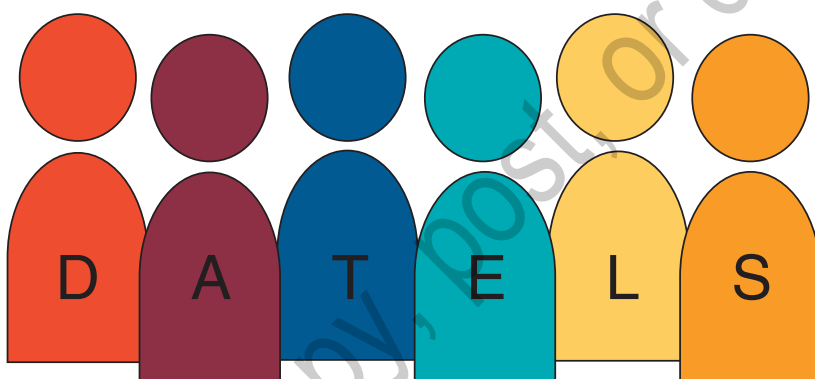


## CHAPTER 1

---

# Digital-Age Teaching for English Learners



*If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob  
our children of tomorrow.*

(Dewey, 1944, p. 167)

## **MULTILITERACIES, MULTIMODALITIES, AND LEARNING ECOLOGIES**

---

We all remember the spring of 2020. A pandemic hit the world and suddenly, everything changed. Just about everything seemed to have shut down overnight, and learning went remote. Administrators and teachers worked together to devise strategic plans to deliver instruction in a way that, for many educators, was entirely new. Many agree that the pandemic

was a catalyst for change in the education world. Now, it is no longer about how we use technology to provide access to daily lessons or to enhance content and language instruction for English learners. Our focus has shifted from how to use technology to support English learners, to how to use technology to create digital-age learning ecosystems for ELs. The emphasis on the development of multiliteracies for ELs through the use of digital learning resources is a necessary shift in TESOL methodology. The development of receptive and expressive language skills in the digital age includes not only listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also viewing and visually representing. This book is an introduction to creating digital-age learning environments that support English Learners. Digital-Age Teaching for English Learners (DATELS) is a student-centered, technology-infused approach that increases opportunities for contextually rich, authentic language practice while promoting 21st-century literacy skills. A DATELS approach engages students in synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities that provide flexible access to deeper academic content, while also developing language skills.

We have also come to understand that the digital age requires the development of multiliteracies and the use of multimodalities for language acquisition and effective communication beyond the classroom (Lesaux, 2016; Vance, 2006). The term *multiliteracies* is of specific relevance to language learners as it encompasses not only the understanding of the various new ways in which we communicate because of advancements of technology, but also acknowledges linguistic diversity and the intersectionality of culture and language. The framework for traditional forms of communication in any given language is bound to a dominant culture (New London Group, 1996; Sang, 2017). Understanding and developing multiliteracy skills provides ELs with equitable access to content and culturally responsive means of expression. This means that we explicitly teach all six literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing), as students use multiple modalities to engage in the 5 Cs of 21st-century learning: communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and culture. In this book we'll examine current understandings of digital-age education and explore how we can improve instructional methodology for English learners to meet the complex demands of this new era.



# THE DIGITAL-AGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

---

## THE CLASSROOM SETTING

There are many new terms to define the classroom setting in the digital age. Unlike traditional classrooms which existed only in a physical space, today's classroom includes both a physical space and a virtual space. Both the physical and the virtual learning environment allows for synchronous and asynchronous classroom experiences. Synchronous instruction occurs at the same time but does not necessarily take place within the same space (e.g., instruction delivered using live video conferencing tools such as Zoom or Google Meet or delivering instruction to students in person in a physical classroom). Asynchronous instruction occurs not only in different spaces but also at different times (e.g., self-paced online classes, pre-recorded video tutorials, independent study). Protocols for designing and implementing synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences are required for students to work successfully whether they are in-person, remote-only, or in a hybrid setting. Whether we deliver instruction entirely in-person, remotely, or in a hybrid combination of the two, designing learning ecologies to advance language development and content knowledge require that we consider the way we want students to interact with one another, learn by doing, and express their ideas using digital learning resources (WIDA, 2014).

