

STRATEGIES AND CONTENT AREAS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Language and literacy education for students who are English language learners (ELLs) has become a topic of interest for many educators. However, educators often disagree on the best strategies for teaching ELLs. Six selected strategies and content areas for teaching ELLs are provided to include strategies for teaching specific skills, sample storybooks for building literacy skills, and so on. Assessment with a sample rubric to include language reduced proficiency is also provided.

Keywords: English language learners, strategies, content, assessment

Introduction

Language and literacy education for students who are English language learners (ELLs) has been well cited in the research as a current hot topic (Anthony, 2008). However, educators and other school professionals often disagree on the best way to teach ELLs. Moreover, programs to address the needs of ELLs vary greatly. The child's first experience with school, both positive and negative, has shown to have a lasting effect. Therefore, in order to meet the needs of ELLs, educators must provide the most conducive environment for learning as possible.

Getting Started

English language learners (ELLs) are one of the largest groups to struggle with literacy (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). Because of this, focus of instruction should be placed on the learn-

er's ability to comprehend the lesson content and not on the learner's language proficiency (Myburgh, Poggenpoel, & Rensburg, 2004). Moreover, research has indicated that ELLs benefit from the same explicit, systematic instruction proven to be effective for native English speakers (Mathes, Pollard-Durodola, Cardenas-Hagen, Linan-Thompson, and Vaughn, 2007). Teachers of ELLs should employ strategies in their classrooms to benefit all of their students. See Table 1 for six strategies and content areas for teaching English language learners.

The Six Strategies and Content Areas

Drama and Movement

Incorporating physical experiences such as drama and movement in reading instruction has shown to be fun for children. For ELLs especially, drama and movement has

Table 1

Six Selected Strategies and Content for Teaching English Language Learners

Strategy/Content	Description	Examples
Drama and Movement	Vocabulary	Acting out a story which includes new vocabulary words.
	Reader's Theatre	Read and dramatize a short script
	Games	Play movement games to mimic actions, sounds, and concepts.
Math	Basic concepts	Measure with body
	Rhythms	Clap to poems or songs
	Patterns	Kinesthetic movement
Music	Culture	Motivate and stimulate
	Home Language	Word play, chants, songs, repetition
	Instrumentation	Drums or Orff instruments
	Vocabulary	Hand signs or gestures
Science	Environment	Experiences with various environments
	Vocabulary	Experiments
	Involvement	"I Spy" walks
Social Studies	Navigation	Role play, Four Corners game
	Shared	Field trips, guest speakers, experiences
	Graphic	Venn diagrams, series of events chains,
	Organizers	compare and contrast matrices, T-charts
	Collaboration	Small peer groups, lively discussion
Storybook Reading	Vocabulary	Storybooks, experience with words
	Comprehension	Explicit print referencing
	Overall Literacy	Scaffolding
	development	Dialogic reading
		Word elaboration
	Scripted lessons	
	Initial sounds	

been shown to help with decoding, fluency, and vocabulary (Sun, 2003). Moreover, good teaching pedagogy should not be limited strictly to reading instruction. Early childhood teachers often use play and drama for learning experiences as appropriate for that stage and age of development for various content areas (Royka, 2002).

Reig & Paquette (2009) suggested the use of games to aid ELLs in classroom instruction. For example, *We're Movement Machines* was a game to mimic machines in motion. *Falling Rain Dance* to imitate weather in movement was another such teaching and learning game. Another game, *Strike up the Gadget Band*, to explore sounds and actions of ordinary kitchen gadgets, was also shown to benefit learners, especially ELLs.

Math

Classroom teachers must employ strategies to help ELLs with basic mathematics concepts. Furthermore, mathematic concepts can be taught kinesthetically. An example would be for students to measure items using their body parts such as arms, legs, or hands. Math concepts such as rhythms and patterns can also be taught kinesthetically (Church, 2001). For example, teaching aides such as *Counting 1 to 20* by Jack Hartman, *Everything Has a Shape* by Hap Palmer, and *Shapes All Around Us* by Music Movement & Magnetism were methods in which ELLs mastered mathematics concepts.

Music

In addition to movement strategies, music can also be used to motivate and

stimulate ELLs who are struggling with language development (Abril, 2003). Basic music concepts can be taught through games such as *Musical Follow the Leader*. Another strategy to help ELLs learn through music were activities which actively engaged them with instruments, such as drums or Orff instruments.

Vocabulary for basic music concepts, as with other content areas, can be taught with hand signs or gestures (Abril, 2003). Word play, chants, and songs are other examples for teaching music to ELLs. Another example of a teaching tool for ELLs was to use music with repetition, even silly songs (Abril, 2003).

