The field of English learner (EL) education is in a state of flux, presenting both opportunities and challenges. While acquiring English, the fast-growing population of ELs is expected to meet rigorous content standards to be ready for college and careers by the end of high school. To support ELs in attaining rigorous content standards, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 mandates, “Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State has adopted English language proficiency standards that . . . are aligned with the challenging State academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 24).

This article addresses challenges in aligning English language proficiency (ELP) standards with content standards in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science. Specifically, the article presents a critique of the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards and the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21). Specifically, the critique focuses on how each consortium addresses two aspects of alignment: (a) disciplinary practices across content areas and (b) cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. Both consortia fall short in accurately reflecting disciplinary practices and maintaining consistent cognitive expectations. Lessons learned from this critique offer recommendations for the field to move forward in ensuring English learners capitalize on the opportunities and meet the demands for both content and language learning presented by content standards. As the challenges in ELP standards development lie squarely at the intersection of content and language learning, the article ends with a call to action for closer collaboration between language and content educators.

Keywords: bilingual/bicultural; content analysis; educational policy; policy analysis; science education

As federal legislation requires that English language proficiency (ELP) standards are aligned with content standards, this article addresses issues and concerns in aligning ELP standards with content standards in English language arts, mathematics, and science. It starts with a brief description of federal legislation for alignment between ELP standards and content standards along with challenges of ensuring alignment. Then, it highlights how current efforts to ensure alignment center on the language used to engage in disciplinary practices of content standards. Next, taking a perspective on ELP standards from the vantage point of content areas, the article presents a critique of ELP standards developed by the two major consortia of states, WIDA and English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21). Specifically, the critique focuses on how each consortium addresses two aspects of alignment: (a) disciplinary practices across content areas and (b) cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. Both consortia fall short in accurately reflecting disciplinary practices and maintaining consistent cognitive expectations. Lessons learned from this critique offer recommendations for the field to move forward in ensuring English learners capitalize on the opportunities and meet the demands for both content and language learning presented by content standards. As the challenges in ELP standards development lie squarely at the intersection of content and language learning, the article ends with a call to action for closer collaboration between language and content educators.

Keywords: bilingual/bicultural; content analysis; educational policy; policy analysis; science education

At present, the two most prominent consortia, WIDA and ELPA21, which developed the ELP standards adopted by the majority of the states in the nation, are in a state of transition. WIDA’s current version of ELP standards was revised in 2012, and the latest revision is underway, with expected completion in 2018. ELPA21 has also been developing and revising its standards since 2012. As the two consortia navigate this transition into uncharted waters, they will continue to grapple with the complex notion of alignment between ELP standards and content standards. The issue of alignment is particularly pressing in light of new content standards through the CCSS and NGSS, which are academically

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rigorous and call for students to engage in language-intensive disciplinary practices, such as arguing from evidence and constructing explanations (Lee, Quinn, & Valdés, 2013). Thus, alignment between ELP standards and content standards is an ongoing and collaborative endeavor that calls on the expertise of educators in a range of areas. Throughout the article, proficiency is used to indicate English language proficiency.

This article is aimed at achieving two goals: (a) as a specific goal, to improve ELP standards and their alignment to content standards and (b) as a broad goal, to inform the field about opportunities and challenges in supporting ELs to meet academically rigorous and language-intensive content standards. It is not aimed at offering a literature review establishing a theoretical or empirical foundation or proposing a particular approach to alignment.

This article starts with a brief description of federal legislation for alignment between ELP standards and content standards along with challenges of ensuring alignment. Second, it highlights how current efforts to ensure alignment center on the language used to engage in disciplinary practices of content standards as disciplinary practices involve both sense-making and language use across ELA, mathematics, and science. Third, from the vantage point of these content areas, the article presents a critique of how WIDA and ELPA21 address two aspects of alignment: (a) disciplinary practices across content areas and (b) cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. The intent is to support the two consortia of states, WIDA and ELPA21, as well as those states not affiliated with either consortium in developing and revising their standards to align with the new wave of college- and career-ready content standards. Finally, it ends with a call to action to the field for continued inquiry into how educators can best support ELs in capitalizing on the opportunities as well as meeting the demands for both content and language learning presented by content standards that are academically rigorous and language intensive.