This book explores how we can leverage these classroom environments to increase interaction and engagement to better serve our English learners.

## THE 5 Cs FOR 21ST-CENTURY LEARNING

Student interaction is directly aligned with the goals established in the Partnership for 21st-century learning framework (2019). The P21 Framework pioneered the identification of four 21st-century skills most important for K–12 learners. These skills became known as the 4 Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. However, we have added a fifth “C”—Culture—to include culturally responsive and sustaining practices that recognize and affirm the diversity that all learners bring to the classroom.

The 5 Cs should be integrated into daily instructional practices for ELs:

**Critical thinking.** Linking learning across subjects and disciplines and assisting ELs in developing background knowledge. Using technology to reduce or remove language barriers so that ELs can decipher problems and find solutions.

**Communication.** Providing numerous opportunities for ELs to share thoughts, ask questions, and discuss ideas and solutions with their peers. This could include the use of translation apps, podcasts, blogs, video chats, social media, and online discussion boards.

**Collaboration.** Creating projects that allow ELs to work with classmates both in class and virtually to achieve a shared goal, while contributing their own talent and expertise. This requires the use of tiered tasks and scaffolded assignments that are accessible in an online learning management system.

**Creativity.** Helping ELs express their thoughts, ideas, and content knowledge creatively. This can be achieved through the use of multimedia resources and project-based learning activities that help ELs use the target language to make real-life connections to learning.

**Culture.** Recognizing that ELs bring rich cultural and linguistic experiences to the classroom and building on them whether working in person or virtually in remote learning environments. It is essential that ELs make meaningful connections between the home and school cultures and develop their unique cultural identities. Design collaborative projects that demonstrate an acceptance and appreciation for cultural diversity. This involves including the global community and respecting the needs of those who are collaborating from different cultures, building an awareness for all students of how culture impacts an individual's or group's choices, and providing a forum for discussions related to multiculturalism.

## **DIGITAL-AGE TEACHING FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS (DATELS)**

Digital-age teaching for ELs (DATELS) is the outcome of our decade-long work with ELs and technology. This framework requires that we embrace the opportunities presented to us in remote and hybrid instructional models and reimagine our

instructional strategies and technology integration to meet the evolving needs of ELs. The strategies, tools, and lesson seeds provided in this book are designed to help us create more student-centered, culturally responsive learning experiences for ELs. Figure 1.1 identifies the key features of DATELs and illustrates how a digital-age learning ecosystem for ELs will accomplish the following:

- Increase social interaction and engagement
- Provide authentic communication and contextually rich language practice
- Reduce the affective filter so that more learning can occur
- Support scaffolded instruction through digital tools and media
- Incorporate all six literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing)
- Emphasize the 5 Cs for 21st-century ELs (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and culture)

