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Online resources and instructional strategies for K-8 ELL teachers and students

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Online Resources and Instructional Strategies For K-8 ELL Teachers and Students

Elementary and middle school teachers face three challenges when working with ELL students:

1. Teaching grade-level content and concepts in a language the students understand so they progress at an appropriate rate.
2. Helping students develop the academic English language skills necessary for transition to English-only instruction.
3. Providing access to bridge the digital divide.

Many ELL students lack access to computers at home, and in schools they too often experience computers in terms of skill practice. We suggest that teachers and ELL students can use digital technologies for engaging in content learning in their first language and for developing English language skills, activities far more challenging and interesting than filling in blanks and clicking radio buttons. Although the majority of all Web sites are written in English, many Web resources do exist in other languages. Numerous strategies suggested here allow ELL students to develop academic language concepts and skills. Although we concentrate on Spanish speakers, many of the strategies and resources suggested will help teachers of other English language learners.

Strategies that Work

Using content embeddedness and common underlying proficiency, the following strategies address beginning and intermediate ELL students' needs. As students move through the stages

By Leslie D. Hall and Anne E. Campbell

What We Know

Most children who are non-native speakers of English become proficient in social or conversational English in about two years. Academic English proficiency, however, requires three to seven years to master depending on prior schooling, level of proficiency in the first language, aptitude for learning languages, and other factors.

An interpersonal level of proficiency is not enough to support the development of cognitive skills needed for content learning that demands more abstract understanding of language and discipline-specific vocabulary. The language of classroom

instruction must be intentionally embedded in meaningful context for ELL students to develop conceptual understanding. This is known as context-embedded communication.

In addition, the principle of common underlying proficiency suggests that the broader the vocabulary development and the deeper the conceptual understanding in the first language, the easier it will be for the student to transfer this vocabulary and understanding to English.

Many Spanish-speaking students come from working-class homes where parents may have limited formal education, and as a result they don't have the life experiences or vocabulary that prepare them for school success. According to this principle, providing experiences and the vocabulary to accompany those experiences in Spanish for Spanish-speaking students builds on the conceptual foundations they bring to the classroom. Spanish-language Web resources provide teachers and students with free, high-quality resources for concept development and language acquisition.

of English language learning, strategies used at previous levels are still appropriate. (*Editor's Note:* See "What We Know," above.)

Beginning ELL students need many clues such as gestures, objects, pictures, or even a translator in academic settings. Activities should be concrete and use movement whenever possible. Use all learning modalities—auditory, visual, and kinesthetic/haptic—to simplify or expand ideas and to provide direct definitions and comparisons to previous learning. See *Tips on Communicating* in the Resource section (page 35).

Use as many visual cues as possible during instruction. Such cues include

drawing on the board; showing well-labeled pictures, illustrations, and photographs; directing students' attention to key elements in the visuals; generating charts and graphs on the computer; and using sites such as Pict4Learning and The Internet Picture Dictionary. Concept mapping offers another way to help students visualize relationships in content areas and literature. Graphic Organizers for Content Instruction contains 12 PDF files of generic graphic organizers.

A digital camera and a computer are extremely flexible tools for working with ELL students. Take photographs of classroom routines or the stages of a project such as an experiment. Take

the camera on neighborhood walks and field trips. Later, label the photographs to build vocabulary or develop sequencing activities that link language directly to the students' experiences.

Assuming students' familiarity with common foods or cultural experiences can lead to misunderstood concepts. Prepare unfamiliar foods such as waffles in class and have the students sample them. Ask someone to take photographs of the process. These can be made into booklets and sent home. Again, the photographs can be used in sequencing and vocabulary activities. Cultural experiences such as camping and American football may also be unfamiliar to Spanish-speaking students. Using advanced image-searching techniques in your favorite search engine, locate pictures of these experiences. Use them to build cultural understanding and vocabulary.

Children's Books

For beginning ELL students, record picture books in English. Include a signal to indicate when the students should turn the page as they listen to and read the book. When making English recordings for ELL students in grades four through eight, record yourself, another teacher, or someone outside your class. You may have native English speaking students in your class who could make the recordings; but ELL students in this age group can be embarrassed if being read to by peers. For these older students, English recordings of textbook chapters, non-fiction books that support unit topics, and short novels can be useful.

