

Transformational Opportunities: Language and Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners in the Common Core Era in the United States

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New demands of the Common Core State Standards imply instructional transformations for all classrooms in the United States, but teachers of students designated as English language learners (ELLs) are among those most likely to feel the impact in their daily professional lives. Language is an integral part of classroom learning in all subject areas, and this article addresses the new and special demands made by the English language arts Common Core Standards that are particularly relevant for the education of ELLs in mainstream and sheltered language arts and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classrooms. The authors propose three key reconceptualizations for teachers of ELLs in English language arts, outlining what is necessary to realize opportunities provided in the standards for these students' linguistic development and academic achievement. They illustrate these reconceptualizations with examples from an instructional unit that has been designed for linguistically diverse middle school Common Core classrooms and exemplifies subject-specific instructional practices that meet the needs of ELLs.

doi: 10.1002/tesj.133

Waves of reform are nothing new to most K–12 classroom teachers. Curricula, programs, standards, and the like come and go almost every school year, and a “wait-and-see” reaction is often a rational response to such changes. After all, what will *really* change? We argue that the demands of the Common Core State Standards represent change of a fundamentally different kind for both content-area teachers and those who specialize in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) in the United States. The implicit and explicit language and literacy demands of the new standards ensure that more will be required of teachers and students in learning the language practices of subject areas and acquiring subject-specific knowledge and expertise through the use of language. This new vision of instruction in the standards implies instructional transformations for all classrooms, but teachers of students designated as English language learners (ELLs)—whether in mainstream, sheltered content-area, or ESOL classrooms—are among those most likely to feel the impact in their daily professional lives.

The English language arts (ELA) standards state that it is “beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners” (and for students with special needs) but that educators are nonetheless responsible for providing “the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if [students] are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post–high school lives” (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2010, p. 6). To accomplish such a task, the document urges inclusion of ELLs in subject-area classroom settings and emphasizes that students can meet the ELA standards “without displaying native-like control of conventions and vocabulary” (p. 6). Such guidance suggests instructional transformations that may or may not resonate with some educators’ philosophies, instructional practices, and lived experiences regarding the education of ELLs. Rather than seeing this as a moment of debilitating conflict, however, we view it as a valuable transformative opportunity for the profession.

Specifically, we argue that transformations are necessary regarding educators’ understandings of language, language

learning, and language learners, and that such changes are vital for equitable classroom learning experiences in the Common Core era. Such an emphasis applies to educators at all levels and in all subject areas, but this need is particularly acute for those non-ESOL specialist content-area teachers who focus on English language arts. These are the teachers and teacher educators who are often formally or informally known in their buildings or institutions for their expertise in teaching language and literacy, but who may or may not have specific expertise in the teaching and learning of second languages to children whose primary language is not English. To this end, we suggest a vision for how teacher knowledge and instructional practices in English language arts can be transformed to meet new demands created by the standards for English language learners.

In the sections that follow, we first outline several of the new demands made by the English language arts standards that are particularly relevant for the education of ELLs. We next propose three key reconceptualizations for ELA teachers that address these demands and outline what is necessary to realize opportunities provided in the standards for these students' linguistic development and academic achievement. We illustrate these reconceptualizations with excerpts from a middle school language arts instructional unit (Walqui, Koelsch, & Schmida, 2012) that was created as part of a university-based, grant-funded initiative to provide freely available curricular exemplars of Common Core-based content-area instruction accessible to ELLs.

New Demands in the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards

As will become clear when we discuss an instructional exemplar later in this article, effective instruction for ELLs to meet the new standards will require opportunities for students to engage with texts, peers, and teachers using language and literacy in all of its complexity. However, in order to understand the demands that ELLs will face, it is helpful, at least initially, to focus on each of the domains articulated by the standards (reading, writing, listening/speaking, and language) and to consider key language and literacy practices highlighted within each of those domains. We have

discussed these demands—along with ideas for leveraging opportunities for ELLs to meet them—in greater depth elsewhere (e.g., Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2012; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2012; van Lier & Walqui, 2012; Walqui & Heritage, 2012; see also Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012; Hull & Moje, 2012). Here, we highlight just a few of the more predominant challenges relevant to ELLs in each area.

