



Language *Link*

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

BUT SHE SPEAKS ENGLISH JUST FINE! *UNDERSTANDING LEVEL 3 STUDENTS*

Of the 500 ELL students in Waterford, **approximately ½ of them are Level 3 students.** From kindergarten through 12th grade, when a student reaches level 3 there is a slowdown in their English proficiency. If not supported in academic language, students can plateau at this level and may be at risk for mediocre performance, failing or even dropping out.

What is level 3? What do kids need? How do we help them grow? This issue will focus on the needs of level 3 students and what we can do as teachers to move these students forward.

The chart below shows English proficiency through the 5 levels identified by the state of Michigan. Level 1 and 2 are students who are easily identifiable as ELL students. Around the 3rd to 4th year of being an English language learner, students move into level 3. At level 3 students are developing more advanced academic language skills.

In level 1 and 2 students are working on naming, repeating and asking skills. At level 3, students are developing more advanced language skills such as describing, comparing, synthesizing and evaluating. While it's true that many native English speaking students are learning these skills in school, it is important to remember that ELLs often lack a large amount of the vocabulary needed to perform such tasks. (*See this month's Student Spotlight*).

Level 3 students may speak quite fluently and often without accent, especially if they began speaking English before adolescence. Their oral communication may seem strong because speaking uses a more casual register of English. Also, any language learner will tell you, the use of a "talk around" keeps their communication flowing.

A "talk around" is what any language learner (even an English speaker learning French) does when they don't know (*cont.pg 2*)

Levels of English Proficiency				
For full descriptors go to: http://www.waterford.k12.mi.us/staffDev/ell/accomdatations%20by%20proficiency.htm				
Basic (1)	Low Intermediate (2)	High Intermediate (3)	Proficient (4)	Advanced Proficient (5)
Beginning English. Non verbal communication. Uses short phrases that are learned and repeated.	Students can comprehend short conversations on simple topics. They rely on familiar structures and utterances. They use repetition, gestures, and other non-verbal cues to sustain conversation. When reading, students at this level can understand basic narrative text.	Students can comprehend the content of many texts independently. They still require support in understanding texts in the academic content areas. They have a high degree of success with factual information in non-technical prose.	Occasional structural errors occur. May have difficulty using and understanding idioms and words with multiple meanings. Writing will have evidence of grammatical errors, lack of complex structures and advanced vocabulary.	Students at this level have demonstrated English proficiency as determined by state assessment (ELPA). They are able to participate fully with their peers in grade level content area classes. Performance is monitored for two years as required by federal law.

Level 3 Students

(cont from cover) a specific word. They can say a whole phrase of smaller words that means the same thing. A language learner might say, "I went walking yesterday without my shoes" because she doesn't know the term *barefoot*.

This ability to use smaller words to talk around specific terms sometimes makes a level 3 student makes them successful at communicating verbally but can cause problems when reading.

Here is what a reading passage might look like for a level 3 student:

In this chapter we will be reading about pexlomb. A pexlomb is defined as any Zox with pictanamerals which floatate the zox into five zubs. For example, think about a zox that is similar to a betra ooz.

ELLs may even be able to use the structure of the text to answer questions without real comprehension:

1. What is a pexlomb?

A zox with pictamaerals which floatate.

2. What is similar to a zox?

A betra ooz

Explicitly teaching academic vocabulary is essential for our level 3 students. The good news is there are many students who need the same vocabulary development. Keep in mind, however, that native English speakers have experiential background and/or the ability to make linguistic connections that the ELL student may not have. While explicitly teaching academic terms is good for all students, it is ESSENTIAL for your level 3 ELLs.

For extended proficiency descriptors and accommodations go to :

<http://www.waterford.k12.mi.us/staffDev/ell/accommodations%20by%20proficiency.htm>

[Language Bits]

Words in Isolation

ELLs often learn vocabulary in isolation. With only one definition or familiar usage of a word, confusion comes about when the word is used in other contexts. For example, ELLs learn "light" as in, *turn on the light*. Students might not even know why they are confused when they hear the teacher ask, "Which one is lighter?" or "Who is wearing the light blue shirt?"

