National Research & Development Center to Improve
EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH LEARNERS
WestEd

SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LEARNERS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

What Can Teachers Do?

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Focused on the role of teachers, this brief is part of a series from the National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners that articulates concrete actions that teachers, leaders, parents, and policymakers can undertake to ensure that adolescent English Learners develop substantive and generative knowledge and skills in distance learning environments. This brief builds on literature about distance learning in general and about English Learners' distance learning in particular. Specifically, it draws on evidence-based studies on distance learning in secondary schools carried out before the pandemic, mostly in credit-recovery settings (Heinrich & Darling-Aduana, 2019); evidence-based practices from in-person instruction with English Learners (Baker et al., 2014; Walqui & Bunch, 2019); well-reasoned scholarship; guidance documents developed by a variety of state and national organizations, including the Council of Great City Schools [CGCS] (Uro et al., 2020), English Learner Success Forum [ELSF] (ELSF, 2020), Learning Policy Institute [LPI] (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), and Policy Analysis for California Education [PACE] (Myung et al., 2020); and proposals, experiences, and opinions of students and teachers engaged in distance learning (Community Design Partners, 2020).

Teachers operate in a multilayered, nested, ecological system in which all aspects and layers of the system interact and affect each other. Because teachers' actions do not occur in isolation, this brief first presents important aspects of the nested system in which teachers work, including district responsibilities and school roles (Table 1). After providing a high-level summary of what quality learning experiences look like, this brief explores the features of quality learning for English Learners in middle and high school in particular and describes how to operationalize these features. Because the quality of students' learning opportunities relies on teacher expertise, and expertise includes an understanding of the theoretical framework that underlies practice, this document touches on the theoretical and evidence-based stances that support the recommendations for teacher

practice. Additionally, for illustrations, the brief draws on examples from one of two units of study for distal learning for adolescent students studying English as an additional language. These units were developed in 2020 by WestEd's National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners.[1]

Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities at Nested Levels of the System

District Responsibilities	School Roles	What Teachers Can Do*
Engage in reciprocal communication with families of English Learners.	▪ Offer communications in the home languages of families and through their preferred channels. ▪ Serve as a hub for resources to meet families' social, emotional, and nutritional needs.	▪ Use every contact with students' families to communicate about available resources. ▪ Listen carefully to families' needs and seek solutions and referrals to address challenges that they identify.
Ensure equitable access for English Learners to instruction and technology.	▪ Offer devices that enable English Learners to access instruction effectively. ▪ Expand access to broadband so that English Learners can participate in synchronous instruction.	▪ Document students' challenges in order to be able to advocate for them. ▪ Track success stories to show the importance of technology access.
Provide accelerated options for the subject-specific learning and language development of English Learners.	▪ Ensure that English Learners are assigned to appropriate grade-level courses. ▪ Offer accelerated options for English Learners to explore and connect the most important ideas within a discipline. ▪ Ensure that students' English language proficiency levels do not serve as barriers to participation in classes or in advanced course enrollment.	▪ Advocate for students to be placed in the most challenging (and well-supported) classes possible. ▪ Seek ways to accelerate learning within courses, through independent or small-group work.

1 These units were developed for Yonkers Public Schools and the New York City Department of Education.

District Responsibilities	School Roles	What Teachers Can Do*
Offer high-quality models, platforms, and tools for ambitious and well-supported distance learning.	▪ Select and adopt high-quality instructional materials and digital platforms that enable English Learners to access and interact with multi-modal texts for disciplinary learning. ▪ Ensure that online learning blends synchronous and asynchronous interaction to support powerful learning experiences.	▪ Provide feedback to district and school leaders about effective programs and platforms. ▪ Share with colleagues materials that are successful, with a focus on features that can be transposed.
Provide professional learning opportunities that expand educator expertise and are coherent, relevant, job-embedded, and responsive to their needs; promote and reward distal collaboration among teachers in the district.	▪ Engage educators in content-focused professional learning that demonstrates best practices in using the same digital platforms they will use with students. ▪ Create sustained opportunities for educators to learn from each other as they share common problems of practice and develop, test, and refine shared solutions.	▪ Participate in communities with colleagues to share solutions. ▪ Share tools and strategies that are effective and can be recontextualized to other professional learning venues.

