

Time-Honored Scaffolds

Frequent Questions and Concerns About English Language Learners



Time-honored ESL scaffolds—the instructional tools of the profession—offered in this section address the questions and concerns classroom teachers most frequently ask and express about English language learners. Commentaries are provided to help classroom teachers develop insights into the linguistic or cultural rationales of the scaffolding tool.

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Question: How do we communicate with English language learners?

Concern: Immediate need to communicate in class.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Use many visuals, icons, and concrete classroom objects to initiate communication.
- Use gestures and facial expressions or other charade-like aids to communicate nonverbally.
- Give the students a key ring full of cards with basic phrases and questions you want them to know immediately. On one side, have the phrase written (or pictured for very young learners), and on the other side have visuals or primary language translations. Get parents, siblings, other students, or ESL teachers to help with the translations.
- At first, break questions down so that only yes/no responses are required. Use strategies like paraphrasing and pausing so students can process what is said as you progress from yes/no questions to information questions. As students gain proficiency, scaffold questioning strategies: move back and forth from display or literal to referential or metaphorical questions.
- Learn one or two phrases in students' primary languages so they know how important communicating with them is to you. Ask parents or older siblings to write a few phrases to post around your classroom. Have all students learn some of the phrases so they, too, learn the value of communication in a multilingual world.

Commentary

- An affectively comfortable environment in which students sense that people will find ways to communicate is an important variable in the second language acquisition and acculturation processes.
- Keep in mind that communication goes beyond words and that students' silence does not necessarily mean they are not trying to understand; rather, they are trying to make meaning out of what most certainly feels and sounds like chaos.
- Try to imagine what it was like or would be like to find yourself in a country where you could not communicate. What support did you or would you need: menus with pictures? bilingual resources? people who use gestures?
- If you have traveled to another country, try to recall people's responses if you tried to use a few phrases in their language. Did your efforts facilitate the exchange? Did using the new language help you feel more in control of the situation?
- Think about your own experiences with trying to communicate in another language. Were you successful? If yes, why and how? If not, why not?

Question: Should we allow English language learners to use their primary languages?

Concern: Having a strategy for learning English and learning in English.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Allow the use of the primary language through bilingual dictionaries, a linguistic buddy to interpret directions and essential information when needed, and translated material. Allow students to complete academic work in the primary language if possible and when necessary.
- Partner beginning-level English language learners with students who share their language. If possible, rotate the linguistic buddies on a weekly basis. Peer teaching and tutoring with same-language partners are useful strategies to help integrate beginning English language learners socially and academically.
- If there is concern that students are overrelying on the use of their primary languages, build in some metacognitive language usage self-assessments to help students understand their own language acquisition patterns. Have students read stories of people who have written about their experiences of schooling in another language to help them reflect on language usage issues.
- Gather insights about their language acquisition by having conferences with English language learners to discuss their feelings and progress. Ask students to keep journals or checklists.
- Encourage older students to use these insights to eventually write a linguistic autobiography about their experiences. The reflective experience can be therapeutic for them and insightful for you.
- Be an advocate—not an adversary—for English language learners and their dual language and cultural development.

Commentary

- A common misconception is that the use of the primary language will interfere with or slow down the acquisition of English, yet research consistently shows that the use of the primary language is essential to the acquisition of English. The primary language (1) helps learners feel secure and comprehend what is going on while they are acquiring English, and (2) helps learners make meaning in the new context.
- Lowering the anxiety of English language learners is essential for their success. When students feel more comfortable and are more proficient in English, they will take risks to use their new language with teachers and students who speak only English. Keep in mind that it is natural for students who share a language to communicate in that language, especially when some of the students are more proficient.

- English language learners will acquire language according to their own variable rates. Some may use English almost immediately upon their arrival in the classroom, while others may not use any English for what seems to be too long a time. Even as students become proficient in English, they will need to use their primary language from time to time, depending on the situation, the tasks undertaken, and a multitude of affective and cognitive factors.
- If students prefer to communicate in their primary languages, perhaps we need to probe their feelings to see what they are trying to tell us. We don't want to silence students who are not yet proficient in English by telling them not to use their own language.
- Access to primary language usage supports second language acquisition, literacy, cognitive development, and academic success. Ultimately, these goals should outweigh any ideological beliefs or personal feelings surrounding the issue of primary-language usage.

Question: What strategies can we use to build background knowledge for academic success?