Be aware of words that have multiple meanings and keep in mind your ELLs may need additional explanation of alternative uses of words.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Supporting content vocabulary for Level 3 ELL students:

❖ Teach important words: don't let students guess which words are key to the essential learning (see *Student Spotlight*).

❖ Pre-teach terms before your lesson. For many students this will help build background knowledge needed for listening with meaning.

❖ Use a bell, ringer, or simple hand gesture to signal the key terms while you are talking. The novelty will help all brains "tune in" to the key words when they are being used. It also breaks up the stream of teacher-talk that can begin to sound like Charlie Brown's mother.

❖ Have students draw non-linguistic representations of words to help them make connections.

❖ Less is More! Rather than teaching the 400 bold type words in the text, focus on the terms that are essential to the understanding and **teach for deep meaning!**

Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.

~Robert Fulghum

❖ To Clarify Terms Ask Students:

■ What's another word that means the same thing as ___?

■ Give me an example of a _____.

■ What does a _____ remind you of?

■ Describe a _____.

❖ Refer back to key terms through content word walls (key academic terms displayed on the way through a unit of study).

❖ Use and reuse words in a variety of contexts to help students make connections.

❖ Whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning! Get students talking, explaining and using key terms.

❖ Read Robert Marzano's Building Academic Vocabulary for ideas on implementing a systemic way to teach vocabulary

❖ For a summary of Marzano's vocabulary instruction, go to "Explicitly Teaching Content Vocabulary" at <http://www.waterford.k12.mi.us/staffDev/ell/instructional%20resources.htm>



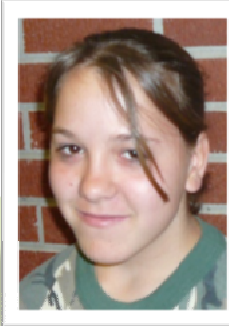
True or False?

Q: Students naturally acquire social language from other students and do not need to be taught how to communicate in social situations.

Many newcomers in middle school and high school learn academic language in class but have few opportunities to practice social language. Most of their social interactions are with students with the same native language background.

Example: Carmen is an English language learner from the Dominican Republic who is in middle school. She is a very good student who works hard and has quickly acquired academic English; however, she socializes only with classmates who speak Spanish. Her social language in English is slow and hesitant. Her Brazilian classmate Diego, on the other hand, is athletic and plays soccer with the boys from his class. Because Diego interacts with many English-speaking teammates, his social English is quite fluent

The answer is **FALSE**. Social language comes easier to students who have real reasons to speak with their classmates. Organized school activities such as sports teams, band, or chorus can expose ELLs to social English. Get your ELL students involved sports, clubs or other after school social activities! From Getting Started with English Language Learners by Judy Haynes. www.everythingsl.com



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Meet Marina Schendel, a 6th grade student at Mason Middle School. Marina is an English language learner that came from Russia 4 years ago. She says, "Middle school is pretty cool. I like

reading lab. It helps you pronounce words and understand them better." Because Marina began speaking English at a younger age, she has very little accent but she says she works on homework every night, sometimes up to 3 hours. "I'm horrible in English," she laughs, "I'm still translating in my head but I'm getting better. I think one day I will be able to think in English, too, but for now I'm doing 2 times the work. I do it in Russian in my head, and then I have to do it in again in English."

Marina's English language arts teacher, Courtney John, says that she encourages Marina to see beyond her mistakes and focus on her good ideas and the message of her writing. "When correcting errors, we try to focus on one area at a time. We will set a goal for improvement, like a spelling pattern or a verb tense, and we focus on that until she's got it."

Math class can be especially hard sometimes, Marina says. "There are big words. I usually just ignore it and if it really matters I will ask the teacher what it means." When asked how she knows if it's an important word Marina says, "If I notice people repeating it a lot then I know it must be the important word. Then I ask. Otherwise I just let it go."

Adjusting to American culture hasn't always been easy for Marina. "Americans smile all the time. They also seem to worry a lot about things that don't matter. It seems like they are always trying to be perfect. It's just how it seems to me." (See *Cultural Corner* in side bar)

Outside of school, Marina continues to work as a translator for young Russian students coming to the United States. She also spends time selling flowers and bouquets made of wire and beads. She is exploring other creative outlets and thinks one day she might enjoy being an interior designer.

