

Teaching Academic Vocabulary Usage to Students who are English Language Learners (ELLs)

Explicitly instruct vocabulary in context:

- All students need direct instruction of vocabulary; however, it is imperative for students who are English language learners (ELLs). They need much more exposure to new vocabulary than their native, English-speaking classmates (August & Shanahan, 2006).
- Students who are ELLs need to learn cognates (related words), prefixes, suffixes, and root words to enhance their ability to make sense of new lexicon (special vocabulary). Understanding context clues, such as embedded definitions, pictures, and charts, build a conceptual framework that students who are ELLs need in order to comprehend the text.
- New vocabulary needs to be explicitly taught, and each new word should be directly linked to an appropriate strategy.
- Students who are ELLs should actively engage in holistic activities **to practice new vocabulary** because learning words out of context is difficult for students who are ELLs. Even if they memorize the meanings of the words on a list, they will not be able to use the words in their own writing or verbal production until they really understand the meanings.
- Pronounce unfamiliar words for students, and have them discuss whether they have heard or seen the words before and in what context.
- Introduce the vocabulary in a familiar and meaningful context and then again in a content-specific setting.
- Provide experiences that help demonstrate the meaning of the vocabulary words.
- Diagrams and photographs are particularly helpful.
- Amplify, don't simplify academic language usage. When teaching students who are ELLs, amplifying access to the linguistic context means providing students with more than a single opportunity to come to terms with the language and concepts involved. Multiple clues and perspectives increase students' opportunities to construct understanding.

Build background knowledge:

- Activate prior knowledge by explicitly linking previously taught text and students' experiences to the new vocabulary.
- Review relevant vocabulary that was already introduced, and highlight familiar words that have a new meaning.
- Access the knowledge that students bring from their native cultures. In learning about tornadoes, for example, students can talk about extreme weather found in their home countries and use the Internet to find examples of such weather.
- Students can watch video clips from the school library, Internet resources, and carefully selected educational television programs. These activities will increase academic vocabulary usage and provide students who are ELLs with background knowledge.
- Key vocabulary can also be introduced through activities that scaffold students' comprehension of academic language. Participation in a variety of activities is central in the development of knowledge. Students develop higher-order functions as they engage in activities that require them to use academic language. It is through these activities that students internalize the key vocabulary needed to learn new content or a new story.

References:

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). Executive summary. In *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Echevarria, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. (2000). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners: The SIOP Model*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Walqui, A., & van Lier, L. (2010). *Scaffolding The Academic Success of Adolescent English Learners: A Pedagogy of Promise*. San Francisco: WestEd.

Provide a variety of activities to practice new vocabulary:

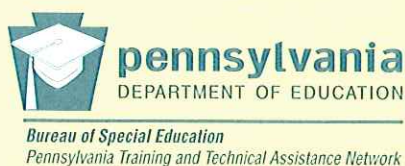
- Engage students in collaborative activities beyond their individual ability to perform, but with ample supports so students feel safe and trust that their mistakes will not be held against them.
- Lesson materials must be multimodal, using visual and auditory enrichment as well as the text itself; and the work around those materials must be multi-sensory, employing all senses. Texts must be read; conceptualized through illustrations; talked about in group work; interpreted through stories, dramatization, and writing; and connected to other texts and experiences.

Promote oral language development through cooperative learning groups:

Students who are ELLs need ample opportunities to speak English and authentic reasons to use academic language. Working in small groups is especially beneficial because students who are ELLs learn to negotiate the meanings of vocabulary words with their classmates. When students work in pairs or small groups, they can better understand and discuss the key concepts of the content area unit.

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