Creating an Equitable Learning Environment for English Language Learners Through Being a Reader, Second Edition – Part 2

By Veronica Vasquez | Categories: English Language Learners, Reading

Part II—Providing English Language Learners Access to the Text and the Instruction

In part 1 of our blog series, I unpacked why it is imperative to provide equitable academic and language instruction for English language learners. An important component of equitable instruction is making sure your ELL students have full access to the read-aloud texts that are utilized so they can do the heavy cognitive lifting during reading instruction. Determining when your ELL students might need additional support in accessing the text, and what that support should look like, is vital. The more you know about your students, the better positioned you will be to make those instructional decisions.

When you have determined that ELL students are in need of additional support for any given week of instruction in Being a Reader, Second Edition, you can consider the pre-teaching support activities, which provide a scaffold for the learning. Pre-teaching instruction is always grouped under three headings: Build Background Knowledge, Preview the Text, and Provide Language Support. The support helps the students access the texts or other lesson content prior to whole-class instruction.

Let's dig into the support for a book used in Grade 1 for a closer look.

Grade 1, Unit 5, Week 1

The texts that are used this week to support comprehension and shared reading instruction are The Frog Who Wanted to See the Sea and One Duck Stuck.

Below is a summary of the pre-teaching support offered for The Frog Who Wanted to See the Sea. As you read through it, consider what might best support your ELL students.

Building Background Knowledge

- Explain that this fantasy (make-believe) story is about a frog named Alice who lives in a pond. She goes on a journey to the sea because she is curious.
- Connect to students: When was a time you tried something new? (Suggest a few examples if needed.)
- Discuss feelings connected to that event. (Use the feelings chart created in Unit 2 as support.)
- Tell the students that the setting (where the story takes place) is near water.
- Show illustrations from the book of essential objects in the story: pond, cattails, reeds, seagull, lily and lily pads.
- Show illustrations from the book and discuss the differences between the river and the sea.

Preview the Text

- Show illustrations or photos of items mentioned in the text but not illustrated: dragonfly, owl, fox, gnat, turtle, fish, and a sharp
Read the story aloud while showing the illustrations and clarifying the suggested vocabulary (suggested vocabulary with definitions are included).

When possible, act out words, use gestures, or refer to the illustrations to provide support for word meanings.

Provide Language Support

This week the students are introduced to the strategy of wondering and to using the prompt “I wonder” to share their thinking.

You might create a “wondering prompts” chart to provide students with additional support. Introduce the students to the chart and post it where they can refer to it throughout the unit. Such prompts might include:

- “I wonder if . . .”
- “I wonder whether . . .”
- “I wonder when . . .”
- “I wonder who . . .”
- “I wonder how . . .”

Keep in mind that to select appropriate scaffolds, you'll need to know your ELLs' backgrounds as well as their academic strengths and needs. You'll also need to have a sense of the linguistic demands of the instructional tasks so that you can determine which scaffolds will set the students up for success.

Selecting scaffolds can cause us to look at our instructional goals in a new and exciting way. Instead of “simplifying” the tasks we give ELLs or overscaffolding, the scaffolds we use should be intentional and differentiated to students’ needs.

In the last part of this blog series, we will explore the strong and intentional ongoing support that is embedded in Being a Reader, Second Edition. We will consider how the supports offered might provide scaffolding options as you differentiate instruction for your English language learners.