English Learners and the Secret Language of School
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Study Questions

Chapter One   Teaching the "Secret Language of School": Academic Language and the ABCs

How is content-area literacy instruction different from emergent (beginning) reading instruction?

What are some specific ways that you can include the ABC's of instruction for English learners in your classroom?

If a colleague were to ask you why it is so important to help English learners develop schema before reading (especially since it takes valuable classroom time), what would you tell him?

How did you learn academic language as you progressed through your school years?

Why do you think the teaching of academic language needs to be made explicit for English learners?

In what ways might you be able to use "text play" in your classroom?

Chapter Two   The Jigsaw Puzzle Big Picture: Preparing Students for Reading

Why is it important for readers to have the "big picture" before they engage in reading a text piece (using the term "text" loosely to mean any reading excerpt or selection, including textbook chapters, poetry, cartoons, recipes, etc.)?

In what ways is the "Q and A" component of the advance organizer strategy an effective way of ensuring learners' engagement? List as many reasons as you can.

How can the "Note" aspect of PLAN lead to the development of a "class schema" of content knowledge that all students can identify and learn?

Have you ever taught your students the "skimming technique" before? What are multiple uses for skimming within a content-area classroom such as science or social studies? (When might you ask students to use it for different purposes?)

Try to create an Anticipation Guide for a piece of text. Then list reasons why students might be particularly engaged in analyzing each of the statements you wrote. (What makes the statements especially interesting or enticing?)

Chapter Three   Reasons for Reading: Teaching Students to Match Their Purposes to Their Practices

Do you have English learners who demonstrate the "struggling reader perspective" by reading everything the same way? Talk with several of them. How did they learn to read? Was "sounding out words," or decoding, the primary approach that was emphasized? Do they recognize that they should be making meaning as they read? What are their definitions of reading?

What would you say are some "personal reasons" that your students read? What kinds of reading resources do they use, and how are such "texts" different from the ones they typically encounter in the classroom? Consider text length, structure, and writing style.

What are some of the materials that students in the grade level(s) you teach enjoy when they read for pleasure? Do you see any patterns or trends? Identify ways in which the act of reading self-selected materials independently is different from reading assigned materials in class.

Is the heavy focus on assessment and accountability a concern for you, as a teacher? What is your opinion of integrating test-wiseness into your curriculum throughout the year versus taking a chunk of time out for test practice right before students take high stakes exams?

How many of your students feel that they will not have to do much "real reading" when they finally get out into the real world? What are some of the replies that you can make to help them see how much the literacy demands of the workplace have escalated in the past few years?

Chapter Four   The Devil Is in the Details: Teaching Students to Recongnize and Recall What Matters Most

Even though "detail" questions represent the lowest level of questioning in terms of critical thinking (recall), why is it important to ensure that English learners can approach them confidently and successfully? What are some reasons for focusing on *WH* words early on in the instructional process?

How many of your students *scan* effectively? If not all of them can do this, what steps are they missing? Explain.

Do you see ways that you can use "Read and Run" (or "Skip and Scan") in your own classroom context? What modifications to the strategy might you include to make this activity more appropriate for your learners?

Have you ever used any form of the cloze procedure before? After reading this chapter, what text pieces might you select as the basis for cloze? What kinds (or categories) of words would you delete to help your English learners, and why?

If you were to ask your English learners to engage in the "story impressions" activity, what text selection might you start with, remembering that a text with narrative (or story-like) elements will be the most appropriate? Provide a rationale for your choice.

Chapter Five   What's the Big Idea? Teaching Students to Distinguish Main Ideas from Supporting Details

In the past, how have you explained the concept of main ideas to students? Do you think that the Herringbone procedure may offer a more tangible way of helping learners to identify the comprehensive idea of a text piece? What advantages do you see in using it?

If you were asked to differentiate between what a main idea statement looks like versus a title, what would you say? How are they related?

Triple Read is used with expository selections that have clearly written topic sentences. Which texts do you currently use at your school that would be appropriate sources for the use of this strategy?

