



Skill Development Instructional Strategies to Support ELs ¹

Youth workforce providers play a pivotal role in fostering skill development among diverse youth populations in the city of Philadelphia, including English Learners (ELs). This tool integrates the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)¹ as well as other instructional strategies to offer a comprehensive approach to skill development that is inclusive and accessible to all learners.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning, UDL, is a framework that emphasizes flexible instructional approaches to accommodate diverse learning needs. UDL principles focus on providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression to optimize learning opportunities for all learners including English Learners. Using UDL principles creates inclusive skill development experiences that address the diverse needs of youth by offering multiple ways to access content, engage with material, and demonstrate skills. Providers can create a supportive learning environment where all youth can thrive by using several instructional strategies including UDL principles.

Strategies in Action

Instructional Strategy	Description	Objectives	In Action	Examples
<i>Multiple Means of Representation (UDL)</i>	As one of the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Multiple Means of Representation encourages educators, instructors, and facilitators to provide content in multiple formats (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile) to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure <i>all</i> learners, including English Learners can access content • Foster a learning environment where learners become resourceful and knowledgeable 	Offer various ways to display information, including alternatives for auditory and/or visual information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use visual aids, graphic organizers, multimedia resources, and real-life examples to support comprehension and reinforce key concepts for ELs. 	When facilitating career awareness activities such as introducing career pathways, provide visual representations such as career maps, infographics, and videos that showcase different job roles, required skills, and potential career trajectories.

¹ Universal Design for Learning guidelines - <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>



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	accommodate diverse learning preferences and language proficiency levels.		Offer written materials in both English and youth’s native language to support comprehension and accessibility.	
<i>Multiple Means of Engagement (UDL)</i>	As one of the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Multiple Means of Engagement encourages educators, instructors, and facilitators to provide interactive learning activities that appeal to different interests, strengths, and learning styles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate <i>all</i> learners to develop skills • Promote participation, interests, and intrinsic motivation 	<p>Embed opportunities to practice skills in the different types of hands-on learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service learning • Expeditionary learning • Project-based learning <p>Incorporate collaborative tasks, role-playing scenarios, and digital simulations to engage all youth including ELs actively in the learning process.</p>	Organize career awareness activities into workshops where all youth, including ELs, to engage in interactive activities such as career scavenger hunts, job shadowing and simulations to learn about different industries and professions.
<i>Multiple Means of Expression (UDL)</i>	As one of the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Multiple Means of Expression encourages educators, instructors, and facilitators to provide varied options for learners to demonstrate understanding and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow learners to express themselves effectively and authentically • Align learners strengths with their preferences 	<p>Allow youth to express themselves or self-reflect through verbal, written, visual, or multimedia formats, and provide support as needed to facilitate expression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital job portfolios • Record video introductions • Use web applications • Monitored discussion forums • Storyboards • Short film 	<p>During project-based learning, allow youth to demonstrate their understanding and skills by allowing them to choose from a list of options to showcase their project’s final product. The options may include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a presentation of their job



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	<p>skill mastery, considering youths' language proficiency and communication abilities.</p>		<p>Provide tools to help learners articulate their skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word prediction software, grammar checkers • Text-to-speech • Provide sentence starters • Outlining tools, story webs, or concept mapping tools • Physical manipulatives or instructional tools 	<p>experience and its impact on their group finding the solution to the real-world challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a reflective journal of their work or internship experience • Film and/or direct a multimedia project that addresses the driving question and showcases the reflection of their job or work experience <p>Provide language support resources and flexible criteria to accommodate diverse expression preferences.</p>
<p><i>Activate prior knowledge</i></p>	<p>Activating prior knowledge means discovering what</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover what is already known 	<p>Prior knowledge can be activated by engaging ELs in activities such as these:</p>	<p>Pick a current event to discuss as a group. For example the Super</p>