Reading: Engaging With Complex Texts to Build Knowledge Across the Curriculum

In what is probably the aspect of the Common Core State Standards that has garnered most attention, students are called upon to read and comprehend texts of increasing complexity, especially texts that are *informational* in nature (shifting away from the traditional dominance of fictional literature in the English language arts curriculum). As articulated by the standards, the complexity of a text involves the extent to which multiple levels of meaning are embedded in the text, how explicitly an author's purpose is stated, how typical conventions of genre are represented, the amount of figurative language used, and the text's grammatical features and vocabulary (CCSSI, 2010, Appendix A). Such textual complexity, along with new and cognitively demanding ideas and concepts students will encounter in many texts, represent challenges for many students, particularly those who have had limited access to such texts either at home or in their previous schooling. For ELLs reading in a language that, by definition, they are still in the process of acquiring, these issues are particularly acute. In order to meet these challenges, successful second language readers draw on the resources at their disposal, including their developing knowledge of the (second) language in which they are reading, comprehension strategies developed in their first and second languages, prior knowledge related to topics and themes of the target reading, and interest and motivation (Bernhardt, 2011).

Beginning-level ELLs who are learning to read for the first time face particular challenges because they must decode written text in a language they are at the very early stages of acquiring orally (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011). Using and developing oral language is particularly significant as a foundation for building

early reading skills, and the standards themselves emphasize the need for students to engage in discussions, asking questions, and sharing their own and building on others' ideas. Importantly, research has shown that ELLs can gain expertise in literacy in English even as their oral proficiency develops and that ELLs' early literacy experiences, including those in students' first languages, support subsequent literacy development (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Riches & Genesee, 2006).

Writing: Using Evidence to Analyze, Inform, and Argue

As students progress through the grades, the Common Core State Standards require them to develop the ability to write a variety of text types and address different audiences and purposes, providing information to help readers better grasp a topic or concept and presenting arguments logically to defend interpretations or judgments. Along the way, they are asked to cite evidence in defense of claims, consider the strength of the evidence others provide when making arguments, and use writing as part of the research process. ELLs must therefore use their developing English to employ evidence in writing while navigating conventions of textual ownership and citations, an area that can be particularly challenging for ELLs who may have learned these culturally defined norms outside of U.S. school settings (Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Pecorari, 2003).

As does first language writing development (Graves, 1983; Henderson, 1981; Loban, 1976), second language writing involves gradual and sometimes slow development, with significant individual learner variation in progress through different stages (Ellis, 1994; Fu, 2009; Valdés, 2001). However, there are also important differences between first and second language writing development. Perhaps most notable is that, depending on their age and background, students may have developed literacy skills and genre knowledge in their home language(s), valuable resources for learning to write in English (Harklau, 2002). Others, especially younger ELLs, may be exposed to writing for the first time in English-medium classes, sometimes without a strong oral foundation in the language in which they are writing. For all students, writing requires them to draw on a range of existing

individual and classroom resources, and this process can be scaffolded to support students in completing tasks while fostering increasing autonomy over time (Kibler, 2011; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013).

Speaking and Listening: Working Collaboratively, Understanding Multiple Perspectives, and Presenting Ideas

The Common Core State Standards require students to use oral language to build on others' ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm their understandings through informal, collaborative group interactions as well as formal presentations. Students are expected to interpret information; explain how it contributes to target topics, texts, and issues; and "present claims and findings by sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes" (CCSSI, 2010, p. 49). Anderson and Lynch (1988) explain that comprehending oral language involves drawing from and integrating sources such as schematic knowledge (factual, sociocultural, and discourse-related background information), contextual knowledge (physical settings, participants, and what has been/will be said), and systemic knowledge (semantics, syntax, and phonology). Doing so effectively involves the use of strategies such as focusing on relevant parts of a message, making predictions, and monitoring one's own comprehension (Goh, 2005; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In order to engage in the kind of speaking called for by the standards, students must also have opportunities to develop the *interactional competence* necessary to participate in the social context of the classroom: negotiating, constructing, and even resisting norms of interaction governing various typical classroom participation structures (Cazden, 1986, 2001; CCSSO, 2012; Mehan, 1979; Philips, 1972, 1983). For example, in classroom presentations, students might be asked to manage the floor, either as individuals or as a group, while simultaneously being expected to respond to teachers' unpredictable interjections and directives, and to engage with the student audience's questions and comments (Bunch, 2009). At the same time, students may be called on to address different audiences simultaneously in a single presentation, often directing their message to fellow classmates while knowing that

the teacher is the audience who will ultimately be evaluating them. Whole-class discussions or group work involve different, but equally complicated, norms for interaction and engagement with different audience(s) for different purposes. ELLs may be unfamiliar with both interactional norms and the language and actions through which they must be accomplished.

Language: Using and Developing Linguistic Resources to Do All of the Above

The Common Core State Standards call for students to develop both a “firm control over the conventions of standard English” and an appreciation “that language is at least as much a matter of craft as of rules” (CCSSI, 2010, p. 51). According to the standards, students must be able to “choose words, syntax, and punctuation to express themselves *to achieve particular functions and rhetorical effects*” (p. 51, emphasis added). As they engage in these functions and achieve these effects, it is important to understand that ELLs, by definition, will use “imperfect” (i.e., nonnative-like) English. With little evidence that “teaching” linguistic features of second languages in isolation leads to learners’ ability to employ those features apart from discrete evaluations that target their use (see Valdés et al., 2011), it is exactly the settings that allow and support ELLs’ participation in the language and literacy practices called for by the remainder of the standards (reading, writing, listening/speaking) that hold most promise for ELLs’ further language development.