Concern: Need to build background knowledge, especially for topics that may be culturally new or different, or to help English language learners with limited formal schooling.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Pinpoint connections between what students may already know in their own culture or from previous schooling and what concepts and understandings you want them to learn. Enlist the help of ESL teachers, most of whom have had cross-cultural training. An Internet search can provide you with “cultural capsules”; that is, information briefs on cultural beliefs and behaviors. Finally, students and their families should be used as informants about their own cultures.
- Use visual supports such as photos, illustrations, demonstrations, and videos and instructional techniques such as brainstorming, anticipatory guides, K-W-L charts, quick writes, vocabulary previews, and text surveys to focus on information needed to develop concepts and understandings that may be culturally new or different for students.
- Use cooperative learning strategies (see the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) or exploratory small-group discussions to preview and develop concepts and understandings.
- Use differentiation strategies (found in the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) such as centers, independent studies, Web-Quests, or jigsaw expert groups to develop concepts and understandings for students.

Commentary

- Instruction that cultivates connections between what students may already know enables meaningful connections to new content. English language learners who have had formal schooling in their primary language often have the academic schemas for schooling. Preparing these students for concepts and understandings in English may simply be a matter of bridging their knowledge through activation strategies or through use of primary-language materials and strategies.
- Students who have had less formal school experience will require more support. Providing opportunities for students to work together (e.g., structured talk with more knowledgeable learners) or to interact with scaffolded instructional materials and tasks can help students develop concepts and understandings or schemas.
- Modeling and scaffolding declarative knowledge (what to learn) and procedural knowledge (how to accomplish tasks) can help underprepared students learn what and how to learn. Modeling can be done by teachers, assistants, or more knowledgeable students.

Question: What do we do if classroom materials are too difficult for English language learners?

Concern: Inappropriate materials.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Provide primary-language books in classrooms and in school libraries. Download primary-language materials from the Internet. Use the shadow reading strategy (reading primary-language materials with English-only materials either sequentially as part of the reading process or simultaneously), depending on students' skills and motivation.
- Enhance comprehension of classroom textbooks by previewing the text with students (e.g., index and table of contents), examining the format of text pages (e.g., headings and subtitles), pointing out visual elements (e.g., illustrations), and modeling how to skim and scan.
- Use picture walks and predictable charts with very young students as a previewing strategy. Many of the strategies used with emergent readers who are proficient in English will work with emergent English language learners as well (see K–2 reading strategies in the Literacy Strategies section that follows).
- Use a variety of materials including illustrated books, dictionaries, graded readers or reference materials, magazines, recorded materials, and student-developed materials as supplements with older learners.
- Use computer software, CD-ROMs, laser videodisks, satellite networks, and the Internet to help students find supportive material in English or primary languages. Bookmark Web sites on classroom topics in students' primary languages.
- Stock baskets with collections of textbooks and nonfiction materials with a range of readability levels so students can read about a study topic (not *toddler* books but books with more illustrations, graphs, and visual supports).
- Adapt or support content material through the use of resource packets, advance organizers, prepared outlines, rewrites, leveled study guides, highlighted text, tabbed sections, taped text or audiotapes, jigsaw text reading, text digests, supplementary readings, and marginal notes. Have other students complete some of these tasks for their own learning and then use their work with English language learners.
- Use differentiation strategies (found in the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) to assist students with material that is too difficult. For example, use the jigsaw method in a math or science class to disperse the material within a group, literature circles to have students share different literary works that are thematically related, and multiple references and materials (e.g., primary and secondary sources) in a social studies class.

- Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice interacting with texts (e.g., talking to the text, sticky notes, think-alouds, pen-in-hand modeling, journey maps, and reciprocal teaching) to increase comprehension of difficult material (see reading strategies in the Literacy Strategies section that follows). The more difficult the text, the more strategies students will need to interact with or about the material.