** For information on the roles and responsibilities of education leaders, see the related brief titled Supporting Adolescent English Learners in Distance Learning: What Can School and District Leaders Do?, available from* https://www.wested.org/resources.

Supporting Quality Learning Experiences for English Learners

As a foundation for supporting English Learners, teachers need an understanding of how they learn under optimal conditions. This understanding can guide teachers in being creative about recreating these conditions in the distance learning opportunities that they offer for students and can recognize both the limitations and the affordances that distance learning has for the education of English Learners. As a first step, teachers need to be aware of, and continue learning about, the circumstances that students are facing. English Learners may be experiencing a myriad of economic, family, and social problems (Uro et al., 2020; Sugarman & Lazarin, 2020). By being receptive and attentive to students' evolving situations, teachers can offer the contingent emotional and pedagogical responses that their students need (Carhill-Poza & Williams, 2020). For example, English Learners access lessons in a wide variety of ways: Some will have access to connectivity at home, others will use hubs outside of their home, or they will be able to log in only after their younger siblings have used the one device available in the home. They may not have been able to log in for days because of family or neighborhood circumstances.

Whatever the situation, all students need to feel truly welcomed, appreciated, and supported. This spirit is best demonstrated not with words (as in recordings or handouts) but with actions, both personal and pedagogical. It is essential that students be provided the opportunity to express their concerns personally and to be listened to attentively, with the teacher providing supportive feedback and information to help them. Pedagogically, teachers can provide amplifications, reiterate important ideas, explain purposes and processes of activities, and announce ideas that will be unpacked next. Teachers and school officials can also signal to students that the class and materials being used to engage them in learning have high levels of challenge and expectations and that the students will be provided with the adequate support and flexibility to meet those expectations. Adults' actions need to convey that English Learners have enormous potential and that it is teachers' role to craft and support the development of that potential.

No two English Learners are alike (Valdés & Castellón, 2010), nor do they move up a predetermined "developmental ladder" of language learning that advances through discrete stages in lockstep moves. Rather, individual students keep developing their language abilities by constantly using and adapting language usage to make meaning about ideas that are relevant and interesting to them. (To capture this idea of language being in continuous development, Swain [2006] uses the term *languaging* and García & Lin [2017] use *translanguaging*.) In this way, all students grow, but growth is not uniform among different students in its trajectory or pace.

A key to providing optimal learning conditions for English Learners is understanding that language and cognition evolve through social apprenticeship in which students learn from and with others, using guidance, models, and

practice (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Walqui & van Lier, 2010; Wells, 2002). As with other learners, English Learners come to know through active participation that invites them to construct and progressively increase their understanding and ability to express evolving insights through exploratory transactions with those around them (Brown et al., 2000). This constructive interaction may be the most difficult aspect to incorporate during asynchronous distance environments. On the other hand, although metacognition — learners' ability to be conscious of how they learn, what they need to learn, and how they are progressing in learning — has been recognized as an important tool in building learner efficiency and self-sufficiency, it is only rarely used in classrooms, whereas distance learning environments are ideal for incorporating metacognitive processes.

Being metacognitive means that English Learners monitor their own learning as it unfolds because they know what it is to learn, how to learn, and how much has been learned. For example, a student observes how arguments are made, applies what they understand to the construction of their own argument, listens to their own presentation of the argument, assesses how well their presentation captures the essence of argumentation, and knows what remains to be developed and what to do to develop it.

English Learners need academic support to engage them in "deeper learning" that includes apprenticeship and metacognition (Chow, 2007). To provide opportunities for such deeper learning, teachers can focus on the following four areas, each of which is addressed further in the following sections:

1. **Sustain academic rigor** by providing experiences and materials that focus on core ideas and processes and the ways of communicating them, engaging students in collaboration with others, and developing "academic mindsets."
2. **Engage English Learners in quality interactions with their peers and themselves** by providing opportunities for them to listen, respond to each other, problematize ideas, and arrive at conclusions after considering alternatives (Mehta & Fine, 2017).
3. **Invite and support English Learners to engage in metacognition** (Donovan & Bransford, 2005), mainly the ability to self-assess in order to determine what and how to learn next.
4. **Carefully plan and enact distance learning for English Learners**, carrying out the "deeper teaching" (Lampert, 2017, p.49) needed for English Learners to experience deeper learning.

