Teaching Vocabulary and Comprehension to English Language Learners

21st century strategies for all teachers
Presenters

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Background Information on ELLs
- Vocabulary
- Activity
- Comprehension
- Activity
- Questions and Answers
- Handouts
Introduction

- So much to teach, so little time…
  - “I Fish, Therefore I Am”
- How do we get students to enter into a meaningful discussion?
- How do we get students to apply what they know to other situations?
- How do we get students to remember beyond the test or project?
Background Information on ELLs

- Important for ELLs to complete a home language survey when they arrive in your classroom.
- ELLs need to feel that the teacher believes in them.
- ELLs are looking for relationships with their teachers.
- ELLs need to feel their cultural background is appreciated.
- ELLs need their teachers to bridge their prior knowledge with what they are learning.
- ELL teachers need to make it real for the student.
Background Information on ELLs

- Communication with the student’s language support teacher is vital.
- Become familiar with your student’s English language proficiency level or tier.
- Foster their language growth according to ACCESS tier.
Tiers of English Proficiency Levels according to ACCESS scores

Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking

- Tier A - low level English proficiency
- Tier B - intermediate English proficiency
- Tier C - high level English proficiency; nearing native speaker proficiency
Teaching Key Vocabulary

“There is little benefit to selecting twenty-five to thirty isolated vocabulary terms and asking ELLs to copy them from the board and look up their definitions in the dictionary.”

Teaching Key Vocabulary
Teaching Key Vocabulary

Determine:

- which words in a unit are *essential* to know
- which words are *important* to know
- which words are *nice* to know
Reference:

Meaningful ways to teach vocabulary to ELLs. (Banchowicz and Fischer, 2000)
Teaching Key Vocabulary

1. ELLs should actively develop their understanding of words and ways to learn them. Teachers should provide semantic maps, word sorts, concept definition maps, etc.
Teaching Key Vocabulary

2. ELLs should find an individualized vocabulary strategy that works for them.
Vocabulary Strategies

- Make a vocabulary book, on paper or on note cards
- Design an ABC PowerPoint of important words for a particular unit
- Utilize or create a graphic organizer for vocabulary words i.e. Frayer Model
- Create a “The Most Important Thing About…” vocabulary book
- Interact with words using word sorts/splash
Teaching Key Vocabulary

3. ELLs should be immersed in the key words: display word walls, create personal dictionaries or lists, draw pictures and place them on bulletin boards.
Teaching Key Vocabulary

4. ELLs should have an opportunity to build on multiple sources of information to learn new words.
Vocabulary Activities

- Word sort for pre and post-reading
- Word Splash
Comprehension

Confidence

A Letter to Mrs. Jago
I was a girl, eager to learn,
eager to catch up with the others.
But the problem was that I was too shy.
One day you asked me,
“What would have Penelope felt after Odysseus returned?”
And I answered, “Very sad.”

I was afraid, afraid of letting my voice be heard,
Afraid of people hearing my accent,
Afraid that the class might think me stupid.

The next day
when I dragged my heavy feet to class,
You softly smiled at me and said “Hi,”
And everything was okay.

It was such a little thing,
And you might not even remember this,
But it will stay forever in my mind.

Now I have more pride in myself,
Though not brilliant in my writing.
Mrs. Jago, thank you for understanding
And patiently waiting
Until I could find the words.

-Yoo Hyun (Jean) Kim
Mata Aguilar, C., Danling, F., Jago, C. English Language Learners in the Classroom (2007) Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH
Affect

- Offer opportunities for your students to practice their new words by listening and rehearsing
  - Use tape recorders, paired reading, podcasting and computers
  - Lowers their anxiety the more they practice
    - More confidence
    - Not as much fear of embarrassment
Making Connections

- Make three types of connections in every lesson
  - Within the lesson
  - Across other lessons
  - In and out of school applications and activities
Making Connections

Reader’s background knowledge influences reading comprehension

“The innings opened briskly. Mr. Barrow, who was rather a showy bat, though temperamental, took the bowling at the factory end of the pitch and cheered the spirits of his side by producing twos in the first over. Mr. Garrett, canny and cautious, stonewalled perseveringly through five balls of the following over and then cut the leather through the slips for a useful three.” (From Dorothy Sayers”, Murder must advertise, 1967, p.250).

When prior knowledge is activated through making connections, it enhances comprehension and reading skills
Meaningful Discourse

- Regular skill-building on discussions that contain different perspectives
  - Lead groups so students eventually learn to say, “I understand you, but I disagree”
- Considering another perspective is a higher order thinking skill that is important for reading comprehension
Comprehension Activity

- You are all seated according to an imaginary economic “class of people”
- You will be given jobs, eat food and live in a space that matches your economic lifestyle.
- We will give you 5 minutes in your “standard of living”.
Meaningful Discourse

Tell what you saw
- Each economic group

Tell how you felt
- Each economic group

Do you think that this models real life?

You would now be ready to read a chapter on standard of living in an economics unit.
Questions and Answers

From audience
Handouts

Feel free to pick up handouts on additional strategies and information about vocabulary and comprehension as you exit the room.

» Thank you for joining us today!

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