What is one thing Marina says teachers can do? "Speak slower...just slow down and relax."



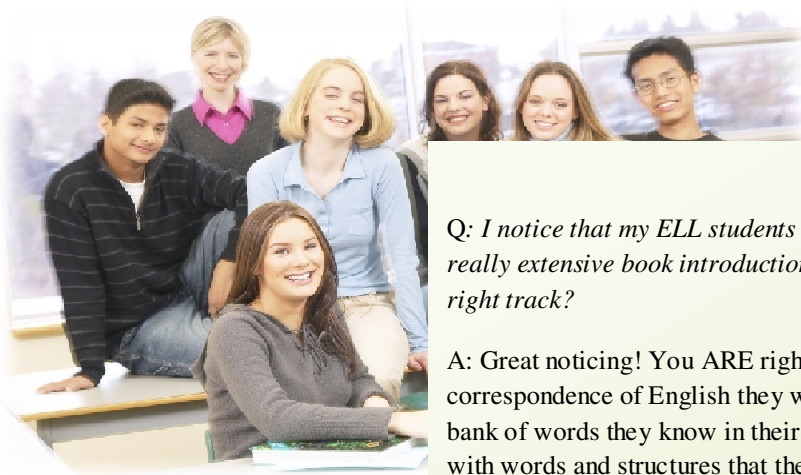
CULTURAL CORNER

Seeing Ourselves through the Eyes of Others:

Americans expect things to go well and become upset when they don't. Russians expect things to go poorly and have learned to live with misfortune. The American habit of smiling all the time can get on the nerves of some Russians. Despite their pessimism, there is an admirable durability and resiliency about Russians, a proven strength and endurance.

They may say, "Americans smile as if they are electric lights turned on", "their smile is something chronic", "an American face is mainly teeth."

So if you smile at a Russian person and get no smile in return, don't feel surprised or hurt. Consider it an exotic national tradition! (Information from: <http://www.goehner.com/russinfo.htm>)



Q&A Elementary

Q: I notice that my ELL students seem to be more confident in writing than reading. They need a really extensive book introduction for every book in their bag a few times a week. Am I on the right track?

A: Great noticing! You ARE right on track. Once students unlock the sound/symbol correspondence of English they will be able to write what they can say. Students will use the bank of words they know in their head to approach writing. The confidence may come working with words and structures that they already know and can say.

However, when the same student opens a book and begins to decode words, the book presents many words and structures that may be outside the student's bank. (*see "Level 3 Students" text example.*) **Front loading, or previewing, is the way to go.** You can help your students by pre-teaching words or structures the students might not know such as irregular past tense verbs, figures of speech, inverted clauses or literary structures. For a reference of language forms that can cause confusion for ELLs go to:

http://www.waterford.k12.mi.us/staffDev/ell/language_forms_that_cause_confus.htm

**Check out Oakland Schools
Summer Workshops...
You only pay for lunch!**

<http://new.oakland.k12.mi.us/Departments/LearningServices/Humanities/ESLBilingual/ConferencesWorkshops/tabid/1587/Default.aspx>

Q&A Secondary

Q: A teacher assistant in my building helps a few students but there are other students in my class that I am told are ELL but don't get her help. Why is this? And how do I know what level my students are?

A: The teacher assistants (see list below) are primarily support for the needs of level 1 and 2 students who are developing social language. They may also assist with higher level students if and when time is available.

Since classroom teachers know their content the best, they are best suited for helping higher level students build the specific academic vocabulary that students need. Classroom teachers are also the best determiners of making accommodations that will help move students toward the essential learning of a unit. If your assistant has extra time to support level 3 students they will need to confer with you about what to help the student study.

A student's proficiency level is primarily, but not completely, determined by their ELPA scores. If you don't have ELPA scores handy, you can ask your ELL support person for the scores. You can also ask the building secretary run an "LEP report" from discovery or email Alicia Duncan. (duncaa01@wsdmi.org).



- Have questions?
- Successful student to feature in the spotlight?
- Teaching tip or ideas to share?

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