Alignment Between ELP Standards and Content Standards in Federal Legislation

The notion of alignment (also referred to as correspondence) between ELP standards and content standards has been prominent throughout the recent history of federal legislation. Based on the previous generation of content standards, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 mandated that states “establish standards and objectives for raising the level of English proficiency . . . that are aligned with achievement of the challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, pp. 270–271).

Then, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility of 2012 revised the original NCLB legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). With the adoption of the CCSS for ELA/literacy and mathematics across the nation, ELs were expected to meet rigorous content standards to be ready for college and careers by the end of high school. Soon after, in 2013, college- and career-ready content standards in science were released through the NGSS and subsequently adopted or adapted by states across the nation. To support ELs in attaining rigorous content standards, each state education agency was required to “adopt English language proficiency (ELP) standards that correspond to its college- and career-ready standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 1).

The ESSA of 2015, which is the latest reauthorization of ESEA, explicitly clarifies the original NCLB legislation for ELP standards:

Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State has adopted English language proficiency standards that—(i) are derived from the 4 recognized domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; (ii) address the different proficiency levels of English learners; and (iii) are aligned with the challenging State academic standards [italics added]. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 24)

While language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and proficiency levels are familiar notions to EL educators, the notion of alignment between ELP standards and content standards is less likely to be familiar to EL educators because it requires knowledge of multiple sets of content standards (e.g., CCSS and NGSS). There are challenges to ensuring alignment of ELP standards with content standards, as described next.

First, content standards are a “moving target” because their development and revision are ongoing endeavors. While there is a general agreement that the CCSS and NGSS represent important progress in quality and rigor over the previous generation of content standards, there are critiques of the CCSS for ELA/literacy and mathematics (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011a, 2011b), ELA/literacy (Beach, 2011; Pearson, 2013), mathematics (Cobb & Jackson, 2011; Main, 2012), and NGSS (Feinstein & Kirchgasser, 2015; Rodriguez, 2015). Despite these critiques, the standards in each content area serve important purposes: They (a) reflect the contemporary thinking in the discipline and current knowledge base on teaching and learning in the content area and (b) serve as the road map for implementation in the present and revisions and improvements in the future.

Second, disciplinary practices across content areas are not always consistent. The CCSS for ELA make connections to literacy across content areas, and the NGSS make connections to the CCSS for ELA (NGSS Lead States, 2013c) and mathematics (NGSS Lead States, 2013b). These connections across content areas represent important progress over the previous generation of content standards that were developed within each content area. However, there has been a lack of communication and collaboration among writers of different sets of content standards, resulting in discrepancies. For example, while the CCSS for ELA/literacy and mathematics and NGSS consistently highlight the disciplinary practice of argument, what counts as argument (i.e., disciplinary norms) and when argument is expected developmentally (i.e., developmental progressions) differ between these two sets of standards (Lee, 2017). Further inquiry into such discrepancies as well as convergences could serve as a road map for future revisions and improvements of the content standards in each area.

Content Standards and ELP Standards

ELs represent the fastest growing student population in the nation: ELs constituted 9.4% of public school students, or an estimated 4.6 million students, for the 2014–2015 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In addition to
those classified as ELs, ELs who have exited language support services (or “former ELs”) often continue to require instructional supports. The ESSA of 2015 includes former ELs in the EL sub-group up to four years after reclassification (previously two years) as part of Title I accountability requirements (previously Title III requirements). The ESSA “steps closer to an ever-EL framework by allowing states to count former ELs in their calculations of EL outcomes” (Umansky, Thompson, & Diaz, 2017, p. 78; also see Thompson, 2017). These changes in ESSA reinforce the need for ELP standards to align with content standards with the goal of supporting the learning needs and achievement of ELs, including current and former ELs (Hakuta, 2017).

Content Standards

In the midst of rapid demographic changes, new sets of content standards have been adopted or adapted by a large number of states across the nation. The CCSS for ELA/literacy and mathematics are implemented across most of the states. With regard to science standards, by spring 2017, 18 states plus the District of Columbia adopted the NGSS, and 13 states adapted the NGSS (based on the Framework) for use as their state science standards (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2017). In addition, individual school districts have adopted or adapted the NGSS regardless of their state science standards.

