# Getting to Know our ELs

| English Language Proficiency | ELs differ in their current development in each of the four language domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing | *How can we gather information about students' language proficiency?* |
|---|---|---|
| **Educational Background** | ELS differ in their development of literacy skills and prior formal schooling in their native language.<br><br>ELs differ in the instruction or formal schooling in English they have received. | *How can we gather information about students' educational background?* |
| **Cultural and Linguistic Identities** | ELs differ in their first languages and language varieties.<br><br>There are differences in culture and lived experiences, even within L1 groups. | *How can we gather information about students' cultural and linguistic identities?* |

# Stages of Second-Language Development

| Stage | Student Characteristics | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Preproduction** | Having little or no English competency<br><br>Entering a silent period or using only their first language<br><br>Using nonverbal responses<br><br>Gathering information about the new language | ELs might **enter a "silent" period**, in which they do not speak at all, except to speakers of their native language. This period can last for several months.<br><br>ELs **listen actively and gather information about the new language**. Although they are silent, ELs may use **nonverbal forms of communication**, such as pointing, pantomiming, and gesturing.<br><br>ELs **start making important connections** between familiar concepts and the new information, even though they might remain silent. |
| **Early production** | Having little English competency<br><br>Using simple words and phrases<br><br>Using telegraphic speech<br><br>Using formulaic chunks of language | ELs might **use simple words and phrases** along with the same type of nonverbal responses as before.<br><br>These students might also **use telegraphic speech**, or one- or two-word phrases to communicate much longer ideas. For example, ELs may point and simply say "ball" when they really mean: "Please give me the ball." They can also **use formulaic chunks of language**, such as: "How ya doin'?" But they may not be able to understand each word and its function.<br><br>ELs **can answer "yes/no" questions and simple "what," "who," and "where" questions** that elicit one- to two-word responses, such as: "What is this?" "Who is playing outside?" and "Where is the cat?" |

| Stage | Student Characteristics | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Speech emergence** | Building sentences<br><br>Trying new vocabulary<br><br>Understanding more language than they can produce | ELs start to use their growing knowledge of English to **build sentences and try new vocabulary**.<br><br>ELs benefit from carefully planned opportunities to speak. Teachers should allow ELs to work in small groups and pair them with students more advanced in English, so the ELs can **take more risks when using English**. |
| **Intermediate and advanced fluency** | Beginning to engage in extended discourse<br><br>Answering complex questions<br><br>Building academic English | ELs begin to **engage in extended discourse** by using complete sentences to communicate complex thoughts. ELs can **answer "how" and "why" questions**, which require fairly complex responses.<br><br>ELs **increase their fluency in English but need to further develop oral and written academic language skills**. Intermediate and advanced ELs still need contextual support to understand and engage in instruction and benefit from carefully planned opportunities to listen to, learn, and use academic English. |

Adapted from Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003; VGC, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2015.

# Student Profiles

## Student Profile 1: Sofía Martinez
Grade: 4
Years in U.S. schools: Currently in Year 2

### Background

- Born in Mexico

- Began attending Memorial Elementary School in May of last year (3rd grade)

- Emigrated from rural Mexico, along with her mother and 2 sisters. Her father and brothers had already established a home in the US and had been working here in the agriculture industry. Before Sofi and the rest of the family joined them, the father and brothers would go home to Mexico to visit a few times a year.

- Sofi has two older brothers and two younger sisters.

- Sofi attended school in her small rural community in Mexico for kindergarten and first grade. After that she went to school in a nearby town, living with her grandparents during the week and returning home for the weekends.

- When she was 8 years old, her mother became ill and Sofi returned home to help her mother and care for her younger sisters. Her grandparents visited often, bringing books to read. Her grandfather often took her on walks through the countryside, teaching her about local plants, telling family stories, and narrating the history and legends particular to that region of Mexico. The following year she was able to return to her grandparents' house and attend the municipal school for before moving to the US.