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	<p>learners already know about a topic. "Prior knowledge" can be accurate or inaccurate, and it can impact comprehension of new content as youth connect new learning to prior knowledge. Identifying prior knowledge gives you a chance to clear up misconceptions. It also gives you a starting point for building youth's knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build youth knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and reflect on what they know about a concept. • Draw a sketch or diagram to show their understanding. 	<p>Bowl or the importance of elections in this country. Ask participants to discuss what they know about the topic being discussed. Ask them what they have heard about it and what they think about it. Tie discussion back to career connected learning concepts.</p>
<p><i>Build background knowledge</i></p>	<p>Building ELs' background knowledge lays the foundation for learning new content. You need to activate youth's prior knowledge to know the background knowledge that you need to build.</p> <p>Knowing each EL's background and culture can help you</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build upon prior knowledge to gain new knowledge • Be mindful of ELs background 	<p>Here are some ways to build ELs' foundational (background) knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present visual images, videos or audio clips. • Provide hands-on activities and experiences. • Have students interact with real objects, known as realia. 	<p>Have youth create a mind map about social media. Ensure they include all characteristics about the topic. Once they are complete discuss the concepts as a group and identify some of the most common ones. Discuss some of the least common ones to help everyone gain a better understanding.</p>



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	<p>select strategies that will connect with their prior experiences and knowledge.</p> <p>Tip: Be mindful when using sayings or phrases that are part of American culture. For example, the meanings of “that’s a piece of cake” and “that’s how the cookie crumbles” have nothing to do with food. Sayings like “A penny saved is a penny earned” and “We’re not in Kansas anymore” and “the South” might be unfamiliar to newcomers. If phrases like this are included in a book, video, or audio clip you’re sharing, do some explicit instruction first. That means taking the time to explain what these phrases mean.</p>			
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<p><i>Build academic and technical language and vocabulary</i></p>	<p>Academic language and technical language serve different purposes and are both valuable in career industries. While academic language focuses on general communication skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, technical language refers to specialized terminology, concepts, and skills specific to industries or professions.</p> <p>Incorporating both academic and technical language is essential for comprehensive career readiness and preparation. Academic language provides a foundation for effective communication, collaboration, and critical thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for reading and analyzing industry-related articles, reports, and case studies to develop critical reading and comprehension skills. • Provide opportunities to introduce industry-specific vocabulary, jargon, and technical concepts relevant to different career pathways 	<p>Here are some strategies to try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use visuals to demonstrate what a vocabulary term means and doesn't mean. • For languages that are close to the English language, use cognates, words that are similar in spelling and meaning in both languages, to help students learn vocabulary or academic terms they may be familiar with in their first language. • Use methods such as scaffolding, that supports youth in building on prior knowledge and internalize new information until the youth becomes independent in thinking and problem-solving. Scaffold language by breaking down complex concepts into manageable chunks and providing support through guided practice and feedback. • Total physical response, TPR is an approach that uses props, gestures, facial expressions, pictures and equipment to communicate the meaning of a vocabulary term as it's 	<p>Do a fishbowl scaffolding activity where youth are introduced to networking for work. Half the group are on the inside of the circle and the other half on the outside. For the group in the middle, they will share what they know about the topic with the whole group. The observers on the outside are not allowed to talk during this time period. After a few minutes, the group gets broken up into smaller groups, mixing those in the center and those on the outside. This time, those who were on the outside share what they learned, offer their thoughts, ask questions, and come to new conclusions as a group.</p>
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	<p>across various contexts. It includes skills such as reading comprehension, writing proficiency, oral communication, and analytical reasoning, which are applicable in all career industries. Academic language proficiency enables individuals to understand and engage with complex texts, express ideas clearly and persuasively, and adapt communication styles to diverse audiences.</p> <p>Technical language encompasses industry-specific terminology, concepts, and skills necessary for success in particular fields or occupations. It enables individuals to communicate effectively within</p>		<p>introduced. ELs mimic these movements as the instructor says the word. TPR can be integrated into career connected learning to help youth, especially ELs understand and internalize industry-specific vocabulary, concepts, and procedures. TPR may look like utilizing physical gestures and movements to signal important concepts, steps or methods in;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety Training ○ Equipment Operations ○ Workplace Procedures ○ Customer Service Training ○ Team-building Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing this as a fun whole-group activity helps to minimize intimidation and gives ELs visual cues to aid understanding. A variation is to have youth present their own gestures, facial expressions, and visuals to physically communicate the meaning of a vocabulary word, and then present them as a group to the 	
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	<p>their chosen profession, understand specialized documents and instructions, and perform job-related tasks with precision and accuracy. Technical language proficiency is essential for navigating industry-specific challenges, collaborating with colleagues, and staying informed about advancements and trends in the field.</p>		<p>entire class. This creates a safe learning space as students present together.</p>	
<p><i>Model expectations and instructions</i></p>	<p>Acting out instructions for an activity and modeling expectations provides clues to help ELs understand verbal or written instructions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help ELs understand verbal and written instructions through modeled behavior 	<p>Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate Collaborative Learning where youth can observe and learn from each other’s behaviors, strategies, and problem-solving approaches. Encourage peer modeling and mentoring relationships where more experienced learners can 	<p>During a career pathways activity, introduce the purpose of the activity and model how to approach each station. Talk about how youth can draw or write their ideas about a topic that’s posted on chart paper. Start by</p>