The key reconceptualizations described below and illustrated in excerpts from the exemplar unit suggest ways in which teachers can effectively respond to these demands and to ELLs’ participation in Common Core instruction and acquisition of English language and literacy.

RESPONDING TO NEW DEMANDS: KEY RECONCEPTUALIZATIONS NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION FOR ELLS IN THE COMMON CORE

The development of literacies (Hull & Moje, 2012) in any subject in the school curriculum involves learning to control new ideas and skills, to express new ideas through language, and to communicate

in ways that are contextually appropriate. School-based language is often subject-specific, and it involves concise and precise ways of expressing complex ideas and concepts that are embedded in the content of a subject and that are essential for learning in that subject. If this is true when the medium of instruction is one of students' home languages, then it is especially important to consider its implications in the education of second language learners.

How do ELLs learn to participate effectively in school-based language and literacy practices? Literacies are learned through participation in activities that both challenge and support participants, in what is conceptualized in sociocultural theory as *apprenticeship* (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). In other words, students need to perceive that the invitation to engage in learning will result in their benefit; that it is legitimate, treating them as worthwhile participants with something to contribute to the exchange; that it is well supported instructionally; and that approximations to accomplished models are accepted as promising attempts on the road to skillful understandings and performances. This means that apprenticeship always takes place in social contexts, where relationships among participants are as important as the activities in which they are engaged. Jerome Bruner (1996) observed that students not only learn *about*, they also learn *to be*; the roles being developed in the classroom context in which academic activity takes place both shape and are shaped by the participants in it. Consequently, the invitations students receive to participate, the nature of the proposed participation, and the availability of contextual supports are all decisive in their impact on students' development.

To provide an example of what instruction that meets new demands in the Common Core might look like in practice, we draw from a middle school English language arts unit focused on persuasive texts, *Persuasion Across Time and Space: Analyzing and Producing Complex Texts* (Walqui et al., 2012; available for download at ell.stanford.edu), created to exemplify pedagogical arrangements that realize the academic potential of English language learners in Common Core State Standards-based classrooms. The unit provides a model for either mainstream ELA

classrooms, which at many secondary schools include some students classified as ELLs alongside students who are either English-only or classified as English-proficient, or for sheltered ELA classrooms. It may also be appropriate for ESOL classes at the intermediate level or above. To be clear, we are not arguing that it is appropriate for beginning-level, newcomer ELLs to be placed in mainstream ELA classrooms, and the unit was not designed with this particular population in mind. As a further note of clarification, although this unit has been designed for English-medium classrooms, teachers are encouraged to draw on students' first languages in a range of ways appropriate to their classroom context in order to activate students' background knowledge, scaffold their own comprehension processes, and engage in effective communication.

The unit comprises five multiple-day lessons and is designed to be taught in daily 45- to 50-minute lessons over a 5- to 6-week period (or an equivalent length of instructional time in a block-scheduling format). As Figure 1 demonstrates, the curriculum is spiraled, in that students develop and deepen their understanding of persuasive rhetoric as they move from more familiar forms of persuasion to more complex and historically situated forms.

- Lesson 1: Students are introduced to the use of persuasion in visual, print, and multimodal advertisements. This lesson explores how advertising techniques first inform, engage, and interest readers and viewers emotionally and then persuade them to take some form of action. As they analyze modality, word meaning, and nuance in multimodal texts, students examine authorial point of view, purpose, and intended audience effects. Students determine central ideas of texts and cite specific evidence to support their analysis.
- Lesson 2: Students further their understanding and analysis of persuasive techniques as they engage in close reading of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They first read informational texts to build schema about the time, place, and political context of Lincoln's famous speech. Students then have multiple opportunities to examine and interact with the Gettysburg Address as they gain macro-level understanding of key ideas in Lincoln's message and engage in micro-level examination of elements such as cohesive and coherence ties. Students then translate the Gettysburg Address into "modern" English to synthesize their understanding of Lincoln's message.
- Lesson 3: Students learn about Aristotle's three appeals and analyze how these rhetorical devices are used to persuade a reader or audience to take