Commentary

- Shadow-reading enables students to gain understandings in their own language to support the development of concepts and understandings. If possible, send primary-language materials home and ask parents to discuss the topics as a preview or review for instruction.
- Adapting, supplementing, and differentiating classroom material can enable English language learners to have access to content. Reading is a skill that transfers; as literate students become more proficient in English, their capacities to comprehend grade-level texts will increase.
- Students who are underprepared or unable to read in their primary language will need many of the same support strategies that struggling readers in English need. Enlist the help of ESL teachers, reading staff, and media specialists to locate materials that are more comprehensible at first.
- One of the most useful ways to help students who have a range of literacy skills (whether English-proficient students or English language learners) is to have a classroom full of multilevel and engaging materials. Overreliance on one text or one reading series does not create a rich environment for developing literacy.
- Some teachers believe that all students should be able to read the materials provided in class, while other teachers see the necessity of having a multitude of materials for different readers in class. This philosophical distinction is a literacy issue for all students (not only for English language learners) and needs to be resolved by staff and educational leaders.
- In addition to providing a supply of learner-considerate materials, teachers can use instructional strategies to support readers with difficult text. Specifically, teachers can modify materials, use differentiation strategies, or model and employ reading strategies for each stage of the reading process to manage a class of multilevel readers.
- Language acquisition is a social phenomenon and, as such, is greatly enhanced when English language learners have multiple opportunities to interact with other students in structured ways.

Question: How can we help English language learners complete basic classroom tasks?

Concern: Assisting students while holding them accountable.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Model step-by-step strategies that can be used to complete a particular task, demonstrate a process using a think-aloud protocol, and provide concrete examples of the finished task. Give explicit instructions and check for comprehension through student demonstration or retelling. This process approach to designing learning experiences is the essence of scaffolding in that it builds in opportunities for modeling, bridging, contextualizing, schema building, metacognitive development, and text re-presentation.
- Use differentiation strategies (see the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) to expand choices and personalize tasks and criteria for success (e.g., Think-Tac-Toe, independent studies, learning contracts, and menus).
- Collaborate with the ESL teacher to modify tasks, depending on the language proficiency levels of the students (beginner, intermediate, advanced). Incrementally challenging tasks should align with the progression of language proficiency.
- Use cooperative learning (see the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) to reap its benefits for heterogeneous classes. Strategically grouped students working together can accomplish more difficult tasks than students working alone.

Commentary

- If learners are unable to complete tasks independently, teachers can use any or all of the following instructional options:
 1. Scaffold or break the tasks into doable parts and then use strategies to move students through the tasks (e.g., sorting vocabulary, buddy reading, taking notes, completing an organizer).
 2. Differentiate the assignments by selecting another task as evidence of students' knowledge (e.g., an oral or visual response instead of a written response).
 3. Modify the task in some way (e.g., one paragraph instead of three).
- Modifying tasks should not be interpreted as simplifying tasks but as building scaffolding into the instructional process to support learners to complete the tasks.
- Cooperative learning differs from group work in that it is highly structured. All students have specific roles or responsibilities and are held accountable accordingly. Its benefits include increased academic achievement, improved self-esteem, active learning, social skill development, and opportunities for simultaneous language practice (i.e., more than one student practicing language at a time).

Question: How can we help students understand lectures or participate in classroom discussions?

Concern: Students' difficulty attending to or using spoken language.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Repeat, rephrase, or paraphrase key concepts or directions when it is evident that students do not understand. Model, pause, clarify, check comprehension, use visuals, and have students do quick "retells" in pairs.
- Give students lecture guides or outlines so they have a structured overview of the content.
- Give students graphic organizers with key words so they can follow the discussion or lecture (see the Literacy Strategies area of this section of the manual). Use organizers that follow the cognitive pattern of the discussions or lectures—for example, concept maps for concept development, Venn diagrams for comparisons, fishbone for cause-effect, Plus-Minus-Intriguing (PMI) charts for expanded thinking, and problem-solution outlines for problem solving.
- Use SMART boards to record notes or make copies of other students' notes so that English language learners can have copies of the major points of the lecture.
- Videotape a couple of your lessons and have colleagues watch them with the sound turned off to see how much they can understand. Ask the viewers to then brainstorm ways to add at least one meaning-enhancing strategy to the discussion or lecture (e.g., key words or icons, gestures and body language, discussion notes).
- Tape record yourself and give the tape to students so they can listen and take notes at their own pace afterwards alone or with the ESL teacher.
- Make sure that lecture or discussion is not the only means for acquiring information in the class. Vary your oral language delivery modes (e.g., modeling, demonstration, visual representations).
- Use 10-2 lectures or discussions interspersed with small-group or pair interaction strategies to process information (e.g., think-pair-share). The 10 represents a small group to which you deliver information or a concept; the 2 represents a cooperative learning strategy (see the Instructional Practices area of this section of the manual) in which students can demonstrate comprehension by reviewing with a partner.
- Increase opportunities for student-student discussions and decrease "teacher talk" through cooperative learning, instructional conversation groups, discussion circles, and small-group interactions with students reporting back to the class. Provide beginning English language learners with cues and structured overviews of the discussions so they can follow along, if not participate right away.

