Teaching English Language Learners Across the Content Areas

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Complete the “What is….?” form with a partner.

Challenges for ELLs in Content Area Instruction
At your tables, list the challenges that ELLs experience in one of these content areas.

- Reading – Group 1
- Writing – Group 2
- Mathematics – Group 3
- Social Studies/History – Group 4
- Science – Group 5

Example

Social Studies
Text is written in the passive voice.

Science
Density of information on textbook page.

Challenges in Reading...

- Language is culturally driven
  – Idioms
  – Figurative language – similes, metaphors
  – Grammar rules – too many exceptions to the rules
  – Imagery and symbolism

Challenges in Reading

- Language is full of unknown vocabulary
- Story themes and endings can be inexplicable
- Unfamiliarity with analyzing characters and predicting outcomes.
Challenges in Reading

• Difficult text structure with a topic sentence, supporting details and conclusion
• Literary terms for story development are not understood
• Students not aware of information that the author left unsaid; the information that “everyone knows”

Challenges in Math

• Formation of numbers varies among language groups
• Measurement systems may vary
• Use of decimal point and comma vary
• Math is not spirally taught in many other countries

Challenges in Math

• Some students have never worked with manipulatives
• Some students learn by rote memory
• Math curriculum may be primarily calculation
• Mental math may be the norm

Challenges in Writing

• ELLs will:
  – Use limited vocabulary
  – Develop ideas first language and translate to English
  – Structure English according to familiar rules
  – Write less than native speakers of English and appear to be less capable

Challenges in Science

• Dense vocabulary and text of a page
• Vocabulary limited to what occurs in class and not outside of it
• Text often uses passive voice
• Labs and scientific method unfamiliar
• What is taught in class does not always match assessment
• Fast pace of text

Challenges in Social Studies

• Context familiarity
• Historical terminology
• Lack of experience expressing personal opinions
• Unable to decipher what’s important
• Seldom asked for alternative view about other countries’ conditions
Challenges in Social Studies

- Familiarity with using time lines
- Being able to take notes while listening to teacher
- Textbooks use complex sentences, passive voice and extensive use of pronouns

Challenges in Social Studies

- Historical concepts (e.g., privacy, democracy, human rights)
- Maps have nationalistic and cultural focus

7 Teaching Strategies for general classroom teachers...

Help teach ELLs more meaningfully

AND

Help meet the learning needs of all learners

Strategy # 1

Provide Comprehensible Input

Provide Comprehensible Input

- Comprehensible input is the most important strategy to be taught to teachers. ELLs must understand what is going on in the class in order to succeed.
- All of the other strategies presented here today relate back to comprehensible input.

Provide Comprehensible Input

English language learners acquire new language by hearing and understanding messages that are slightly above their current English language level.
Plan ahead
Think about how you will support ELLs to make the content meaningful and comprehensible.
Use concrete examples and real experiences. Visuals, modified teacher speech, realia, manipulatives.
Example: A field trip taken at the beginning of the unit.

Provide Comprehensible Input

• Modify Teacher Speech
  – Research shows that teachers speak about 170-180 words per minute and provide 1-2 seconds of wait time

• Elementary age students understand at the rate of 120-125 words per minute.
• High school students understand at the rate of 140-150 words per minute.
• What are the implications of this research? Discuss with partner

• Using shorter sentences with simpler meaning
• Stressing high frequency vocabulary, repeating and reviewing
• Watching for comprehension
• Adapt texts so concepts are easier

• Texts used in the mainstream classroom must be made accessible to ELLs.
  • This can be done in several ways.
    - Rewrite or retell text
    - Use books that are written on a lower language level.
Help ELLs become acquainted with conventions of text (table of contents, glossary, index, etc.).

Strategy #2: Activate Prior Knowledge

Activate Prior Knowledge

- Brain based research points to importance of linking prior knowledge to what is being taught.

- Teachers must consider the background knowledge of their students
  
  Example: Link names of cities in U.S. to cities in native country.