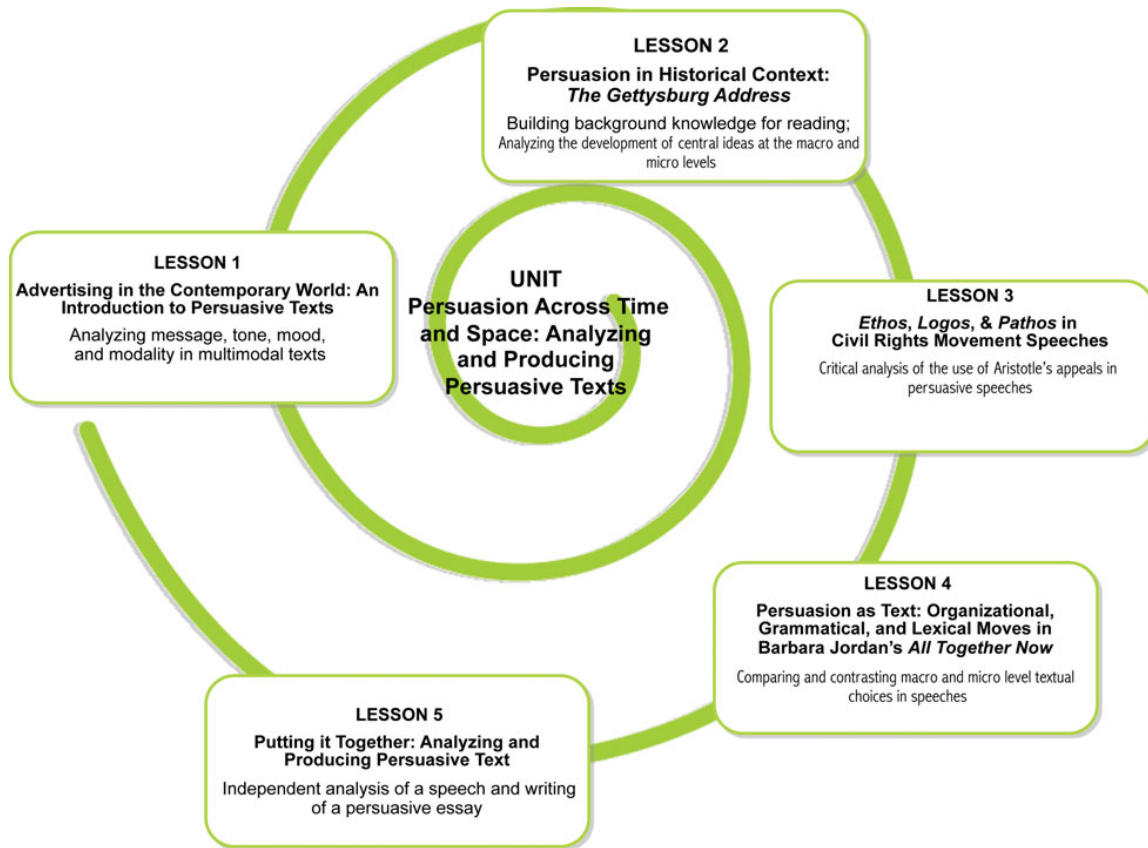


Figure 1. Spiraled unit design

action or identify with a particular cause. Students use this knowledge to critically analyze speeches including Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," Robert F. Kennedy's "On the Assassination of Martin Luther King," and George Wallace's "The Civil Rights Movement: Fraud, Sham, and Hoax."

- Lesson 4: Students examine how authors construct persuasive texts at macro and micro levels. Students work collaboratively to analyze structural, organizational, grammatical, and lexical choices made in one speech, Barbara Jordan's "All Together Now." They communicate their understanding of these elements to a younger middle school audience in preparation for writing their own speeches as the culminating performance of the unit.
- Lesson 5: Students appropriate what they have learned from in-depth study of persuasive texts to independently analyze a persuasive speech and write their own persuasive texts. Students begin by consolidating their knowledge of how authors deliberately use persuasive devices by analyzing and assuming the role of an author studied in the unit. Students then analyze a persuasive speech, written by someone close in age, before applying techniques learned in the unit to construct their own persuasive texts.

Lessons provide multiple opportunities to activate and build on students' background knowledge of popular persuasive

appeals and then to develop and refine students' understanding, introducing progressively more complex tasks that build on principles of persuasion previously learned in the unit. In this sense, lessons are closely linked rather than stand-alone sets of activities. The three main features of the unit discussed below, each illustrated with an excerpt from one or more lessons, signal important reconceptualizations necessary for the design and enactment of learning opportunities for second language learners if we want them to develop sophisticated literacies for life in school and beyond.

Reconceptualization 1. Away From a Conceptualization of Language Acquisition as an Individual Process Toward an Understanding of Language Acquisition as a Process of Apprenticeship That Takes Place in Social Contexts

We take the position that language learning is not solely the accomplishment of individual students, but is fundamentally a socially constructed process of apprenticeship in which interaction is (and becomes) the engine driving development. In this respect teachers have the responsibility for planning robust and flexible invitations for students to engage in apprenticeship with others through tasks that have multiple entry points and provide benefits—albeit differentially—for all (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). The five lessons in the unit exemplar contain multiple carefully constructed opportunities for students to work in dyads or groups of three or four, a form of social engagement that develops their conceptual, academic, and pragmatic competence.

