Tips for Teachers: Promoting the Achievement of English Learners

A Message from Terri H. Mozingo, Chief Academic Officer

In a school division characterized by increasing linguistic diversity, it is essential that all ACPS educators be adept at addressing the needs of English Learners (EL). We are pleased that this fourth edition of “Tips for Teachers” highlights a range of strategies proven to be especially effective in helping EL students learn both key academic content as well as the academic language associated with it. Although the GLAD and cooperative learning strategies presented here are especially useful for EL students, many of them are also universal best practices that can help all our ACPS learners prepare for upcoming SOLs.

PROJECT GLAD

Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design) is an instructional approach that incorporates a variety of strategies to support bilingual students in simultaneously learning content and acquiring language. Project GLAD is grounded in research related to second language acquisition and sheltered instruction. Sheltered instruction is an umbrella term used to describe instructional strategies and scaffolding techniques that help make grade-level content comprehensible for all learners, regardless of their language proficiency, while also supporting their language development. The eight components of effective sheltered instruction addressed by Project GLAD include:

1. Focus on Language
2. Plan for Peer Interaction
3. Support Meaning with Realia/Visuals/Movement
4. Activate Prior Knowledge/Create Shared Knowledge
5. Make Text Accessible
6. Develop Student Learning Strategies
7. Bridge the Two Languages
8. Affirm Identity (linguistic, cultural, individual)  
   (Kriteman & Tabet-Cubero, 2015)

Project GLAD Strategies

In Project GLAD, these elements of sheltered instruction are attended to through a collection of high-yield, learner-focused strategies. The strategies are then connected to six categories for instruction, including: Focus and Motivation, Input, Guided Oral Practice, Reading and Writing, Extended Activities for Integration, and Assessment and Feedback. Below is a brief summary of three popular GLAD strategies that support content and language integration:

1. Focus and Motivation Strategy: Teacher-Made Big Books

The teacher creates a “Big Book” related to the new unit of study. Enduring understandings, academic vocabulary, key text structures, and standards-based concepts are introduced in the Big Book using patterned, predictable language, authentic pictures, and a repetitive frame. The teacher initially reads the Big Book to the students, and it is then referred to throughout the unit for re-readings, discussion, etc.
Anna Harvin, Project GLAD Coach at Mount Vernon and John Adams, supports teachers as they implement Project GLAD strategies. Here are a few comments she has heard from teachers who have been using Project GLAD strategies in their classrooms and are seeing the benefits.

“I can’t believe how many SOLs you just hit with one chant!”

“I am so excited to be teaching like this.”

“It was amazing to see how my students could use the content vocabulary, not just repeat it”.

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2. Input Strategy: Pictorial Input Chart

The teacher designs a picture-supported chart to use during direct instruction, developing the chart’s categories and content from grade-level standards. The chart’s pictures and facts are lightly sketched in pencil prior to instruction. During instruction, students sit in close proximity as the teacher fills in the chart with markers and introduces new language and concepts, using color-coding to support brain imprinting. Students are to repeat key academic language with the teacher, who also uses 10/2 processing prompts to support processing and promote peer interaction.

3. Guided Oral Practice Strategy: Sentence Patterning Chart (SPC)

The teacher creates a blank SPC chart with four columns. Using a different colored marker for each part of speech, including adjective, a noun (plural, from class content/chants), verb, and prepositional phrase, the teacher guides the students through brainstorming words to write in each column (typically derived from class content and chants). The students then chant the parts of speech to the tune of “Farmer in the Dell,” followed by actual words from the chart. The teacher puts post its in front of the words to support tracking while reading, and eventually invites students to choose words and lead the activity.

Project GLAD is a research-based instructional framework that fosters rigorous content instruction through language-rich, thematic unit design. Although it takes an average of 5 to 7 years to gain academic proficiency in another language, EL students cannot wait to learn academic content until they have mastered English. To this end, Project GLAD supports teachers in directly and explicitly teaching students grade-level content and standards, while also supporting the students’ acquisition of social and academic English. If you are interested in learning more about Project GLAD implementation in ACPS, please contact the Office of EL Services.
The Power of Cooperative Learning

In classrooms in which cooperative learning structures are used regularly, students increase language acquisition and academic content knowledge more quickly and far more thoroughly than with traditional instructional strategies. Cooperative learning should not be mistaken for group work, as the structures are research-based strategies that are carefully designed to include the four basic principles:

P: Positive Interdependence
I: Individual Accountability
E: Equal Participation
S: Simultaneous Interaction

While participating in cooperative learning structures, students engage in quality student interaction within heterogeneous groups. These opportunities provide greater comprehensible input and allow students to practice academic language in an authentic way. As students engage in higher-order thinking and discuss their thoughts with peers or groups of four, the affective filter is lower and student motivation is often higher. Cooperative learning offers built-in differentiation, as students benefit from peer support. Social skills and classroom climate are also enhanced when cooperative learning is used on a consistent basis.

Please contact your EL instructional Specialist for ideas on adapting structures for emergent ELs.

Using Cooperative Learning for SOL Preparation

Did you know you can use cooperative learning structures in conjunction with multiple choice questions and test review packets? Yes! It is highly encouraged! The following structures are perfect for reviewing content in any grade level and content area:

- Quiz-Quiz-Trade
- Inside-Outside Circle
- RallyCoach
- Fan-N-Pick
- RallyTable
- Jot Thoughts
- AllWrite RoundRobin
- Continuous RoundTable
- Continuous RoundRobin
- RallyRobin
- Mix-Pair-Share
- Numbered-Heads-Together & Random Reporter

Refer to the margin for information about accessing the ACPS Kagan Cooperative Learning Resource Page for more details about these structures.
Every Student Succeeds...