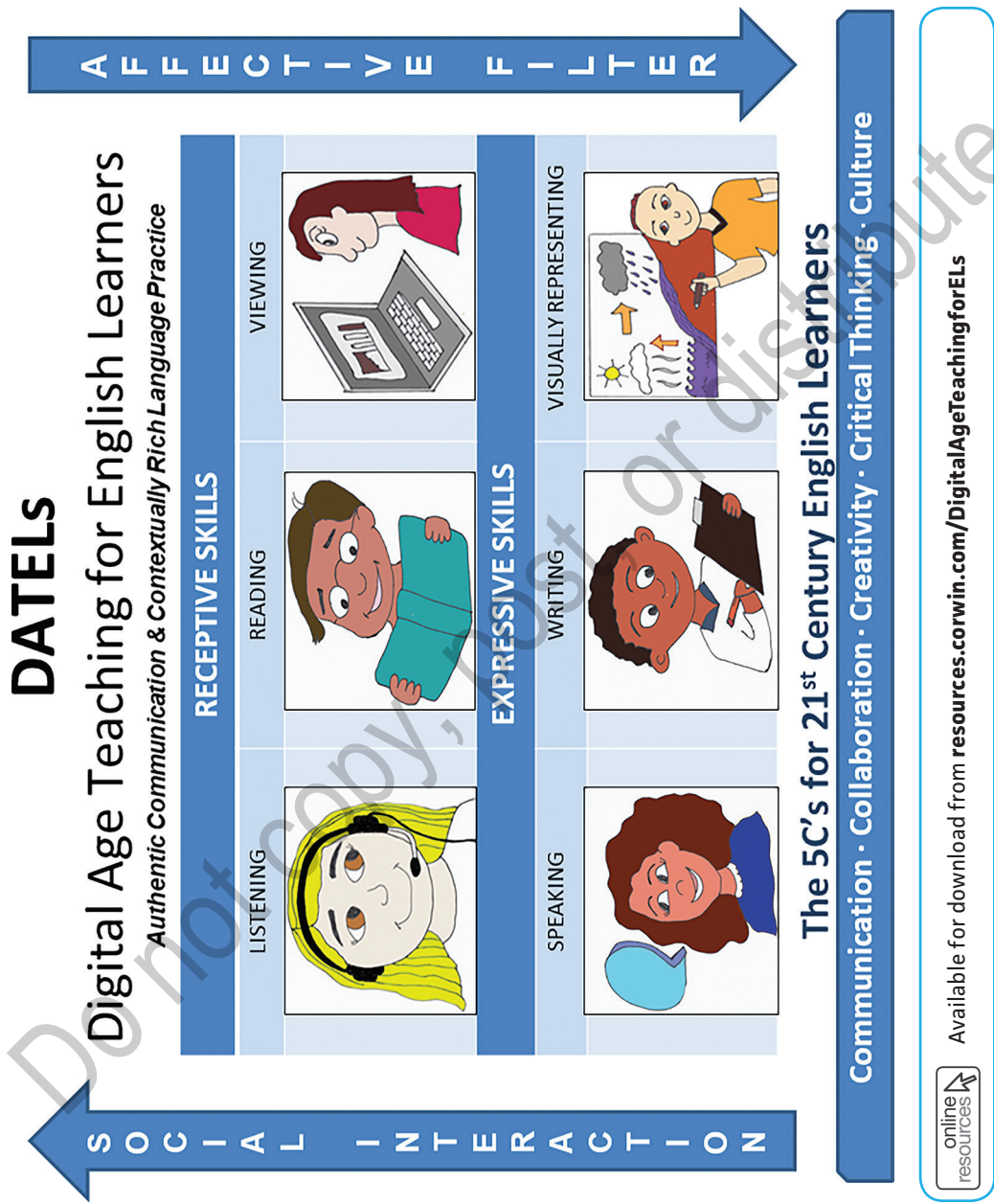
As we examine our pedagogical practices and the role that technology plays in the education of English learners, we must also critically examine the deep-rooted inequities in our schools and societies. In K–12 schools and higher education settings, educational inequities—including the digital divide—have intensified the call to action: We must provide ELs with full and equitable participation in in-person, remote, and hybrid instructional models. In this book, we present strategies, resources, and ready-to-use practices for ELs to ensure meaningful and intentional outcomes that include:

- Bridging the digital divide to ensure equitable access for ELs to all instructional resources, materials, and learning opportunities in a variety of settings;
- Presenting an approach to planning instruction for ELs that includes content, language, social-emotional learning, and technology integration;
- Applying culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining pedagogy to all types of instructional models.

## **LEARNING BY DOING**

Educators today are reimagining the concept of learning by doing in the digital age. Inquiry-based and project-based learning activities that require digital literacy have become a part of everyday instruction. These instructional models call for a reexamination of Bloom’s taxonomy as it applies to 21st-century learning. Do you recall the six dimensions of Bloom’s taxonomy?

