INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, CALIFORNIA

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Abstract. This article examines inclusive physical education (PE) practices for English learners (ELs) in elementary schools, with a primary focus on the state of California and reference to international frameworks. As the number of EL students continues to grow, ensuring equitable access to PE becomes increasingly important.

Purpose. The study aims to analyze educational policy, instructional models, and practical strategies that support the inclusion of ELs in PE, with an emphasis on fostering both physical competence and language development.

Methods. The research includes a review of key education policies – particularly the Every Student Succeeds Act and California's EL Roadmap – along with an analysis of evidence-based instructional models such as Sheltered Instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Theoretical foundations include sociocultural theory, second language acquisition theory, and UDL principles. Practical strategies are synthesized from literature and field-based examples.

Results. The study identifies inclusive strategies such as the use of visual aids, explicit vocabulary instruction, cooperative learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy as effective tools for engaging ELs in PE. Curriculum integration models such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) are highlighted for their ability to foster simultaneous physical and linguistic development. The research emphasizes the critical role of the PE teacher in creating multimodal, linguistically supportive, and culturally responsive learning environments.

Conclusions. Inclusive PE benefits not only ELs but all students by promoting empathy, collaboration, and respect for diversity. A comprehensive, integrated approach to teaching PE can reduce language barriers, enhance physical and cognitive engagement, and support academic equity in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: inclusive education, English learners, physical education, Universal Design for Learning, sheltered instruction, second language acquisition, California education policy.

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ІНКЛЮЗИВНЕ ФІЗИЧНЕ ВИХОВАННЯ ДЛЯ УЧНІВ, ЯКІ ВИВЧАЮТЬ АНГЛІЙСЬКУ МОВУ, В ПОЧАТКОВИХ ШКОЛАХ КАЛІФОРНІЇ

Анотація. Статтю присвячено вивченню інклюзивної фізичної культури (ФК) для учнів, які вивчають англійську мову як другу (EL – English learners), у початкових школах, з основним акцентом на штат Каліфорнія (США) та урахуванням міжнародних підходів. З огляду на зростання чисельності EL-учнів забезпечення рівного доступу до ФК є критично важливим.

Мета дослідження – проаналізувати політику, педагогічні моделі та практичні стратегії, які сприяють інклюзії EL-учнів у процесі викладання ФК, з особливим акцентом на розвиток мовних і фізичних навичок одночасно.

Методи дослідження: теоретичний аналіз освітньої політики (особливо Every Student Succeeds Act та California EL Roadmap), порівняльний аналіз інструкційних моделей (Sheltered Instruction, Universal Design for Learning), синтез емпіричних прикладів з освітньої практики, огляд теоретичних засад (соціокультурна теорія, теорія засвоєння другої мови, UDL).

Результати. Установлено, що інклюзивне навчання у ФК для EL-учнів ґрунтується на інтегрованому підході, що поєднує розвиток мовної компетенції з фізичною активністю. Використання візуальних матеріалів, чіткої інструкції, спільного навчання та культурно релевантного викладання сприяє кращому залученню EL-учнів. Моделі навчального плану, як-от CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) та SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), дозволяють одночасно формувати мовні та рухові навички. Підкреслюється роль учителя ФК як фасилітатора інклюзивного, мультимодального та культурно чутливого освітнього середовища.

Висновки. Інклюзивна фізична культура є не лише засобом підтримки EL-учнів, а й чинником підвищення якості освітнього процесу загалом. Вона сприяє розвитку емпатії, командної взаємодії та поваги до різноманіття серед усіх учнів.

Ключові слова: інклюзивна освіта, вивчення англійської мови, фізична культура, універсальний дизайн навчання, інтегроване викладання, Каліфорнія, політика освіти.

Golub P., Kohut I., Marynych V. Inclusive physical education for English language learners in elementary schools, California. Sport Science Spectrum. 2025; 2: 3–11
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32782/spectrum/2025-2-1

Голуб П., Когут І., Маринич В. Інклюзивне фізичне виховання для учнів, які вивчають англійську мову, в початкових школах Каліфорнії. Sport Science Spectrum. 2025; 2: 3–11
DOI: https://doi.org/10.32782/spectrum/2025-2-1