1. Sustain academic rigor

Three main features define rigor:

1. throughout a lesson, there is a focus on central ideas related to a theme and disciplinary practices in the subject matter area;
2. expansions and interconnections link to that idea to form increasingly more complex clusters of understanding; and

3. the lesson is structured for learning deeply through apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship is a process of socialization through which students are invited to gradually appropriate ideas, skills, and language used by the community into which they are being ushered (such as the community of mathematicians). Apprenticeship takes place gradually as English Learners engage in the exploration of a theme from diverse angles, using the language needed and actively putting different conceptual and linguistic elements into practice. As a result, students increasingly understand key ideas in the discipline and their structure, think critically about them, own these ideas, and become increasingly accomplished at using them.

2. Engage English Learners in quality interactions with their peers and themselves

Human beings develop higher-order processes through the purposeful use of language (Vygotsky, 1978) as they are afforded valuable opportunities to interact and have appropriate models and support. For English Learners, this development takes place both through the language they share with their families and through English, their additional language.

Ideally, teachers invite English Learners to talk about important topics, respond to reading, write their ideas, and respond to others' ideas. These are the tools of academic learning. For students who may be working beyond their ability to perform on their own, teachers can provide four types of interactions to support the students' development:

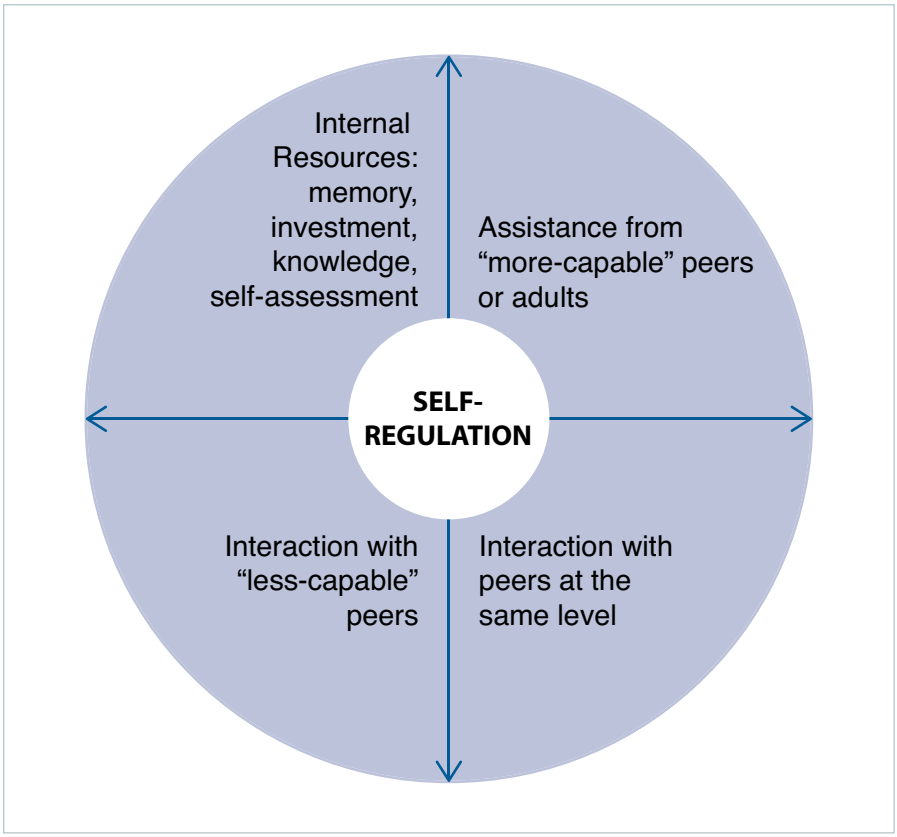
1. interactions with those who know more and can guide and model for the learners through expert-novice interaction;

2. working with others who are at their same level of development, whereby peers solve problems together that they could not solve on their own;

3. working with others who know less, thus having the opportunity to explain, teach, model and, through those activities, gain clarity and expertise; and

4. talking with themselves, either silently or audibly, using their inner resources and their awareness of strategies learned for the task at hand (van Lier, 2004).