FIGURE 1.1 • DATELS

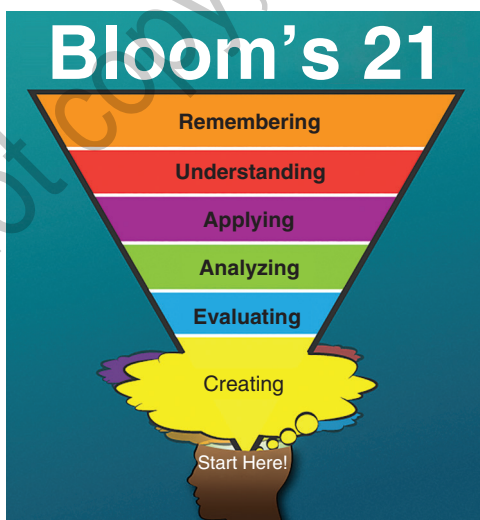


Consider what happens in the 21st-century version that has turned Bloom's taxonomy literally upside down (see Figure 1.2). In this rendition by Wright (2012), the skills are inverted as students begin with creating, then move up the pyramid through evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding, and finally, remembering. This flipped visual conceptualization of Bloom's emphasizes a learning-by-doing philosophy and starts with a process of investigation and engagement as opposed to starting with direct teaching, lectures, and rote memorization.

Flipping Bloom's taxonomy in order to enhance students' ability to access higher-order thinking is also the subject of research on retrieval practice (Argawal, 2019). Whereas traditional study methods focus on drilling to get information into students' heads, retrieval practice is an instructional strategy that is focused on helping students pull knowledge out of their heads through actively recalling information. Learning by doing and activating prior knowledge before introducing new information is essential to helping English learners develop and retain new concepts in the target language.

When we commit to transforming education for ELs—and for all students in the digital age—we also commit to a shift in priority from students as consumers of information to students as creators. For English learners, the emphasis on starting with creating and activating prior knowledge means engaging them

**FIGURE 1.2** • Bloom's 21



**Source:** <https://shelleywright.wordpress.com/2012/05/29/flipping-bloomstaxonomy/>

in authentic, communicative experiences and providing more opportunity to practice the target language. This is not “sink or swim” methodology! For these learning experiences to be productive, you need to lay down some groundwork. Indeed, the language required to participate in this type of learning is carefully scaffolded. We will explore how to accomplish this throughout the book.

An emphasis on student-centered, collaborative learning means increased opportunities for students to interact with peers and use English along with their full linguistic repertoires to complete authentic tasks. We must also emphasize the importance of using the SIX literacy domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing) to engage students in multimodal language, literacy, and disciplinary practices. You can engage ELs in this highly communicative environment by using carefully scaffolded questioning techniques that lead ELs to evaluate and analyze tasks. As a result, they develop higher-order thinking skills and use academic discourse across all content areas.

## REMOTE AND HYBRID LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

An integral part of the digital-age learning environment is the use of Flipped Learning methodologies (Bergman & Sams, 2012). There are many different versions of Flipped Learning and we have devoted a chapter to it along with its benefits for ELs later in this book. Flipped Learning methodology is neatly aligned to best practices for ELD/ESL instruction. Simply stated, in Flipped Learning environments, direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space (flipped-learning.org). This creates more time for students to collaborate and create when they are together in person or virtually. With a combined understanding of Bloom’s 21 and the Flipped Learning model, you will build a foundation for self-directed learning whether you are working in fully remote or hybrid classroom settings.



## UNDERSTANDING ELs

### WHO ARE OUR ENGLISH LEARNERS?

Before we address the unique needs of ELs, let us take a snapshot of the U.S. EL population. English learners are considered a unique, ever-growing subgroup of the U.S. student population. According to Hussar et al. (2020):



- The population of students designated as English language learners (ELs) has increased from 3.8 million students (8.1%) in 2000 to 5 million (10.1%) in 2017, and it is estimated to continue to grow.
- Roughly 3 out of 4 ELs speak Spanish as their home language, whereas the next nine most common languages are Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, Portuguese, Haitian or Haitian Creole, and Hmong.
- The most newly identified subgroup of ELs attend kindergarten to 3rd grade.
- Approximately 15% of ELs are also identified as students with disabilities
- Only 2% of ELs are labeled as gifted.

