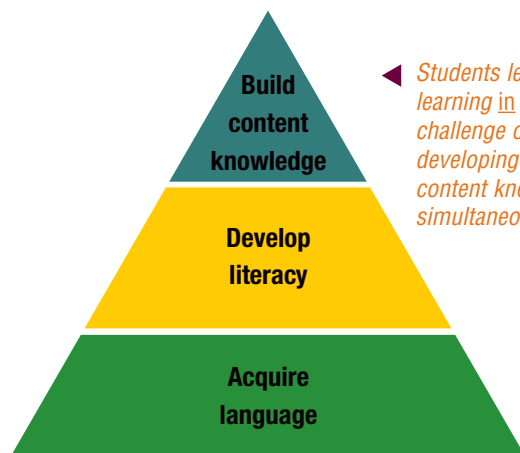


The Application of SDAIE Strategies in Developing ELLs' Academic Literacy

Why Additional Language Support is Critical for Beginning and Early Intermediate ELLs

by Dr. B. Gloria Guzmán Johannessen

Secondary teachers have always faced the daunting task of planning instruction that meets the needs of all learners in classrooms filled with students of differing language, cultural, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. What is different for secondary teachers today is the dramatic increase in the number of English language learners (ELLs) entering middle and high school. These students pose additional challenges to an educational system that is largely unprepared to meet their linguistic and academic needs, including the need to develop academic literacy, a concept that flows from the idea of “academic language” (or “academic English”). Academic literacy refers to the reading, writing, and oral discourse required in a formal academic setting; it is a complex undertaking that requires students to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing “for multiple school-related purposes using a variety of texts and demanding a variety of products” (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).



◀ *Students learning English and learning in English face the challenge of acquiring language, developing literacy, and building content knowledge simultaneously.*

Increasingly, secondary teachers have turned to an approach called Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) to make instruction more comprehensible to their adolescent ELLs and to develop these students' academic literacy (O'Malley & Pierce, 1990; Echeverria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Herrera & Murry, 2005). The SDAIE approach provides

teachers with techniques and strategies that promote language and academic development among ELLs and, at the same time, are appropriate for English speaking students in literacy and content area instruction. However, a common mistake teachers make is using these strategies with Beginning and Early Intermediate ELLs without providing additional language support. Without such support, the strategies will not be effective and students will lose valuable instructional time. This article focuses on the rationale for the use of SDAIE strategies with students at the Beginning and Early Intermediate levels of English language proficiency.

Providing Additional Language Support—Why and When

Teachers who consciously use knowledge about their students' language, culture, and funds of knowledge recognize that instruction needs to be adapted to the students—not the other way around. From this perspective, teachers are able to make language and academic decisions in their lessons that are sensitive to ELLs at all stages of English language proficiency. Lalas and Solomon (2007) describe academic adaptation as a conscious approach to educational equity solutions because it is an integral part of educational planning and fundamental to the teaching-learning processes. Making academic adaptations is a constructive step toward creating educational experiences for ELLs that are appropriate, meaningful, and engaging. These adaptations can have a positive impact on how ELLs learn and respond in a classroom environment.

Teachers need to adapt SDAIE strategies when the language required for effective participation is beyond the English proficiency of their students. Current informal and formal English language assessments describe the expected receptive (hearing and reading) and expressive (speaking and writing) skills required at various levels of English language proficiencies. For example, Beginning students do not understand simple English conversations; they speak in one or two words and have a vocabulary so limited as to make conversation almost impossible. Similarly, Early Intermediate students can comprehend only some social conversation if it is spoken slowly and with frequent repetition. Students at this level are hesitant speakers and often remain silent because of language limitations and a restricted vocabulary. The English language limitations of these ELLs suggest that teachers must use judgment in considering how to use SDAIE strategies most effectively and appropriately in classrooms with multiple levels of student language proficiency. Generally, modifications are required for teaching strategies that require extensive receptive and expressive language.

2008 Conference Calendar

Alaska Bilingual Multicultural Education/Equity Conference

January 28–30, 2008
Anchorage, AK

NABE 2008

February 6–9, 2008
Tampa, FL

Virginia ESL Supervisors Association

February 8–9, 2008
Richmond, VA

Iowa Culture & Language Conference

February 19–20, 2008
Des Moines, IA

Illinois TESOL-BE

February 29–March 1, 2008
Naperville, IL

CABE 2008

March 6–8, 2008
San Jose, CA

TESOL 2008

April 2–5, 2008
New York, NY

Using Graphic Organizers with Beginning and Early Intermediate ELLs

Graphic organizers are one of the most effective teaching and learning strategies educators use with all students. While graphic organizers are traditionally used as pre-reading activities (Fisher & Frey, 2003), the graphic organizer presented below and others employed in SDAIE may be used in many different ways.

What? _____	Who? _____
Theme/Topic: _____	
Where? _____	When? _____
How? _____	Why? _____

It seems obvious that students must have a fair amount of language in order to use this graphic organizer effectively. Such a graphic organizer would work well with Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced ELLs, as well as with mainstream students. However, because of the complexity of the language task associated with this graphic organizer, teachers need to provide additional language support in order for it to be appropriate for ELLs at the Beginning and Early Intermediate levels. Here is an example of how a teacher might use this graphic organizer with these students before, during, and after engaging them in a reading selection.