For example, during the second lesson, as students prepare for reading the Gettysburg Address, they engage in a social, multifaceted reading process that simultaneously builds content knowledge by historically contextualizing the American Civil War and encourages use of metacognitive skills to support the reading of complex texts. The task is structured as a jigsaw project, in which each member of a three-person *base group* joins a different *expert group* to develop knowledge on a different aspect of the war. Once in expert groups, students divide into dyads to read a short three- to five-paragraph text, with each student reading alternate paragraphs aloud. At the end of their

designated paragraphs, students use a *clarifying bookmark* (Quality Teaching for English Learners, 2007) to talk with their partner and monitor their understanding of the text (see Figure 2). With short texts—no longer than four paragraphs—reading of the entire text is done aloud to provide students with peer opportunities to practice the bookmark strategy, but with longer texts the strategy would be employed only with selected paragraphs that lend themselves to the given metacognitive strategies being practiced.

In reading challenging texts that may be beyond their comprehension level, students engaging in the clarifying bookmark activity are required to slow down their reading and, in conjunction with peers, consciously apply strategies to make sense of the text, focusing on what they understand, how they understand it, what they do not understand, and what they can do about it. Over time, students appropriate this conscious and effortful focus on strategies and their relevant application, automatically using these skills in individual reading until they encounter a text that is complex beyond their ability to understand. At this point students are once again able to employ the conscious process of focusing on textual meaning-making through strategies they have learned. Figure 2 shows three clarifying bookmarks used in this unit. The left-hand side of the card lists six strategies (two per bookmark) that students may apply to metacognitively address their source of difficulty. To the right of each metacognitive strategy are three formulaic expressions (Ellis, 2005) that can help ELLs begin to articulate their attempts at meaning-making.

Several elements of support for ELLs in this task are notable. First, the activity begins in a social, peer-supported structure that requires students to engage in metacognitive and content-related knowledge building before asking students to read and employ the strategy individually. Further, students are given choice as to *what you can say*, in that multiple examples of classroom registers of language appropriate for the task are provided. Finally, introduction to these metacognitive strategies is gradual. The two strategies found in Bookmark 1 are introduced to students first, and they are practiced until students appropriate them. At that

Handout #5: Clarifying Bookmark

Clarifying Bookmark 1

What I can do	What I can say
I am going to think about what the selected text may mean.	<i>I'm not sure what this is about, but I think it may mean...</i>
	<i>This part is tricky, but I think it means...</i>
	<i>After rereading this part, I think it may mean...</i>
I am going to summarize my understanding so far.	<i>What I understand about this reading so far is...</i>
	<i>I can summarize this part by saying...</i>
	<i>The main points of this section are...</i>

Clarifying Bookmark 2

What I can do	What I can say
I am going to use my prior knowledge to help me understand.	<i>I know something about this from...</i>
	<i>I have read or heard about this when...</i>
	<i>I don't understand the section, but I do recognize...</i>
I am going to apply related concepts and/or readings.	<i>One reading/idea I have encountered before that relates to this is...</i>
	<i>We learned about this idea/concept when we studied...</i>
	<i>This concept/idea is related to...</i>

Clarifying Bookmark 3

What I can do	What I can say
I am going to ask questions about ideas and phrases I don't understand.	<i>Two questions I have about this section are...</i>
	<i>I understand this part, but I have a question about...</i>
	<i>I have a question about...</i>
I am going to use related text, pictures, tables, and graphs to help me understand unclear ideas.	<i>If we look at this graphic, it shows...</i>
	<i>The table gives me more information about...</i>
	<i>When I scanned the earlier part of the chapter, I found...</i>

Figure 2. Clarifying bookmark

point, Bookmark 2 (with two more strategies) is added, and students have a choice among four options. When, after several applications, the teacher has observed that all students can make the appropriate choice among four plans of attack, the final two strategies (Bookmark 3) are added. Eventually students have a choice of six strategies that they can use autonomously as they read and make sense of complex texts.