In grades 4-6, keep a variety of picture books in the classroom. During silent reading time, encourage all students to read or reread their favorite books. Suggest that ELL students take the books home to read to younger siblings.

Increase your students' vocabularies and conceptual understandings by recording, or asking someone who is fluent in the native language to record, a picture book. This is a good way to involve parents or advanced high school students learning a language. Use these recordings and books in listening centers.

Recordings in English work well with intermediate ELL students to increase their vocabularies and to model reading strategies. For these students, in addition to recording the text, point out objects and actions in the illustrations. Ask the students to relate the illustrations to the story and to make predictions. For younger intermediate ELL students, picture books work well. For grade four through eight students, find books with high interest, simple English vocabulary, and a variety of fiction and non-fiction subjects. Many English language novels have been adapted for use with ELL students. Publishers such as Cinco Puntos Press and series such as *Penguin Readers* are good resources.

For ELL students with Spanish-language reading skills, fully bilingual books, with text in both English and Spanish, provide content in Spanish while modeling English language skills. See Dr. Denise Agost's site, Culture and Language, Words and Art: Fully-Bilingual Picture Books and others for appropriate books. Wordless picture books also offer opportunities for students to practice language skills.

Provide intermediate language learners with recordings and materials in Spanish. It is especially effective in content areas to find materials and to make recordings for the subjects currently being studied. In science and math, the Web site Activities Integrating Math and Science offers many fun and well-researched activity books in

both English and Spanish. Additional Spanish-language sites have been created by agencies as diverse as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and organizations in Spain and Latin America. To determine whether the complexity of the material is appropriate for your students, use Dictionary.com. Having your ELL students use these materials just before whole-class instruction will give them a preview of the concepts and help them attach English vocabulary to the concepts previewed in Spanish.

Conclusions

Basing instruction on the principles of content embeddedness and common underlying proficiency provides scaffolding needed by many students in any classroom. Likewise, the suggested instructional strategies address multiple learning styles and cognitive abilities to the benefit of all students. In addition, engaging learning activities utilizing digital technologies can ensure that the digital divide between ELL students and native English speakers does not continue to widen.

Resources

Pedagogical Resources
Tips on Communicating: <http://www.everythings.net/services/tipsoncommunicating.php>

Concept Maps
 Graphic Organizers for Content Instruction: http://www.everythings.net/services/graphic_organizers.php

Dictionaries
 Dictionary.com Translator: <http://dictionary.reference.com/translate/text.html>

Sources of Illustrations and Photographs
 The Internet Picture Dictionary: <http://www.picturedictionary.com/english/ill-in-the-blank.php>
 Pict4Learning: <http://www.pict4learning.com>

Picture Books
 Culture and Language, Words and Art: Fully-Bilingual Picture Books: <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~de22/fully.html>

Content Area Resources**Science**

AIMS: Activities Integrating Math and Science:
<http://www.aimsedu.org>

Spanish-Language Science

Anaclea—Teacher Links: Science: <http://anaclea.homestead.com/sciencetopics.html>

Anaclea—Teacher Links: Nutrition: <http://anaclea.homestead.com/nutrition.html>

Ciencia para Chicos: http://www.fisicarecreativa.com/sitios_vinculos/ciencia/children.htm

Curiosikid: <http://www.curiosikid.com/view/index.asp?pageMS=23040&ms=158>

La Ciencia es Divertida: <http://ciencianet.com>

Math

Anaclea—Teacher Links: Mathematics:
<http://anaclea.homestead.com/math.html>

At Home with Math-Diez Actividades

Cotidianas para Padres y Niños:

<http://athomewithmath.terc.edu/>

Kentucky Migrant Technology Project—

Math and Science Resources: <http://www.migrant.org/assets/math/>

Social Studies

Celebrating César Chávez: <http://celebratingcesarchavez.homestead.com>

For an annotated list of these and other resources, see <http://www.iste.org/ll>



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