

## ISSUE BRIEF

# Edgenuity: Supporting English Language Learners

### The Growing Concern

During the 2009–10 school year, approximately 4.7 million U.S. public school students were identified as English language learners (ELLs).<sup>1</sup> While ELLs comprise approximately 10 percent of the K–12 population, experts predict that this figure will reach 40 percent by 2030.<sup>2</sup>

ELLs face unique academic challenges. As a group, they speak more than 325 languages,<sup>3</sup> and 9.2 percent receive special education services.<sup>4</sup> ELLs not only have to learn the fundamentals of a new language, but they also must meet the new rigorous requirements of the Common Core State Standards initiative and other college and career readiness state standards.

At a time when ELLs are expected to master more advanced content and concepts than ever before, data indicate that ELLs are struggling in U.S. schools. Among eighth graders, only 3 percent of ELL students achieved proficiency on the reading portion of the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), compared to 33 percent of non-ELLs.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, only 5 percent of ELL eighth graders achieved proficiency on the mathematics portion, while 35 percent of non-ELLs accomplished this.<sup>6</sup>

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## Edgenuity: Improving the Academic Achievement for ELLs

Researchers have pinpointed several evidence-based instructional strategies for improving the academic achievement of ELLs. The following principles are incorporated into Edgenuity courses:

### 1. Teach vocabulary in multiple contexts:

Research indicates that “front-loading” vocabulary helps make content more accessible to students.<sup>7</sup> Studies also show that vocabulary development is enhanced when students receive multiple exposures to words.<sup>8</sup>

» **Our solution:** At the beginning of each lesson, Edgenuity students are explicitly taught four to six academic and domain-specific vocabulary words. Students have chances to practice using and applying words through the course. They also have access to the Edgenuity glossary tool, which allows them to track their understanding of vocabulary words.

### 2. Set high expectations:

Studies indicate that ELLs are often held to lower benchmarks for academic achievement than their non-ELL peers.<sup>9</sup> All too often, teachers tend to water down the curricula and do not teach higher-order thinking skills.<sup>10</sup>

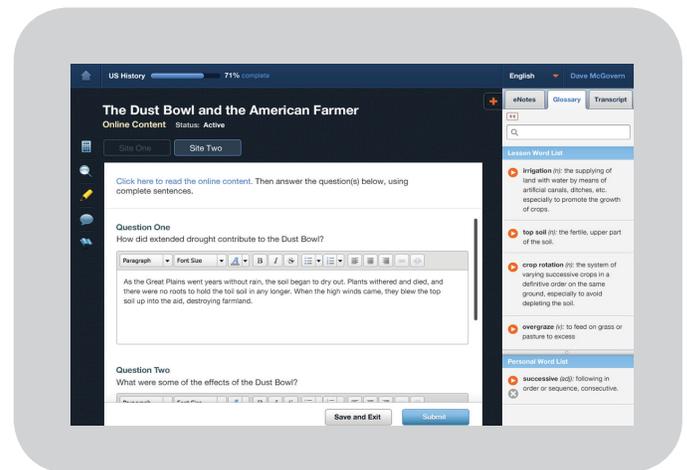
» **Our solution:** Higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and application are embedded throughout each course. In reading assignments, students learn to analyze text closely. Writing assignments require students to support a position using evidence from primary and secondary sources. In mathematics, students solve multi-step problems and justify their thinking. Interactives and open-ended activities leverage technology to allow students to make and test predictions and build conceptual understanding. Students also engage in projects and performance tasks designed to build higher-level skills in all areas and apply learning in authentic contexts. Finally, Edgenuity’s discussion board allows

students to collaborate in a teacher-guided and monitored forum that elicits academic discourse and critical thought.

### 3. Provide explicit instruction:

Explicit instruction includes setting clear learning goals, modeling how to complete a task, providing multiple opportunities for students to practice skills independently, and showing relationships between concepts, words, or ideas. Studies indicate that explicit instruction can improve ELLs’ comprehension.<sup>11</sup>

» **Our solution:** Explicit instruction is the cornerstone of Edgenuity courses. Our courses feature videos of highly qualified, certified instructors who deliver explicit instruction, orient students to the lesson goals, ground concepts in relevant real-world contexts, and offer clear and concise explanations of subject matter.



Edgenuity’s glossary supports ELL vocabulary development.

### 4. Activate background knowledge:

Data show that ELLs vary in age, socioeconomic status, school exposure, background knowledge, life experiences, and culture.<sup>12</sup> Studies indicate that effective ELL instruction builds upon students’ existing knowledge to make content meaningful.<sup>13</sup>

» **Our solution:** Throughout our courses, Edgenuity activates students' background knowledge. The warm-up at the beginning of the lesson connects students' prior knowledge to new content. Direct-instruction videos emphasize the real-world context and relevance of the subject matter. On-screen teachers also prompt students to think about what they already know when learning new topics.

