

Effective teachers understand that English learners are studying complex concepts and processing new content in a new language. These students are capable of meeting high academic standards but require adjustments to the way instruction is presented. If their language needs aren't taken into consideration, they risk becoming long-term English learners.

There is substantial evidence that effective teaching is critical to the success of all students, but in the case of English learners, it begins with believing that these students can be successful. Studies have

in its sentence structure, level of vocabulary, forms, and functions. Use of academic language permeates even those standards that don't explicitly use the term "academic language" (Walqui and van Lier, 2016). For example, take the required language skills that are reflected in some state standards. Students are asked to execute all of the following:

- Use questions to connect ideas from several speakers.
- Move from explaining one's own ideas to explaining the ideas of others.
- Summarize and synthesize points of disagreement.
- Make logical inferences from the meaning of text.

- Creating daily opportunities to interact with peers about the lesson's content.
- Using language frames to support development of writing and oral language.
- Teaching a set of academic vocabulary words intensively over several days.
- Using cognates across languages when possible (e.g., *production* and *producción*).
- Providing multiple exposures to and experiences with key academic vocabulary.

Many of these recommendations are good for all students, however, they are critical for providing access to grade-level content for English learners. In addition to an emphasis on academic English during content teaching, English learners need to spend specific time each day focusing on English Language Development (ELD) or English as a Second Language (ESL).

Designated ELD/ESL

When Nestor is in his ELD group, he is able to talk about the text with a partner or a small group, which increases his comprehension. He also has more opportunity to practice using academic language. Nestor's experience supports the perspective that second-language learning is a social process developed primarily through meaningful and motivating interactions with others (Saunders, Goldenberg & Marcelletti, 2013). The Common Core and other state standards emphasize development of oral language skills, and English learners need focused instruction on how to use English in various ways and for specific purposes. Research indicates that students who receive focused second-language teaching made significant gains (Saunders et al., 2013)

There are a variety of standards that can be used to guide instruction during this designated instructional time, including state ESL or ELD standards (e.g., California and Texas) and national standards such as TESOL, WIDA, and ELPA21 standards. Teachers utilize these standards for lesson planning and teaching.

During ELD/ESL time, English language development is the primary focus of instruction with core literacy content used as the vehicle for learning. In this way, language is learned in context and important knowledge and concepts are reinforced through language practice. Students are exposed to the same vocabulary and text studied during core literacy time and as a result they develop a deeper understanding of the text and its associated vocabulary.

Intentional, Purposful Redundancy. English learners benefit from having words and ideas presented multiple times in a variety of ways. The additional practice with the same or related vocabulary and concepts during designated language study provides the intentional purposeful multiple exposures that these students need to acquire academic language and literacy. When they return to whole-group instruction, they are better equipped to participate in grade-level literacy lessons with their English-speaking peers.

The vast majority of academic struggles are attributed to low literacy levels. Researchers and others have suggested that a credible, plausible approach for helping English learners improve language and literacy skills is to capitalize on ELD/ESL time by reinforcing content used in literacy lessons. Introducing students to a new, unrelated vocabulary and text during ELD/ESL time is counterproductive; that protected time needs to be used to provide English learners with the vocabulary and skills they need to be successful during literacy instruction.

Summary

Improved academic outcomes for English learners begin with teachers who believe that English learners are capable of learning grade-level content alongside their English-speaking peers. English learners benefit from both integrated content and language teaching, as well as from a specific time each day when the focus is on English language development. The reciprocal relationship between literacy lessons and ELD/ESL instruction provides optimal learning opportunities for English learners. When the necessary instructional supports are provided, these students' academic performance and language proficiency improve (Short, Echevarria & Richards-Tutor, 2011), and will result in fewer students becoming long-term English learners (Olsen, 2014).

References

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