Pedagogy Overview: English Learners

Who are English learners?

Worldwide, the number of children growing up in linguistically diverse homes is on the rise. This trend holds enormous potential for these youths, as the ability to speak more than one language is a significant asset in today's global economy. In the United States, this population of learners is often referred to as English learners (ELs). Although ELs may share common characteristics, it is important to remember that no two students are the same. This diversity cuts across language background, generational status, language-learning experiences, as well as the degree to which students' lives are impacted by known factors related to academic learning opportunities. To best support ELs, educators must have a clear understanding of their students' backgrounds and focus on providing high-quality reading instruction, with varying levels of support. The need for strong reading instruction grows all the more pressing for ELs demonstrating difficulties in the middle- and high-school grades: a time when the cognitive and linguistic demands of school texts and curricula increase significantly.

What do we know about reading development among English learners?

ELs have enormous potential for growth but are faced with an ambitious challenge in the classroom. The challenge is two-fold—develop English language proficiency alongside other academic skills and knowledge. Researchers indicate that strong academic language skills are a key indicator of academic performance, and this is especially true for ELs. Also known as the language of schooling, academic language includes oral and written language as a means of communication and thinking about disciplinary content. Proficiency in the use of academic language is connected to an interrelated subset of skills that include morphology, syntax, text structure, and academic vocabulary.

How does Lexia® PowerUp Literacy® promote literacy development for English learners?

The goal of Lexia PowerUp Literacy is to support educators as they provide differentiated literacy instruction to help struggling and non-proficient readers in Grades 6-12, including students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The central design principles of PowerUp are effective practices for all students, including ELs. In what follows, the key ways in which PowerUp supports literacy development of adolescent English learners are described:

Teach key components of reading using a systematic and structured approach
For all developing readers, including ELs, systematic and explicit instruction focused on the key components of reading is crucial: word-reading skills, language, and comprehension. PowerUp provides sequenced and structured instruction in each of these key areas. An essential feature of this instructional experience for ELs is the way in which the program creates personalized learning paths for each student through an adaptive placement and scaffolded, differentiated instruction along the way.

Build academic language through meaningful content
ELs often require intentional and comprehensive opportunities to develop academic language and concepts in English. PowerUp builds this critical linguistic knowledge with a focus on building skills related to morphology, syntax, text structure, and academic vocabulary.

Morphology: The study of morphemes, or meaningful units of words such as prefixes, roots, and suffixes, is known as morphology. Knowledge of meaningful word parts helps ELs to build vocabulary knowledge. While working in tasks within the word study strand, students build their knowledge of word parts that derive from

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Latin and Greek and occur in many of the literacy and domain-specific vocabulary words found in literary and academic texts. Offline materials provide additional practice with activities such as writing new words using suffixes and prefixes and sorting words based on Latin roots.

Syntax: Syntax is the understanding of parts of speech and the rules that govern how words combine to become sentences. Syntactic knowledge is a key component of academic language and supports text comprehension. Through grammar activities in PowerUp, students build their syntactic knowledge through activities such as highlighting and sorting parts of speech in sentences, identifying sentence types, selecting the correct connecting word or phrase, and identifying the correct subject-verb agreement.

Text Structure: Academic language development is supported when students understand the structure of texts. In PowerUp students are explicitly taught the structures of various text types and apply this knowledge across genres. Additionally, offline materials support students in analyzing how sentences and paragraphs contribute to the development of ideas in the text.

Academic Vocabulary: Academic vocabulary includes the abstract and multifaceted words and phrases more common to academic text and talk than everyday conversation. Academic language is supported when students are well equipped with the vocabulary needed to proficiently conquer reading, speaking, and writing tasks. While working in comprehension activities, domain-specific academic vocabulary is introduced and practiced. Furthermore, targeted activities focus on developing an understanding of literary terms, transition/signal words, and multiple meaning words. In-text, clickable vocabulary words also offer further support and reinforcement of academic words. Additionally, grammar activities provide direct teaching of domain-specific grammar terms, such as parts of speech and complex grammar concepts.

Capitalize on technology to represent content in multiple ways and languages

As ELs develop their English proficiency and reading skills simultaneously, it is crucial that instructional approaches represent content in multiple ways—through language, text, graphics, and multimedia presentations. Lexia PowerUp Literacy offers a platform for learning that strategically uses technology to enhance the learning experience. For example, oral language development is supported through access to Listen Mode which allows students to select any text on the screen and hear that text read aloud. At the same time, clickable vocabulary terms in online texts offer embedded English-language support with student-friendly definitions that are provided through text and audio and paired with illustrative photographs. Additional visual supports are woven throughout the program, including images to depict terms and concepts, graphic organizers, visually engaging videos to preview content, and dynamic highlighting of grammar and word structures.

PowerUp's On-Demand Instruction feature provides ELs (and all PowerUp learners) with easy access to tools that scaffold deep learning. This support feature provides student-driven access to instructional videos, anchor charts, and instructional images. The instructional video reviews the skill being taught while the anchor chart and instructional image supports students with language, examples, and practice with concepts.

Offer real-time, embedded progress monitoring

Using data to guide instruction is the bedrock of quality teaching and learning. For ELs, it is particularly important that educators monitor development across the components of reading, responding in a timely and efficient way when difficulties surface. When it comes to all of the key components of reading development, ELs should be supported as readily as their English-only peers. Lexia's Assessment Without Testing® technology provides educators with real-time progress-monitoring data across these skills and competencies. This information is collected without a test event, saving time for what matters most: instruction that is guided by data.

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Provide resources for targeted instruction and extended application

While collecting data is the first step to reaching data-driven instruction for ELs, it is how the data is used that makes a difference for learning outcomes. Lexia PowerUp Literacy uses students' individual data to recommend specific resources for face-to-face instruction as well as materials for practice and extension of skills learned online. For example, Lexia Lessons® are explicit materials for targeted, small-group instruction—a key strategy for supporting ELs' reading development.

Just as important as targeted instruction are opportunities for extended and enriching application. Lexia Skill Builders® offer paper-and-pencil tasks that extend online learning. These materials feature explicit activities that lend themselves to building listening, speaking, and writing skills, often in the form of peer collaboration.

References

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