1. Prior to presenting the graphic organizer, engage students in basic vocabulary development.

- Present new target vocabulary in context (using pictures and short, simple sentences that provide the students with meaning).
- Give students an opportunity to use the new vocabulary by pointing, repeating the words, or using the words in phrases or short, simple sentences.
- Emphasize the vocabulary that will respond to the *what*, *who*, *where*, and *when* questions.

2. Present the graphic organizer and use it for pre-reading (or during listening).

- Give each student a copy of the graphic organizer. Read each question word (*what*, *who*, and so forth) aloud and have students repeat after you.
- Ask students to listen for words that answer the *what*, *who*, *where*, and *when* questions in the selection you are going to read aloud or the selection they are going to read. (The *why* and *how* questions require a higher level of expressive English.)
- Instruct students to write relevant words on the graphic organizer as they listen to the reading.

3. Use the graphic organizer for post-reading (or post-listening).

- Review the lists of words the students wrote on the graphic organizer. As students read their words, extend concepts and expand the language by providing appropriate models in short sentences.
- Display the graphic organizer on a large screen and write in key words as you review them with students.
- Use the words in new contexts. It's important that students hear (and see) the words used in multiple contexts in order to internalize them.

4. Use the graphic organizer as a reference for expanded reading activities and writing.

- Ask students to write—following a model—short sentences that contain the new target vocabulary words you wrote on the graphic organizer.
- Provide students with additional exposure to the target words by reading short paragraphs that contain the new vocabulary; use pictures along with the reading to enhance student comprehension.
- Have high Beginning and Early Intermediate students write short, original sentences with the new vocabulary.

In classes that also include fluent English speakers and ELLs at more advanced language levels, teachers can have the more advanced students focus on all elements of the graphic organizer (including the *why* and *how* questions).

Conclusion

SDAIE offers secondary teachers strategies and techniques to develop adolescent ELLs' academic literacy by making instruction more comprehensible. These strategies can be used to meet the needs of all students, including ELLs at the Beginning and Early Intermediate stages of language proficiency. However, teachers must provide additional language support when using SDAIE strategies and techniques when the implicit language task is too challenging for ELLs at the Beginning and Early Intermediate levels of English proficiency. With additional language support, these strategies can help new ELLs build the foundation for academic literacy.

From Champion of IDEAS, Red Level

Activity 3 People, Places, and Things at School

DIRECTIONS: Look at the picture and complete the sentences. Use the word bank to help you fill in the words. Use each word only once. Write words in all caps and be neat!

UNIT 1: MY WORLD
Chapter 1: School Days
My First Day of School
By Mariko Yamaguchi

It is a warm September morning. I walk through the big door to the first of my new school. I do not see even one student that I know. I feel nervous. I see the principal. He looks at me and says, "Good morning." I feel more nervous.

Word Bank:
1. There is a...
2. There is...
3. There is...
4. There is...
5. There is...



▲ Students need exposure to new words in multiple contexts in order to build their vocabulary, a critical ingredient in academic literacy.

FAQs: ADOLESCENT ENGLISH LEARNERS

Q. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE ACADEMIC NEEDS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL ELLS? HOW DOES THIS KNOWLEDGE HELP TEACHERS?

A. Nationally, there are more than six million students in grades 6-12 at risk of failure because they read/comprehend below the level required for academic success. Recent research points out that 96% of ELLs in the eighth grade read below grade level (NCES, 2004). Short & Fitzsimmons (2007) point out that literacy development for high school ELLs is a particular problem: "Not only do these students have to master complex course content, usually with little context or understanding of the way that American schools are structured or operate, but they have fewer years to master the English language." As a complicating factor, ELLs enter middle and high school at diverse stages of English language proficiency and with dissimilar formal academic backgrounds (Diaz-Rico, 2007; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercury, 2002). Thus, there is no one level of instruction that can meet the individual needs of all students. It is important to know students' individual language, academic, and cultural backgrounds upon their entrance to the public school system (Diaz-Rico, 2007; Lalas & Solomon, 2007; Ovando, Combs, & Collier, 2006). It is also critical to take into consideration students' funds of knowledge. Researchers use the term "funds of knowledge" to describe the information, approaches to thinking and learning, and practical skills related to a community's everyday life. Educators learn about students' funds of knowledge in order to better understand the connections between academic goals and students' experiences in the community. This enables them to develop academic materials, strategies, and activities that build on what students know and can do outside of school.

Q. WHAT GUIDING PRINCIPLES PROMOTE ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS?

A. The following eight guiding principles help teachers more effectively engage ELLs in academic environments. These guiding principles are based on educational research and the contributions reflective of practitioners (Johannessen, 2002). They serve as a foundation for instructional planning that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of mainstream students as well as to students who are in the process of learning English:

1. The classroom environment reflects an orientation to academic work.
2. Academic activities have authentic and relevant communicative purposes in the target language.
3. Comprehensible input is fundamental to instructional activities.
4. Teachers have a manifest belief in the academic potential of all students.
5. Academic work is connected to students' previous knowledge and experiences.
6. Academic work has immediate utility to students' academic and social experiences beyond the classroom.
7. Language and academic assessments are essential to new teaching processes.
8. Teachers assume full responsibility for teaching.

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