Book Study Suggestions

for Pauline Gibbons'

English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking: Learning in the Challenge Zone

by Judy Wallis

Learning is inherently social. Though sometimes we feel isolated as teachers, most of us know the benefits of taking time to engage with colleagues. It is in those conversations, or "teacher talk" as Regie Routman calls it, we find our own ideas clarified and enriched. While there are many ways to structure a study group, it is most important to foster a climate in which teachers feel free and safe to participate in the ongoing conversations and exchange of ideas. Other guidelines can make book study more productive. Here are a few things you might consider.

Watch Group Size: You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. Often the optimal number is four or five to ensure there is time for all to exchange ideas. The larger group can reassemble at the end to debrief.

Use Study Questions: Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- Put three or four questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- Create a chart with two or three starter questions and ask the group to generate more, tapping their own personal interests and needs.
- Decide on three or four questions and divide the group by interest in the various topics. This allows for a more in-depth study.
- Make copies of the suggested questions for everyone and invite discussion without deciding where to start.

Create an Agenda: Make sure you have planned a beginning and an ending time and *always* honor those times. Teachers are busy and knowing there will be a time to start and a time to end is important.

Stay Focused on the Topic: Plan a procedure that is transparent. You might start by saying something like "Let's decide on a signal to use when we feel the discussion is drifting and then have everyone agree to help stay focused."

Include Everyone: Keep groups small enough so that even the quietest member is encouraged to speak. Active listening on everyone's part will help. Remember that periods of silence should be expected when people are thinking.

Share Leadership: Rotate group facilitation. Identify several "duties" for the facilitator. Examples might include creating a discussion format, suggesting a big idea from a chapter or group of chapters, and synthesizing or summarizing at the end. Remember that in a study group, *everyone* is a learner. This isn't the place for an "expert"!

Create a List of Norms: Expectations that are transparent often make study groups function with greater ease and increase potential for success. These can be simple and might include ways to invite a tentative member into the conversation, about listening, start and stop times, and a procedure for refocusing.

Set Dates for the Next Meeting: Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will facilitate.

Engage in Reflection: Stop from time to time to reflect on what you are learning and how you might make your group's interactions more productive.

Celebrate Learning: Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning.

The following questions relate to the content in each chapter. There are suggestions and many more concepts and ideas are presented in each chapter. Enjoy!

1 English Learners, Academic Literacy, and Thinking

Defining the Issues

1. Gibbons outlines transitions students must make as they move through school. Discuss the specific ways in which these transitions challenge EL learners.

2. Identify some of the ways in which content areas require different literacy skills.

3. There is great diversity among ELLs. How does that diversity affect classroom teachers and schools in program design?

4. Discuss Gibbons' rationale for integrating ELLs within the context of mainstream teaching. How do her ideas compare with those within your own school or district?

5. The chapter includes a discussion about the need for "high-quality intellectual accomplishment." In what ways might the three criteria provide direction for increasing student learning and performance in your school?

6. What are advantages for ELLs when educators take a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning?

2 | Intellectual Work in Practice
A View from the Classroom

1. Consider the "seven intellectual practices." Which practice(s) could your school select as a goal to promote improved student learning and achievement?

2. Apprenticeship is an important concept discussed in Chapter 2. How might you incorporate the ideas of apprenticeship in your own teaching?

3. Reflect on the theory that "learning is social." Discuss the importance of incorporating this idea into teaching ELLs, and how doing so would change the ways in which classrooms are organized for learning.

4. Gibbons defines "real world tasks" as those having an authentic relationship to the real world. In what ways could your own teaching become more authentic?

5. How might the assessment practices used in your classroom or school change to accommodate and evaluate rich tasks?

3 | Literacy in the Curriculum
Challenges for EL Learners

1. Consider your own definition of literacy. Reflect on ways to expand and refine it in your work with ELLs.

2. What are the ways in which subject-related knowledge (or lack thereof) affect the performance of EL learners?

3. Gibbons suggests that language grows out of and varies with context. How might that idea affect the ways in which you design instruction for EL learners?

4. Discuss some of the ways in which spoken and written languages differ and the implications for teaching and learning.

5. How and why does making time for students to talk affect the way students learn new ideas and concepts?

4 Engaging with Academic Literacy
Examples of Classroom Activities

1. The author suggests that an important learning principle is ample modeling combined with supported practice. In what ways can you incorporate more modeling and supported practice into your own teaching?

2. The chapter includes a discussion of prior knowledge. Consider ways you might include more opportunities to help students tap and enrich their prior knowledge.

3. Gibbons suggests moving "toward texts" rather than "beginning with them." Share your own experiences and thoughts about this idea and how they relate to more supportive classrooms and increased student learning.

4. Discuss the language activities outlined in the chapter. How do they compare with the ones you find successful with students? Are there some you might consider incorporating in your own instruction?

5. Many of the activities discussed in the chapter record students' thinking *within* the learning process. How might capturing and posting these thinking-process charts in the classroom offer students ongoing support?

5 Building Bridges to Text
Supporting Academic Reading

1. Compare and contrast the three approaches used to teach reading: "bottom up," "top down," and interactive. What strengths and weaknesses do you see in each?

2. Gibbons explains that students' cultural purposes for reading may differ. How might you find ways to build on the differences and expand students' experiences and understanding?

3. Consider the Freebody and Luke "reader roles." How can you use this information to support students in becoming more proficient readers?

4. Discuss the ways in which teachers offer support before, during, and after reading and the importance of each type of support.

5. How do after-reading activities offer students ways to enhance and extend their reading and make connections to their prior knowledge and experiences?

6 | Scaffolding EL Learners to Be Successful Writers

1. Look over the list that outlines what proficient writers know and do. How might you support EL learners' development of these through your teaching?

2. How could you incorporate genre study into your instructional program to enhance and support ELLs?

3. Think about "real-world" genres and those valued in school. How might they differ and what challenges might those differences present for students?

4. How could using the "teaching and learning cycle" be incorporated into your instructional planning to enhance student learning?

5. Review the framework for assessment. What do you notice about the questions? What might their order suggest to students about what is valued?

7 | Planning Talk for Learning and Literacy

1. Consider all the ways in which teacher talk affects student learning.

2. Discuss Krashen's theory that "language comprehension is always ahead of language production." Why might this be an important variable and affect the way teachers view their students?

3. How can educators create programs that value growth in students' first language as they acquire a second language?

4. Discuss the strengths and potential pitfalls in IRF and IRE teacher discourse patterns. What considerations do educators need to keep in mind?

5. What are important considerations in pacing for teachers of EL learners?

6. How do authentic experiences and examples help students connect new information to their known?

8 Planning for a High-Challenge, High-Support Classroom
Setting Up EL Learners for Success

1. Discuss the conditions for creating effective learning environments. How do those suggested in the chapter compare to your own?

2. The author presents two types of scaffolding: designed and interactional. Consider their similarities and differences and the conditions within which they might be used.

3. What advantages do collaborative activities offer support for ELLs?

4. In what ways does continuous and ongoing assessment of students' strengths and needs inform teaching and affect their learning?

5. Reflecting on teaching is an essential practice for becoming a thoughtful educator. Consider the ways in which reflection on the many variables that affect student learning might be particularly important for EL learners.

6. Offering students a range of texts from which to learn is particularly important for ELLs. Discuss some of the possible sources teachers could tap to increase access to interesting and accessible texts.

7. The chapter discusses multiple forms of assessments. Share your successes and challenges with each of the different types of assessments.

8. Teacher assumptions and beliefs may enable or constrain student learning. Discuss ways educators can become more aware of their own and others' views to positively impact student learning and achievement.