

*Connect* is based on scientifically proven pedagogy in language and literacy.

The curriculum is built on specialized knowledge necessary for working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, the assets they bring into the classroom, and the unique academic challenges they face. *Connect* was created specifically to address the developmental needs of English Learners (ELs) as they grow in language proficiency and content knowledge. Lessons contain differentiation and offer scaffolds for students who need additional support (including

students with disabilities), as well as amplification for students who would benefit from additional challenges (including gifted learners). Literacy and language instruction is supported and designed specifically to advance ELs' knowledge of listening, speaking, reading, grammar, and writing using both English language development and academic standards. Special attention is devoted to academic vocabulary to ensure access to discipline-specific content language and syntax. All components of *Connect* frame the education of English Learners from an asset-based perspective.

## Research background

### Language learning in *Connect*

The foundational research on language indicates that there is a distinction between acquiring a language and learning it (Krashen, 1982). ELs acquire their home language in natural ways through the process of communicating with their families and communities. When children are acquiring language, their parents or caretakers do not pause to explain a grammatical point or overtly note the pronunciation of a word. Instead, they address the linguistic development in authentic and natural ways.

In contrast, when learning a new language, students must learn about structure, pronunciation, and usage. In a classroom setting, complex emotional and motivational factors come into play as students strive to develop language. Krashen (1982) referred to this as the "affective filter." When the affective filter is high, students may experience anxiety, self-consciousness, boredom, annoyance, or even alienation. When the affective filter is low, students experience less anxiety and are actively engaged. *Connect* is structured to create environmental and pedagogical supports that engage ELs in the simultaneous learning of language and content in an engaging and welcoming manner. Meaningful tasks are posed in inviting ways that engage students in

learning to speak, listen, read, and write in English—at levels that challenge them while offering support.

### Language interaction in the classroom

The work of Vygotsky (1978) has long served as a foundation for much of the research and theory on language development. He strongly believed in the role of social interaction in the development of cognition and language—notably, the importance of multiple exposures and meaningful interactions with language. Students cannot learn a language through rote memorization and have it be preserved or applied in any meaningful way. Instead, repeated exposure is crucial. Further, Bruner's (1977) work also emphasized the importance of revisiting concepts and ideas. He noted that learning requires a continual deepening of understanding in progressively more complex ways. *Connect* contains multiple opportunities for repeated interaction in pairs, small groups, and whole groups. Vocabulary and concepts are revisited and reviewed throughout the curriculum.

Building upon the foundational research and translating it into progressive applications shows that language instruction has evolved. Stanford's *Understanding*

*Language initiative* (2012), commissioned papers from EL experts on language and instruction with regard to today's standards-driven education. Key findings illustrate that language teaching should be embedded in the discipline with a focus on task, purpose, and audience. Also, instead of exclusively pre-teaching all content, activities that build on students' background knowledge and that scaffold both content and language development are key.

### Scaffolded instruction

Systemic supports are needed in order to support the complex, nonlinear process of language learning (Walqui, 2012). With scaffolded instruction, the educator supports students at a level just beyond what they are able to achieve on their own. Vygotsky (1978) called this the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). Current research building upon the ZPD emphasizes the importance of scaffolds across the language domains. For example, the American Institutes for Research Center for English Language Learners (2018) disseminated research noting that scaffolding is crucial in language acquisition and literacy. They suggest adding visuals, gestures, examples, graphic organizers, and sentence frames.

*Connect* incorporates the foundational research and progressive models designed to meet the needs of today's culturally and linguistically diverse learners. The research is translated into strategies that function in a cohesive and consistent manner, focusing on the desired result of increased English language and literacy development.

### References

- American Institutes for Research, Center for English Language Learners. (2018). English learners and close reading: Providing scaffolding for writing. Available at <https://air.org/resource/english-learners-and-close-reading-providing-scaffolding-writing>
- Bruner, J.S. (1977). *The process of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walqui, A. (2012). *Theoretical and Pedagogical Shifts in the Design and Enactment of Learning*. Understanding Language Initiative. Available at <http://ell.stanford.edu>

### Connect Instructional routine

- **Explore and learn** Each lesson begins with an open exploration Big Idea. This is an initial engagement where students preview visuals, Essential questions, activities, and text. Students share what they know (e.g., about the theme, concept, vocabulary, etc.). Vocabulary is cued, but not pre-taught out of context, as the development of schema is necessary for language to be retained and meaningful. After the exploration, there is direct instruction of the standards-based topic.
- **Practice** Students have many opportunities to interact with language across the domains in a guided manner followed by a gradual release.
- **Communicate** Students then have multiple opportunities to reiterate their learning with partners, in small groups, and independently.
- **Assess** Lessons include formative assessments so that teachers can gauge progress in real-time and then respond to individual student needs.