- Use a process approach to encourage more speaking. Allow opportunities for “working talk” (classroom-based practice sessions in small groups) so students can make judgments about what is worth saying and why, and then for “rehearsed talk” (performance-based responses) so students focus on the quality of their spoken responses rather than the quantity (number of times they raise their hand to speak).
- Use random-selection strategies like selecting cards with students’ names or the ticket-out-the-door strategy (i.e., students must say something before leaving).
- Provide opportunities for more speaking through real-life speaking tasks (e.g., debates for social studies, readers’ theatre or author’s day for language arts, small-group problem solving for math, investigative reports for science).

Commentary

- Krashen (1981) coined the term *comprehensible input* to refer to the process of making messages understandable to English language learners. Some of the characteristics of comprehensible oral input include paraphrasing, clear articulation, greater use of high-frequency vocabulary, less sarcasm and slang, and fewer idioms. Nonlinguistic aids include objects, visuals, videos, and movement.
- Cummins distinguished between context-reduced and context-embedded communication as well as cognitively demanding and cognitively less-demanding tasks that students encounter in communication.
- An example of a rich-context, less-demanding task is to follow demonstrated directions (e.g., a physical education teacher showing how to throw a ball). An example of a rich-context, more demanding task is to understand academic presentations with visual support (e.g., a geography lesson using maps and globes or a math lesson using manipulatives). An example of a context-reduced, less-demanding task is to engage in predictable discussions (e.g., answering recall questions about stories read in an elementary language arts lesson). An example of a context-reduced, more demanding task is to make a formal oral presentation independently (e.g., in a middle or high school social studies class). Using this theoretical model can help teachers identify ways to scaffold students through the provision of context and the scaffolding of cognitive demand.
- Producing utterances in another language is referred to as output and usually happens as a result of negotiation of meaning or interaction with others. One knows immediately via the feedback one receives whether or not the output was comprehensible or understood. Continued opportunities for these types of rehearsal and feedback exchanges promote language development. Interaction and negotiation of meaning between participants in small-group situations enhance the processes of second language acquisition.

- It is important not to force students to speak until they are ready to. Some students will do so almost immediately, while others appear as if they are never going to. When students are ready, they will speak. This is another good time to use the scaffolding process: having students go from nodding, to yes/no responses, to pair shares, to small-group interactions, to oral presentations with a self-selected audience, to one day feeling comfortable and skillful enough to present for a whole-group audience.
- The process for oral language development follows these stages: observation, participation, practice, performance. Students need to observe spoken language, participate in initial exchanges, practice with more extended exchanges, and finally perform independently. Giving students clear criteria and examples of what class participation looks and sounds like helps set the stage.
- It is important to keep in mind that class participation in Western-style classrooms may differ from other cultural styles. Preparing for, rehearsing, and performing oral tasks should always be done in a climate of trust and advocacy.

Question: How can we help English language learners with their vocabulary development?

Concern: Understanding of content vocabulary (i.e., concepts and understandings).

Scaffolding Strategies

- Pinpoint content-obligatory vocabulary (terms and phrases indispensable for concepts and understandings) as the focal point of vocabulary development. Identify content-support vocabulary (terms and phrases that are important for concepts and understandings). Work with the ESL teacher to devise personalized vocabulary lists for English language learners and have the students keep vocabulary journals.
- Use categorical frameworks to help students understand the difference between general and technical vocabulary. For example, post a science word wall that distinguishes between general academic vocabulary (e.g., fall to the bottom, rise to the top, stay the same) and technical vocabulary (e.g., sink, rise, remain unchanged). Use the Simon Says, Science Says strategy to have students practice the different terms, or have students use a cooperative learning strategy after they have completed related experiments. Finally, indicate to the students which terms are expected in their lab reports.
- Use vocabulary strategies that are more inductive and interactive in nature, such as open word sorts for science, definition maps for social studies, four-dimensional word study for math, and character maps and word walls for language arts (see the vocabulary strategies in the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual).
- Plan explicit vocabulary strategies or have vocabulary-building strategies available in centers or as anchor activities (see the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual).
- Provide glossaries and bilingual, picture, or electronic dictionaries to students.
- Gather materials (e.g., visuals and multimedia) to create a context for essential vocabulary. Post symbols or icons with labels around the room. Construct a content-based word wall with students as the unit progresses (elementary school level) or have students keep a portable word wall (middle and high school levels).

