Defining Learning Objectives for Emergent Bilingual Learners

Question: How do we *define* the language and content learning objectives that drive instruction for emergent bilingual learners in mainstream classroom settings?

Constructing Learning Objectives

Preparing teachers to develop content objectives (Eisner, 1967/1983) and implement standards-aligned content instruction (Porter et al., 2012) are key components for lesson plans designed for emergent bilingual learners.

To support English learners in developing content knowledge, teachers must identify the language demands embedded in the content curriculum. When crafting language objectives, teachers should consider the language skills necessary to understand the content, including the language the teacher or text will use to convey the information. A second consideration in lesson planning for this population is the language required for students to communicate understanding of the content.

When setting language objectives, educators may also consider English learners' demographics (e.g., the language(s) they speak at home, their age, and/or the amount of time they have been in the United States) and their English proficiency level. Another key factor to consider is including the language domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. All four domains must be integrated into lessons and language objectives to support ELs' oral and written language and comprehension. Deliberately planning for instruction in all four language domains is crucial to support literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006). The following examples illustrate language objectives that address different language domains:

- *Students will be able to write a paragraph describing the zones of geography in Virginia* (language domain: writing)
- *Students will be able to orally discuss the zones of geography in Virginia with peers* (language domain: speaking and listening)
- *Students will be able to read a short text about the zones of geography in Virginia* (language domain: reading)

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model is one well-known approach to instruction for ELs. The approach calls for specifying content and language objectives for each lesson and preparing strategies to address them (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2017). Teachers are urged to distinguish between learning strategies and teaching strategies. One teaching strategy is to employ scaffolds to make the lesson content accessible to English learners.

Learning strategies include equipping students with clues and tactics to decode text and understand spoken language and content. Another learning strategy is to use knowledge of language structure, such as the fact that a Spanish noun ending in –*idad* almost always has an English cognate that ends in –*ity* (see Fillmore & Snow).

Cognitive Academic Language Skills

The concept of "academic language" has been widely debated. Core Academic Language Skills (CALS) are a more recent development, and have been defined as "a set of language skills that correspond to linguistic features prevalent in academic texts found across content area classrooms, yet infrequent in informal conversations" (Uccelli & Galloway, 2018). Cross-disciplinary in nature, CALS are "specific language skills that support school reading," "can be systematically scaffolded across content areas," (p. 66) and are categorized into seven domains. We recommend that educators use CALS to develop learning objectives, including language and content objectives. In this way, educators will reveal the language demands within their curriculum, and ultimately support their students in school.

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