Reconceptualization 2. Away From a Conceptualization of Pedagogical Activities as “Help” Provided to Students Geared Mainly to “Get the Job Done” Toward Activities That Scaffold Students’ Development and Increasing Autonomy

Introduction of the Common Core State Standards has triggered discussion around educators’ understanding of the concept of scaffolding. For some, the term refers to any help teachers provide that enables students to complete activities. Others have made arguments that there should be no more scaffolding for students, especially for English language learners, because too much scaffolding has been provided. Both responses communicate misunderstandings of the term. Coined by Bruner and Sherwood (1976), and based on Vygotsky’s seminal ideas of activity in the *zone of proximal development*, scaffolding is a metaphor that refers to the “just right” kind of support that teachers design for students in order to move them beyond their current state of development and make their knowledge *generative*, so that students can use it to support new learning. Scaffolding is always responsive, predicated on observations of students’ level of maturation, and based on teachers’ knowledge of the assistance required to realize students’ potential. Just like physical scaffolds on buildings, pedagogical ones “should be constantly changed, dismantled, extended, and adapted in accordance with the needs of the workers. In themselves they have no value” (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 24). Scaffolding begins where the student currently is, and it both builds and accelerates development. As Maybin, Mercer, and Steirer (1992) remind us:

[Scaffolding] is not just any assistance which helps a learner accomplish a task. It is help which will enable a learner to accomplish a task which they would not have been quite able to manage on their own, and it is help which is intended to bring the learner closer to a state of competence which will enable them to complete such a task on their own. (p. 188)

Two essential aspects of scaffolding are intimately related: *structure* and *process*. Structure refers to the organization of the activity students are asked to participate in, how it begins, what is required to work through it, and how it culminates. However, the structure is there only to make the process possible. The clarifying

bookmark, for example, provides an organized way of supporting students in interactions around complex text.

Scaffolding is also forward-looking. A key characteristic of scaffolding is intellectual push with concomitant support, which eventually leads to a process of handover/takeover. Teachers' observations of students' participation allow them to plan instructional next steps that enable students to assume increasing responsibility for supporting themselves. The clarifying bookmark, for example, has three levels of handover: Once the first two strategies are appropriated by students, two more are added with instructional support until they are appropriated, and so it continues with the other two.

Both initial scaffolding and the handover/takeover process require thoughtful planning as well as in-the-moment adaptation. Hammond and Gibbons (2007) call these two different aspects of support *designed-in* and *contingent* scaffolding. Designed-in scaffolding (embodied in the instructional unit presented here) refers to the planned assistance teachers deliberately construct as they select, sequence, and consider instructional activities that will support their lessons. These planned features "are an essential pre-requisite for creating a learning context where contingent scaffolding becomes possible. Without these designed-in features, contingent scaffolding may become a hit and miss affair that contributes little to learning goals of lessons or units of work" (p. 10). As scaffolded activities are enacted in practice, and as teachers observe interactions, then other supports are provided or removed contingently, or as needed.

In addition to the thematically and conceptually linked and spiraling unit curriculum, teachers are provided with multiple pathways for differentiating instruction so that all students can achieve at high levels. The unit as a whole, and each lesson individually, includes apprenticeship experiences in which students have multiple levels of support designed to foster increasing levels of autonomy over time. In each lesson, learning activities or tasks are carefully sequenced within and across a three-part lesson architecture (Quality Teaching for English Learners, 2007; see Figure 3) that prepares students to engage with texts, guides them in interacting with those texts, and then helps extend their understanding.

Throughout the unit, options for minimal, moderate, and maximal levels of designed-in scaffolding—intended to support students in concert with the contingent scaffolding that will result from students’ interaction with each other and the teachers’ ongoing, in-the-moment formative assessment—are also described for each lesson task. The nature of this scaffolding, however, deserves further discussion. At its best, differentiation allows teachers to provide students with individualized supports that will allow them to be successful in achieving the same goals although through varied types of performances, but in practice many teachers “differentiate” by providing different instructional goals for different kinds of students. This, of course, can perpetuate academic and linguistic divides. The best way to approach the topic of differentiation, in our minds, is to think of it as the right kind of support offered to students in a class so that they all make progress toward accomplishing the same goals. This entails inviting all students to engage in similar activities and contribute equally to the accomplishment of a common goal, although each student may be scaffolded differentially through designed-in and contingent support. In this sense, each student’s