Commentary

- Content-area vocabulary falls into four categories: high-frequency words, general academic vocabulary, technical or specialized vocabulary, and low-frequency words. Teachers need to systematically analyze which types of words are needed for each kind of classroom task and make the categories explicit to learners.

- Direct study of vocabulary in isolation is not effective. Vocabulary must be contextually presented and practiced. Do not give long lists of words for students to look up in dictionaries and then test them on the meanings of the words.
- The process for vocabulary instruction is best planned as “exposure to, practice with, and mastery of.” The ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction is transfer; that is, students should be able to recognize meanings of words when they come across them while reading or listening, and they should be able to use an expanding vocabulary in their speaking and writing.
- Vocabulary acquisition is also a social phenomenon. Having students work together with words, terms, or phrases will have a positive effect on all students’ conceptual development. Don’t make the assumption that students who are English-proficient do not need vocabulary development, especially academic and technical vocabulary.
- Research continually indicates that free voluntary reading or reading extensively in a wide range of genres is essential for developing high levels of vocabulary (and reading comprehension).

Question: How can we help English language learners improve their reading and writing skills in mainstream classrooms?

Concern: Readiness levels of students' literacy skills.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Use read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading as an inherently scaffolded reading process for young English language learners to gradually release responsibility from teacher as reader to learner as independent reader.
- For older students also, plan the reading process as an inherently scaffolded experience. Design prereading strategies to activate background knowledge, build vocabulary, and introduce a skill-building strategy (e.g., predicting, visualizing, self-questioning, or direction setting). Model a during-reading strategy (e.g., comprehending, making connections, determining importance, or summarizing) that students can use to practice the desired reading behavior (see the reading strategies in the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual). Have students complete an after-reading task that can assess their understandings or double as a prewriting strategy or a strategy to prepare for speaking.
- Use reading strategies that promote partner or small-group interaction (see the reading strategies in the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual). Establish reading study groups to use specific strategies, such as talk-to-the-text, annotation, and color coding. Have the groups respond to the texts through structured conversations and focused talk.
- For beginning English language learners or more proficient ones who are struggling readers, use additional scaffolds in the form of reading strategies that provide guides, outlines, marked texts, and taped readings.
- Confer regularly with English language learners to monitor their sense of strategy usage via metacognitive self-assessments. Share the process with the ESL teacher so students see class-to-class connections.
- Use an analogous writing process for very young writers (e.g., shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing).
- For older students, note that the writing process is an inherently scaffolded experience because of the stages of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing (see the writing strategies in the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual).
- Provide writing frames for beginning English language learners or more proficient ones who are struggling writers to help them get their ideas down on paper, or allow them to draft their ideas in their primary language first.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice learning strategies to improve their literacy skills (e.g., define them, model them, embed them in reading and writing activities, and then assess their use).

- Have students keep a writer's notebook to collect ideas for writing.
- Conduct minilessons to focus on the process and the qualities of good writers. Emphasize the importance of how good readers and writers think.

Commentary

- Reading programs for English language learners are similar to those for English-proficient students in that they need to be balanced. Students learn to read (i.e., they receive instruction on the major cueing systems for making meaning from print) and read to learn (i.e., they become immersed in engaging texts of all genres). In selecting texts for emergent English language learners, it is important either to go for texts that have universal cultural appeal or to build background knowledge to help scaffold the reader-to-text connection.
- Students need a process approach to literacy development to guide them through a progression of skill development, refinement, and precision.
- A critical consideration when selecting reading comprehension strategies is to match the strategy with the desired behaviors; in other words, students need to practice the behavior as a result of the strategy. Examples:
 - 1 Do You Hear What I Hear? for gathering information for nonfiction notebooks in a grade 1 class.
 - 2 Scintillating Sentences and Quizzical Quotes for understanding the use of dialogue in a grade 3 language arts class.
 - 3 T-Notes to scan texts for particular information in a grade 7 social studies class.
 - 4 Anticipation Guides to practice recognizing what is opinion in a grade 9 science class.
- A teaching strategy transforms into a learning strategy when students can independently use it to construct meaning from a text. Conscious attention to one's own learning leads to better control over what needs to be done and how it can get done.
- Students need to be exposed to how texts are constructed and used and they then need opportunities to practice constructing such texts themselves. Connecting reading experiences to speaking or writing is as important for second language acquisition as it is for first language development.
- Two kinds of writing continuums can be used to assist English language learners. One is a continuum of writing behaviors from novice to practitioner to sophisticated (i.e., using performance indicators). Teachers can select writing strategies to coach students through the continuum (coaching = explicit feedback + strategy to use).
- Another continuum establishes domains of writing starting with informal (e.g., lists or letters) and going to more formal (e.g., research reports). As students practice the different tasks, they can list the defining characteristics of each.
- Chances are many English-proficient students would benefit from literacy strategies across the curriculum.

