

Building language and promoting concept knowledge in social studies classes

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October 2009

CREATE is a National Research and Development Center funded through the National Center for Education Research (NCER), Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education. It addresses specific challenges in the education of English language learners in the middle grades (Grades 4-8)

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In general, ELLs

- have fewer opportunities to engage in academic discussions,
- to be exposed to rich content instruction, and
- to have good language models among their peers.

- In middle school, English language learners' academic success depends on their ability to acquire the content and vocabulary knowledge associated with each of the content areas.

Therefore, we were interested in determining the

- effect of a seventh grade social studies intervention that included specific instructional and learning strategies, and flexible grouping on students' content knowledge and
- on their vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Findings

- ELLs in the intervention consistently outperformed ELLs in comparison condition.
- ELLs in the intervention performed as well as non-ELLs in the comparison condition.
- Non-ELLs in the intervention also benefited from the intervention.

Intervention

- Multi-component
- Disciplinary knowledge
- Effective practices

Intervention components

1. Introduce the big idea
2. Teach pre-selected vocabulary
3. Paired reading or teacher-led reading
4. Discuss reading questions
5. Watch video clip
6. Discuss video questions
7. Wrap-up

Disciplinary Literacy

- Knowledge and skill in the subject area is essential in supporting young people in becoming active participants in society.
- Content literacy instruction can help students gain access to the accepted knowledge of the disciplines allowing them to also critique and change that knowledge.

Thus,

- the basis for instruction were “big ideas”.
- Big ideas are concepts or principles that facilitate the most efficient and broadest acquisition of knowledge.
- This shifted the instructional focus from the acquisition of historical facts to one in which the *big ideas* provided context for using language and understanding the content.

Effective Practices

- ✓ Enhance instruction
 - To build language
 - To build content knowledge
 - To build comprehension
- ✓ Delivery of Instruction
 - Interactive
 - Flexible grouping

Objective: Build language

Explicit vocabulary instruction:

- Students need an academic vocabulary
- Words central to the big idea

Practices: To build language

Explicit vocabulary instruction:

1. Pronounce the word, give Spanish cognate, and define it.
2. Ask or tell students how the illustration is representative of the word.
3. Use the word in two sentences.
4. Give examples and non-examples.
5. Give students opportunities to encounter the word throughout the lesson.

Practices: To build language

Discussions

- Structured opportunities to use vocabulary words taught, to use vocabulary associated with content, and to compare information from various formats.
- Increases students' opportunities for both comprehensible input and output.
- Is focused and scaffolded

Practice: To build comprehension

Graphic organizers

- assist students to organize information and their thoughts,
- better understand the discipline, and
- make connections among and between concepts

Practice: To build comprehension

Graphic organizers

1. Introduce the graphic organizer students will use and have students locate it in their notebooks.
2. Explain how they will use it that day or throughout the week.
3. Remind students that graphic organizers are used to write the most important information (main ideas) in their lessons.
4. Review students' responses.

Practice: To develop comprehension

Questions related to the readings or video

- Questions are posed prior to reading or watching a video clip.
- Students work in pairs to answer

Practice: to build content knowledge

Strategic use of media:

- Brief video clips
- Related to the big idea or target concept
- Provide additional background information on topics that are unfamiliar to students

Practice: to build content knowledge

Strategic use of media:

- To build background knowledge
- To anchor instruction
- To provide content in an additional format

Activity: to build content knowledge

Strategic use of media:

1. Introduce the video clip either before or after students have read the textbook passage.
2. Tell students what to listen for as they watch the video.
3. After watching the clip, pairs discuss.
 - Answer questions
 - Compare to text
4. Students contribute their answers in a whole class discussion.

Practice: Flexible grouping

Structured pair work

- Increases students opportunities for both comprehensible input and output.
- Provides an interactive and motivating structure for peer-mediated learning, and
- Increases engaged time.

Activities: Structured Pair Work

- reading text,
- working on graphic organizers, and
- discussing a posed question.

Summary

The components have evidence of being effective general instruction practices and research with ELLs indicates that the objective met with each of the components has been identified as important in improving the academic outcomes of ELLs (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Conclusion

The components used in this intervention can be easily adapted for use in other content areas It requires:

- a shift in the focus of instruction to an emphasis on the big ideas,
- attention to vocabulary and background knowledge development, and
- altering interaction patterns in the classroom between teacher and students and between students.