LANGUAGE DIVERSITY & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:
LEADING ADVANCED LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO FOSTER ELLS' ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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Meeting #3
Agenda

9.00 a.m. Introductions & Institute Overview
9.15 a.m. Where We've Been
9.35 a.m. Where We're Headed: Instructional Improvement
9.45 a.m. Getting to Work: Moving Towards Instructional Improvement
11.00 a.m. Team Time
11.45 am. Lunch
12.30 p.m. Moving Towards Instructional Improvement at Your Site
1.45 p.m. A Primer for Meeting 4: Content-based literacy for students and teachers
2.30 p.m. Next Steps

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I. Purpose and Objectives

This institute is designed to address the pervasive challenge for today's middle school instructional leaders serving linguistically diverse populations: how to ensure that their classrooms and instruction are designed develop students' *advanced* literacy skills, rather than *basic* literacy skills. The institute is designed around 5 specific objectives for participants' professional learning:

1. to revisit current knowledge about ELLs' literacy development and literacy needs during the middle school years
2. to revisit the separable skills that comprise advanced literacy, with emphasis on the language of schooling and print and how these manifest across content areas
3. to learn high-impact instructional strategies that promote and integrate formal and informal instruction to build oral and written language
4. to analyze key literacy data at the classroom- and school-level to surface patterns and trends in order to strengthen the instructional core
5. to focus on leading effective literacy instruction (objectives 1-4) at the school-level, supporting teachers to gain professional tools to support ELLs and to establish successful professional learning communities

II. Institute Design & Resources

The institute will be held monthly from October through May, and will be facilitated by Nonie K. Lesaux, Sky Marietta, and Emily Phillips Galloway from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Across the institute, an emphasis is placed on school-based application of the information learned. To this end, each session will progressively build knowledge while supporting participants to take their new learning and apply it to their school. The sessions are designed to model best practices in adult learning. A number of structured discussion protocols and tasks that guide participants through the learning process will be used—and can be used by participants at their school.

All institute materials will be made available to participants, including:

- The slides from each session
- A module from each session, which will give further information on the content
- Webinars on key topics with an associated, embedded, turnkey presentation
- Key articles and resources that reflect best evidence
- Discussion protocols to support school-based PLC work

The institute will close with a summative exercise to capture the content and learning across the 9 days.

III. Institute Product

As a main product, each participant will have the opportunity to a develop "blueprint" for their school—to bring together and guide efforts to promote advanced literacy skills among the student population, including ELLs. The blueprint process has several steps, including a baseline analysis, resource allocation analysis, and action planning (e.g., professional development) to determine appropriate supports and next steps. We will facilitate this process over the course of this institute; all work will take place within institute hours.

For Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Conducting a baseline analysis should involve multiple stakeholders. Who might these people be in your school?

***NOTE: There is no work required between institute meetings. The PLC materials, including webinars, are strictly a resource for those who would like to take this work out of the institute and into their site.

IV. Institute Guiding Principles

For literacy instruction and supports to be effective in any school, but especially schools with high numbers of students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, there are at least 3 guiding principles to consider:

1. Struggling readers are not struggling thinkers
2. The aim of literacy instruction is to give students access to high-level ideas and content
3. There are multiple potential sources of students' literacy breakdowns, related to the learner, text, and the learning context

For Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): These three guiding principles not only direct the institute design, but also could direct the work of PLCs focused on developing students' advanced literacy skills. As a precondition to moving the effort forward, PLCs might ask:

1. How are we organized to meet the needs of struggling readers, giving them access to high-level content?
2. How do we find out the source of comprehension breakdown(s) for our struggling readers?

V. Effective Professional Learning Communities

"…A Professional Learning Community is a collaboration of teachers, administrators, parents, and students, who work together to seek out best practices, test them in the classroom, continuously improve processes, and focus on results." -Rick DuFour, (2002)[1].

1. **Shared mission, vision, values, goals**

What distinguishes a learning community from a more general collection of professionals is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the members believe and that govern their actions and behaviors.

2. Collaborative Culture

Professionals in a learning community work in teams that share a common purpose. They learn from each other and create the momentum that drives improvement. They build within the organization the structure and vehicles that make collaborative work and learning effective and productive.

3. Collective Inquiry

People in a learning community relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results.

- They reflect publicly on their beliefs and challenge each other's beliefs.
- They share insights and hammer out common meanings.
- They work jointly to plan and test actions and initiatives.
- They coordinate their actions, so that the work of each individual contributes to the common effort.

4. Action Orientation / Experimentation

Members of professional learning communities constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas.

For Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):

Because advanced literacy instruction in the middle school requires the engagement of all members of the school community, establishing a shared vision and norms for inquiry is a particularly important first step.

PLCs might begin by:

1. Drafting a mission statement or vision.
2. Establishing norms and systems for collaborating and for shared inquiry.
3. Agreeing upon practices for translating insights into actions and for evaluating the success of these efforts.

[1]DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

5. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Members of a learning organization are not content with the status quo and continually seek ways to bring present reality closer to future ideal. They constantly ask themselves and each other:

- What is our purpose?
- What do we hope to achieve?
- What are our strategies for improving?
- How will we assess our efforts?

6. Results Orientation

Professionals in a learning organization recognize that no matter how well-intentioned the efforts, the only valid judgment of improvement is observable and measurable results. Assessment and re-evaluation are the keys to continued improvement.

Effective Participation in the Institute

Our goal is to build a PLC where there are no bad ideas and no assumptions; a place where we can come together with open minds to move our collective work forward.

- Effective learning requires a safe climate for participants to express themselves
  - Listen with respect
  - Withhold judgment
  - Be mindful of confidentiality

- Involvement is necessary to increase the richness and relevance of content
  - Attendance is vital to participation
  - Be fully present
  - Minimize distraction (silence cell phones, no email, no side conversations)

- Strong contributions often integrate one's learning with their own self-assessment and reflection

III. Identifying the challenges of complex texts: A text analysis

Sample Text: *CPO Focus on Earth Science, Grade 6*

Waves

Wind causes waves

Ocean waves at a beach occur as a repeating pattern of wave crests and troughs. A **crest** is the high point of a wave, and a **trough** is the low point. The height of a wave is the distance between the wave crest and trough.

Wave height

The wind is the most common cause of ocean waves. The height of a wave is influenced by:

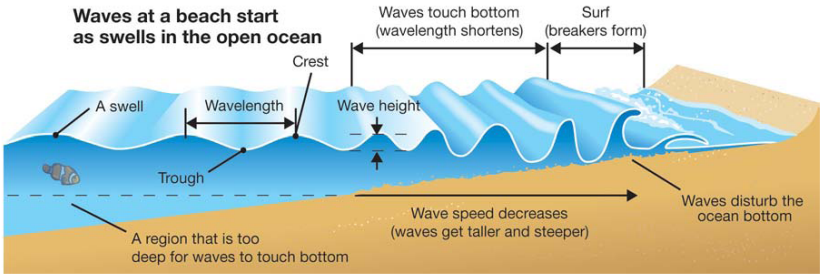
- The strength of the wind.
- How long the wind blows.
- How much open water the wind blows over.

Wavelength

The distance between two wave crests is called the **wavelength** of a wave. The ability of a wave to disturb the ocean bottom as it approaches a beach depends on its wavelength. A passing wave can "reach" down about half its wavelength. That means that a wave with a wavelength of 10 meters can only disturb the ocean bottom if it is five meters deep or less.

Waves stir up sediment on the ocean bottom

Most waves will reach deep enough to affect the part of the shoreface nearest the beach. The lower part of the shoreface is only affected by the strongest waves with the longest wavelengths.



VOCABULARY

crest - the high point of a wave.

trough - the low point of a wave.

wavelength - the distance between two wave crests, or the distance between two wave troughs.

Swells

In the open ocean, most waves look like moving humps of water called swells. Swells can travel great distances over open water without losing much energy because although the swell moves, the water stays close to the same place.

If you could watch a blob of water as a swell passed by, you would see it move in a circle. First the blob would drop and move toward the approaching swell. Then the swell would lift the blob and push it forward. Finally, the blob would drop back to its starting place. Because the blob would end up right where it started, little energy is lost. That's why swells can travel great distances without losing much energy.

By the time a swell reaches a beach, if it has a lot of energy, it can become a huge breaker! A breaker is a wave that becomes foamy as it hits the beach.

What might be challenging about this text? What background knowledge does the reader need to support comprehension? What disciplinary challenges does this science text present?

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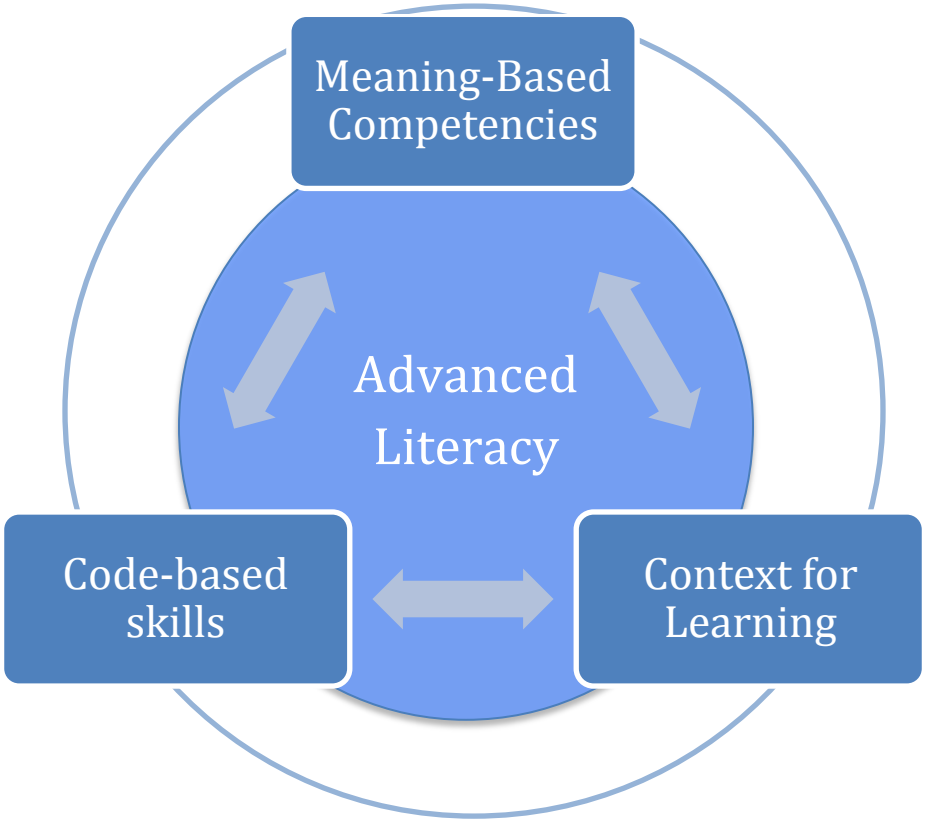
Code-Based Skills vs. Meaning-Based Competencies: A Framework for Conceptualizing Adolescent Literacy



Code-Based Skills

Skills involved in accurate and efficient word reading

Meaning-Based Competencies

Skills involved in comprehending the language and meaning of complex texts and ideas when reading or listening

Context for Learning

Contextual and affective factors that influence learning

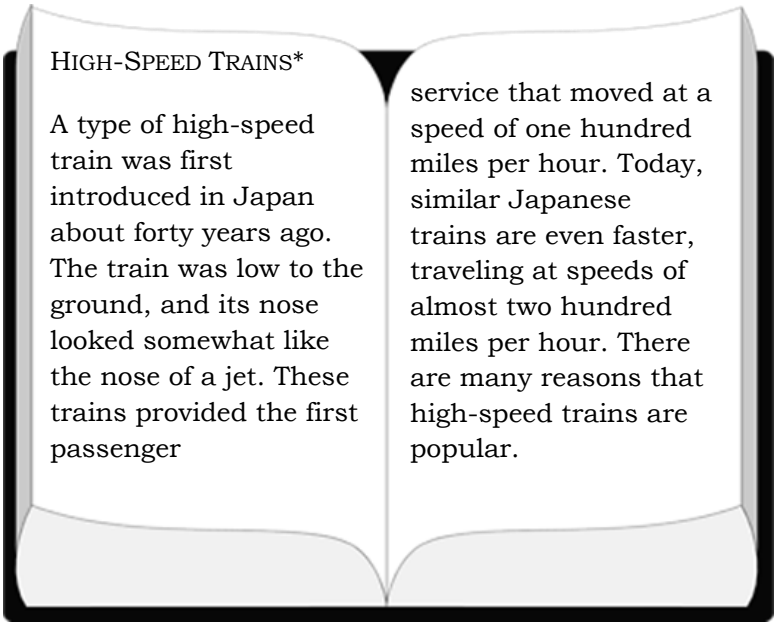
IV. ELLs & Literacy Breakdowns: Code v. Meaning

Why do many ELLs struggle to comprehend texts? One major problem lies in whether they acquire both the *skills* and *knowledge* needed to read and understand complex texts.

Code-based skills are those that allow students to master the mechanics of reading—for example, the ability to map the 26 letters onto their respective sounds in combinations (44 in total), and thus read words[i].

Meaning-based competencies, on the other hand, are comprised of the range of abilities and knowledge necessary for making meaning from text. They include the skills associated with language development, such as oral language, vocabulary, and listening comprehension skills, as well as the foundational knowledge needed to access and apply a text's message.

The passage, *High-Speed Trains*[ii], adapted from a reading assessment commonly used in elementary schools, illustrates the distinction between skills-based and knowledge-based competencies in reading.



HIGH-SPEED TRAINS*

A type of high-speed train was first introduced in Japan about forty years ago. The train was low to the ground, and its nose looked somewhat like the nose of a jet. These trains provided the first passenger service that moved at a speed of one hundred miles per hour. Today, similar Japanese trains are even faster, traveling at speeds of almost two hundred miles per hour. There are many reasons that high-speed trains are popular.

To read even this short passage, the reader must be able to map sounds onto letters (for example, /s/ /p/ /ee/ /d/) and blend these to form a word. She must also recognize common spelling patterns, such as the "-igh" family found in the word "high." And she must do this quickly enough in order to then spend some time attending to the passage's meaning; if the reader takes too long, the information from the beginning of the passage is no longer in memory[iii]. At 5th grade, a student must read at least 115 words a minute.

Having these **code-based skills** is necessary but not sufficient to support reading comprehension.

Students also need **meaning-based competencies**, including understanding the meaning of the words in their contexts and other relevant language skills. Without well-developed meaning-based competencies, having mastered the mechanics of reading becomes less and less valuable with time—the core benefit of mastering the mechanics of print is that the reader has the "mental space" to devote to making meaning from print.

For example, to make meaning from the passage above, students need these meaning-based competencies:

- conceptual knowledge about both trains and jets;
- vocabulary knowledge that's embedded in the passage. For example, the many possible meanings of the word "service" makes this especially challenging. (Dictionary.com provides 37 entries under the word "service," including noun, adjective, and verb forms along with a number of idioms.)
- cognitive strategies necessary to monitor their comprehension and repair any misunderstandings

  e.g., a child who pictures a human nose upon coming to the word "nose" in the text must adjust this misunderstanding when reading the comparison to a jet's nose

  interest and motivation to finish the passage

For many children, especially children from low-income or non-English speaking homes, meaning-based competencies are more likely to be key sources of academic difficulties—these populations often have difficulty comprehending more advanced text[iv].

Code-Based Competencies	Meaning-Based Competencies
- Constrained, i.e., mastery oriented ➢ e.g., 26 letters, 44 sounds ➢ e.g., word reading automaticity - Typically in place by 3rd grade	- Unconstrained, i.e., not mastered ➢ e.g., 50,000 words by 12th grade ➢ e.g., relevant cross-content knowledge -Develops from infancy through adulthood
- Highly susceptible to instruction in a relatively brief period of time	- Requires sustained instruction, through adolescence
-Represent a set of skills that are applied similarly regardless of the content area	-Represent a set of competencies that manifest differently in each content area.

Applying the Framework to Identify Sources of Literacy Breakdown

	Breakdown Source	Description
Code-Based Skills	**Word Reading Accuracy**	One of the most basic reading skills is the ability to read words accurately. Reading words accurately in middle school requires a student to have a broad range of words that are read automatically (i.e., "sight words") as well as the ability to decode unfamiliar words. In middle school, this includes reading multi-syllabic words with complex spelling.
	Word Reading Fluency	Along with accuracy, an important basic reading skill is fluency. This includes reading at a pace that allows a student to focus on the meaning of a passage rather than the process of reading.
Meaning-Based Competencies	**Conversational Language**	Participating in everyday, face-to-face interactions with peers and adults requires conversational language skills. Students with preliminary English experiences are still developing conversational language skills in English.
	Academic Language	In order to understand the abstract and decontextualized language of text, students need a suite of abilities, often called "academic language." This includes knowledge of academic vocabulary words, an ability to formulate ideas with increasing precision and nuance, and an understanding of how information is structured through text and discussion. All of these abilities are moderated through language, and thus require increasingly sophisticated language abilities for all students.
	Conceptual Knowledge	Every discipline has an associated set of conceptual knowledge, often termed "schema." Without the necessary background knowledge and experience, a student will struggle regardless of reading and language skills.
	Strategic Knowledge	Strategies support students as they grapple with learning and sharing new ideas and information. Strategic knowledge includes the awareness that a strategy would be helpful, a repertoire of tactics that can support consolidation and transfer of new knowledge, and the ability to select and put to use an appropriate strategy.
Context for Learning	**Out-of-School Experiences**	All students come to school with rich personal experiences that can be used to support reading and learning. However, there are big differences in how directly these out-of-school experiences support school-based learning. Indeed, some families and neighborhoods face pressing challenges that can disrupt a student's schooling.
	Within-School Experiences	Teacher-student relationships, classroom climate, and quality of the learning environment all exert tremendous influence on student learning. Given the right classroom context, students can often master challenging material.
	Engagement	Ultimately, learning new ideas requires engaging with the material—often in spite of difficulties or hurdles. In adolescence, attention and motivation waxes and wanes in response to particular topics and activity.

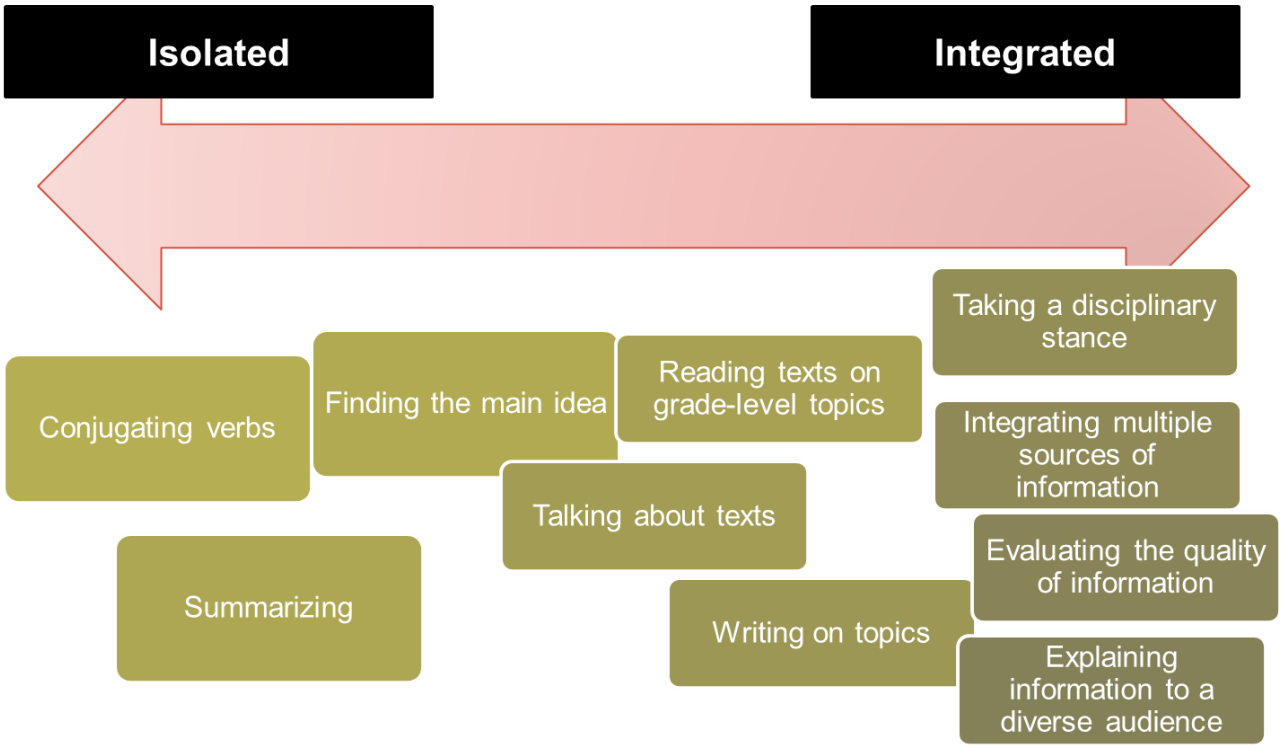
Key Instructional Shifts

The Common Core State Standards demand dramatic changes in instructional practice. For instance, we have all heard that the CCSS call for increasing the amount of informational text that our students read, focusing more heavily on reading closely, and on writing more persuasive essays. However, while these are practices that are advocated in the CCSS, solely making these changes in our classrooms is not likely to raise the achievement-levels of all middle grade students (Duke, 2013). The CCSS are broader—and more meaningful—than simply making these small shifts. In fact, the Standards call for a series of larger shifts that we should consider when crafting instruction for ELLs and their English-only peers.

Then…	Now…
Focusing on the rare words and discipline-specific vocabulary	Focusing on the academic vocabulary, sentence and text-level (text structures) features
Reading passively to gain content knowledge	Reading complex texts as a 'critical consumer' to gain alternate perspectives and to enter into a conversation with the author and with peers about the content
Using a single text to teach a topic	Using multiple texts (text sets) of varying genres and complexity on a topic to build deep conceptual knowledge
Reading and writing mostly narrative, short texts for a limited audience (teacher)	Reading and writing a broader range of genres, to put forth more nuanced arguments, for a broader set of readers (peers, disciplinary colleagues)
Teaching reading and writing as separate subjects	Connecting reading and writing instruction throughout the day (both 'writing to learn' and 'learning to write')

An Instructional Continuum

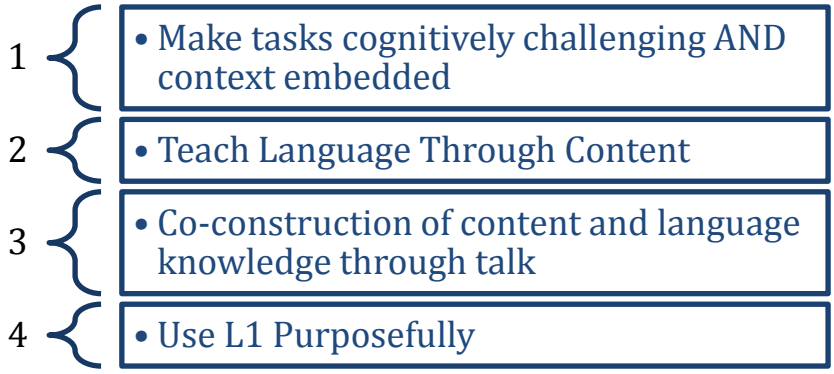
In our teaching, we need to make sure that the isolated literacy skills we teach are complemented with more integrated approaches that require use of language with ideas.



Teaching Complex Texts: Beyond Strategies

We once believed that literacy skills were generalizable across all content areas and so equipping students with literacy skills in elementary school would translate with later school success. However, while students in elementary school (grade 4) continue to show improvement in their reading skills on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) when compared to students 15 years ago, this early success does not generalize to proficiency in reading the texts in the disciplines, which often employ specialized language and disciplinary norms of accuracy and precision (Fang, 2004; Halliday, 1998; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Best Practices for Knowledge-Building Instruction for ELLs: 4 Key Levers



Instructional Lever 1: Make tasks cognitively challenging AND context embedded

What does this mean?

Struggling producers of AL are not struggling thinkers! The CCSS call for students to be exposed to complex ideas and curricula that are contained in text. Students can be supported in these tasks when we provide visual and oral supports (e.g., provide 'context').

Examples:

-Providing graphic organizers

-Allow time to write and think

-Making use of text comprehension routines (e.g., Read and Unpack)

-Use talk with peers to scaffold thinking about complex ideas

Instructional Lever 2: Teach Language Through Content

What does this mean?

Because language learning is an outcropping of learning concepts, the most impactful language occurs during regular content instruction. By engaging students in writing and speaking activities that require the use of the target language features, we create an authentic context for language use.

Examples:

-selecting vocabulary to explicitly teach that is necessary for conveying topic knowledge

-reading multiple texts on a topic so that students are exposed to target language multiple times

-engage in units of study where language and topic knowledge are developed overtime

Instructional Lever 3: Co-construction of content and language knowledge through talk

What does this mean?

Language knowledge develops when the contexts are authentic and the motivation for communicating linked with a desire to be understood. Often, discussion with peers is the richest context for acquiring new language.

Examples:

-Frequent, short discussions should punctuate every class period.

-Students should be engaged in discussing complex text to provide opportunities to practice using the language of the text. This offers exposure to fluent models of language when groupings are heterogeneous.

Instructional Lever 4: Use L1 Purposefully

What does this mean?

For students literate in a first language, we can reduce the cognitive challenge of learning tasks by allowing time for them to explicitly connect L1 knowledge of concepts and accompanying language to L2.

Examples:

-Allow for students to work with peers who share an L1 at the start of a instructional unit.

-Provide opportunity to use L1 at first to articulate concept knowledge.

Teaching Complex Text: A Few Guidelines

- Select fragments of texts that 'matter' to developing conceptual knowledge
- Focus on language that students will need to generate oral and written responses throughout the unit or to understand the substance of the material presented
- Be sure that students are doing most of the 'heavy lifting'! (e.g., thinking and grappling in heterogeneous groupings)
- Routines matter—repeating tasks across a range of texts supports students in gaining mastery.

Best Practices for Knowledge-Building Instruction for ELLs

Scenario: You should keep in mind:

1. How do the instructional practices align to the school's beliefs about how students learn best from complex texts and to the Danielson Framework for Teaching? (1.2 and 4.1)
2. How is each student being engaged and challenged in relation to the text being taught? (1.1 and 1.2)
3. How are teachers checking for understanding of the text and adjusting instruction accordingly? (2.2 and 1.2)

Step 1: While viewing the video, complete the anecdotal low-inference rubric drawn from the quality review framework.

Classroom Visit Tool **Lever 1: Make tasks cognitively challenging AND context embedded**	
Anecdotal Evidence: Low-Inference Observations	
What is the teacher doing to support students in accessing the complex text to build knowledge?	What are the students doing with the text?

Step 2: After watching the video, take a moment to record your thoughts:

List other classroom noticings (student work, teacher-student comments):
Summary notes and questions:

Step 3: With your school partner consider the questions below as if this teacher is a member of your school community:

What is the evidence of school-wide beliefs about the role of complex texts in knowledge building?

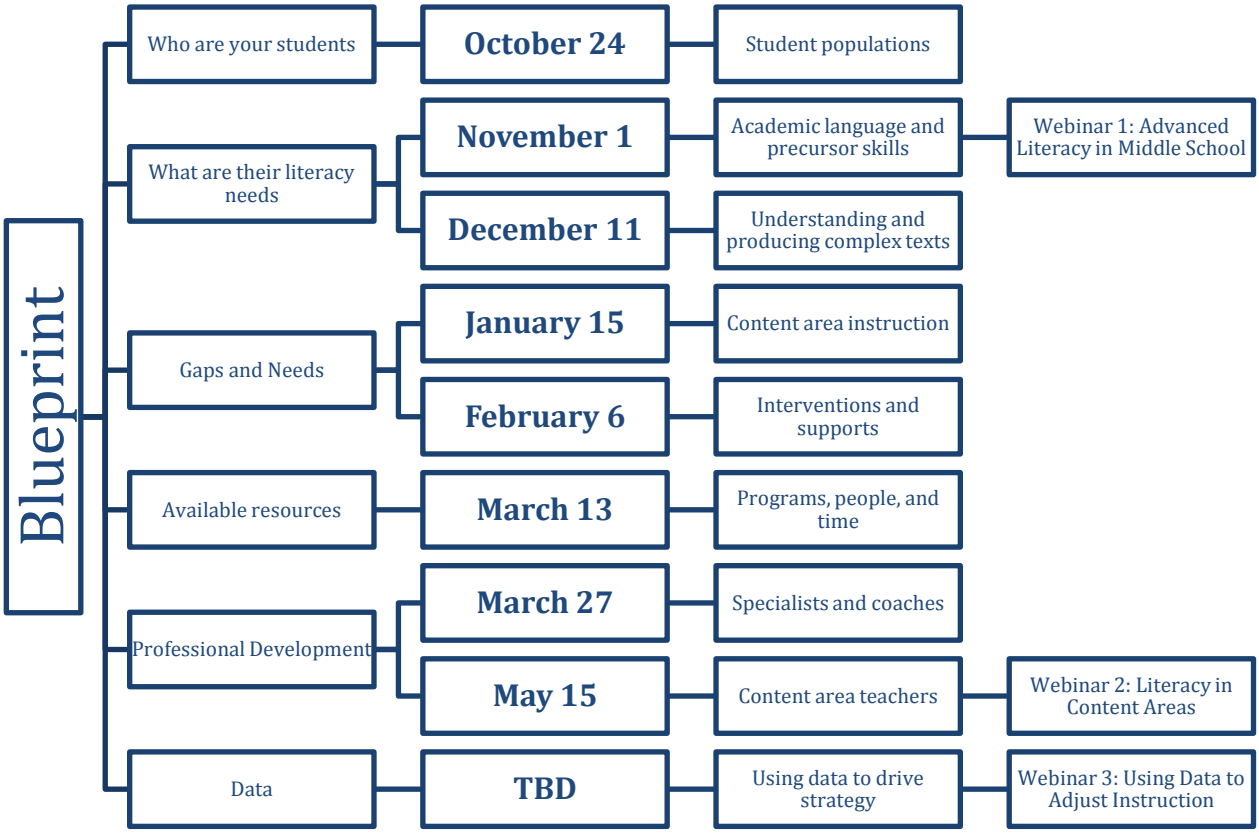
What are the strengths and areas of improvement for the lesson given our focus on lever 1? What feedback would you give this teacher?

Step 4: First, decide with collaboratively on a single area of this teacher's instruction to move forward. Now, as a team, consider the support structures that exist to move this educator's practice forward (these may exist in the form of PD, peer learning groups, common planning times).

Area of suggested improvement:

Supports to develop practice	
Support Available	Frequency (weekly, daily, monthly)

IX. Institute Overview



[i] Chall, J.S. (1996). *Stages of reading development*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company.

[ii] Passage adapted from Good & Kaminski (2007), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, 6th ed.
[iii] Chall, J.S. (1996). *Stages of reading development*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company.

[iv] Lesaux & Kieffer (2010). Exploring Sources of Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among Language Minority Learners and their Classmates in Early Adolescence. *American Educational Research Journal,* 47.