Question: How do we help English language learners master correct grammar?

Concern: Accuracy and proficiency.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Work with the ESL teacher to plan exposure and explicit instruction in the structure of English through specific subject-area genres in the context of readers' and writers' workshops (i.e., minilessons). Expose students to grammatical features through text types. For example, narrative writing often uses the past tense, descriptive vocabulary (adjectives), and dialogue. Expository writing uses the present tense and technical vocabulary.
- Provide explicit instruction on text features and how they work. Point out how words and phrases are used. Have students discover and discuss the grammatical cues that indicate relationships such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and so on.
- Focus on grammatical features that might relate to a specific genre—for example, verb tenses in social studies, auxiliaries in math, verb phrases in science, and sentence structure in language arts.
- Think of instruction for accuracy as a process: expose students to text, model specific features through exemplars, guide students through the joint construction of text, and then have students practice independently for oral presentations and writing assignments. Provide feedback through the process to help students reflect on language usage and form.
- Mirror or paraphrase correct forms in oral exchanges with students; do not overtly correct students, but provide feedback by paraphrasing the form. Address written errors as part of the editing process.

Commentary

- Traditional approaches to the teaching of grammar were skill driven; that is, the emphasis was on “learning” (even mastering) grammar before “using” it. The learning involved the memorizing of facts, as if the accumulation would eventually transfer into usage. Current approaches are context driven, so that the learner develops an understanding of language structure. In other words, grammar teaching does not involve isolated grammar drills; instead, grammar is acquired in the context of actual language use.
- Grammatical instruction is a process: teachers expose students to grammatical features, design tasks so students can practice usage, and then expect improved usage (not mastery) as a result of “using” the grammar. Students acquire grammar through the active construction of knowledge: they explore, hypothesize, try, verify in speaking or writing, and then internalize (i.e., complete the feedback loop).

- Learners need to have models of how language is used. Every genre has a specific purpose, a particular organizational structure, and characteristic linguistic features or markers (i.e., signal words and phrases) to indicate how words are used.
- English language learners must feel free to approximate increasingly complex structures. Making mistakes is essential to the second language acquisition process. In the early stages, students will make many errors. As they progress and become more proficient, the number of errors will decline. Errors are normal and necessary if students are to experiment with extending their language use. Function and meaning precede form and accuracy.

Question: How can we assess English language learners' subject-matter knowledge without punishing them for their lack of English proficiency?

Concern: Fairness, equity, and excellence.

Scaffolding Strategies

- As the fairest way to assess English language learners, use performance assessment tasks as evidence of what they know and can do. Be clear with the criteria to be used for assessing how well students know and can do. The criteria may be in the form of checklists, rating scales, or rubrics, but they must be grounded in district standards or your expectations (i.e., they must be benchmarks or performance indicators). Provide students with exemplars (samples of student work) for each level of performance so they get a student-generated sense of the expectations.
- Throughout the instructional process, provide improvement- or solution-focused feedback by sharing the expected criteria of performance (e.g., a rubric) and then coaching learners to perform better through teacher and peer conferences that focus on specific strategies for improving performance (i.e., coaching students through the rubric). For example, if students are copying information rather than taking notes while gathering information in the library, it is probably because they do not know how to take notes. Give them some note-taking strategies to move them away from copying and toward appropriate note-taking behaviors. Some examples include Cornell Method of Note Taking, Coding Strategy, Four-Way Reporting and Recording (see the reading strategies in the Literacy Strategies area that follows in this section of the manual).
- Compile portfolios (e.g., anecdotal records, checklists, ratings scales, journals, graphic organizers, drawings, running records, clozes, projects) with ESL teachers to focus on learners' progress. Portfolios can vary in type and purpose, be useful for the instructional scaffolding process (e.g., feedback portfolios), or function as the basis for grading (e.g., accountability portfolios).
- With the ESL teacher, design a long-term, performance-based project for emergent English language learners. Build in interim checkpoints to provide feedback to students about the quality of their work. Differentiate or modify the project assessment tasks as appropriate for students' proficiency or knowledge skills.
- Whenever testing an English language learner, allow extra time for completion. Modify response options as another equity strategy (e.g., allow taped answers rather than written ones, demonstrations, and one-on-one discussions). Use more constructed-response types of test items so students can show what they know and can do.