Figure 1. Interactions That Support Students' Development



Source: van Lier (2004), used with permission

Distance learning is particularly useful for prioritizing this fourth type of relationship — the metacognitive act of English Learners talking to themselves. Distance environments favor the development of students' resourcefulness (the "internal resources" section of Figure 1), and metacognitive conversations which take place within the learner's head can serve to build up resourcefulness by developing the student's autonomy. However, in ideal situations, metacognitive work that is done through interaction with others (interacting with experts, with peers at the same level of development, and with others who know less) prepares English Learners for their inner development of resourcefulness. In this way, hybrid learning arrangements that blend in-school learning with virtual learning can be strategically used to reinforce and expand distally what is introduced and practiced face-to-face.

3. Invite and support English Learners to engage in metacognition

Several aspects of controlling one's own learning are involved in metacognition. For English Learners to become self-directed (Dent & Koenka, 2016), the teacher can support them to:

- *understand purpose:* understand why they are being asked to work on something;
- *behave strategically:* know what to do in order to learn;
- *self-assess:* be aware of how their understanding grows and changes over time;
- *determine their own learning paths:* recognize both their accomplishments — in terms of conceptual, analytic, and language development — and the areas in which growth is still required, thus being able to request specific assistance; and
- *build stamina:* understand that learning requires effort and perseverance (Resnick & Hall, 2012).

Self-monitoring can take place in conversations with others or in conversations with oneself. Teachers need to model how such "thinking aloud" occurs so that students can then practice and appropriate the process.

The following are suggestions for what teachers can do to scaffold the development of their students' metacognitive skills.

- Work with English Learners to be metacognitively prepared for the overarching learning experiences expected in the lessons (Salvatore & Donahue, 2004).
- Encourage students to build their cognitive stamina by tackling difficult texts that require them to apply specific strategies in order to learn deeply. As Resnick and Hall (2012) put it, "effort creates intelligence."
- Model for English Learners. Also, ask them to analyze how texts are structured, how the texts accomplish their purpose (Derewianka & Jones, 2016), and which typical phrases tend to link ideas in particular types of text (e.g., which phrases initiate new ideas, how ideas are connected, how the text concludes). Students can keep notes in their notebooks about these details of text and notes about how they are incorporating such language in their own oral and written work.
- Invite students to record in writing their initial understanding of ideas or texts (using paper notebooks so they can access these notes when somebody else is using the computer). After students have had the chance to explore ideas in more depth, refer them back to their original notes at the end of the unit so they can assess how much their understanding has changed (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020; Chick et al., 2009). This activity can be called "I used to think, but now I understand."
- Anticipate and validate confusions: "This is not an easy text; I am sure you will find some ideas really confusing. Jot down what you do not understand and send me your questions. It is good to know what is giving you problems; it helps you find a solution."
- At the end of a class, ask students to create in their notebooks a triple-entry journal. They should label the first section "These ideas are clear to me," the second section "I understand these ideas more or less," and the third section "I still need to work on . . . and this is what I will do." This simple journaling can help students gain practice in developing awareness of their own learning.
- Have English Learners write in their notebooks their study habits and the successes they have had in various assignments, being

sure to date their entries. A month later, invite them to review their notes in order to decide which study habits and preparations led to the best performance in class (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, 2020).

- When exploring a theme such as pandemics, give your English Learners (and other students) choices once everybody has gone through the same introduction to the theme. Students might choose reading about the Black Death, the Cholera Epidemic, or HIV/AIDS. Whichever reading they choose, however, specify that they need to focus on central ideas that are substantive and generative and that weave into the general structure of knowledge you want students to build — in this case, how the studied pandemic started, how people reacted to it, what remedies were tried, how they worked, and what lessons can be derived from the process. Each chosen assignment should fit into this conceptual structure.