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			<p>guide and support their peers in understanding and meeting expectations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use nonverbal cues, gestures, hand signals, facial expressions, and visuals such as pictures and video clips to support ELs who are at the beginner and intermediate proficiency levels of language acquisition. These types of support can help them start to feel comfortable about participating in small- and large-group activities. It also helps with engagement because they won't feel "lost" or confused about what to do. 	<p>physically showing them where each group will start. Then provide an example of a written response and a drawn response. Point to the clock and hold your hand up with how many minutes they have at each station. Then ring the timer and walk to the next station so they know what action you expect them to take when they hear the timer. It's also helpful to have these steps clearly outlined on a slide or chart, with visual clues for each step is also helpful. Be available to offer support and guidance throughout the activity.</p>
<p><i>Use icebreakers that value culture</i></p>	<p>Icebreakers are opportunities for ELs to share about their culture and experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use icebreakers that value culture 	<p>Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In My Culture: ELs stand in a circle. The facilitator draws a topic from a hat. Youth take turns standing in the center of the circle and sharing about that topic in 	<p>Put youth in small groups. The facilitator will pick various topics for the room to discuss in their small groups. For each topic the small groups will go</p>



			<p>their culture. (For example, if music is the selected topic, students might share a favorite song or type of song, like a mariachi song.) Depending on how comfortable group members feel, ask them to draw or write their responses before sharing with an elbow partner. Those partners then share with two other partners. This can reduce anxiety about sharing with the full group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our Sayings: ELs share popular sayings used in their first language. Encourage them to try to translate it into other languages represented in the group.• One Hope, One Challenge: ELs share one hope they have (or had) as a newcomer to the U.S. and one challenge they face (or have faced). This can help build a sense of community for newcomers. It also gives them an opportunity to share their solutions for overcoming barriers.	<p>around and have each person share out about that topic in their culture. Topics may include things such as music, food, and pop culture.</p>
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<p><i>Technology integration</i></p>	<p>A variety of technology devices, software, and apps can be integrated to accelerate language acquisition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use technology to accelerate language acquisition	<p>Here are some ways you can use technology to support ELs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online collaboration tools: Youth can collaborate in groups with mixed levels of language proficiency, which help them practice their fluency skills. Google Classroom is one example.• Digital portfolios and collaboration platforms: Youth can upload images, video, audio and text and collaborate online. Some examples include Seesaw and Flipgrid.• Audio apps: Youth can record themselves speaking, practice pronunciation, listen to their responses to the instructor's questions, and refine their responses as needed. This provides useful practice, as some state language assessments include a speaking component that is scored and becomes part of each student's "level of language acquisition" score.	<p>Put youth with different language proficiency in small groups. Have them record a video commercial discussing their goals for the program.</p>
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<i>Cooperative learning</i>	Cooperative learning can accelerate English language acquisition by putting ELs in groups that include native English speakers and ELs at various levels of language development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerate English language acquisition through cooperative learning	Here are some ways to help ELs become comfortable in group learning settings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intentionally group youth with mixed levels of language proficiency. This allows ELs to interact with others and develop language skills and concepts. Small teams help ELs build confidence, express themselves, and observe one another solving problems.• Consider rotating cooperative learning roles so youth interact with one another in different ways (e.g., reporter, recorder, timekeeper, task manager, materials manager).	Put youth with different language proficiency in small groups.
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