Commentary

- Some teachers do nothing different for English language learners and just let the assessment cards fall as they may. Other teachers feel compelled to make assessment requirements as easy as possible for English language learners. Neither option is viable. Teachers need to have high expectations for English language learners and then they need to design assessment and instruction experiences to enable performance as close to the expectation as possible.
- Performance assessment tasks inherently require products or performances from students and provide a sense of joint responsibility, especially when the expectation criteria are clear and the steps toward attainment are doable. In the process, learners have time and opportunity to use and practice their developing language proficiency and knowledge base in functional ways.
- Performance assessments support instruction, assist teachers to make instructional decisions, maximize the window for drawing conclusions from authentic performances, and provide teachers with evidence to monitor student progress and adjust instruction.
- Instructionally logical formative and summative assessment tasks honor the sense of assessment as a tool *for* learning and not just *of* learning. For example, students take notes, plan an outline, draft, make several revisions, and edit a research paper (all formative tasks). They then need to synthesize their ideas into a summative task, such as an oral presentation (using PowerPoint perhaps) to share with classmates.
- Learners must receive purposeful feedback from more knowledgeable others (teachers or peers). The quality of feedback must be relevant, appropriate, timely, and nonthreatening. Above all, purposeful feedback provides insights into what to do next to improve a level of performance.
- Classroom and ESL teachers, working together, design instructional scaffolds to support students along the process of completing a performance-based project. Design considerations include students' proficiency levels, the language and cognitive demands of the tasks, the extent of students' experiences and interactions with the types of tasks represented, the degree of incremental challenge, and the cultural nuances of the task.

Question: How do we grade English language learners?

Concern: Maintaining standards and respecting students.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Use standards-based performance assessments to gather evidence of what students know and can do, along with clear criteria given to students at the outset of instruction (e.g., rubrics) and well-planned instructional scaffolds for support. Weighting each criterion or each task can clarify for students what they can do to have their performance honored accordingly.
- Provide ESL teachers with the expected performance tasks and the rating criteria well before the tasks are to be completed. Together, brainstorm a list of scaffolding options to make each task more doable.
- Differentiate performance assessment tasks by providing choices as to what students can do for a grade.
- Make students a part of the of the assessment process. Nothing helps English language learners achieve more than the knowledge and evidence that their teachers are their strongest advocates.

Commentary

- Some teachers of English language learners grade students using the same system they use for all students; that is, they grade each piece of work and then average the grades at the end of the term. This traditional grading paradigm requires reflection and action within the context of a standards-based curriculum.
- On the other hand, some teachers feel guilty about grading English language learners at all; so instead they focus on effort or behavior until they feel that the students have acquired enough English.
- The increasing use of standards-based performance assessments graded according to externally established criteria allows for a more equitable way of grading, as long as teachers think of assessment and instruction as tools for enabling student learning and achievement—and plan accordingly. English language learners can achieve a level of acceptable performance if teachers provide scaffolds along their instructional path with the end target in sight.

Question: How do we motivate English language learners?

Concern: Unmotivated students.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Use as many scaffolding strategies as possible to increase the sense of achievement. The more students see that they can do, the more they will want to do.
- Use an inquiry model of learning (students form questions, gather information using many sources, present their findings, and evaluate their own success of their inquiry). An inquiry model not only taps into student-generated learning but also allows for step-by-step scaffolding by teachers, who are liberated from teaching to focus on learning.
- Use active learning strategies to engage students (e.g., role-plays, simulations, songs, problem-solving activities, brain-compatible methods).
- Plan a culture study or a project in which students do research and share information about their own cultural history.

Commentary

- Krashen (1981) notes three affective variables that influence language acquisition: self-esteem, motivation, and level of anxiety. All are interrelated: the level of comfort one feels in a classroom has an effect on the level of efficacy one senses, and a student's sense of efficacy has an effect on his or her level of motivation.
- Social learning theorists indicate that students are motivated by observing others' actions and the consequences of those actions. Translated into classroom practice, this means that students need to develop an understanding of their own learning and have a sense of control over it. When students are aware of what is expected and are provided with strategies for attaining those expectations, chances are they will feel and exhibit more motivation. What we need to help English language learners understand is that they can engage and try without fear of failure.
- Critical pedagogy takes the stance that we are directly shaped by and then, in return, we shape what happens in the world. This transformative conception calls for curriculum that is grounded in the lives and experiences of students. Including students' home cultures in the classroom is important to the lives of English language learners as well as to the lives of their peers.
- Helping learners to make decisions to transform their lives begins with unconditional support.