When it comes to academic achievement measured by standardized assessment, there are numerous studies that report a substantial opportunity gap. For example, in 2019, “the reading score for 4th-grade ELL students was 33 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers” (p. 73). In the same year, “the average mathematics score for 4th-grade ELL students was 24 points lower than the score for their non-ELL peers” (p. 84).

These facts certainly tell an evolving story, yet our suggestion is to seek out a much more personal story: in our day-to-day practice what is most important is to get to know each EL as an individual with unique characteristics, vast cultural heritages, complex academic and non-academic experiences, and rich linguistic repertoires.

How can we best respond to the diversity among this student population? Honigsfeld and Dove (2019) suggest that educators recognize and carefully address the complex variation that exists among ELs. It has been noted that ELs are far from being a homogenous group requiring a one-size-fits-all approach; instead, they may differ based on the following factors: (a) prior schooling, (b) level of language proficiency in the native tongue or in any additional languages, (c) level of literacy in languages other than English, (d) level of language proficiency in English, and (e) the student’s learning trajectory. See Table 1.1 and reflect on which of these groups and subgroups of ELs you work with in your own school.

The purpose of this summary table is to alert you to the vast *within-group* diversity that you are likely to encounter when working with ELs and to offer a quick reference guide to the complex background experiences and readiness levels that are to be expected among ELs. The technology tools and practices we suggest will also have to be carefully selected, adjusted, or

modified to best match the needs of ELs. To better understand the unique background experiences and cultural knowledge that ELs bring to the school, we as educators, must not only collaborate with each other and engage in ongoing professional learning opportunities, we can also reach out to the community both physically and virtually. Creating multilingual, interactive online resources for parents of ELs that identify what they need to know about enrolling their child and supporting their learning in an American school is an opportunity to build a trusting relationship and enhance parent engagement.

When English learners represent such complex subgroups as depicted in Table 1.1, you may find it overwhelming to learn

**TABLE 1.1** • Diversity Among English Language Learners

<b>Prior education</b>
• Formal, grade-appropriate education in another country
• Formal, grade-appropriate education in school system
• Interrupted formal, grade-appropriate education in another country
• Interrupted formal, grade-appropriate education in school system
<b>Linguistic development in language(s) other than English</b>
• Monolingual (home language only)
• Bilingual in two languages other than English
• Bidialectal speaking both a standard language other than English and a dialect
• Multilingual in three or more languages
<b>Status of language proficiency and literacy in language(s) other than English</b>
• Only receptive language skills
• Productive oral language skills
• Emerging literacy skills
• Grade-appropriate literacy skills
• Any or all of the above skills in more than one language other than English
<b>Level of English language proficiency (WIDA, 2020)</b>
1. Entering: Knows and uses minimal social language and minimal academic language with visual and graphic support

2. Emerging: Knows and uses some social English and general academic language with visual and graphic support
3. Developing: Knows and uses social English and some specific academic language
4. Expanding: Knows and uses social English and some technical academic language
5. Bridging: Knows and uses social English and academic language working with grade level material
6. Reaching: Knows and uses social and academic language at the highest level
<b>Learning trajectory</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating typical academic and linguistic developmental trajectories</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating academic and/or linguistic developmental challenges and difficulties that do not respond well to accelerated learning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating academic and/or linguistic developmental challenges and difficulties that respond well to systemic interventions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating academic and/or linguistic developmental challenges and difficulties that require special attention</li> </ul>

**Source:** Adapted from Honigsfeld and Dove, 2015.

about and keep in mind each student's background information regarding the following key questions:

- If the student was born outside of the country are there any unusual circumstances or trauma surrounding the child's arrival to their new home? Is there sufficient information available about the child's previous educational background, and how can the transition to a new school system be as seamless as possible?
- What is the child's language proficiency and literacy level in the home language, in English, and in any additional languages?
- Are there any indications of gaps in education, learning difficulties, or other predictable challenges?