3 Moments in a Lesson

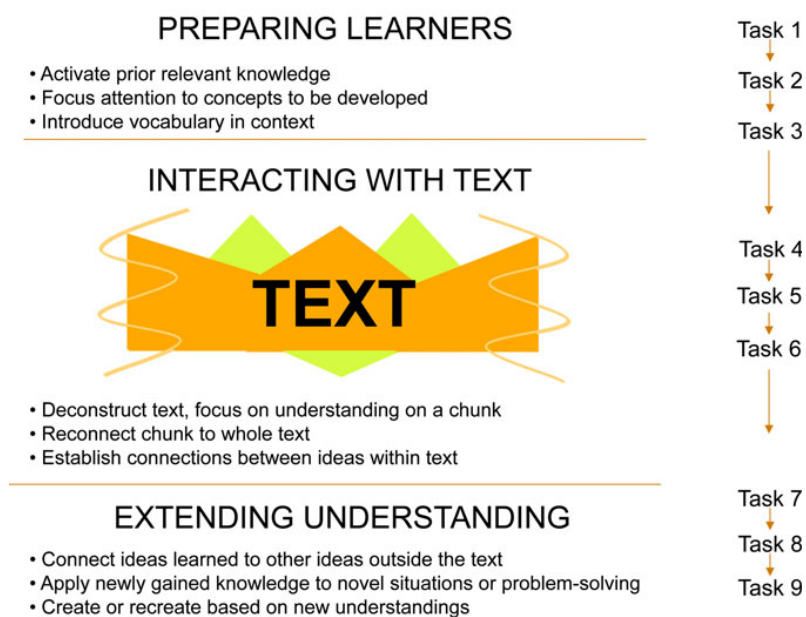


Figure 3. Three-part lesson architecture

contribution is equally important to the accomplishment of the joint task. Students are then prepared to engage successfully in individual tasks, such as those described in Lesson 5.

In a previous example, we mentioned that the jigsaw project that prepared students to read the Gettysburg Address provided them with group-based opportunities to develop different parts of equally important information necessary to prepare them to comprehend Lincoln’s complex text. Because each student returns to his or her base group as an “expert” with different information, contributions are equally important, and so all members of the base group learn part of the background information necessary to read the speech. Although each of the three texts is essential to this preparation, Text 1 (“The Biography of Abraham Lincoln”), Text 2 (“The Civil War”), and Text 3 (“The Battle of Gettysburg”) vary in length and complexity. This is where differentiation takes place: A teacher is asked to homogeneously group students into three expert groups by reading proficiency and to give the longest (and most complex) text to students at the highest level of proficiency, and so on.¹ Students read different texts and fill in their designated section of a graphic organizer in homogeneous expert groups, but once in their heterogeneous base groups they will be able to share key information about their text that the other students need in order to complete the entire graphic organizer. In this sense, each base group must achieve the same goal for the lesson, but each member receives the right kind of support, accomplished through both differentiated reading tasks and teachers’ contingent scaffolding of individual students during expert and base group phases of the reading activity.

Reconceptualization 3. Away From Use of Simple or Simplified Texts Toward Engagement With Complex, Amplified Texts

English language learners should have opportunities to engage with authentic texts that represent various elements of complexity, rather than having access only to simple or simplified texts.

¹ Adequately determining ELLs’ reading proficiency is a complex endeavor, given their varying first language literacy skills, second language literacy skills, and overall second language proficiency. In this unit, teachers are encouraged to use a range of diagnostic measures to best make this determination.

However, complex texts are not accessible on their own: They need to be amplified through processes of scaffolding, which can be embedded in the text or added to it.

Earlier, we pointed out that texts can be complex in a variety of dimensions, both in terms of a text's grammatical features and the demands that its vocabulary represents as well as in other ways, such as how many levels of meaning are implied, how conventionally the structure of a text represents particular genres, and whether, even if conventional, those genres are familiar to students. In working with students to become proficient in reading complex texts, it is important to keep in mind that students can focus on particular *aspects* of text complexity while being provided with support that "lightens the load" on other aspects. Similarly, text complexity can be initially explored with students using modalities that might be more accessible and motivating for ELLs, especially at earlier levels of proficiency, as well as for struggling readers in general. For example, in Lesson 1 of the unit, students are asked to review advertisements and their slogans, and to categorize them as "soft" or "hard" sells, indicating what language and visual cues prompted their responses. Building on their intuitive observations, students are then led through a systematization of their knowledge of the use of modality in English, learning typical language and modal verbs used in soft, medium, and hard sells. After this they create their own advertisements and explain the type of sell they intend. The concept, introduced initially in Lesson 1, is spiraled and made deeper and more complex through subsequent lessons.

An example of scaffolding embedded in texts comes when, after reading background information on the Civil War, discussing key words and ideas found in the Gettysburg Address using a Wordle (www.wordle.net), and hearing the text read aloud twice by the teacher (who provides opportunities for students to explore language and details of the speech as needed), students then answer the kind of text-dependent questions requiring close reading that have been advocated as a strategy associated with the Common Core State Standards (see Brown & Kappes, 2012). Note that students are asked to engage

in such activities only after they have had the ample opportunities mentioned above to activate and build background knowledge, work with peers and the teacher, and experience elements of the text in multiple modalities.

Scaffolding is then extended to support further levels of analysis as students are asked to read the text in *four voices* to deepen their comprehension and prepare for analysis of literary devices in the text. For that purpose, the speech has been divided into chunks of language that represent semantically coherent units of information. Divisions were typically (though not always) made at clausal or phrasal boundaries; such choices were made according to the complexity of the chunk and the semantic meaning it carries. This technique can be seen in the first sentence of the Gettysburg Address, in which chunks alternate in four different fonts (plain, bold, underlined, and italics):

Four score and seven years ago **our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.**

The entire text of the speech in four voices can be found in Figure 4.