4. Carefully plan and enact distance learning for English Learners

Lesson design needs to be different for distal environments than for face-to-face classes. Most middle and high school classes last 55 minutes, and, to a large extent, teachers can see what the students are doing, thus having the opportunity to draw them into an activity if they are disengaged. In virtual environments, sessions vary in duration and English Learners are alone with a computer for the most part, so a main consideration for teachers is finding ways to involve students in activities that are relevant, enticing, and varied in their modes of engagement. This flexibility can have advantages because it makes accommodating diverse learning paces possible (Heritage et al., 2013). Explicitly explaining the value of this variation can validate for students the facts that not everybody learns in the same way or at the same pace and that everybody can improve their own effectiveness.

> Among their favorite online learning experiences were projects that incorporated choice in what topics they studied, how they shared learning, and who they worked with.
>
> *(Community Design Partners, 2020, p. 7)*

To offer quality and engaging opportunities for English Learners, teachers can plan and enact lessons that simultaneously apprentice students into three types of disciplinary practices that are valued and shared by subject matter experts: conceptual, analytic, and linguistic practices (Valdés et al., 2011; Walqui & Bunch, 2019). A well-crafted lesson, the medium for that apprenticeship, involves preparing learners, offering opportunities to interact with engaging texts, extending understanding, and using formative assessment, as described in the next sections of this brief. A lesson typically extends beyond just one sitting, though. It would be impossible to explore a topic deeply in just one hour. The multiple essential angles and interconnections of a lesson's topic have to be explored over time, ideally across several sessions. Students may spend a week covering a distance lesson

— a similar amount of time that it would take in a face-to-face class. However, how students access the lesson online will vary. Whether in-person or distal, lessons need to produce the joy of learning in students — they need to feel challenged, supported, and engaged.

> Students knew what meaningful learning looked and felt like, and wanted more of it.
>
> *(Community Design Partners, 2020, p. 7)*

Preparing Learners

The goal of preparing learners for a lesson is to activate knowledge that the students already have in order for that knowledge to serve as the conceptual basis upon which the lesson will be constructed. Activities for preparing learners may ask students to share experiences or to agree or disagree with a few carefully framed statements that point to ideas that will be developed in the lesson. Preparatory activities focus students in the direction of themes that will be unpacked. When students do not know much about the topic, activities may also "build the field" (Gibbons, 2009) — that is, the activities may help to construct the indispensable shared student experiences required for them to be introduced to a topic in meaningful ways.

Example of Preparing Learners for a Lesson

In the following example, students are being prepared to start working on a lesson on the Black Death. The goal for the lesson is to build an understanding of the difference among key concepts. With that purpose in mind, English Learners are invited to watch a video and to pay close attention to four terms as they are introduced. As English Learners watch the video, they take notes and then write a definition — using their own understanding and words — in a provided chart, adding an example for each definition. The specific instructions provided by the teacher are as follows:

As you watch the video . . . pay close attention to four terms as they are introduced: Endemic, Epidemic, Outbreak, and Pandemic. Write a short definition in your own words in the chart, and provide an example of each.

Students are then invited to connect these ideas to what they already know from current experience as they are asked to categorize COVID-19 as either an epidemic, an outbreak, or a pandemic, and then justify their responses.

Source: RicochetScience, "Epidemics, Outbreaks, and Pandemics," https://tinyurl.com/yb53yh5m

The following are more examples of how teachers can prepare English Learners effectively.