Question: How can we involve parents of English language learners?

Concern: Uninvolved parents.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Encourage parents to have primary-language conversations with their children each day about school events and activities. Model or send home a list of the kinds of questions parents can ask.
- Encourage parents to read books with their children. Help them find resources through the library, local bookstores, and community services.
- Explain the value of homework (and then make homework tasks valuable). Ask parents to provide a quiet space and to designate a regular time for homework. They should discuss the work in the primary language and help, if possible, or perhaps a sibling or a school-assigned tutor can help.
- Invite parents to attend orientation workshops, parent-teacher meetings, open houses, school performances (especially involving their children), seminars, and English as a second language classes for themselves (geared toward the English they need for understanding and helping their children adjust to school).
- Invite students and their parents to come to school for portfolio nights (i.e., children-led parent conferences) and family learning nights (e.g., children-led centers to share such learning activities as science experiments, storytelling, math games, and mapping-the-world-by-heart activities).
- Be sure to prepare for the kinds of barriers that might prevent parents' involvement by providing such services as translated notices, on-site interpreters, transportation, and child care.
- Encourage your school to hire a parent liaison to make home visits and calls and to provide insights into the linguistic and cultural factors that may affect parental involvement.

Commentary

- Parental involvement can have a significant effect on students' success in school, especially when it comes to literacy and cognitive development. However, teachers often ask parents to speak English to their children in an attempt to increase students' proficiency. In fact, research dictates that parents should interact with their children in the languages in which they are most dominant and comfortable. It is the nature of the parent-child interaction rather than the choice of language that develops literacy-readiness skills. Children who experience elaborated exchanges with their parents come to school with a cognitive maturity that other children may lack. As they acquire English, this level of cognitive development will transfer in English.

- Parental involvement is multifaceted and reciprocal. Schools need to provide background sociocultural information and training to teachers and school staff so they can work effectively with parents and families (i.e., without being judgmental). Methods of two-way communication need to be institutionalized and not be dependent on the few persons who are bilingual. Outreach efforts need to take into account the practical barriers which may impede parental involvement. Schools need to link the curriculum to home through learning activities and scaffolds. Parents need to feel and be empowered to be a part of the decision-making process. Families with special needs must be assisted through community services (e.g., sponsoring agencies, religious institutions, and key community leaders).
- Above all, it is important to establish a climate that makes each and every parent feel welcome. This may require some self-reflection on the part of schools, especially as it pertains to the parents of English language learners.

Question: How can professional development help teachers better address the needs of English language learners?

Concern: Lack of professional knowledge or skills.

Scaffolding Strategies

- Content for professional development should adhere to the following guidelines:
 - All teachers need to understand how to systematically plan the alignment of content and language objectives (what students should know and be able to do).
 - All teachers need to develop capacities to design standards-based assessments for collecting evidence of second language acquisition and academic achievement simultaneously.
 - All teachers need to become skillful at backward design (i.e., planning instructional experiences to help students complete the assessments successfully).
 - All teachers need to increase their repertoire of scaffolding strategies on an ongoing basis.
 - Content teachers need training in second language acquisition principles as well as the social, political, linguistic, and cultural dynamics of second language education.
 - ESL teachers need training in the dispositions and methods of content areas and in the teaching of multilevel proficiency groups.
 - All teachers need training on how to collaborate and coteach.
 - All teachers need modeling, guided practice, and feedback within a climate of trust and advocacy (the same learning process that students need).

Commentary

- Professional development is most effective as a part of a clear and consistent vision of learning that is shared schoolwide. Learning-centered classrooms benefit all students, albeit for different reasons. Adequate time and resources for ongoing and purposeful professional development need to be provided.
- School leaders and teachers would do well to review possible staff development options and to make informed decisions to target professional efforts to specific needs.
- Modeling for teachers what we want them to do with students seems the most effective way to design professional development experiences.
- School leaders need to identify specific expectations and clear criteria for performance and then support teachers through the improvement or solution process. Section three of this ASCD Action Tool provides a professional development rubric to increase teachers' capacities to work collaboratively for English language learners.

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