## 5. Make instruction accessible:

Research shows that universally accessible instruction can anticipate and accommodate the needs of ELLs with diverse backgrounds by providing multiple means of expression, representation, and engagement.<sup>14</sup> In addition, studies show that graphic organizers can help ELLs make relationships between concepts and skills apparent to students.<sup>15</sup>

» **Our solution:** Edgenuity courses provide students with multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement:

» **Multiple Means of Representation:** Edgenuity courses use video lectures, graphic displays, text, simulations, video captioning, and read-aloud support features. On-screen teachers explain concepts using verbal, concrete, manipulative, numerical, graphical, and symbolic representations. Graphic organizers are included in instruction, tasks, and assignments.

» **Multiple Means of Expression:** Throughout instruction and assessments, students manipulate images, answer questions, highlight text, complete surveys, and fill out graphic organizers. These multiple means of expression appeal to a variety of learning styles and allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways.

» **Multiple Means of Engagement:** Detailed course maps and pacing guides clearly state expectations, provide students with a structured overview of course activities and objectives, and visually alert students and teachers to students' course progress and pace. Teachers can personalize instruction based on an individual student's needs. Prior to instruction,

teachers can create individualized tutoring modules by customizing targeted supplemental learning blocks. At the end of instruction, teachers can adjust the time allotted for assessments, allow students to use a calculator or dictionary, or modify grading settings.



Edgenuity courses use graphic organizers to make concepts clearer.

## 6. Use home language strategically:

Studies show that students can better understand complex concepts if they are explained in their home language.<sup>16</sup>

» **Our solution:** Students can translate on-screen text into Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, French, German, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, or Vietnamese. They can also hear any section of text read aloud in English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, or Arabic for auditory comprehension. By using the translation feature, students can check for accurate reading comprehension.

## 7. Model metacognitive strategies:

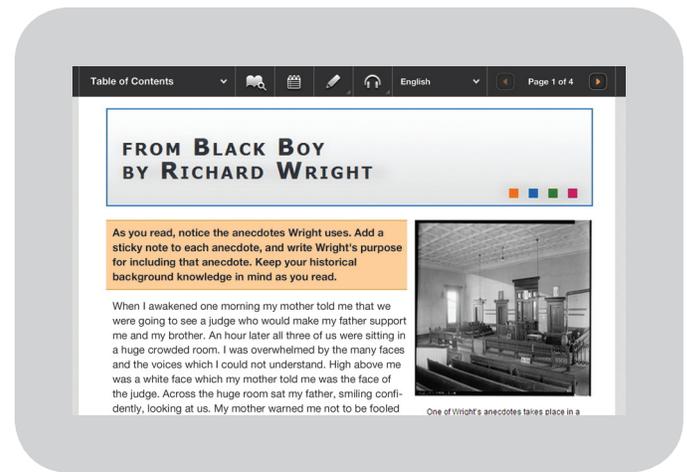
Studies show that metacognitive strategy instruction—or helping students to “think about their thinking”—can enhance ELLs' academic achievement. In particular, strategies such as planning and goal setting, asking questions, making predictions, monitoring comprehension, problem solving, and evaluating can help improve ELL students' declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

» **Our solution:** Edgenuity provides problem-solving, metacognitive, and reading-strategy instruction. Students are taught a multi-step process for solving problems. They learn how to use mnemonics, graphic organizers, checklists, and problem-solving strategies to check, process, and retrieve information. They also are taught comprehension strategies such as making connections, predicting, visualizing, asking questions, monitoring understanding, making inferences, analyzing text structure, and synthesizing. Edgenuity courses encourage student elaboration, self-questioning, and explanation.

## 8. Provide instructional support for the close reading of texts:

Experts agree that close reading of text is essential for ELLs who need to acquire academic language.<sup>18</sup>

» **Our solution:** Edgenuity's CloseReader™ leverages the power of technology to model, scaffold, and reinforce close reading of text. The CloseReader models fluent and expressive reading at strategic points in the text. Text and audio reading supports scaffold thoughtful analysis of individual words, phrases, and sentences as students read. The CloseReader also features embedded comprehension tasks, ensuring that students think critically as they read—not just after they read.



The CloseReader's toolset helps students access grade-level text.

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## Endnotes

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Edgenuity courses provide a powerful set of tools, helping put students on a path to personal, professional, and academic success.

**For more information email [solutions@edgenuity.com](mailto:solutions@edgenuity.com).**