- Announce at the beginning of each lesson what the *purpose* of the whole lesson is and how it links to the full unit, consisting of the cluster of lessons that came before and those that will follow (a sequence of lessons that explore different aspects connected to the same theme). Make explicit what specific aspect of the central theme is being explored in the lesson and why.
- Organize knowledge development around core concepts and key practices in the discipline (Donovan & Bransford, 2005). When key themes are chosen, they lend themselves to multiple explorations through different lenses across several lessons. Bruner (1990) said that understanding a discipline was understanding how knowledge is organized. This — students getting a sense of how ideas are interrelated in a discipline — is what all classes need to aim for, whether face-to-face or virtual. Having this kind of deep knowledge is what enables students to keep learning on their own as they keep weaving interconnections across disciplinary constructs.
- Prepare students by asking them to consider situations they may have experienced that relate to the theme to be explored, although not in the same context in which the lesson will explore it. You may ask them to list ideas, create conceptual maps, or do a quick-write. Ask them to keep their notes so that over time they can go back to the notes and track their own learning.
- If your students do not have the background needed to make sense of the text or theme you are going to work on for upcoming lessons, "build the field" (Gibbons, 2009; Derewianka & Jones, 2016) by engaging students in an activity that develops enough background knowledge for them to be able to productively work with and make sense of the upcoming text and ideas. Keep in mind that a lot of knowledge is culture-specific. What American 9th graders know about history, for example, is different from what Nicaraguan or Vietnamese 9th graders have learned through life or history classes in their prior schooling experiences.
- Again using the example of a lesson on the Black Death, a teacher may tape at home a brief (3- to 5-minute) mini-lecture on how the Black Death started, using pictures, maps, and graphs to convey the terrible devastation caused in medieval Europe by the fleas that arrived with rats in merchant boats. English Learners could watch the mini-lecture several times, if needed, to practice listening and making sense of clues in the text. Whereas one teacher may be able to record only one or two mini-lectures per lesson, two teachers working together can plan and distribute responsibilities, thus doubling the impact of their work. A bit at a time, teachers in a school or across schools can develop — and improve on — a variety of mini-lectures that, when school returns fully to in-person sessions, can still be used as homework, allowing the teachers to prioritize in-person interactions while students are in class, in what is called "a flipped class" (Sams & Bergmann, 2013).
- Make the introduction to each lesson relevant and enticing. Try to begin the weaving of ideas in the first minute of class and continue making interconnections throughout. If the class is synchronous, for

example, show a brief clip from a movie and prepare students with a couple of questions to serve as lenses for the viewing. For a lesson on pandemics, a good beginning may be to use a scene from the Werner Herzog film *Nosferatu the Vampyre* and ask students to view it with the purpose of being able to explain what they think is going on and what may have happened to the ship's crew and passengers. A particularly appropriate scene from the movie is that of a ship arriving at port with no apparent passengers or crew, but as townspeople go onboard, they see the corpses of sailors killed by the bubonic plague and rats descending to land from everywhere in the ship. The 2-minute image and students' focused viewing would begin planting the first ideas that will enable them to link ideas and knowledge about epidemics and pandemics, discuss their impressions and what they later learn, and appropriate ideas over time. In the same way, scenes from a painting depicting the devastation caused by the Black Death (such as Bruegel's "The Triumph of Death," circa 1562), anteceded by some good focus questions, could also both motivate students and ready them to connect ideas.

> The concepts that organize experts' knowledge structure what they see and guide their problem-solving.
>
> *(Donovan & Bransford, 2005, p. 576)*

- Always explain the purpose of specific tasks or activities to students, whether in face-to-face lessons or virtually. Why are they being asked to do this? How can they apply the skills and ideas they are going to learn through this activity in future, different, but related circumstances? The more students are aware that they are not asked just to do busy work and fulfill requirements — but instead to build life skills that they can use again — the more invested they will be.

Offering Opportunities to Interact With Engaging Texts

As students go through a lesson, they need opportunities to take in constituent ideas in texts. The "texts" may include oral explanations, paintings, written essays, videos, and so on. Students need to explore the ideas in these texts while they talk, read, or write. They then need to weave the ideas together with other related ideas — present in texts chosen by teachers — to create deep, interconnected understandings. A superficial understanding is inert and focuses on one idea in isolation, whereas deep understandings are connected to other ideas and are generative, or productive of new understandings.

The following are examples of how teachers can provide engaging opportunities for English Learners to interact with texts.

