

## Key Thoughts

Both newcomers and ELs may learn concepts in each core subject through simultaneously engaging in subject specific analytic practices and related language practices. Students should be encouraged in deliberately constructed, stimulating, and supportive ways to carry out tasks beyond what they can do independently. This repeated engagement apprentices them into being able to perform those academic practices independently, using appropriate academic language, over time. In guiding students in this way, it is important to focus on the following key concepts:

### **1. Instruction in language is not separate from the learning of content**

As students learn new concepts and skills (for example, in mathematics or history) they learn the language. This idea runs counter to the idea proposed by traditional language acquisition curricula and programs, which assume that first students need to learn English, and then they can learn disciplinary content. That traditional view also holds that language learning is a linear and progressive (step by step, with increasing difficulty) process and that the learner should not move forward until the formal and structural aspects of language (grammar, roots and parts of words, vocabulary, sentence structures, parts of speech, and the like) are learned.

Learning is not, however, a linear process; learning a second language is complex, gradual, nonlinear, and dynamic. Thus, instruction that focuses solely on acquiring English is insufficient for newcomers.

### **2. Pedagogical scaffolds (instructional supports) help students engage and learn rigorous, grade-level content and related uses of English** (Walqui, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Kareva & Echevarria, 2013).

Such scaffolds include inviting students to make intellectual claims based on evidence in their experience, or providing academic and linguistic support for expressing ideas in different disciplines (e.g., describing their observations and proposing hypotheses in science, or explaining their solutions to mathematical problems) (Kibler, Valdés, & Walqui, 2014; van Lier & Walqui, 2010).

This kind of scaffolding supports students' learning through a deliberately constructed sequence of activities that leads to the targeted academic goals. Scaffolding does not mean simplifying tasks or academic expectations. On the contrary, it is about structuring engagement in activities that challenge students' thinking, and introducing big ideas in a way that is accessible and prepares them for more complex analysis of those ideas and texts. Providing the appropriate kind of support and the intellectual push required for students to work beyond their current competence builds their autonomy in the field of study.

### **3. Higher-order academic learning requires scaffolding and conceptual, analytic, and linguistic development.**

Newcomers bring a powerful learning platform, and have learned the everyday language practices of their families, communities, and culture through interactions with others (Heath, 1983). These skills, and the norms, values, and beliefs of their families and communities, constitute the basis of their linguistic and cultural worlds (van Lier, 2004).

As newcomers learn English and academic content, they apprentice into new, additional worlds and ways of expressing themselves that may take time and support. In the beginning they may not speak English accurately or correctly. They will achieve accuracy as they continue to communicate in places where their messages and contributions are valued. This process will help students feel valued and want to be part of the community that uses English in appropriate ways. Throughout the process, educators may wish to emphasize what is being communicated first, and then develop new, academic concepts and uses of language.

#### **4. Engagement and expression should evolve as students learn English.**

Those who are learning English should be treated as capable, not as having limited intelligence (Leseaux & Harris, 2015). Both newcomers and ELs are intelligent, willing to learn, and are legitimate participants in classes; they can make partial sense of ideas and processes if invited to engage. Teachers can encourage better learning outcomes by providing opportunities for students to actively participate and interact with one another in relation to the subject matter (Haynes & Zacarian, 2010). The more students participate in diverse engagements around a theme, the clearer their understanding of ideas and relationships will become. Newcomers need support for tolerating ambiguity, making efforts to express themselves and to understand others. In these attempts, students may use phrases or words in their home language to get meaning across. Teachers need to understand that this use of the student's family language is appropriate and necessary.

#### **5. Prior knowledge should be tapped to activate and connect it to new learning.**

It has been suggested that students build schemas (clusters of interrelated understandings) that increase content learning and language development simultaneously (Walqui, 2006). Moreover, knowing that their family and community culture(s) and language(s) are valued in school develops newcomers' confidence in their new schools, their teachers, and their own learning.

Viewing newcomers as valued contributors to the school and community builds strong bridges between the unfamiliar world of school and students' home worlds, and strengthens new learning. (González, Moll, & Amanti, C., 2005).

#### **6. Student grouping should be purposeful for instruction, and should vary between homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings, depending on students' literacy and language skills (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcellati, 2013).**

Heterogeneous groups provide students who are not strong English speakers with peer modeling and support. Homogeneous groups help teachers to pay close attention to students' needs related to the theme of the lesson, or the discipline-specific uses of English. In all circumstances, schools should carry out their chosen programs in the least segregative manner consistent with achieving the program's stated educational goals (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, & U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2015, January).

#### **7. Independent learning uses various metacognitive strategies for learning**

The ability to think about one's own thinking, and to identify and "own" new ideas or consciously use those ideas to determine how to proceed, is a key component of becoming an independent learner. Newcomers use metacognitive strategies to construct meaning from texts written or spoken in a new language. For example, a student may recall hearing peers say, "One possible solution to this problem is to..." in order to express a hypothesis. They then consciously decide to begin their participation in the same way. As they negotiate meaning when interacting with others, they may signal agreement in ways they have observed before. To write sequential reports, they learn to recognize the need to use connecting words such as *first*, *after that*, *meanwhile*, *simultaneously*, and *finally*. In this way they gain awareness of conventions used in written and visual literacies across a variety of academic situations (Stanford University, 2012).

Providing students the strategies for engaging in academic dialogue with others (for asking questions and analyzing information) and giving them the tools to choose those strategies when needed is setting the stage for their autonomy and agency as learners. Newcomers need a range of supports to participate in grade-level disciplinary learning while learning a new language.