ELLs and Expository Text: Why can’t I understand what I am reading?

A Research to Practice Perspective

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TABE Presentation

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“I made a mistake because I didn’t know what I said… you know… how Mexican people add another word to make it make sense…”

Rocio, 10 years old
4th Grade ELL student
Comprehension Processing

Goodman (1984) suggests that thought and language are used as a process to construct meaning. Therefore, reading is a constructive process in which a reader interacts with the text to create meaning.
ELLs and Expository Text

Expository Text

Factors contributing to challenges of comprehension of expository text:

- Background knowledge (McNeil, 2010)
- Vocabulary (Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller and Kelley, 2010)
- Student interest (Lipp and Wheeler, 1991)
Comprehension processing of ELLS

Underlying proficiencies are important in building strong L1 to transfer to L2 (Cummins, 1979). The Natural Approach provides means for comprehensible input (Krashen, 1992).
Comprehension processing of Expository text for ELLs

- Overview of literacy acquisition of ELLs
  - More complex than L1 reading (Koda, 2007)
  - Cross-linguistics used by ELLs to adjust and modify literacy acquisitions (Iannacci, 2008)

- ELLs constructing meaning with Expository text
  - High degree background knowledge = high degree construction of meaning (Auckerman, 2007)
  - Language acquisition and literacy acquisition are both orally related (Fitzgerald, 1995)
How do ELLs process expository text?

Reconceptualization of content words

- The results suggest that on these particular non-fiction texts, the ELLs were challenged by content words as 92% of the miscues on content words caused a meaning change.
How do ELLs process expository text?

- Challenges to syntactic and semantic acceptability
  - The findings of this study suggest that ELL readers in this study seem to be familiar with the grapho-phoneme aspect of content words. However, those same readers made syntactic or semantic miscues without self-correction.
How do ELLs process expository text?

Self-monitoring for self-correction

- ELL readers in this study appear to use grapho-phonics in their reading processes.
Readers’ Samples

Reader 1
Reader 2

Discussion…
How do ELLs describe their reading processes after reading expository text?

Challenges of semantic transferring from L1 to L2
During the RMA sessions, readers were asked three key questions about their reading process:
- Does the miscue make sense?
- Why do you think you made this miscue?
- Did that miscue affect your understanding of the text?

The focus of conversations was reading processes after reading expository text.
So what is research telling us about ELLs and how they process expository text?
Readers’ engagement is essential

- Building background knowledge
- Allowing for conversation and collaboration
- Engaging in critical thinking activities
How are teachers teaching ELLs?

- Philosophies
- Teacher training
- Personal experiences
- Student population
Conversation in the Classroom

- Essential component of successful reading events
- Allows for the use of critical thinking
- Creation of new information while engaging in authentic conversational events
Activity (if time and space allows)

Enhancing Vocabulary for ELLs

Content Vocabulary

**Vocabulary Grab Bag Activity**

Groups
Assign numbers
1 - Picker
2 - Reader
3 - Expert
4 - Coach

**Vocabulary Charades**

Partners
Act out vocabulary word given
Share with group
Vocabulary Grab Bag Instructions

- Person 1 reaches in, takes out a vocabulary card.
- Person 2 reads the word or concept aloud. If using pictures as the stimuli on the card, Person 2 looks at the picture and names the item or situation depicted.
- Person 3 either defines the word/concept or uses the word/concept in a sentence.
- Person 4 confirms or coaches (for right/wrong answers) and then praises or paraphrases (for higher level questions) and then praises.
Vocabulary Charades Instructions

Given a specific unit of study for a content area
Assign students with a partner
Random assignment of vocabulary words
Take 10 minutes to think of your best “acting skills” to demonstrate the word without speaking
Present to group to see if they can figure it out
Debrief on activity
Implications Supporting ELL Expository Text

- Teacher awareness of transferring of L1 to L2 and its competencies.
- Utilization of all language domains within all content areas for opportunities to reconceptualize vocabulary.
- Integration of literacy across the curriculum.
- Going beyond grapho-phonemic awareness – learning to read; reading to learn
- Classroom discussions for student ownership of learning and self-successes
Questions?
Thank you for attending!
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