- Sofi's mother and grandparents all attended school through 6th grade in Mexico. Her father went through 9th grade. Her grandfather is self-educated – an avid reader and local leader in the community where he lives.

### Education

Sofi arrived in May of last year, so she had only 3 weeks of instruction in the United States prior to this school year. (For state-level data collection, this counts as 1 year of instruction.) She brought in certificates from the summer reading program at the local library when she started school this year. She is very eager to learn and loves to read. She has read all the Spanish books in the library, so the librarian requests books from other libraries for her on a weekly basis.

She is very attentive in class and often looks to her classmates for clues on what to do. In science, she frequently shows her work to her teacher and is very pleased when she receives confirmation that she has done the work correctly. Sofi excels in the science lab lessons and often helps the other students in her group, showing them

through gestures, figures, or speaking in Spanish. Although Sofi often excels in math, she struggles with certain concepts like fractions and decimals.

When the class reads together in language arts, Sofi pays very close attention. She is quiet and sometimes visibly nervous during class discussion. When she is paired with a Spanish speaker, Sofi appears more relaxed. Her teacher has observed her speaking to her partner in Spanish about her family and her life in Mexico when it relates to a story.

Sofi is writing short sentences in English, and she can string them together to form a brief paragraph on a familiar topic. She incorporates vocabulary displayed around the classroom and sentence structures from examples provided on the board. She depends heavily on a bilingual dictionary and often uses English words that do not quite fit the context of what she is writing about.

Sofi has learned to use individual words and phrases to express her needs in English, such as *bathroom, pencil,* and *please*. Without high levels of context and visual cues, Sofi shows little comprehension of written or spoken English.

Sofi has made good friends with a group of girls that includes several bilingual students. She usually comes to school happy and eager to participate, but her teacher has expressed concern that she occasionally seems sad and withdrawn.

# Student Profile 2: César Morales
Grade: 5
Years in U.S. schools: Currently in Year 6

## Background

- Born in the US
- Oldest of three children, he is the "language broker" for his parents when dealing with English in the community, government, school interactions, etc.
- He and his family have moved around a lot, following work opportunities for César's father.
- César has attended three different schools in two different school districts.
- César uses both English and Spanish with his siblings and mostly Spanish with his parents and uncle.

## Education

César is an active participant in class and an eager learner. He is also very well respected by his peers. He often plays the role of peacemaker when there are conflicts between students, or he amiably brings his classmates back on task when there are disruptions in the lesson.

César has always done well in math, but is struggling with math this year. He also struggles with comprehending the textbook information in other content areas. Many of the strategies César had learned to use in previous grades – finding the answers to the questions within the text, getting the important ideas from the section titles and other text features, are not sufficient to understand and learn the new concepts being presented.

César does well, though, learning from class discussions. He is an active participant and often raises the level of discussion with insightful questions and comments, building off the contributions of his peers.

César is a great storyteller, artfully crafting funny and poignant details that reveal the characters or moral of his stories. He is aware that his writing is not as strong as his oral skills. His writing includes many original ideas and he understands how to support his ideas in an essay. However, his ideas appear unclear or ambiguous in his writing because he struggles with English syntax and the formal aspects of written communication. His teachers commonly observe sentence fragments, verb tense errors, and word-usage errors his writing. Often, he uses informal, conversational language in his writing. When he attempts to use academic vocabulary, he is unsure of how to use the words correctly in a sentence, or how to use them to effectively communicate an original idea.

When César was in fourth grade, his teacher knew that César could explain what he knew about a topic orally and that written tests and assignments often did not reflect his understanding of the content.

| Feature of Effective Instruction for ELs | How I will incorporate this feature in my lesson: |
|---|---|
| Build and activate students' background knowledge. | |
| Use modeling and think-alouds. | |
| Make connections between students' L1 and English. | |
| Use nonlinguistic representations (visuals; nonverbal cues). | |
| Use manipulatives. | |

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|---|---|
| Create concrete examples and nonexamples that connect to students' experience or knowledge. | |
| Make connections between social and academic language. | |

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