English for Latin America: Approach to Teaching and Learning
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English for Latin America (ELA) represents current thinking in second language learning and teaching. It draws on studies in second language acquisition, task-based language learning, and learner engagement and motivation. The approach also reflects recent findings in language processing and brain-based learning that suggest that bilingual learners draw on both first language and second language resources to make meaning and express ideas. The scope and sequence of the ELA curriculum is based on the Common European Framework (CEF) for language learning that lays out key competencies for each level. The general approach to the curriculum uses student-centered task-based instruction at the core of which are multiple opportunities for students to use English in meaningful ways: Students engage in language practice and in conversations with each other and the teacher; they respond to audio prompts and teacher questions; and are encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. Grammar and pronunciation are contextualized and interwoven into instruction that emphasizes authentic communication while highlighting "how English works."

The curriculum that guides English for Latin America is guided by key principles of language learning and its approach highlights essential concepts in the acquisition of a second or foreign language.

Supporting Second Language Development
The developmental nature of Second Language Acquisition is well represented in the ELA curriculum. The principle that learners are capable of understanding much more than they are able to produce is reflected in a structure that introduces a highly entertaining story or dialogue that may include some unfamiliar language that students should be able to understand using context clues. Students are encouraged to use their background knowledge and experience to capture the gist of the situation before moving on to practice specific expressions and structures in the communicative exercises that reflect the language demands of the world outside of the classroom. To help students build the skills and confidence required in real life unscripted encounters with English speakers, ELA also includes an emphasis on "strategic competence," including the inclusion of repair strategies (i.e., what to do when communica-

tion breaks down). Helping students to develop compensatory strategies that allow them to communicate in situations where the language demands are greater than their proficiency reflects an important emphasis on authentic language use, rather than on language that has been artificially simplified. Skits and suggested role plays further encourage engaged use of English and foster deeper language development.

Learner Engagement
In the ELA curriculum, engagement, central to learning, is achieved by offering different aspects of engagement (cognitive, social, and emotional). Cognitive engagement is achieved through activities such as quizzes, games and contests that require critical thinking and problem solving. Emotional engagement is fostered through humor, popular music, and topics that resonate with middle school students and youth. Social engagement occurs as students learn as part of a classroom community that emphasizes student to student and student to teacher interactions. These interactions are at the core of ELA as students are encouraged (and required) to practice English and learn with and from each other. Engagement is deepened as students use the new language to express ideas and respond to what others are saying. These multiple opportunities for students to respond to the radio instructor, work collaboratively with peers, and interact with the classroom teacher provide the essential conditions for rich learning.

Skill Building
Communicative competence, the ultimate goal of modern language teaching, requires competence in all four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing) along with socio-cultural awareness and strategic competence. ELA, with its emphasis on interactive audio, reflects recent views in second language learning that highlight the importance of aural competence since much of communicative success inside and outside of the classroom depends on strong listening skills. By listening to high interest interactive audio segments (not merely short conversation clips), students learn crucial skills associated with listening for understanding. Activities integrated into the program both during and after each segment encourage global listening (understanding what's going on) and targeted listening (catching details).

Routine Expressions and Everyday Language

In recent years, there has been greater recognition that much of real life communication is made up of routine expressions and common collocations (groups of words that are commonly used together). The ELA exploits this phenomenon by using expressive language that reflects actual language use (rather than relying on sentences used to demonstrate a particular grammar pattern) and introducing popular expressions found in English language movies, popular music, and TV shows. The narrative structure of the audio segments weaves sentences and expressions together in ways that draw students' attention to the language and set the stage for further development of reading, writing, and speaking skills. Active learning, built into the design of the program, is further reinforced in pauses between segments when students and teachers follow prompts and interact.

Authentic Language Use

In order to be become proficient and productive, second language learners need many opportunities to participate in meaningful exchanges. At the core of the LEA approach are multiple opportunities to use English with peers and with the teacher. Since ELA is classroom-based (as opposed to computer-based), authentic conversations reflecting typical situations are not only possible but the norm. Students are able to talk about topics that interest them, using language related to sports, friends, and money and practicing related English structures in the process. Students are encouraged to use English outside of the classroom and interact with English speakers at work or in tourist settings. Reading and writing activities are used to expand such language use and extend it to new contexts. Emphasizing a learner-centered approach, the ELA approach also helps traditional teachers become comfortable with a noisy classroom where students can make mistakes that are not immediately corrected (although time is set aside for corrective feedback where appropriate).

Validation of Language and Culture

Recent studies indicate that second language acquisition can be strengthened by the strategic and judicious use of the native language (L1) in second or foreign language (L2) teaching. These studies suggest that limited and thoughtful inclusion of L1 not only acknowledges the value of the mother tongue but also facilitates comprehension, particularly at lower proficiency levels. ELA supports this approach. It uses L1 (Spanish) sparingly while at the same time creating an environment that immerses students in English. Spanish is used to set the stage for the lesson, to ensure that instructions for peer activities are understood,

and to build the relationship between the radio instructor teaching at a distance and the students and teacher in the classroom. The overall approach recognizes Spanish as a helpful resource, rather than an impediment to learning English.

Culture, both of the home culture and the culture of the target language, is intimately linked to language learning. ELA supports an approach that creates cross-cultural competence and allows learners to build on what is culturally familiar while increasing their knowledge of English. Students learn about important cross-cultural differences in communication and ways of interacting. Through culturally responsive teaching, ELA recognizes and validates both Latin American culture and Spanish as a world language.

Understanding How English Works

ELA recognizes that full proficiency in English requires a focus on both fluency (being able to communicate in spite of limited English) and accuracy (using the correct forms of the language). It engages students in activities that alternate between an emphasis on meaning making (understanding ideas and expressing oneself) and on structure (grammar and pronunciation) with the ultimate goal of having students master both and communicate effectively. While the primary goal of ELA is to build communicative competence in listening and speaking, careful attention is also given to reading and writing, vocabulary development, and standard English sentence structure. The audio segments that begin each episode encourage students to focus on what a story and dialogue might be all about (students listen for meaning), while later activities might draw students attention to form. Throughout the program, students are asked to focus on grammar and pronunciation only after common expressions and basic language are introduced and practiced.

Using Multiple Learning Dimensions

Language proficiency is complex, develops over time, and requires engagement, focus, and practice. English for Latin America (ELA) reflects these concepts by offering a well-structured 100-hour learning program in which language and concepts are introduced, practiced, and continuously reinforced. Taking into account the many ways in which individual students acquire another language, ELA offers a multi-dimensional approach to learning that responds to varying learning preferences. The program uses music, drama, and entertaining dialogues to take advantage of different channels for language processing, allowing students' brains to make connections that result in deeper learning.