How does the identification of topic sentences in an expository passage or selection help readers to write an effective summary of the material?

How could the utilization of the Herringbone (fishbone) graphic support English learners in constructing main idea statements that are syntactically and semantically correct? What types of modeling can occur if the graphics are developed in small groups or pairs? If groups present their graphic organizers to the class as a whole?

Chapter Six   What Are Signal Words, Anyway? Teaching Students to Understand Order of Events and Cause-Effect Relationships

In your own words, how would you clarify the difference between a text that is written chronologically and one that contains events listed by "the order of the telling"? How would you introduce these concepts to your English learners in a way that makes this contrast clear to them?

What advantages does the Sentence Strips + Timeline Strategy provide for English learners? Do you see multiple learning outcomes that might evolve from the implementation of this approach? What might they be? (Consider reading, writing, listening, and speaking.)

Had you ever heard of the "empty box format" before you read this chapter? Did you already know that it represents a type of sequence question? What other kinds of questions are students sometimes required to answer on tests that they may not understand?

Why are some cause/effect signal words only "possible" indicators of cause/ effect relationships? What is one example of a signal word that sometimes represents a cause/effect relationship and sometimes does not? Explain how you would teach this concept to English learners.

What are the benefits to using sentence frames for everyday, common examples of cause/effect relationships (such as those in Figure 6–17) before asking students to find such structures in their academic texts? How can these frames be useful as the basis for writing assignments?

Chapter Seven   Get a Clue! Teaching Students to Make Inferences and Determine Unknown Word Meanings

What aspects of the ABC's are incorporated into an inference lesson when a teacher initiates role-play scenarios as a beginning step?

Why do you think Detective Search is a process that may be unfamiliar to many students? How important do you think it is for teachers to demonstrate the clue-finding procedure before students are asked to do it on their own? Explain.

What other "iffy words" might you add to the list in Figure 1–7? What kinds of materials in your classroom might you select for teaching students how to find clues in texts to answer inference questions?

Can you think of additional ways to scaffold the process of teaching inferences other than (or in addition to) using GRIP? What would you recommend and why?

Which of the context clue strategies described in this chapter are familiar to you? Are unfamiliar to you? What might be the first steps to take in introducing these strategies to English learners?

Chapter Eight   Using Assessment Tools That Lead to Effective Instruction and Student Growth

How often are teachers able to consider different ways of making contexts "comfortable" for instruction and testing? What would you change about your room, your instructional processes, or your classroom procedures in order to make learners feel more at ease?

What information do norm-referenced tests provide to educators? Do you feel that such data can be supplemented with other assessments that offer more useful information for helping your students? What such assessments do you currently use? What would you use if you had wider access to a variety of assessment instruments?

Do you ever use an interest inventory or motivation profile in your class? What information would you want to know about your English learners to help them connect with appropriate texts for independent reading?

Would you say that you consider yourself to be a "flexible reader"? What are some methods you can use to show students how to match their purposes for reading to their practices? Could you use an activity such as the one in Figure 8–4 as a starting point? (The entire activity is contained in Appendix H.)

What are some of the advantages to administering an Informal Reading Inventory such as the Ekwall/Shanker IRI or the Roe and Burns IRI? What are the disadvantages?

Chapter Nine   Offering Real Reading Opportunities in All Classrooms

Did you learn any new information about the practice of Round-Robin Reading from this chapter? How often do you implement this process with your English learners? What have you observed about its effectiveness with your own students in the past?

Reading aloud to students is often eliminated as a typical practice in upper grade classrooms. What justification for reading aloud to your English learners would you provide to your principal if she questioned why you were doing it?

Is the ReQuest procedure one with which you were familiar prior to reading Chapter 9? What benefits do you feel it would offer your English learners in the ESL, language arts, or content-area classroom?

How do the practices of Paired Reading and Scaffolded Reading offer English learners opportunities for immediate feedback and comprehension support?

If you were to present the idea of implementing an SSR program at your school, what arguments would you offer to your administrators and colleagues to show how important independent reading is for English learners (and all students, in general)?