Science

Pray & Monhardt (2009) proposed a process for teaching science to ELLs as follows: a) determine appropriate skills and concepts, b) determine specific activities, c) include students' background knowledge, and d) appropriately assess student learning. Other teaching strategies, such as providing stimulating environments such as oceans, swamps, or parks in science instruction, provided necessary shared learning experiences (Rillero, 2005). In addition, taking "I Spy" walks (Rosenow, 2008) and using science experiments (Rivkin, 2005) to promote vocabulary were also important strategies for teaching ELLs.

Social Studies

Role play and the Four Corners game for navigational words and skills have been suggested by Rieg & Paquette (2009) to teach social studies. Tompkins (2009) cau-

tioned to include shared language experiences to read, talk, listen, or write about social studies content for ELLs. Further, content related field trips and invited guest speakers were ways to include shared language experiences. Another strategy was the use of graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams, series of events chains, compare and contrast matrices, and T-charts to reinforce the language (Weisman, E.M. & Hansen, L.E., 2007).

An example of peer collaboration in social studies classrooms to include ELLs

was to make charts to compare and contrast geographic regions throughout the United States. Further, students may work in small groups for rich discussion, and then write graphic organizers to summarize main points to reduce language (Weisman, E.M. & Hansen, L.E., 2007).

Storybook Reading

Research argued that vocabulary which affected reading fluency as well as comprehension for ELLs can be predicted by a student's level of vocabulary knowledge

Table 2

Suggested Storybooks and Strategies for Teaching ELLs

Strategy/Content Area	Storybook	Author
Vocabulary	A Letter to Amy	Keats, E.J.
	The Wind Blew	Hutchins, P.
	The Ugly Vegetables	Lin, G.
Comprehension	Jump, Frog, Jump!	Kalan, R.
	Good Night, Gorilla	Rathmann, P.
	Chugga-Chugga,	Lewis, K.
	Choo-Choo	
Scaffolding/Dialogue: building overall early literacy development	Corduroy	Freeman, D.
	Big Red Barn	Brown, M.W.
	Jesse Bear,	Carlstrom, N.W.
	What Will You Wear?	
	Noisy Nora	Wells, R.
	One Dark Night	Wheeler, L.

(Grabe, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987). Moreover, vocabulary can be enhanced by learning words in context and providing opportunities for oral response (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004). In addition, differentiating between important and non-important text, and engaging in peer conversations about the text were shown to be important indicators of success in comprehension strategies. See Table 2 for suggested storybooks aligned specif-

ically to suggested strategies for effective teaching to ELLs.

Assessment

As with any assessment, the primary purpose has been to evaluate whether the student has met the desired learning objectives. When creating assessments, teachers should include accommodations for language ability (Pray & Monhardt, 2009). For example, the use of one or two word

Table 3

Sample Rubric for Inquiry-Based Science Lesson on Magnets

English Language Ability		
	Excellent	Revise
Beginning	Demonstrates or presents findings with one or two word descriptors and/or pictures with the use of "helper sentence starters." Each presentation contains a question, a plan for investigation, a description of the data, and conclusions.	Demonstrates findings with one or two word descriptors and/or pictures. However, the presentation omits one or more key features and does not thoroughly describe the key features.
Intermediate	Presents findings using sentence descriptors and/or pictures. Each presentation contains a question, a plan for investigation, description of the data, and conclusions.	Presents findings using Sentence descriptors and/or pictures. However, the presentation omits one or more of the key features and does not thoroughly describe the key feature.
Advanced	Presents findings using	Presents findings using

<p>paragraph descriptors and/or pictures. Each presentation contains a question, a plan for investigation, a description of the data, and conclusions.</p>	<p>paragraph findings and/or pictures. However, the presentation omits one or more of the key features and does not thoroughly Describe the key features.</p>
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Note: National Research Council (1996). *National science education standards*.

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descriptors to describe concepts after the vocabulary has been taught has shown to be useful for ELLs. Further, assignments as well as assessments should include language reduced proficiency. See Table 3 for a sample rubric for an inquiry-based science lesson on magnets.

Conclusion

Strategies employed to aide any struggling learners were shown to be equally, if not more, effective for teaching ELLs. Several classroom strategies and content area suggestions were made in this article, but it is certainly not an exhaustive list. Good teaching strategies for all students have been proven as good teaching strategies for ELLs. Good strategies that work for any struggling learners may also benefit ELLs. Because of this, all students, including English language learners, will have a better chance at proficiency when presented with these strategies.

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