions, and learning activities could be modified based on specific grade-level expectations or learning targets that students must reach before they are considered to be meeting the Standard. In the cases where the student is demonstrating skills embodied in a Standard, the learning target may begin with the actual Standard because the other performance indicators (see sample

in Figure 4 in the Appendix) or skills have already been mastered. Either way, pre-assessing by identifying each of those skills will inform the teacher which skills or shifts to focus on that will best meet the varied needs of students. Recent amendments to the guidance document CR PART 154 now state that ELLs can be grouped together as long as the grade span is no greater than two grade levels. This will help students who will have similar academic language fluency with one another, thereby allowing for greater specificity of planned learning activities that address specific gaps in student knowledge.

ESOL teachers in schools that are not following the New York State Common Core curriculum can choose one shift as the focus on a unit of study. They would start by determining which learning targets are needed to meet the grade-level standards related to the shifts.

In terms of the CCSS, when you have a group of ELLs that are diverse on multiple levels, an entry point to the Standards could be the NYS shifts in ELA or math. The entry point becomes the skill that you design a unit around. For example, based on student work samples in writing, you may decide that the group in general is weak in citing evidence from text to back up their opinions or their analysis of literature. By designing a unit around shift 5, Writing from Sources, students could be required to write a persuasive essay analyzing a specific literary element in a piece of literature where they argue their case for this element as what propels the plot forward or heralds the climax of the story.

Proficiency Levels and NLAPS

Once the learning targets are identified by grade level, the next step is to focus on the proficiency levels of your students as shown on the NLAPs, which were designed by New York State to provide all teachers of ELLs with another entry point into the CCSS regardless of their role in teaching ELLs (New York State Education Department, 2014–2015). The NLAPs are organized by modality (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) and by domain (Receptive and Productive). The descriptions highlight what English language learners are able to do at one of five levels of proficiency—Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, and Commanding (Appendix, Figure 1). Each NLAP is an ELA Standard in both the anchor (described in terms of what students will be able to do upon graduation from high school) and as its grade-level equivalent (how students demonstrate the Standard at their developmental stage and grade level) with descriptors that allow teachers to pinpoint exactly how an ELL can demonstrate the ELA Standard at his or her corresponding proficiency level for each modality of ELA (for an example, see Figure 3 in the Appendix). By providing this guide, the NLAPS help teachers further students' ability to stay on course with the CCSS while they facilitate English language acquisition (Gottlieb, Katz, & Ernst-Slavit, 2009).

In addition to the information provided by the descriptors, each NLAP provides a detailed description of the linguistic demands required in order for a student to be able to meet the grade-level standard. Linguistic demands include all aspects of academic language—function, grammar, and vocabulary. The NLAP give all teachers of ELLs the specific and measurable learning targets that can be pre-assessed, thus reducing much of the analysis the teacher must do and strongly supporting teacher planning (Wolf, Wong, Blood, & Huang, 2014).

Students at the emerging level of English language proficiency can complete writing tasks that are scaffolded with cloze exercises, while students moving toward transitioning and expanding in English proficiency need fewer supports to being able to write independently.

NYS Instructional Shifts in ELA as an Entry Point into the CCSS

As described in the previous section, in the cases where there are too many grade-level variables, ESOL teachers can zoom out and use the NYS Common Core instructional Shifts in ELA to design their instruction. This is very helpful in situations such as pull-out teaching, when ESOL teachers are working with multi-grade-level and multi-proficiency-level groups. It is worth noting that each module at each grade level addresses one of the shifts in ELA: for example, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, the

first domain/module/unit focuses on students developing close reading skills. A unit planned around close reading would enable teachers to utilize grade-level texts that may not be used in the NYS Common Core Curriculum, but that may explore similar content and allow students from multiple grade levels and multiple proficiency levels to share the same learning targets. You would still consult the grade-level standards for pre-assessing students' skill levels and for identifying learning activities, but you wouldn't need to teach each lesson outlined in the close reading unit of each grade level. Figure 5 in the Appendix presents the CCSS pedagogical shifts outlined on <u>www.engageny.org.</u> Another, more detailed source for understanding the learning targets embedded in the shifts can be found online in "Common Core 'Shifts' in English/Language Arts" (Oregon Department of Education, 2011).

Conversations and Questions

Once you are equipped with learning targets and NLAPs, it is time to make the planning a shared conversation with your learning partners. While it is difficult to coordinate instruction with everyone who shares a role in a student's instructional day, such conversations are essential to ensure cohesion with either the classroom teacher or the ELA teacher—or both. Recognizing that there are as many teaching configurations as there are learning targets, we provide the following questions to guide the conversations. And, to ensure that their instruction meets the needs of all levels of language learners, *all* teachers should keep in mind the following questions when planning lessons.