In this activity, each student in a group of four is asked to read aloud phrases in her or his selected font, and groups read the text two times or more as necessary to make sense of meaning and intonation. Teachers make it clear to students beforehand that many times, as they listen to English, they are likely not to understand at least parts of a text. The advice follows that they should not give up if they do not understand one piece but instead should focus on comprehending the next part of the text. Without this explicit advice, ELLs often become frustrated and stop trying to attend to meaning. Even if this pause is only momentary, by the time they focus on the text again, the damage is irreparable. If instead they learn to tell themselves that if they do not understand something in the text, they should focus on the next chunk, or the one after it, they will begin to develop two habits that make good second language learners: They will tolerate ambiguity and learn to make educated guesses, thereby becoming *willing and accurate guessers*, characteristics of successful language learners that Rubin

Handout #10: The Gettysburg Address in Four Voices

Directions: Each student chooses one of four fonts (regular font, bold font, underlined font, or italics); when it is your turn to read aloud, you will read your font only.

Four score and seven years ago **our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.**

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, **testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.** *We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.*

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, **living and dead**, who struggled here, have consecrated it, *far above our poor power to add or detract.* **The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.** It is for us the living, **rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.** *It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

Figure 4. Four voices

(1975) pointed out several decades ago. The materials and instructions provided for teachers in this unit excerpt encourage these characteristics, both in helping students see examples of ways in which texts can be meaningfully chunked into smaller parts and in encouraging students to develop effective comprehension strategies that allow them to gain meaning from complex texts and prepare for a more formal analysis of literary devices.

This unit exemplar attempts to provide guidance to teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum developers regarding reconceptualizations that will need to take place in the education of ELLs so as to realize their potential in the Common Core era. Second language development is a complex process, in which each student develops along a unique path and trajectory because they all start at different points and because scaffolds provided for them work in different ways at the individual level of impact. Nonetheless, it is important to know that, given appropriate pedagogical supports, all students will advance and that the students who have the most room to grow will do so in accelerated ways.

CONCLUSION

The unit detailed here is part of an effort to exemplify the curricular and instructional reconceptualizations necessary for ELLs to meet new challenging content standards in the Common Core era, a model that can inform both language arts and ESOL teachers as they move forward with curricular reform in their schools and districts. In other words, we hope that the unit, beyond being enacted by teachers for whom the grade level and topic are appropriate, will spark efforts by teachers, schools, districts, and curriculum developers to create materials that are promising for ELLs at a wide variety of grade levels and that address a range of thematic approaches. As teachers and other educators start the process of reconceptualizing their instruction for ELLs in the Common Core era—that is, as they move beyond “wait and see” toward engagement and action—what are the key principles they should keep in mind?

The unit profiled here, intended as a starting point for reflection and conversation rather than a blueprint for instruction, offers several implications. First, instruction should aim to socialize students into the language and literacy practices emphasized in the Common Core State Standards, and while engaging in this process teachers should focus on guiding and supporting students rather than teaching bits and pieces of language or correcting “errors” in students’ work. Additionally, the ways in which teachers design scaffolds are key to ELLs’

success. Designed-in scaffolding is necessary for teachers to prepare lessons for diverse learners, but scaffolds are not ready-made activities that automatically fit predetermined slots or types of students. Rather, they must be personalized in response to particular students and texts. In this way, units and lessons provide a framework for contingent, interactive scaffolds that are both student centered and context sensitive, a framework that allows teachers to remove scaffolds when students no longer require them. Finally, effective instruction in the Common Core era does not settle for simplifying curricula and instruction in efforts to make it easier for ELLs to understand. Teachers should instead focus on amplification, or what Gibbons (2003, p. 25) calls “message abundancy,” as they create materials and classroom activities that offer ELLs multiple opportunities to learn curricular content as well as the language through which they can express this learning. This can be done through several techniques, including the use of visual, oral, and written modalities; spiraled curricula that deepen knowledge and skills over multiple lessons; multiple activities that engage with elements of the same text in varied ways for different purposes; and groupings that allow students to learn from peers as well as teachers. In this way, classroom teachers can be urged to amplify rather than simplify language and literacy instruction for ELLs (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). The same recommendation can apply to the collective efforts of all educators who share responsibility for ELLs in these times of change.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work discussed in this article was supported by the Understanding Language (UL) initiative (ell.stanford.edu), funded by the Carnegie Corporation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations. We are grateful to our UL colleagues for their ongoing collaboration and constructive criticism.

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