New content standards in ELA/literacy, mathematics, and science raise the bar for content learning to prepare all students for college and careers. Both the CCSS and NGSS expect students to engage in disciplinary practices, such as arguing from evidence. For example, students engage in argument as they make claims, provide relevant and sufficient evidence to support their claims, and offer sound reasoning. Engagement in disciplinary practices involves language use (CCSSO, 2012; Lee et al., 2013). As disciplinary practices are language intensive, they present both opportunities and demands for all students, especially ELs who are acquiring an additional language while engaging in disciplinary practices in ELA (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2012), mathematics (Moschkovich, 2012), and science (Quinn, Lee, & Valdés, 2012).

ELP Standards

States must have ELP standards that are aligned with these new content standards. ELP standards are no longer decontextualized from content standards, as was the case with pre-NCLB ELP standards. Instead, ELP standards are expected to align with their content counterparts and reflect the language learning opportunities and demands of content standards. “Language learning opportunities” are highlighted because (a) the new content standards offer opportunities for language learning through purposeful language use and (b) while “demands” invites a list of what ELs cannot do, “opportunities” makes us pause and consider what can be possible that we had not thought of before.

Currently, efforts to ensure alignment have centered on language-intensive disciplinary practices of content standards. The CCSSO (2012) developed a framework for evaluating correspondence between ELP standards and the CCSS for ELA and mathematics and the NGSS. This document, Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards Corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards (abbreviated as ELPD Framework), provides guidance to states as they adapt or develop ELP standards to reflect the language that ELs must acquire to meet rigorous content standards. In particular, the ELPD Framework highlights language-intensive disciplinary practices across ELA (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a), mathematics (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b), and science (NGSS Lead States, 2013a; National Research Council [NRC], 2012).

WIDA and ELPA21

Both WIDA and ELPA21 emerged in response to federal legislation for alignment (or correspondence) but at different points in time. WIDA was formed in the wake of NCLB of 2001 when a consortium of states received an Enhanced Assessment Grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop ELP standards aligned with content standards. ELPA21 was formed more recently in the wake of ESEA Flexibility of 2012 when a consortium of states received an Enhanced Assessment Grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop ELP standards corresponding to content standards based on the ELPD Framework (CCSSO, 2012). ELPA21 is an outgrowth of the Understanding Language Initiative at Stanford University (http://ell.stanford.edu), devoted to improving education for ELs in light of the CCSS and NGSS.

As of December 2017 (when this manuscript was submitted), 35 states and four districts, territories, and agencies have adopted WIDA ELD Standards (WIDA Consortium, 2012, 2014), and 10 states have adopted ELPA21 ELP Standards (CCSSO, 2014; ELPA21, 2017). Of the remaining 5 states, Connecticut adopted ELPA standards that are nearly identical to ELPA21 Standards, while Arizona, California, New York, and Texas elected to develop and use their own state-specific standards and are not affiliated with either consortium.

Both WIDA and ELPA21 Standards recognize the role of language in content learning. There are, however, significant differences in their approaches to promoting alignment. These differences have important implications for how each set of standards informs classroom instruction and large-scale assessments of proficiency fashioned for accountability purposes. This article offers an initial inquiry into the extent to which each set of ELP standards aligns with content standards. Specifically, the article highlights how WIDA and ELPA21 address two aspects of alignment: (a) disciplinary practices across content areas and (b) cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. The first aspect concerns the extent to which each set of ELP standards reflects disciplinary practices with accuracy and sufficient specificity. The second aspect concerns the extent to which each set of ELP standards reflects the cognitive demands of disciplinary practices across proficiency levels. To illustrate these two aspects of alignment, the article presents select examples across content areas and grade levels or grade bands from both sets of ELP standards. Each section begins with a brief overview of how the standards are organized.

WIDA English Language Development Standards

The WIDA ELD Standards were launched in 2003 and went through multiple rounds of revision. The most recent version
released in 2012 consists of (a) Standards statements, (b) Performance Definitions, and (c) Model Performance Indicators (MPIs). First, the five Standards statements represent the social, instructional, and academic language needed to succeed in school, especially in the content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies (see Figure 1). Second, two sets of Performance Definitions describe the specific features of receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) language use expected at each of the six proficiency levels as ELs progress toward meeting the five Standards statements (see WIDA Consortium, 2012). Third, MPIs offer examples of how ELs might use language at each proficiency level in the context of grade-level instruction and assessment in the content areas for individual grades from K–8 and grade bands 9–10 and 11–12 (see Figures 2 and 3 for examples of MPIs).