We suggest maintaining important information about the ELs in your school in a student management or learning management system that would allow you and your colleagues to have access to basic information about each EL. You can also create your own database by using Google Forms or a similar tool to survey your students individually using the profile template shown in Table 1.2. EL Portrait at a Glance

**TABLE 1.2** ● EL Portrait at a Glance

Name:	Date:
Student Background/Social-Emotional Information:	
Student Academic Strengths:	Student Academic Needs:
Student Technology Strengths:	Student Technology Needs:
Language and Literacy Development Goals:	
Accommodations or Modifications: (if necessary)	

**Source:** Adapted from Honigsfeld and Dove, 2015.



## MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN LESSON SEEDS

As you explore the lesson seeds provided in this book consider how they may be adapted for use in your content area for your grade level and for your unique group of students. Also consider how these lesson seeds can be transformed into HyperDocs for student use. HyperDocs are online documents that contain content, links, and instructions for students to follow; they are designed to support self-directed learning. Students use the HyperDoc to guide them through an interactive learning experience by clicking on a highlighted word or image. HyperDocs can be shared with students in the same way any online document might be shared in your learning management systems (see more on HyperDocs in Chapter 2).

Each lesson seed accomplishes the following:

1. **Sets student goals that encompass multiliteracies and multimodalities**

Learning targets allow students to understand what they are expected to learn and how to demonstrate

what they have learned. As mentioned earlier, digital-age instruction must integrate core content, with technology and language targets that relate to real-world communication and collaboration. ELs must be empowered to take ownership of their learning and effectively develop communication skills for the classroom and beyond.

## **2. Activates students' prior knowledge**

Activating prior knowledge helps ELs make connections to new information and use higher-order thinking skills they are learning in the classroom. We can tap into what students already know by first assessing prior knowledge and skills and then making connections between the new concepts being taught and the students' knowledge and experiences. ELs whose funds of knowledge are not aligned to what is taught in U.S. schools greatly benefit from activities that explicitly build foundational skills and background information.

## **3. Enhances student engagement**

You can make content accessible for English learners by providing an environment in which students learn by doing. You can differentiate instruction through a blend of technology resources that provide multimodalities and entry points. ELs can then access the content and participate as active learners in the classroom. This approach to delivering instruction ensures that the lesson is comprehensible to students, and it meets the language demands of grade-level content. Including explicit instruction of academic language is important to the development of higher-order thinking processes associated with literacy and academic settings.

High levels of student engagement may be achieved through careful planning of learning activities that motivate students while also providing opportunities for frequent student-to-student interactions within the classroom. For ELs, activities should integrate all language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing), as well as address digital literacy.

Here is a description of the categories in our lesson seed template. You can reproduce this template to create your own lessons:







**[TITLE]**

**[Grade Level]**

In this lesson students will...

**Student Goals**

- **I can [language target]**
- **I can [content target]**
- **I can [tech target]**

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACTIVATE</b></p> <p>Activating prior knowledge and building background information is essential to help ELs engage with content in the target language</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CREATE</b></p> <p>Start with an inquiry process. Break activities into manageable steps according to the needs of each student. Allow students to engage in productive struggle and problem solving in order to create the targeted outcome.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EVALUATE &amp; ANALYZE</b></p> <p>Allow students to use critical thinking skills and to complete needs assessment and analyze findings to plan next steps</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COLLABORATE &amp; APPLY</b></p> <p>Students work together and use what they have learned to complete an authentic task</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DEMONSTRATE</b></p> <p>Students show what they know by publishing, demonstrating or presenting product or outcome to an authentic audience</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>REFLECT, ASSESS &amp; REMEMBER</b></p> <p>Incorporate authentic assessment including peer review, audience feedback, journaling and self assessment rubrics to allow students to reflect on and remember what they have learned.</p>



## EXPAND

Provide additional resources and activities for various proficiency levels to personalize instruction and provide opportunity for ELs to integrate the lesson content and newly acquired language skills.



Available for download from [resources.corwin.com/DigitalAgeTeachingforELs](https://resources.corwin.com/DigitalAgeTeachingforELs)



## CONSIDER THIS

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

One of the 5 Cs of 21st-century skills we discussed earlier is collaboration. As longtime collaborators, we believe that it is essential for educators to foster collaboration not only between students but also with other teachers in their learning community. As you read through the book, we invite you to identify opportunities for teacher collaboration and/or student collaboration related to the theme of each chapter.