Activate Prior Knowledge

Teachers need to be aware of what ELLs and others do not know.

*Ex. Students from other countries will have very little background in U.S. history and difficulties with concepts such as democracy, free will, privacy.*
**ELL Students Speak for Themselves: Identity Texts and Literacy Engagement in Multilingual Classrooms (Cummins)**

- Cummins presents an alternative set of principles for promoting academic engagement among ELL students.
- Central to our argument are the interrelated propositions that:
  - ELL students’ cultural knowledge and language abilities are important resources in enabling academic engagement (Cummins);
  - ELL students will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning.

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**Activate Prior Knowledge**

Explicitly link content to students’ personal, cultural, and world experiences as well as prior learning.

Example: Understanding the growth of the cities in the 1800s requires knowledge of what a city is.

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**Strategy #3: Determine key concepts. Define unit, language & content objectives.**

- Write the key unit concept in student friendly language and display it in the room.
  - Ex: The development of cities caused new problems in the 1800s.
- Tie new learning to the key concept.
  - Ex: Families lived in tenements because so many new people moved to the city.
Determine key concepts. Define unit, and language & content objectives.

• At the beginning of each lesson, write a content object on the board.
  Ex. Today we will learn why people moved to cities in the 1800s.
• Revisit the content objective at each transition point in the lesson
• At lesson’s conclusion ask students if the objective was met.

Step 3: Determine key concepts. Define unit, and language & content objectives.

1. With your partner, decide what your language and content objectives will be for a lesson you have chosen.
2. Share your language and content objectives with another pair.

Strategy # 4: Make lessons visual

Examples
• Picture of a skyscraper
• Drawing of an elevator
• Photograph of Jane Addams
• Hull House in Chicago
• Map of the U.S. in the 1800’s
• Photographs of people living in a tenement, a cable car, automobile, and train
Strategy # 4 Make lessons visual

• Introduce the key concepts and vocabulary by telling a story about the text.

• Use graphic organizers and charts to organize information for ELLs.

Strategy # 4 Make lessons visual

Help teachers to routinely:
- Model highlighting techniques
- Teach students how to identify and note key concepts and vocabulary using:
  sticky notes,
  highlighters,
  wiki sticks

ELL student outline
Animals of the Forest
I. Living in levels
   A. A temperate forest makes a good habitat for all kinds of animals.
   B. Some forest animals live on ground
   C. The definition of habitat: The habitat is the place where an animal or plants usually lives in nature.
II. What Every Animal Needs
   A. Animals live in habitats that meet their needs.
   B. Animals live in places where they can find food.

Strategy # 5
Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Modify Vocabulary Instruction
Students acquire new vocabulary by indirect and direct instruction

Indirect learning occurs in multiple ways including:
- Interacting with others
- Being read aloud.
- Reading independently

Modify Vocabulary Instruction
ELLs need direct learning experiences as learning English and content indirectly does not occur routinely for all learners.
- ELLs are less likely to interact with others in English.
- Parents do not read aloud to students.
- Students unlikely to read extensively in English.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction
ELLs will use language more readily if they can pronounce the words.
(But knowing how to pronounce and spell words does not guarantee comprehension.)
Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Provide pronunciation instruction for students and have them repeat it 3 or 4 times. Review pronunciation at the beginning of each lesson.

Teach the pronunciation of proper names and places.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction

• Teachers should provide direct, explicit instruction of academic vocabulary.

• ELLs need much more exposure to new terms, words, idioms, and phrases than do English fluent peers.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction

• Teachers must know what’s been previously learned and experienced by their students.

  – For example: In teaching a unit about natural disasters, teachers might ask ELLs for information about the kinds of extreme weather conditions that are found in their native countries.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Select 5-8 essential terms, words, idioms, and phrases [TWIPs]

Connect them to student’s prior knowledge.

Use visuals.

Create activities that:

• Demonstrate meaning of TWIPs.