Disciplinary practices across content areas. As shown in Figure 1, WIDA identifies five Standards statements. Statements 2 through 5 are identical but with different endings indicating four content areas (“communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts/ Mathematics/Science/Social Studies”; WIDA Consortium, 2012, p. 3). As evidenced by the repetitive nature of these statements, the Standards are generic, without consideration of the disciplinary practices of each content area. Each of these disciplinary practices requires use of language, which should be reflected in ELP standards if they are to demonstrate alignment with content standards (CCSSO, 2012). While all of these disciplinary practices may call for communicating information, ideas, and concepts (i.e., the language used in WIDA's five Standards statements), the Standards statements lack sufficient specificity to ensure that ELs are supported to engage in a wide range of disciplinary practices across content areas.

The generic nature of the Standards statements becomes problematic when they are operationalized into language use in the form of MPIs. As described earlier, MPIs are examples of how ELs might use language in the context of standards-based instruction and assessment in the content areas (more details about MPIs are provided in the following). Figure 2 shows an MPI for Standard 4 intended to align with two fifth-grade NGSS performance expectations in earth and space science (see ESS1-1 and ESS1-2 in WIDA Consortium, 2012, p. 79). Every NGSS performance expectation blends a science and engineering practice, a disciplinary core idea, and a crosscutting concept. The science and engineering practices identified in these two performance expectations, respectively, are arguing from evidence (“Support an argument” in ESS1-1) and analyzing and interpreting data (“Represent data in graphical displays” in ESS1-2). Both of these practices inherently involve language use and should be reflected in ELP standards if they are to align with the NGSS. Problematically, the task asks students to “explore a variety of informational texts and media . . . to create a class book to share with first grade reading buddies” (see Example Context for Language Use). This traditional literacy task of arranging words, sentences, and paragraphs across Levels 1 through 5 does not reflect the language needed to engage in the science and engineering practices of arguing from evidence and analyzing and interpreting data.

Cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. Based on WIDA's Can Do Philosophy, the WIDA ELD Standards promote alignment with content standards “by ensuring students at all levels of language proficiency have opportunities to engage in the cognitive challenges represented in those content standards” (WIDA Consortium, 2012, p. 14). As shown in Figure 3, each MPI identifies four components: (a) a content standard (referred to as Connection), (b) an example task aligned with the content.

### Figure 1. WIDA's five Standards statements.

standard (referred to as Example Context for Language Use), (c) the level of cognitive demand required of all students to participate in the task (referred to as Cognitive Function), and (d) the grade-level words and expressions for the task (referred to as Topic-Related Language).

Figure 3 presents an MPI for Standard 3 in mathematics at fourth grade (WIDA Consortium, 2012). The Language Functions (circled in Figure 3) describe how students at each proficiency level can use language in different ways to carry out the Cognitive Function. In differentiating Language Functions for each proficiency level, WIDA claims to maintain a “uniform cognitive demand across all levels of proficiency” (WIDA Consortium, 2012, p. 5). This does not appear to be the case, however, since Language Functions themselves imply varying degrees of cognitive demand, thereby altering the Cognitive Function of the task for students at different proficiency levels. For ELs at the lower levels of proficiency in particular, the cognitive demand of the task is often severely diminished as a byproduct of adjusting the Language Functions.

In this particular MPI aligned with the CCSS for mathematics at fourth grade (Figure 3), students are creating displays...
of lines and angles they find in their school, home, or community. The Cognitive Function for the task is defined as follows: “Students at all levels of English language proficiency APPLY their understanding of lines and angles” (WIDA Consortium, 2012, p. 72). According to Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy, whose organization of cognitive functions WIDA has adopted, application is a higher-order cognitive skill that requires using information in a new way or context (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The MPI suggests that ELs at different levels of proficiency can meet this Cognitive Function of “APPLY” by performing Language Functions suited to their particular proficiency levels: “Label” (Level 1), “Define” (Level 2), “Describe” (Level 3), “Compare and contrast” (Level 4), and “Explain” (Level 5).

There are at least three problems with this MPI. First, it is unclear how the Cognitive Function of “APPLY” relates to the standard identified in the Connection. Second, it is unclear how each Language Function relates to the Cognitive Function. These two problems indicate ill-defined relationships among the Connection, Cognitive Function, and Language Functions across proficiency levels. The third problem, which is most relevant to ELs and the issue of cognitive expectations, is that the Language Functions become increasingly cognitively demanding as the proficiency levels increase. For example, “Explain” at Level 5 implies a greater cognitive demand than “Describe” at Level 3, which implies a greater cognitive demand than “Label” at Level 1. It is unlikely that ELs at all proficiency levels are able to meet the same academically rigorous content standards by performing Language Functions of varying cognitive demand. This concern is particularly acute for beginner ELs, who may be perfectly capable of grade-appropriate cognitive work despite needing substantial linguistic support to demonstrate their abilities.

**ELPA21 English Language Proficiency Standards**

Launched in fall 2012, ELPA21 is still in the process of development. The ELPA21 ELP Standards most recently released in 2014 consist of (a) Standards statements, (b) K–12 Practices Matrix, and (c) Performance Descriptors. First, ELPA21 specifies 10 Standards statements (see Figure 4). Second, the K–12 Practices Matrix identifies alignment (called “correspondence” in the document) between these 10 Standards statements and disciplinary practices from the CCSS for ELA and mathematics and the NGSS (see Figure 5). More detailed alignments are listed for individual grades from K–8 and grade bands 9–10 and 11–12 (CCSSO, 2014, pp. 34–209). Third, Performance Descriptors for each Standards statement specify targets for performance (i.e., what students should be able to do with language) by the end of each of the five proficiency levels (see Figure 6). These descriptors are articulated for grade levels K and 1 and grade bands 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12.

**Disciplinary practices across content areas.** The ELPA21 Standards inaccurately characterize disciplinary practices in their (a) Standards statements, (b) K–12 Practices Matrix, and (c) Performance Descriptors. First, as shown in Figure 4, Standards Statement 4 refers to claims, evidence, and reasoning in the document between these 10 Standards statements and disciplinary practices from the CCSS for ELA and mathematics and the NGSS (see Figure 5). More detailed alignments are listed for individual grades from K–8 and grade bands 9–10 and 11–12 (CCSSO, 2014, pp. 34–209). Third, Performance Descriptors for each Standards statement specify targets for performance (i.e., what students should be able to do with language) by the end of each of the five proficiency levels (see Figure 6). These descriptors are articulated for grade levels K and 1 and grade bands 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12.
they involve claims, evidence, and reasoning. Thus, they could be either combined into one standard or placed next to each other.

Second, the ELPA21 Standards provide a K–12 Practices Matrix to “help teachers leverage the strongest correspondences between the ELPA Standards and the CCSS and NGSS” (CCSSO, 2014, p. 33). Figure 5 lists disciplinary practices in ELA, mathematics, and science in the left column and identifies the specific ELPA21 Standards statements to which each disciplinary practice is aligned (CCSSO, 2014, p. 34). Notably, no alignment is identified between the NGSS practice of developing and using models and the ELPA21 Standards (highlighted in Figure 5). Although modeling is traditionally perceived as physical representations of objects or events, the NGSS emphasize conceptual modeling, which involves linguistic modalities (i.e., oral and written language), in addition to nonlinguistic modalities (e.g., drawing, symbols, equations, tables, graphs; Grapin, in press). Also, modeling involves the language practices of explaining and arguing as students use their models to explain a phenomenon or argue alternative explanations. In mapping the alignment, writers of the ELPA21...
Cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. The ELPA21 Standards affirm, as the first of their eight Guiding Principles, that ELs “have the same potential as native speakers of English to engage in cognitively complex tasks” (CCSSO, 2014, p. 1) to achieve college- and career-ready standards. For each of the 10 Standards statements, Performance Descriptors specify what students can do with language by the end of each of the five proficiency levels. Students at the higher proficiency levels by definition can do more with language. Problematically, however, they are also expected to engage in disciplinary practices in more cognitively demanding ways.

The bottom row of Figure 6 shows the descriptors at each proficiency level for Standard 4 at the 9–12 grade band (CCSSO, 2014, p. 27). First, the quantity of descriptors increases across proficiency levels as students at a given proficiency level are expected to demonstrate the abilities specified at previous levels plus additional abilities introduced at that particular level. Students at Level 1 are expected to demonstrate one ability (i.e., express an opinion), students at Levels 2 through 4 are expected to demonstrate four abilities, and students at Level 5 are expected to demonstrate five abilities. Second, the quality of the descriptors at the lower levels of proficiency is different from that at the higher levels of proficiency. Students at Level 1 “express an opinion,” students at Levels 2 through 4 “construct a claim,” and students at Level 5 “construct a substantive [italics added] claim.”

As both the quantity and quality of abilities increase across proficiency levels, there is a corresponding increase in cognitive demand. For example, the Level 5 descriptors (“construct a substantive claim, distinguish it from a counter-claim, provide logically ordered and relevant reasons and evidence, and provide a conclusion that summarizes the argument presented”) imply a much greater cognitive demand than what is expected at earlier levels. The underlying assumption is that students at higher proficiency levels are capable of doing more with not only language but also reasoning and sense-making as they engage in disciplinary practices. Thus, ELPA21, similar to WIDA, is unable to hold constant the cognitive expectations of its Standards across proficiency levels.

Call to Action

With the arrival of rigorous content standards that aim to prepare all students for college and careers by the end of high school, the field of EL education faces both opportunities and challenges. Federal legislation requiring that ELP standards align with content standards calls for increased attention to how language proficiency may progress in achieving content standards.

Discussion

As WIDA and ELPA21 continue to develop and revise their standards, this article offers a critique of each set of standards in terms of two aspects of alignment: (a) disciplinary practices across content areas and (b) cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. The shortcomings of the standards in each of these aspects raise questions for the field of EL education.

First, ELP standards must reflect disciplinary practices with accuracy and sufficient specificity. The WIDA ELD Standards are not sufficiently specific to reflect disciplinary practices, which becomes problematic when they are operationalized into language use in the MPFs. The ELPA21 ELP Standards reflect disciplinary practices inaccurately in some cases. Given the language-intensive nature of college- and career-ready content standards, defining what counts as “language” and what counts as “content” remains a question for ELP standards writers, test developers, and practitioners alike. For example, arguing from evidence is both a disciplinary practice and a language function. Yet making such distinctions, both conceptual and empirical, is critical to ensuring that ELP standards and their associated assessments serve their intended purposes.

Alignment in terms of disciplinary practices across content areas raises the following question: Given multiple sets of content standards, each with different norms and expectations for language use, how do ELP standards reflect the language used to engage in disciplinary practices across content areas? Because ELP standards cannot be reasonably expected to reflect disciplinary practices on a one-to-one basis (as this would render them unwieldy and minimally useful), writers of ELP standards should seek to identify practices that are common across disciplines (e.g., argument from evidence in ELA, mathematics, and science). While similar in name, however, the nature of these practices and the language used to engage in them may vary from one discipline to the next. For example, what constitutes argument and when argument is expected developmentally may be different in ELA than in science (Lee, 2017). Given this challenge, the field of EL education will need to decide whether to align ELP standards with each content area specifically, across content areas broadly, or some combination of both approaches. In addition to improving alignment of ELP standards with content standards, these efforts could push the content areas to...
address convergences and discrepancies in their own standards as well as recognize the language learning opportunities and demands that content standards present to ELs. Furthermore, as stated earlier, critiques of the CCSS and NGSS point toward improving these standards over time. Through this process, EL education and content areas can each take a seat at the table to ensure ELs are supported to engage in disciplinary practices across content areas.

Second, ELP standards should identify ways in which ELs can meet a common set of cognitive expectations using language commensurate with their proficiency level. The WIDA ELD Standards, as they are operationalized in the MPIs, fail to demonstrate how ELs can meet grade-level cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. Similarly, the ELPA21 ELP Standards are unable to maintain consistent cognitive expectations across proficiency levels. Although both WIDA and ELPA21 promote the belief that ELs at all proficiency levels are able to engage in disciplinary practices (based on WIDA’s Can Do Philosophy and the first of ELPA21’s Guiding Principles), they fall short in their execution. By confounding language proficiency with cognitive expectations of content standards, they lower the bar and portray a deficit view of ELs.

Alignment in terms of cognitive expectations across proficiency levels raises the following question: How do ELP standards maintain the same expectations for content learning while varying the expectations for language use across proficiency levels? In particular, this question applies to how ELs at lower levels of proficiency communicate their ideas. Nonlinguistic modalities (e.g., gestures, drawings, symbols, equations, tables, and graphs) are essential semiotic resources of the disciplines and can help ELs communicate their ideas (Grapin, in press). In addition, use of home languages, while effective with all ELs, may be especially critical in supporting beginner ELs to engage in science and engineering practices and communicate disciplinary meaning. Home languages and multilingual approaches need to be considered in aligning ELP standards with content standards.

**Future Research**

Insights gained from the critique of WIDA and ELPA21 regarding their alignment to content standards offer robust areas for future research addressing theory, policy, and practice. One area of research involves development, implementation, and consequences of aligning ELP standards with content standards for instruction and assessment with ELs. What are potential theoretical or conceptual frameworks to guide alignment of ELP standards with disciplinary practices across content areas? How do educational policies need to be structured to support ELP standards aligned with disciplinary practices across content areas? What are the consequences of implementation on ELs’ learning and achievement?

Another area of research involves maintaining the same expectations for content learning while varying the expectations for language use across proficiency levels. Traditionally, ELP standards diminish the cognitive demand of content area tasks as a byproduct of adjusting the language load (e.g., ELs at lower levels of proficiency are asked simply to label while ELs at higher levels of proficiency are expected to explain and argue). As college- and career-ready content standards are intended for all students, language supports must be provided for ELs across proficiency levels to master these content standards. What are the potential theoretical and conceptual frameworks to guide this effort? How do educational policies need to be structured to support the effort? What are the consequences of implementation on ELs’ learning and achievement?

**Collaboration Across EL Education and the Content Areas**

The challenges of aligning ELP standards with content standards lie squarely at the intersection of language and content learning. Confronting these challenges calls on the expertise of both language and content area specialists. The limitations of existing ELP standards cannot be attributed solely to the consortia of states charged with their development (i.e., WIDA and ELPA21). Rather, these limitations are the product of a longstanding division between the field of EL education and the content areas, which has allowed each to advance in relative isolation from the other. In the era of alignment, such division is no longer viable.

This article is intended to serve as a call to action for closer and more substantive collaboration between these historically divided fields. While content area educators and EL educators come to this collaboration with their own unique expertise, each must develop an understanding of the other for such collaboration to be substantive. Writers of ELP standards should be familiar with the nature of disciplines and the teaching and learning of content within and across disciplines. To use science as an example, writers of ELP standards must ask the question: “What is science?” They need to understand how science for K–12 is conceptualized in the Framework (NRC, 2012) and NGSS as these reflect the field’s most current thinking on what counts as science and how children learn science through developmental progressions. In the same way, writers of content standards should be familiar with the nature of language and how children acquire a second language (i.e., English). They must interrogate some of their preconceived notions and tacit assumptions about language, starting with the most fundamental, though rarely discussed, question: “What is language?”

Alignment between ELP standards and content standards will be possible only through ongoing and productive dialogue and sharing of expertise between the field of EL education and the content areas in research, policy, and practice. The most recent federal legislation for alignment between ELP standards and content standards could serve as a catalyst to promote such collaboration. Embracing this challenging work is essential to ensuring that EL standards support all ELs in accessing standards-based, grade-level instruction and assessment in the content areas as a path toward educational equity.

**NOTES**

1In recent years, there has been a shift in terminology from development to proficiency when referring to English language standards (Bailey & Carroll, 2015). This shift can be attributed to the newly mandated use of English language proficiency (ELP) assessments for accountability purposes in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era. Adding to this confusion, the influential Council of Chief State School Officers (2012) document uses the two terms in combination (i.e., “Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards”). Following the language used in the federal legislation, I refer to all English language standards as ELP standards except when referring to a specific set of standards that uses different terminology (e.g., WIDA English Language Development [ELD] standards).

2This issue is further complicated by the fact that other content standards, such as the Next Generation Science Standards, expect students to engage in argument by constructing claims and supporting
them with evidence and reasoning as early as kindergarten (Lee, 2017; National Research Council, 2012).

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