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Introduction. The rapid growth of English learners (ELs) in U.S. elementary schools has prompted educators to seek inclusive frameworks for all content areas, including physical education (PE). High-quality PE is an **academic subject** that contributes to students' physical, social, and cognitive development, and it must be accessible to ELs on equal terms with native English speakers [6; 7; 15; 17; 18]. Ensuring meaningful participation of ELs in PE requires alignment with education policies, use of inclusive instructional frameworks, integration of language development into the PE curriculum, and grounding in proven learning theories [12; 13; 19; 20]. This report reviews comprehensive national and state-level policy frameworks for inclusive PE, identifies instructional models and strategies for teaching ELs in PE, examines curriculum integration approaches that dual-focus on physical skills and language development, and discusses key theoretical foundations (sociocultural learning, Universal Design for Learning, and second language acquisition theory) that inform best practices. The focus is on U.S. frameworks –especially California – while also noting influential international perspectives.

National and State Policy Frameworks Supporting Inclusive PE for ELs

U.S. Federal Policies and National Guidelines

Federal education policies mandate that EL students have full access to the standard curriculum, including PE, and that schools take affirmative steps to support their language development in all subjects. The **Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)** continues strong accountability for ELs' progress and emphasizes their inclusion in a "well-rounded education" (which explicitly encompasses health and physical education). Civil rights guidance from the U.S. Department of Education further underscores these obligations. For example, a 2015 joint **Dear Colleague** letter from the Department of Education and Department of Justice cautions districts against any segregation or exclusion of ELs from non-academic subjects; it explicitly notes compliance issues when schools **segregate ELs in areas like recess, physical education, art, or music**, rather than including them with peers [1; 6; 7; 15]. In practice, this means ELs cannot be pulled out of PE for separate instruction without providing comparable PE access, and PE teachers must ensure ELs can participate meaningfully. In addition, Title III of ESSA provides federal funding to help districts implement programs and teacher training for EL inclusion across the curriculum. National professional standards also promote inclusive practice. **SHAPE America's National PE Standards** (2014) [11] emphasize that a physically literate student should "exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others" (Standard 4) and that quality PE programs be equitable and inclusive for all learners. While the national standards do not specifically single out ELs, the expectation of meeting every child's needs implies adapting instruction for students of diverse languages and cultures. SHAPE America and related organizations have published resources to help PE teachers support diverse learners (e.g. recommending visual aids, simplified language, and peer support) [11; 14; 16], aligning with broader frameworks like Universal Design for Learning. Together, these federal guidelines and national standards create a policy climate in which inclusion of ELs in elementary PE is not optional but required and supported.

California State Frameworks and Policies

California, with the largest EL population in the nation, provides a robust example of state-level frameworks for inclusive PE. **California Education Code §11300** requires that all EL students receive both **Integrated and Designated English Language Development (ELD)** as part of their schooling [2; 10]. *Designated ELD* is a separate block focusing on English development, but *Integrated ELD* means **ELD standards are taught in tandem with academic content standards in every subject** [2] – including physical education. This policy enshrines the idea that PE teachers are also language teachers in context; they must incorporate language objectives and supports within regular PE lessons. The **California Physical Education Framework** (2009) explicitly addresses English learners in its "Universal Access" chapter, offering guidance on creating an inclusive environment in PE for students at varying English proficiency levels [3; 9]. According to this state framework, PE teachers should use **Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)** strategies (also known as sheltered instruction) to make physical education content comprehensible to ELs [3; 9]. For instance, if teachers are not bilingual, they can employ SDAIE techniques such as *clearly enunciating speech, using simple synonyms for advanced terms* (e.g. explaining *"cardiorespiratory" means heart and lungs)*, and leveraging cognates between English and students' primary languages [3; 9]. The framework also emphasizes nonverbal and contextual supports: teachers should use **gestures, facial expressions, demonstrations, props, and visual aids** to clarify instructions and key concepts [3; 9]. Even common idioms in sports (e.g. "keep your eye on the ball") need to be explicitly explained or replaced with clear language for ELs [3; 9]. California's guidance further suggests allowing bilingual teacher aides or peer translators when available, and grouping EL students with patient, supportive buddies – or pairing newcomers with a peer who speaks the same home language – to ease communication [3; 9]. Notably, the framework insists that ELs **should not be exempted from PE or given a watered-down curriculum**; instead, they should receive appropriate scaffolding to engage with the same standards-based physical education content as their peers [6; 7; 15]. In sum, California's policy framework operationalizes inclusive PE through mandated integrated language instruction and detailed strategies, serving as a model for how state-level standards can support EL inclusion. Other states echo similar principles (for example, requiring content teachers to shelter instruction for ELs), but California's EL Roadmap and PE Framework are especially explicit in expecting PE teachers to contribute to ELs' language development while advancing physical literacy.

Instructional Frameworks and Strategies for Inclusivity in PE

Inclusive PE for ELs is underpinned by instructional frameworks that accommodate linguistic differences and facilitate content learning and language acquisition simultaneously. Two well-established frameworks in general education – **Sheltered Instruction** and **Universal Design for Learning** – are highly applicable in the PE context, alongside specific pedagogical strategies tailored for physical activity settings.

Sheltered Instruction (SDAIE/SIOP): Sheltered instruction is an approach originally developed for core academic subjects,

but its principles readily transfer to physical education. The core idea is to **adapt the delivery of content so that it is understandable to students who are still learning English, without diluting the content**. In PE classes, this entails using **"a variety of interactive and multimodal means to access information"** [3; 9]. Teachers modify their language demands: they speak **slowly and clearly, with proper enunciation**, and check frequently for comprehension. Vocabulary is taught explicitly – for example, introducing the names of body parts or movement skills with visual demonstration and repetition. The California PE Framework suggests defining advanced or domain-specific terms using everyday language (*"muscle" in English corresponds to músculo in Spanish*) and avoiding idiomatic expressions that might confuse ELs [3; 9]. When introducing a new skill (say, a basketball dribble or a yoga pose), a PE teacher might describe it in **simple phrases, show a live or video demonstration, and use gesture-rich cues** (pointing to body parts or modeling the action) so that EL students grasp the concept even if some English words are unfamiliar [3; 9]. Teachers are encouraged to hold up objects (e.g. a ball or beanbag) as they talk about them, and use pictures, pictorial charts, or even labeled diagrams to reinforce key terms. These sheltering techniques closely align with best practices from the **Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)**, a research-based model that emphasizes building background knowledge, explicitly teaching vocabulary, using visual aids, and integrating opportunities for interaction [3; 9]. In fact, high levels of student interaction are a hallmark of sheltered lessons; **cooperative learning activities**, such as small group games or pair exercises, not only engage students physically but also prompt them to communicate – thereby reinforcing language skills. Research confirms that **interactive methods benefit ELs** in PE: *"high levels of interaction are associated with enhanced learning of content and English"* [3; 9]. Therefore, PE teachers often incorporate partner work, team challenges, and peer coaching, creating structured talk opportunities (using simple English or a mix of languages) as students discuss rules, strategies, or provide feedback to one another. This social interaction is doubly beneficial: it helps ELs practice listening and speaking in a low-stress setting, and it bolsters comprehension as peers often intuitively scaffold each other's understanding.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): UDL is a framework aimed at removing barriers and providing **multiple avenues for learning** to accommodate the full range of learners' needs. In an inclusive PE class, UDL translates to offering content in multiple formats and allowing students various ways to participate and demonstrate understanding. For ELs, UDL-based planning means that language will not be the sole gatekeeper for engagement. For example, a PE teacher can present instructions both orally and visually – *showing pictures or video clips* of a skill alongside verbal explanation [3; 9]. They might provide written keywords (with translations if possible) on task cards or a "word wall" in the gym, but also rely on **demonstration and modeling** so that students can learn through observing and doing. To account for different language proficiency levels, teachers can encourage nonverbal responses: instead of answering verbally to check for understanding, EL students might use a thumbs-up/down signal or point to a picture (as suggested in the California framework) [3; 9]. Such **multiple means of representation and expression** align with UDL principles and ensure that a student with limited English can still process the lesson content and show what they know. UDL also promotes giving students choice and adjusting task difficulty – for instance, an EL student might choose to **demonstrate a concept physically** (showing a balance or exercise) rather than explaining it in words, or might use an app or drawing to illustrate their fitness plan instead of a written essay. These options lower linguistic barriers while keeping expectations high for skill learning. A recent SHAPE America case example highlights similar strategies: teachers used **short cue words and visual icons** to break down complex motor skills, "chunking" instruction into small steps and increasing practice opportunities so ELs could learn by repetition and see success without heavy verbal explanation [11; 14]. In sum, applying UDL in PE creates a flexible learning environment where ELs can thrive; it dovetails with sheltered instruction techniques, as both emphasize visuals, scaffolds, and differentiation.

Targeted Teaching Strategies: Within these broader frameworks, educators employ a range of concrete strategies proven effective for EL inclusion in PE:

Explicit Vocabulary Instruction: Successful PE teachers teach the language of movement very deliberately. They introduce key terms (for example, names of locomotor movements like *skip, hop, lunge*, or concepts like *goal, boundary, balance*) in context, explain their meaning, and have students practice using them. Strategies such as a *"Word of the Day"* in PE, word walls with images, or vocabulary games can reinforce academic language [5]. Clancy & Hruska (2005) recommend writing **language objectives** for each PE lesson – i.e. stating what ELs should be able to *"do with language during the lesson"*, such as *"describe a partner's movement using at least two new vocabulary words"* [4; 8]. By planning specific language outcomes (vocabulary, sentence frames for giving feedback, etc.), teachers ensure that language development is woven into physical activities [4, 8]. This intentional focus helps ELs learn English terminology integral to PE content (like body parts, actions, sportsmanship phrases) while they engage in the activity.

Visual Supports and Demonstrations: Visuals are indispensable in an EL-friendly PE class. Teachers use pictures, diagrams, or even stick-figure sketches to illustrate rules of a game or the sequence of a skill. They might show a short video clip of children performing a skill correctly vs. incorrectly and ask students to identify differences [3; 9]. During instruction, effective teachers frequently demonstrate the expected task (or enlist a student to model) rather than relying on lengthy verbal descriptions. A 2013 JOPERD article specifically advocates using visual supports to foster ELs' independence in PE, noting that when language is a barrier, *seeing* the task can make all the difference (Columna et al., 2013) [4; 8]. These supports help create that "comprehensible input" which second-language theory demands – ELs can connect the English words they hear with the actions they see.

Peer Pairing and Cooperative Learning: As mentioned, peer interaction is both a teaching tool and a language scaffold. Teachers often **pair EL students with bilingual buddies** or sympathetic partners who can help translate or demonstrate as needed [3; 9]. Small group activities are structured so

that ELs are actively involved (e.g., each student has a role like timekeeper, equipment manager, or team captain, which encourages responsibility and communication). Cooperative learning tasks – like team challenges where students must plan a strategy – encourage ELs to communicate in a low-pressure, meaningful context. Research by Echevarría, Vogt, & Short (2000) has shown that such *interactive, cooperative methods benefit both content learning and English acquisition* [3; 9]. Additionally, working with peers gives ELs a chance to hear English used by classmates (often using simpler language than a teacher might use) and to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes in front of the whole class.

Multilingual Resources and Support: Inclusive teachers recognize the value of students' home languages as a bridge to learning. They may allow and even encourage ELs to **use their native language** to discuss tactics with a same-language peer or to process instructions internally [5]. Some teachers label equipment or areas of the gym in multiple languages (especially for basic terms) or learn a few keywords in their students' languages (e.g., counting in Spanish during exercises, or greeting in Chinese). Where possible, important safety instructions might be conveyed in the child's first language as well. By validating and using ELs' L1 (first language) as a resource, teachers lower anxiety and make the content more accessible – a practice supported by sociocultural theory and translanguaging approaches. In cases with very limited newcomers, schools sometimes provide **bilingual aides or interpreters** for PE until the student gains basic English [3; 9]. Even technology can assist (translation apps or illustrated glossaries). The overarching principle is that language difference should not prevent full participation: any available tool (be it another language or visual or physical demonstration) is used to communicate expectations and content.

Culturally Responsive Teaching in PE: Culture and language are intertwined. Effective PE programs incorporate students' cultural backgrounds to make learning more relevant. This can mean including games, dances, or sports from the cultures represented in the class, giving ELs a chance to shine as experts and teach their peers. It also means **building an inclusive climate** that appreciates diversity – for example, discussing athletes from various countries, or adapting activities to respect cultural attire/modesty needs. Culturally responsive pedagogy in PE, as Young & Sternod (2011) note, involves *"celebrating individual differences, providing meaningful and relevant learning experiences, and insisting on high expectations for everyone"* [4; 8; 16]. When ELs see their identities valued, they are more likely to engage and attempt communication. One pedagogical concept, **"ethnolinguistically relevant pedagogy,"** has been proposed to blend culturally relevant teaching with sensitivity to language needs [4; 8]. This includes strategies like honoring the different ways students communicate nonverbally and adjusting to varying interaction styles across cultures. By being attuned to both culture and language, teachers empower ELs in the PE classroom.

In practice, teachers often combine these strategies fluidly. For instance, a 5th-grade PE lesson on teamwork might begin with a brief introduction of the word "cooperation" (with a student-friendly definition and a Spanish cognate if applicable), followed by a cooperative game. The teacher might demonstrate the game with student helpers, use simple English narration, and then have the class play. During the activity, the teacher encourages an EL student and a buddy to discuss their plan (allowing them to whisper in their first language if needed), and later asks the EL student to show the class one of the successful strategies their team used (demonstrating, rather than explaining verbally if the student is shy with English). Through such lessons, ELs gradually acquire not only physical skills but also the language and confidence to express themselves in the PE setting.

Curriculum Integration Models for Language Development in PE

Integrating language development with physical education requires intentional planning but can be highly effective. Rather than viewing PE as an "English-free" zone, educators now use **curriculum integration models** to simultaneously engage ELs in physical activity and strengthen their English skills. Two prominent models/approaches in this regard are **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)** and the incorporation of **Language Objectives** into PE curricula, both supported by emerging research and practice.

Integrated Content and Language Instruction (Content-ESL Integration): In the United States, the push for **Integrated ELD** means PE lessons include language-rich activities that align with English Language Development standards. A practical model is to plan each PE unit or lesson with dual objectives: *physical objectives* (aligned to PE standards) and *language objectives* (aligned to ELD or language arts standards). Clancy and Hruska (2005) introduced this approach for PE explicitly. They argue that PE specialists can "assist English language learners in developing language by implementing language objectives in their lessons" [4, 8]. For example, in an elementary soccer unit, a physical objective might be "Students will dribble a soccer ball with control using both feet," and a parallel language objective might be "Students will orally describe their dribbling technique using sequence words (first, then, next)." During the lesson, the teacher teaches transition words ("first, then, finally") in the context of explaining a skill progression, thus reinforcing language. The **SIOP model** offers a template for this: teachers activate prior knowledge (perhaps discussing games students played in their home country – connecting to known words), introduce new vocabulary pre-lesson (names of equipment, action verbs), then teach the content through sheltered techniques. At the end, they might have a reflective task where ELs use a sentence frame to express what they learned ("Today I learned how to ____."). By integrating such language tasks, PE becomes another venue for content-based language learning, similar to how science or math classes incorporate language support. Some schools have even implemented **co-teaching models** where an ESL teacher collaborates with the PE teacher to infuse more language instruction into PE time – for instance, the ESL teacher might facilitate a quick interactive vocabulary review or a bilingual discussion within the PE class. This kind of collaboration aligns with models of **Content-Based ESL** and has been noted as a best practice in districts aiming for holistic language support. Importantly, curriculum integration should be planned so that language learning **enhances** the PE experience rather than interrupting it. The California PE

Framework provides concrete examples of natural integration: using lettered beanbags to reinforce the alphabet while doing physical activities, or having students write down unfamiliar terms from a PE lesson to discuss later [3; 9]. In one example, "*letter recognition is reinforced by using beanbags with letters printed on them*" during an activity [3; 9]. In another, students practice writing by keeping a personal glossary of new PE terms they encounter [3; 9]. These activities marry movement with literacy practice. Even a simple "Simon Says" game in PE can double as language practice (following commands in English), akin to the **Total Physical Response (TPR)** method in language teaching which has students respond physically to language input. Thus, PE teachers can draw on techniques from language education – TPR, storytelling with acting out, echoing and repetition, etc. – to create lessons that serve dual purposes. The integration model ensures that ELs do not miss out on language learning when they leave the regular classroom for PE; instead, they get another reinforcing context where language is tied to action and visual cues, often making it more memorable.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (International Perspective): Internationally, **CLIL** frameworks (widely used in Europe) also illustrate how language learning can be embedded in subjects like PE. In some bilingual or immersion programs abroad, PE might be taught in a target language (for example, an English-taught PE class in a non-English speaking country), effectively using PE as a vehicle for language immersion. Studies of CLIL in PE have shown that students can indeed acquire new vocabulary and expressions related to sports and movement while simultaneously meeting physical education outcomes. The concept of CLIL aligns with sociocultural theory by situating language learning in meaningful content interactions. While CLIL is typically associated with teaching content in a second language, its underlying principle – a dual-focus on content mastery and language growth – is mirrored in U.S. integrated curriculum models for ELs. Another international example is the **"Language Friendly School"** initiative (in some European contexts) where every teacher, including PE teachers, is aware of language objectives and strategies to support multilingual students. These global approaches reinforce the idea that integrating language and content is beneficial across contexts. For instance, researchers Burden et al. (2013) advocated preparing PE teachers with intercultural and language pedagogy training, coining the term "*ethnolinguistically relevant pedagogy*" to emphasize teaching that respects students' linguistic identities while teaching content [4, 8]. Such a pedagogy in practice involves integrating simple language-learning moments into PE: e.g., briefly discussing how different languages express a movement concept, or having students learn to count or say "good job" in each other's languages as part of the class routine. These approaches not only build language skills but also foster inclusivity and global awareness among all students.

Interdisciplinary Curriculum Connections: Another model for integration is to connect PE with other subject areas in project-based learning, so that language-rich tasks naturally flow from physical activities. For example, an elementary class might do a cross-curricular unit where in PE they learn a series of dances from around the world (addressing PE standards and multicultural appreciation), and in their language arts block they write informational paragraphs about those dances or keep a journal of their feelings when dancing. ELs in such a unit get to physically experience the content first, which can make writing or speaking about it in English more accessible since they have a concrete reference. Similarly, PE can integrate with science or health lessons – e.g., students perform exercises in PE and then in the classroom chart their heart rates and write observations, hitting both PE and science/English standards. These models require coordination but can be powerful: they contextualize language development in real experiences. The curriculum integration approach aligns with the idea of educating the "whole child" and ensures ELs practice academic language in multiple modalities (speaking during PE teamwork, reading/writing when reflecting on an activity, listening to instructions, etc.). Crucially, the **thematic integration** keeps ELs engaged; rather than isolated language drills, they use English for authentic purposes related to enjoyable physical activities.

In summary, curriculum integration models show that language development need not be confined to English class – it can happen **alongside PE learning**, enhancing both. Whether through deliberate language objectives in each lesson or through interdisciplinary projects, ELs can be effectively engaged in "two for one" learning that advances their physical skills and their English proficiency together. This reflects a shift from viewing PE purely as playtime to recognizing it as a rich context for language practice, aligning with modern educational frameworks that value content-based language learning.

Theoretical Foundations Supporting Inclusive PE for ELs

Several theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for why and how inclusive practices benefit English learners in physical education. Key among these are **sociocultural learning theory**, **second language acquisition (SLA) theory**, and **Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles**. These theories, alongside related concepts like culturally relevant pedagogy and intercultural communication, explain the mechanisms by which ELs learn best in PE and justify the strategies discussed above.

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotskian Perspective): Sociocultural theory posits that learning is a social process, with knowledge constructed through interaction, language, and cultural tools. Lev Vygotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) suggests that children learn best when working slightly above their independent ability level with support from more knowledgeable others. In an inclusive PE setting, this translates directly into practices like **peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and teacher scaffolding**. When ELs participate in group activities, they are operating in a rich social environment where they can observe and imitate peers, receive immediate feedback, and gradually take on more complex tasks as their understanding grows. Language is central in sociocultural theory as both the medium of social interaction and a cognitive tool. Even if an EL is not yet proficient in English, the *social discourse* around a physical task (teammates encouraging each other, a friend explaining a rule one-on-one) mediates learning. The teacher's role is to scaffold the EL's participation – for example, initially pairing the EL with supportive peers (scaffold through social support), using gestures or bilingual cues (scaffold

through tools), and building on the student's existing cultural knowledge (connecting a new game to a familiar game from the student's home culture). Over time, these scaffolds can be removed as the student gains independence. The **sociocultural emphasis on context and culture** also supports the use of culturally relevant content in PE. By incorporating students' cultural games or dances, a teacher is tapping into the learners' prior knowledge and identity, which Vygotskyan theory would say facilitates meaning-making. Moreover, sociocultural theory underlies why **interaction-driven strategies** (like those in sheltered instruction) work: because "*learning is mediated by social interaction in a meaningful context.*" In fact, the success of **cooperative learning** for ELs in PE (noted in the CA framework and research by Echevarría et al.) is a direct affirmation of sociocultural tenets – when ELs converse, strategize, and problem-solve with classmates in the context of a game or activity, they are not only learning the task but also developing language through purposeful use [3; 9]. Another aspect of sociocultural theory is the idea of **cultural capital** and **funds of knowledge** that students bring. An inclusive PE teacher guided by this theory will value the diverse experiences ELs bring (perhaps a student was a soccer expert in their country, or learned martial arts from family) and create opportunities for those ELs to share and lead, turning the classroom into a community of learners where everyone's expertise is recognized. In short, sociocultural theory supports inclusive PE by encouraging collaborative, culturally-aware, and scaffolded learning experiences in which ELs can actively participate and gradually master both PE content and the English language through social engagement.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory: The field of SLA offers insights into how ELs acquire English and how PE can support (or hinder) that process. One key principle is **Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis**, which argues that learners need comprehensible input – language input just beyond their current proficiency (i+1) that they can understand with context clues – in order to acquire a new language. PE is uniquely suited to provide comprehensible input because instructions are often paired with demonstration and the physical context makes meaning concrete. For example, an EL might not know the word "stretch," but seeing classmates stretch as the teacher says "stretch your arms" makes the input comprehensible. The strategies of using visuals, gestures, and simplified speech all serve to make input in PE more understandable (thus aligning with Krashen's theory). **Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis** further suggests that students learn language better when they are not anxious or self-conscious. PE classes can lower the affective filter for ELs by being more informal and activity-based; many ELs who feel shy speaking in a formal classroom may open up on the playground or during a fun game. That said, if not managed well, PE could also raise anxiety (e.g., being forced to speak in front of the whole class to answer a question could be intimidating). Therefore, applying SLA theory, teachers strive to create a **low-stress, supportive environment** in PE – emphasizing effort and teamwork over perfection, so ELs feel safe to try using English. Another SLA concept is the **Interaction Hypothesis** (Long, 1996), which holds that language proficiency develops through meaningful interaction and communication breakdowns that prompt learners to negotiate meaning (ask for clarification, etc.). PE provides many opportunities for authentic interaction: students have to communicate to play games or solve tasks together. An observant teacher can orchestrate situations where ELs need to use a bit of English to communicate ("Which way should we pass the ball?") and peers naturally scaffold by rephrasing or modeling correct language. This negotiation of meaning in real time helps solidify language learning. Additionally, **Swain's Output Hypothesis** highlights the importance of learners producing language, not just listening. PE can encourage output in non-threatening ways: for instance, having ELs use simple English to encourage teammates ("Go, go, shoot!") or to celebrate ("We won!") or even to give a short report ("Our team got 3 points."). These utterances, while brief, are valuable language practice. Researchers Bell and Lorenzi (2004) emphasize that it is the responsibility of all teachers, including PE teachers, to both **ensure content learning and facilitate second-language acquisition** for ELs [4; 8]. Their work suggests using PE activities as contexts for vocabulary development and functional language use (like giving commands, asking questions, or describing actions). Indeed, some SLA techniques appear implicitly in good PE teaching – **Total Physical Response (TPR)**, a method where learners respond physically to verbal commands (e.g., "jump," "touch your toes"), is essentially a staple of early elementary PE and doubles as language practice. By aligning instruction with SLA theories (ensuring input is comprehensible, giving plenty of interaction and output opportunities, and maintaining a positive climate), PE teachers help ELs acquire English incidentally as they learn motor skills. This theoretical backing reinforces that language development in PE is not a distraction but rather a feasible and educationally sound goal.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): While UDL is often discussed as a set of guidelines rather than a learning theory per se, it is grounded in cognitive neuroscience about how diverse students learn. UDL's core principles – *multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement* – are very supportive of EL inclusion. From a theoretical standpoint, UDL recognizes that there is natural variation in learner needs and that curriculum should be designed from the outset to accommodate that variation. For ELs, this theoretical approach means that **language proficiency is just one dimension of learner variability**; instead of treating ELs as an "exception" to plan for separately, a UDL-minded teacher designs PE activity that have built-in options beneficial for all. For example, a station-based PE lesson might include picture instruction cards at each station – this helps ELs who need visual cues, but it also benefits younger readers or any student who needs a reminder, embodying the UDL idea of multiple representations. The theory behind UDL also draws on the concept of **removing unnecessary barriers**: in the case of ELs, an unnecessary barrier might be complex language in instructions. By simplifying language or pre-teaching vocabulary (a practice we've seen recommended by policy), the teacher is removing a barrier while still preserving the learning challenge of the physical task. UDL and SLA theory intersect on the idea of lowering barriers and affective filters. Additionally, UDL emphasizes learner engagement and choice – theoretically, this aligns with motivation research (e.g., self-determination theory) and applies to ELs by giving

them some autonomy. An engaged, self-motivated student will invest more in communication and learning. If an EL can choose, say, between two roles in an activity (timer or reporter), they might pick the one they are comfortable with linguistically; over time, as their confidence grows, they can try more language-heavy roles. This personalization is a UDL-driven practice that supports incremental growth. We see UDL's influence in many of the strategies already discussed: using **multiple modalities** to teach (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) ensures that if an EL does not catch something in English, they catch it through demonstration (multiple representation) [3; 9]. Allowing different ways for students to show understanding – maybe one student draws a diagram of a play, another explains it verbally, another physically demonstrates it – gives ELs alternatives to traditional language-heavy assessments (multiple expression). And providing choices or culturally relevant options in activities keeps ELs engaged by connecting to their interests (multiple engagement). In essence, UDL's research-based guidelines reinforce and systematize the intuitive adaptations good teachers make for ELs. By following UDL, a PE teacher isn't just accommodating ELs as an afterthought; they are proactively planning for a classroom where **linguistic diversity is expected and planned for**. This theoretical orientation shifts the mindset from "remediating" ELs to designing lessons that all students, including ELs, can access and excel in.

Cultural and Linguistic Asset Perspective: Underlying all these frameworks is a fundamental shift from a deficit view of ELs (focusing on what they lack in English) to an asset-based view (recognizing the skills and knowledge they bring). The **California English Learner Roadmap** and many scholars advocate an asset-oriented approach – sociocultural theory and culturally relevant pedagogy both support this by recognizing the value of home culture and language. When teachers operate from this perspective, they are more likely to implement inclusive practices because they see diversity as a strength to build on, not an obstacle. They might invite ELs to share a soccer cheer in their language or incorporate counting in multiple languages during warm-ups, signaling that multilingualism is valued. Theoretical frameworks like **Cummins' empowerment framework** for bilingual students also stress integrating students' identities into the curriculum as a way to advance academic success. In PE, this could mean acknowledging and celebrating the diverse physical activities students engage in outside of school (e.g., a student's expertise in a cultural dance or sport becomes part of the class content).

In summary, the convergence of sociocultural learning theory, SLA theory, UDL, and related educational theories provides a powerful justification for inclusive PE practices. Sociocultural and SLA theories explain *why* strategies like scaffolding, cooperative learning, and comprehensible input are crucial – because language and learning are social and developmental processes. UDL provides a *framework to operationalize* these strategies universally, designing PE instruction that is accessible to ELs from the start. These theories collectively support the notion that **when ELs are included and supported in PE, they are not only learning sports and games but also actively acquiring language and social skills in a holistic way**. The theoretical foundations therefore call for a learning environment in PE that is rich in interaction, supportive in multiple modes, respectful of cultural-linguistic diversity, and academically rigorous for all students.

Conclusion. Inclusive physical education for English learners in elementary schools is reinforced by a multi-layered framework of policies, pedagogical models, and theories. National and state policies (from federal civil rights law to California's integrated ELD mandate) establish that ELs have a right to equitable PE participation and language-supported instruction. Instructional frameworks like sheltered instruction and UDL translate these policies into classroom practice through concrete strategies – using visuals, simplifying language, encouraging peer interaction, and differentiating tasks – that enable ELs to access PE content and simultaneously develop English proficiency [3; 9]. Curriculum integration models demonstrate that physical education can dovetail with language development rather than exist in isolation; whether via carefully crafted language objectives within a PE lesson [4; 8] or broader CLIL-style units, ELs learn language best when it is embedded in meaningful content and activity. Finally, foundational theories provide the "why" behind these approaches: sociocultural theory reminds us that learning emerges in social contexts (justifying collaborative, culturally responsive PE practices), SLA theory guides us to make language input comprehensible and interactions plentiful in PE, and UDL principles ensure we plan for learner variability (including linguistic differences) from the outset. These frameworks converge on a common theme: **inclusion**. Rather than pulling ELs out or treating PE as an afterthought, the modern approach is to leverage PE's unique strengths – its interactivity, visual nature, and motivational potential – to support ELs. As one educational resource put it, helping ELs acquire English and promoting academic language "are not mutually exclusive" with teaching PE [4; 8], through thoughtful planning and a positive, asset-based mindset, PE teachers can make a significant contribution to ELs' language growth. Inclusive PE enriches the learning of all students, creating a classroom atmosphere of empathy, teamwork, and respect for diversity. By following the outlined frameworks and strategies, educators equip themselves to meet the dual challenge of improving physical skills and language skills together, ultimately ensuring that English learners are fully included in the joy and educational value of elementary physical education.

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