• Provide student’s with practice using TWIPs multiple times in context.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Tier 1 TWIPs

Tier 1 TWIPs include:

basic 1-2 syllable words or phrases used in everyday conversation (e.g., blue, pencil, chair).

Step 5: Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Tier 2 TWIPs

• more sophisticated tier 1 words.

• often one or two syllables longer than tier 1 words.

• Transition words that are used to mean and, but, and so such as also, however, and therefore

Adapted from Beck, McKeown, and Kucan. (2002). Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.
Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Tier 3 TWIPs

low frequency, often academic
multisyllabic TWIPs that are not likely to be used outside of class
(i.e. photosynthesis, quadratic equation, fraction, longitude, latitude, and iambic pentameter)

Adapted from Beck, McKeown, and Kucan. (2002). Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.

Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Keep two words walls:

1. Everyday TWIPs.
2. Unit or content-specific TWIPs.
Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Portable word walls can include:

- New words
- Old words/new use
- Specialized language
- Environmental words
- Slang

New Weather Words
- tornado
- cyclone
- updraft
- Tornado Alley
- wall clouds
- high pressure
- low pressure
- weather satellite

Old Words With New Meanings
- funnel
- mass
- pressure
- alley

People:
- meteorologist
- scientist
- storm chaser

Words describing tornadoes
- destruction
- violent
- extreme
- damage

Weather Words to Review
- cumulous clouds
- cold front
- cumulonimbus clouds
- warm front

Step 5: Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Support teachers to sort Word Walls into categories. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Buildings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trolley cars</td>
<td>Skyscrapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevators</td>
<td>Tenements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 5: Modify Vocabulary Instruction

Support teachers to use Word Wall sorted by category to help students complete a Cloze activity.

A new way of making tall buildings called ________ was discovered.

Electric ________ could take people up and down the _________. New forms of transportation such as ________ were invented to get people from one place to another.

Use cooperative learning

- If teacher want to include ELLs in the content instruction of their classroom, they should not lecture. Why?
- English native speakers understand only 14% of what is said by a teacher during a lecture.
- ELLs will understand even less.
ELLs benefit from cooperative learning structures. Give students a job in a group. Monitor that ELLs are participating.

ELLs are able to benefit from comprehensible input and output.

All small group configuration are not created equal.

Teacher A instructs students to work with a partner and complete a worksheet.

How does this impact ELLs learning?

Teacher B uses structured groups for student projects. Every student has a job and knows what they need to do.

Structured small learning groups helps build cooperation and sharing in your classroom.

Support use of ELLs’ learning styles.

Lecture style learning is difficult for ELLs

Some ELLs come from cultures in which collaboration is norm.

Beginning learners of English are usually visual and kinesthetic learners.

Teachers should appoint a Social Facilitator for small group work. This person keeps a tally sheet for group interaction.

Hana /////

Safwon //

Thomas //////////

Margo ///////

any partners activities no one will pick me as their partner and I felt really, really left out and kids also made fun of me because I looked different. and I couldn’t speak English properly. Teachers in school were really helpful; they tried their best to make me comfortable in class.
Strategy # 7
Modify homework and tests for ELLs.

Step 7: Modify homework for ELLs.
- Many teachers neglect to modify homework.
- Consider ELLs English proficiency level
- Base homework on what they can actually do on their own.
- Think of homework assignment as a continuation of the day’s lesson
- Give ELLs a written copy of key concepts and word wall vocabulary to take home.

Step 7: Modify assessments for ELLs.
- Base assessment on English proficiency level
- Think of assessment as a ‘must teach’
- Work backwards from assessment
- Use categorized Word Walls – base assessment on those words
- Provide student handouts of objectives and word walls to use to prepare for assessment.

Modify assessments for ELLs.
- Model sample responses
- Allow extra time
- Simplify language without losing meaning or use of higher order thinking skills.
  For example:
  What did Jane Addams do to improve the lives of immigrants in Chicago in the early 1900’s?
  Simplified:
  How did Jane Addams help poor people in Chicago?

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