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

The 21st-century immigrant experience to the United States has been riddled with ferocious political debates, anti-immigrant sentiments, increased global crises—be it economic, political, or other—that pushed migrants and refugees to leave their countries and seek a new home. Educators are uniquely positioned to embrace immigrant families and foster students' social and emotional well-being in the classroom and the larger community. A recent OECD (2018) report cautions that

ensuring that students with an immigrant background have positive well-being outcomes represents a significant challenge, because many immigrants or mixed-heritage students must overcome the adversities associated with displacement, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers and the difficulty of forging a new identity all at the same time. (p. 5)

Families and their children who try to make a new life in the United States are already demonstrating resilience by virtue

of overcoming many hardships, including trauma surrounding their relocation to a new land; further nurturing students' resilience is one way to ensure that they overcome adversities, develop a stronger sense of belonging, and have higher levels of motivation and lower levels of academic anxiety (Colorin Colorado, 2018). Throughout the book, consider how to achieve this.

## **CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE-SUSTAINING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

We recognize that all students bring tremendous strengths to their learning. To ensure that asset-based, rather than deficit-focused instructional and programmatic decisions are made on behalf of ELs, in this book we build upon a current Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education (CR-SE) framework published by NYSED (2019). We chose this framework because it synthesizes the most current understandings about how to

helps educators create student-centered learning environments that: affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning, develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change. (para. 1)

More specifically, we advocate for technology integration for 21st-century learning experiences that

- recognize and proactively respond to the digital divide that exists among communities
- ensure equitable access to information, tools, and resources for ELs
- create a welcoming and affirming digital learning environment
- afford students an inclusive technology-supported curriculum
- match high rigor with high support for all

Our intention is to place special emphasis on culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining pedagogy in each chapter to help leverage students' differential backgrounds, experiences, learning pathways, and trajectories as assets.



## RESOURCES OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

To better understand the unique background experiences and cultural knowledge that ELs bring to the school, we must not only collaborate with each other and engage in ongoing professional learning opportunities, we must also connect with the larger community both physically and virtually. Creating multilingual, interactive online resources for parents of ELs that identify what they need to know about enrolling their child and supporting their learning in school is an often-overlooked opportunity to enhance parent participation in their child's education. Such resources also open the door to more vibrant family and community engagement. Takanishi and Le Menestrel (2017) note that family engagement among EL parents may be expanded and enhanced when the following key practices are in place:

creating a welcoming environment, providing orientation programs, using technology to enhance two-way communication, instituting district- and school-level parent advisory committees and school support teams that include parents of ELs to support ELs' academic success and emotional well-being, and instituting adult education programs for parents of ELs. (p. 281)

*Which of these ideas resonate with you and could be considered in your context?*



### DIGITAL-AGE EXPLORER'S CORNER

Each vignette in the following chapters is provided by teaching professionals who are currently working in the field. As you read about the learning experiences they have created for their students, imagine the possibilities of adopting similar instructional practices and leveraging technology tools in your own teaching context, for your own unique group of students.

## Chapter Summary

- Creating a digital learning ecosystem in your classroom helps ELs communicate using multiple modalities and supports the development of multiliteracy skills.
- The DATELs framework incorporates the 5Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and culture into the six

language domains: writing, speaking, visually representing, reading, listening, and viewing .

- Incorporating Flipped Learning with inquiry-based learning models allows ELs to access higher-order thinking skills and increases opportunities to use the target language.
- In order to meet the unique needs of each EL we must first understand the complex diversity of this subgroup of students.
- Culturally responsive education practices include addressing the digital divide that disproportionately affects ELs and their families.



## PLN Questions

- 1.** What types of digital learning resources (DLRs) do you currently use with ELs in your school and why?
- 2.** How does Bloom's 21 pertain to your classroom and the use of DLRs?
- 3.** How can the DATELs framework guide instruction for ELs?
- 4.** What resources can we offer families of English learners to support them in working with their children at home?
- 5.** How can technology be used to make your classroom more culturally responsive and focus on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge?