

Words Their Way With English Language Learners

Critical Questions About Students' Languages and Learning

To survey students' language use, and to plan *Talk With* activities, consider the following questions and areas of inquiry. Key concepts in these questions are highlighted for emphasis. These questions open discussions among teachers serving the children in your class, and can be phrased in ways that will open discussions among students (Bear, 2005).

1. What *language* or languages other than English does the student *speak*?
2. *How often* does the student use the primary language? What *percentage* of the time is this primary language spoken?
3. How common is the language in *this school*?
4. What is the student's preferred language in which to view *television*?
5. *How long* has the student been *learning English*?
6. How would you describe the student's *willingness* to start a *conversation*?
7. Is he or she *understandable* when speaking English? (Dickinson, McCabe, & Sprague, 2003, p. 558)
8. How often does the student use *varied vocabulary* or try out new words (words heard in stories or from teacher)? (Dickinson, McCabe, & Sprague, 2003, p. 558)
9. Does the student speak in *connected phrases*?
10. Is the student *expressive* in his or her speech?
11. Are there sounds in English that you notice are difficult for the student to *pronounce*?
12. How many years did the student receive *formal education* in the home language?
13. What is the level of *literacy development* of the student in the home language?
14. Does the student *read text* in the *home language* with accuracy, fluency, and expression?
15. Does the student use the *home language* for *writing* in classroom activities?
16. In writing, does the student *blend* the home language with English?

Ten principles of word study instruction with English learners

1. Look for what students use but confuse.
2. A step backward is a step forward.
3. Use words students can read.
4. Compare words "that do" with words "that don't".
5. Sort by sound and sight.
6. Begin with obvious contrasts.
7. Don't hide exceptions.
8. Avoid rules.
9. Work for automaticity.
10. Return to meaningful texts.

Word Study

Materials: Picture cards for sorts

Procedure:

1. Select up to 10 pictures from the sort for the vocabulary study.
2. Preview these pictures with students. Name the picture and have students repeat the name.
3. Talk about the pictures. Have students generate examples. Teacher paraphrases and provides a simple definition. For example, in a transportation-related sort, Edgar may say, "I see a **jeep** on TV." Paraphrase the student response, for example, "Edgar saw a **jeep** on TV." Provide a simple definition of the word, for example, "A **jeep** is like a square car that can go off the road."
4. If students do not have enough English words to say something about a picture, the teacher should move into a more directive role. For example, "This is a tractor. A tractor helps the farmer plant." Body language and translating the definition into a student's home language is recommended to support this new language learning.
5. When all of the cards have been discussed, chant each word as a group one last time.

Literacy Instruction for English Learners in the Syllables and Affixes and Derivational Relations Stages

1. Cluster students into word study groups based on the results of their developmental spelling inventories. Do not assume that age or grade level equals understanding.
2. Find out who your students are: What languages do they speak at home? What literacy skill do they have in their first language? What background experiences do they have that relate to the content of the lesson? What do current language proficiency tests show about students' oral language skills in English? Use this knowledge to adapt your lesson and tailor questions to individual students as you go.
3. While you may need to simplify instruction to address the language and literacy levels of your students, try to do so with materials that match the social maturity of your students.
4. Be as explicit as needed in your word study instruction. English learners do not have a large reservoir of vocabulary words to pull from during lessons. Provide lists and simple dictionaries for them to refer to as you work together. Help them by sharing simple words that can be connected to new vocabulary.
5. Make every lesson a language-learning event. Move from what students can say, to putting it into writing. Incorporate daily opportunities for talking about words and texts. Assume that much of the vocabulary in your lesson will need to be taught and worked with. Oral discussions about words are critical so that students are bathed in language - they hear it spoken and use it to share experiences, discuss issues, ask questions, and make connections during their literacy lessons.
6. Place meaning-making at the center of each literacy lesson, even if you are focusing on a skill. Help students to self-monitor and speak up when they do not understand what is going on.

7. Connect spelling, vocabulary, and grammar study. Words that are featured in word study must also become vocabulary words, and should also be used and analyzed in conversational speech and connected text as a part of the lesson.
8. Don't overemphasize pronunciation. Students at the upper levels of word study understand distinctions in letter-sound correspondences, even if they cannot pronounce them perfectly. Pronunciation will continue to be refined by students' interactions with printed materials over time.
9. Give extra support to students who have more limited English language skills. This may include working with a partner, having a peer translator, or seeing physical examples of projects.