- Is my lesson/unit authentic and based on grade-level skills outlined in the CCSS? Is the purpose relevant to my students? Does it enhance what they are learning in other content areas? The two best ways to measure a unit's validity in teaching are to (a) collaborate with general education teachers in sharing assessment data that illuminates skill gaps in a student's literacy profile, and (b) keep pace with ELA and other content area topics in order to plan learning that mirrors and enhances ELL content learning while facilitating English language acquisition.
- Does the end of the unit performance task engage students in sharing their learning through multiple modes? ELLs must be engaged through the productive domains of writing and speaking in order to challenge their thinking through problem solving and analyzing evidence collected on a topic that leads toward answering an intriguing question. To enhance the work they do on their own, projects that require teamwork and inquiry allow for students to bring out the best thinking in one another as well as the opportunity to share in the learning (Adams, 2010–2011). In order to facilitate those kinds of results, students must be presented with compelling questions, texts, and opportunities to collect data in some form. Giving students specific types of projects to complete that require writing to demonstrate their thinking and rubrics that outline criteria for completion will guarantee that the demands are rigorous. Performance tasks should be content-based and require reading multiple texts from a variety of genres and reviewing other types of sources (video clips, realia, field trips, manipulation of data, primary sources) to enable acquiring expertise in a specific topic. For example, based on the question "How do humans and the environment have an impact on one another's health?," students can complete learning activities that allow them to investigate and collect evidence. A performance assessment might require students to take a position that humans and the environment either don't have an impact on one another or that they do, and write an essay that supports their position. Another option could be to ask students to answer that question from the viewpoint of someone who will be born in the year 2500 based on current evidence of global warming.
- *Have I planned for students to learn content-based academic language?* Once you've determined the topic and performance tasks, you can use grade-level NLAPs to determine linguistic demands of writing a position essay required at a student's grade level; the functional language required to form an opinion and carry on an academic discussion becomes the criterion that makes up the rubric used to rate the student's performance (Scarcella, 2008).

- Does the lesson progression include a way for students to build on their reading and writing skills? Are the skills evident? The best way to determine this is to give a pre-assessment that previews the exact language and content that the performance task will involve. The pre-assessment should contain a reading and a response that requires students to use evidence from the reading to answer the guiding question that will be the basis of the performance task. Use the same rubric to evaluate the writing piece. If it is evident that a student couldn't comprehend the reading, you can supplement the grade-level text with other accessible texts for those who need it.
- Does the lesson provide repeated opportunities to revisit the text for multiple purposes? When
 choosing texts that support the inquiry of a unit, choose a text that explores multiple themes from
 multiple perspectives. Guiding questions will drive student inquiry into the texts to help expose
 those themes and support student thinking as they use that evidence to hold their own in an
 academic discussion and later in their writing (Adams, 2010–2011). Provide opportunities for
 students to reread and revisit the text to build comprehension.
- Are there opportunities for student-led discussions and other protocols to support student ownership of learning? The CCSS require stamina in reading and writing. One way to build stamina is to establish a clear purpose. If students are allowed to develop knowledge on a topic over time by reading, discussing, and writing in small groups or pairs, they will have ample evidence to shape their thinking during the performance tasks. Regular opportunities for students to hold academic discussions with clear objectives and well-established roles and routines will elicit interaction between students and texts that will spark great ideas and inspire students to expand their search for sources that support their theories (Lefstein & Snell, 2010; Short & Echevarria, 2004).

Using these entry points for planning leads to student achievement. Because teachers can set learning targets that are grade-level appropriate and aligned to the CCSS; student growth is assured, because the instruction focuses on the academic language required to meet the Standards while integrating content. The NLAPs provide teachers with specific tasks students can do independently and with teacher support based on their proficiency level in each of the domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Designing instruction that allows students to participate in learning activities with their grade-level peers is respectful and inclusive. Positive outcomes include deep thinking, application of skills for real purposes, and rich discussions between peers that lead to higher student success on performance tasks that might otherwise appear too daunting to attempt. Most significant, this approach to planning shifts ELL students from passive observers of classroom instruction to active and successful participants in the entire learning process (Lefstein & Snell, 2010).