- With an article about the Black Death as the main reading for a lesson, ask students to make sense of the narrative about the trajectory of the pandemic through time and space. To do so, they might trace in a map, as they read, the route the pandemic followed as it spread through Europe for five years, killing between 75 and 200 million people. After that, they could, for example, observe details from a Bruegel painting depicting a village with many dead people, not enough caskets, and general desolation. You might ask students to look at the painting, describe the scene it depicts, and connect ideas to the reading. In another session, have students listen online to a reading of Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" — ideally accompanied by pictures (many good ones are available online) — again weaving together and extending their understandings about pandemics.
- Have students use graphic organizers to take notes as they read, think, and work through texts. The organizers could be written, pictorial, or animated. Using compare-and-contrast matrixes which have questions that point to key ideas can be very useful as a precursor to writing or speaking tasks.
- In distance learning, to provide the critical opportunities for students to present ideas, compare points of view, and sustain arguments about topics of relevance to their lives, invite each student to interact with a peer via texting, emails, or phone calls. If the class has the possibility to be synchronous, shared time should be privileged for interactions among students and with the teacher.
- Invite students to keep in their notebooks writing assignments on a topic. They can then be asked to review their prior notes and organize them to write a more complete essay.
- Keep asking students about the connections they are observing between and among ideas. For example, you may invite them to go across time to compare what they are learning about the Black Death, Poe's story, and the current situation with COVID-19.
- Offer them opportunities to choose among options as they explore different texts, genres, and formats about the theme at hand. Distance learning offers unique opportunities for doing so. Some students may like to read stories (from *The Decameron,* for example), look for art representations of the epidemic (there is a wealth of information online), or watch a movie about an epidemic at home. Always offer a reason for the exploration and accompany it with a focus and with questions that help students organize ideas.
- Record mini-lectures for your students. For example, you may video record yourself explaining to students how connections were first made between the presence of rats and the Black Death. If you use pictures from paintings from the time and guide students to focus on certain details, or provide guidance on how to read and interpret a painting, they will learn through apprenticeship processes. Gradually build a library of mini-lectures about key themes. In the future, when classes return fully to in-person meetings, these mini-lectures can be assigned as homework in order to reserve class time for in-person collaborative work (Sams & Bergmann, 2013).

- Ask your students to make 1–2 minute recordings of themselves commenting on, for example, Prince Prospero, the main character in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death." Have them listen to themselves and write a few notes explaining what they think they did well, what they can improve on, and what they can do about it.

> Teachers will need additional daily planning time and training to redesign instruction and make the substantial instructional shifts necessary to provide high-quality learning experiences.
>
> *(Myung et al., 2020)*

Extending Understanding

One of the important purposes of learning is to invite students to take the understandings that they derive from a lesson and use those understandings in other contexts, outside of the lesson. That is the goal of "extending understanding" activities. Students apply newly gained ideas to situations not discussed in class, thus emphasizing the relevance of those ideas.

In a class pursuing the same theme as in previous examples in this brief, a teacher might invite English Learners to analyze the current situation with COVID-19 and explore the similarities and differences between other pandemics and coronavirus outbreaks, looking for sources of contagion, ways of preventing the spread of the virus, and problems encountered in their neighborhoods in trying to protect themselves from the spread.

Using Formative Assessment

As English Learners respond to affordances emerging from dynamic communicative situations (van Lier, 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), they are not only learning language and content simultaneously, they are also adapting their language resources to new circumstances and new needs (Larsen-Freeman, 2013). The recognition of this perspective is fundamental to the practice of formative assessment — assessment of learning to inform next learning. When effectively implemented, formative assessment can support students and teachers to engage

in contingent learning and pedagogy in the context of acquiring subject-matter content.

The teacher should not be the only one who assesses students. As this brief has suggested, if English Learners are aware of goals and what accomplishing them entails, and if they are provided with opportunities to reflect on their advances against their current performance, they can track and regulate their own development. In fact, the more students know how they are doing academically, the deeper their learning. For such deep learning to be realized, the metacognitive practice of formative assessment has to begin with a clear articulation of proximate learning goals and performance criteria. Both teachers and students need to understand what is to be learned and how they will know if learning has been successful. For English Learners who are developing language and are learning content simultaneously, learning goals and performance criteria will necessarily reside in the context of the language use — the concepts to be learned and the language through which the concepts may be encoded, connected, and sustained (see, for example, Heritage et al., 2013).

Offering English Learners and all other students the opportunities to learn effectively through distance learning that may be necessary during the current pandemic may maximize their autonomy and help them develop academic agency. And what works well distally could well accompany teachers' practice when everyone goes back to school in person.

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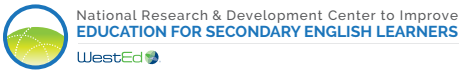

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