With grade-level Standards for ELA, teachers essentially have a curriculum available to them because skills are very clearly spelled out in terms of the grade-level learning targets. While nothing replaces coplanning, co-teaching, or general collaboration, teachers can use the Standards to design instruction with learning activities leading to performance tasks that are completely measurable. For districts that are using the NYS Common Core Curriculum, the assessments for each domain or module are available on www.engageny.org, along with the New Language Arts Progressions. Teachers can use the NLAPs to determine what to focus on based on where ELA classes are in relation to the module progressions. ESOL teachers who are pushing in can also use the NLAPs to determine how best to support students in the classroom based on their English language proficiency (New York State Education Department, 2014–15).

When comparing the focus for Standards-based learning pre- and post-arrival of the Common Core, it's worth noting that the biggest shift in instruction is from content to skills. As ESOL teachers, we worked hard to find ways to build students up with content understanding but without giving enough opportunities to practice skills that require higher level thought processes. The NYS shifts in ELA focus on those skills that students need to have in order to be college and career ready. If we arm students with well-developed skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and math, they will be able to build their knowledge in the content areas in meaningful, lasting ways.

Using entry points supports all teachers in all content areas. As we work to meet the new targets, ESOL teachers will be able to leverage their expertise with the skills of the content area teacher to ensure achievement for all students.

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Figure 2. Example of RL Standards 1–3 Compared at Grades 6–7

Corresponding author: tracy.cretelle@rcsdk12.orgReading Standards for Literature 6-12 $_{\rm [RL]}$

The following standards offer a focus for instruction each year and help ensure that students gain adequate exposure to a range of texts and tasks. Rigor is also infused through the requirement that students read increasingly complex texts through the grades. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year's grade-specific standards and retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades.

Grade 6 students:	Grade 7 students:	Grade 8 students:
Key Ideas and Details		
1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.	1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as references drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgements.	2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.	2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot, provide an objective summary of the text.
3. Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.	3. Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g. how settings shapes the characters or plot).	3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Figure 3. Anchor Standard and Grade Level Standard of NLAP

Common Core Anchor Standard: SL1.2 COMPREHENSION AND COLLABORATION.	MAIN ACADEMIC DEMAND:
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually,	Compare/Contrast, Synthesize and Evaluate the
quantitatively, and orally.	Credibility of Information Presented in Various Formats
Common Core Grade 9-10 Standard: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in	GRADE LEVEL ACADEMIC DEMAND:
diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and	Evaluate the Reliability of Different Sources of Information
accuracy of each source.	Presented in Diverse Media or Formats

Figure 4. Sample Performance Indicators at the Entry Level

5 Levels of Language Progressions		Entering		
Whe	When acquiring a new language, student performa			
RECEPTIVE	Oracy and Literacy Links	 L. Able to compare and contrast <i>iwo or more</i> sources cf information by organizing <i>pre-identified key words</i> into a <i>Venn Diagram</i> that targets similarities and differences, as sources are read aloudin class, or in <i>partnership and/or teacher leadsmall group</i> discussions, in <i>new and/or home language</i>. R. Able to evaluate the credibility of <i>two or more</i> sources by rating each source (<i>authority and/or currency</i>) in a <i>provided scoring rubric</i> and <i>justifying the ratings by</i> choosing from a <i>pre-identified list of words</i>, when reading sources in <i>new and/or home language</i>. 		

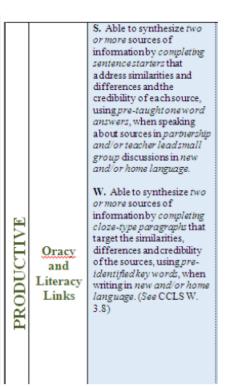


Figure 5. CCSS Pedagogical Shifts

Pedagogical Shifts demanded by the Common Core State Standards

There are twelve shifts that the Common Core requires of us if we are to be truly aligned with it in terms of curricular materials and classroom instruction. There are six shifts in Mathematics and six shifts in ELA/ Literacy.

Shifts in ELA/Literacy		
Shift 1	Balancing Informational & Literary Text	Students read a true balance of informational and literary texts.
Shift 2	Knowledge in the Disciplines	Students build knowledge about the world (domains/ content areas) through TEXT rather than the teacher or activities
Shift 3	Staircase of Complexity	Students read the central, grade appropriate text around which instruction is centered. Teachers are patient, create more time and space and support in the curriculum for close reading.
Shift 4	Text-based Answers	Students engage in rich and rigorous evidence based conversations about text.
Shift 5	Writing from Sources	Writing emphasizes use of evidence from sources to inform or make an argument.
Shift 6	Academic Vocabulary	Students constantly build the transferable vocabulary they need to access grade level complex texts. This can be done effectively by spiraling like content in increasingly complex texts.

Appendix

Figure 1. Map of a Sample NLAP

