Scaffolding

Oral Language for

ELLS

From STRUGGLING to TRANSLANGUAGING

The Deep End

Imagine being dropped into a social studies course that is being taught in a language you don't speak. Maybe you recognize some words and can even follow the class discussion, but when the teacher turns to you and asks you to join the discussion, what might happen? Do you speak in your home language or the immersion language or maybe a bit of both? Perhaps you don't speak at all out of fear of being wrong. You are comfortable speaking with your new friends outside of class, so why don't you feel ready to dive into classroom discussions?

This scenario captures two core concepts about language immersion and acquisition that have shaped instructional practices for almost four decades: (1) some learners may experience a "silent period" when first introduced to a new language and (2) **there may be a difference between students' development of conversational fluency vs. their acquisition of academic language proficiency in the new language.** Let's examine these two ideas to see if they are absolutes or can be mitigated with scaffolds and translanguaging.

No Silence Required

Krashen (1982) describes the "silent period" as a phenomenon that takes place when a language learner is first exposed to a new language. According to this theory, a language learner is silent, or nonverbal, because they don't feel comfortable speaking in a new language. An English language learner (ELL) in the silent period is said to produce little to no oral language in the second language for a contested period of time that can span from a few days to a year! However, Krashen writes that "the silent period in child second language acquisition would not be as long if more of the input the child hears is comprehensible" (p. 82). He suggests that the more comprehensible input we build into our instruction, the quicker children will transition out of the silent stage.

Translanguaging instructional practices allow ELLs to use their full linguistic repertoires as learners. By encouraging them to use their home language(s), we will enable students to communicate their ideas fully, particularly for newcomers who may not want to take many risks early on in speaking and writing English.

NOTE: Need a refresher on comprehensible input? Go back to Session 4 to review!

No Waiting Required

Cummins (1979) proposed a dichotomy between what he called basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). This theory helped a generation of educators to explain why a student may be socially fluent in a language, but still need additional support and time to complete grade-level assignments. More recent researchers have critiqued the theory as offering a deficit perspective of language learners (Cummins, 2008; Flores, 2021; Bunch & Martin, 2021). Indeed, there is no need to wait for ELLs to demonstrate a certain standard of language before they can participate in grade-appropriate learning. By encouraging translanguaging – and scaffolding language demands – ELLs get to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire to engage meaningfully in grade-level academic content as they learn language.

Another critique of the original theory is that everyday conversation and oral language skills are far from "basic" and may in fact be the critical engine of intellectual work (Bunch & Martin, 2021). Effective instruction begins by recognizing and encouraging all of the linguistic variations (dialects, registers, languages) – including the linguistic variations of English speakers – and leveraging those sophisticated language skills for communicating about disciplinary ideas.

How to Scaffold a Discussion

As teachers of both content and language, we know that deliberate planning for the oral language production of our students is crucial. We have to think about the questions we ask, as well as define the expectations for a classroom discussion. Gibbons (1991) asks us to think about our questions and to anticipate the language needed for ELLs to engage with our questions. **To illustrate this idea, let's imagine two math discussions on shapes.**

INITIAL QUESTION
What do you notice about these shapes?

Rectangle
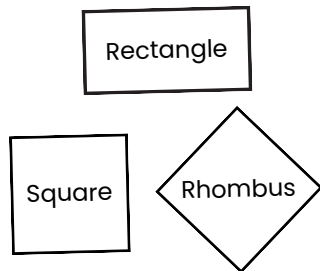
Square   Rhombus

POSSIBLE STUDENT RESPONSES
- There is a square.
- There's a rectangle and a rhombus.
- There are 3 shapes.
- They all have 4 sides.
- The shapes all have 4 sides.
- They all have parallel lines.
- Each shape has 2 sets of parallel lines.

What vocabulary and phrases will ELLs probably need?

We also identify the type of vocabulary and phrases students will need: a rectangle, a square, a rhombus, numbers (such as 3 and 4), sides, shape, parallel lines, and two sets of parallel lines.

What language tiers seem to emerge?

We can also tier these sentence stems in terms of grammatical complexity; we display them and encourage students to use the sentence stems to answer our question.

Level 1	Level 2
There is a _____.	There are _____.
There's a _____.	The shapes all have _____.
There is a _____ and a _____.	They all have _____.
	Each shape has _____.

What home language supports will newcomers need?

- Translate the question using Google Translate. Display the translation alongside the English question. If your ELL can't read their home language, use the audio function so they may listen to the question. Note, however, that you should use online translation tools to translate simple words or phrases only. Do not translate packets or heavy linguistic work. Accuracy of online translated language decreases as the language being translated becomes more complex.
- Create a <u>bilingual mini-dictionary</u> that includes translations for your tiered sentence stems and vocabulary words.

What sentence stems will ELLs likely need?

Based on the anticipated student responses, we are now able to analyze the language structures ELLs will need to use in order to describe the shapes and to answer the question "What do you notice about these shapes?"

Singular grammar structures	Plural grammar structures
There is a _____.	There are _____.
There's a _____.	The shapes all have _____.
There is a _____ and a _____.	They all have _____ (number) sides and _____ _____(adjective + noun).
Each shape has _____.	

What translanguaging supports can help?

- **Individual scaffolds**: If you have only one Portuguese student, for example, teach the ELL how to use the voice-to-text function on Google Translate. Also, provide the student with a personalized headset so they may listen repeatedly to the pronunciation of the text in English. The student may want to share the names of the shapes in Portuguese for the benefit of the whole class.
- **Partner scaffolds**: Pair two Portuguese speakers to discuss the question in Portuguese first. Encourage students to try the English sentence stems and then encourage them to listen to their translated answers in English and practice the pronunciation with each other.
- **Small group scaffolds**: Meet with a pair or small group of Portuguese students to model the use of the Google Translate tools and monitor their progress. Facilitate a bilingual conversation so ELLs can leverage their home language(s) to engage with the question meaningfully. As a teacher, use the Google Translate "conversation" and "transcribe" features on your phone. Model how to connect their ideas to the tiered sentence stems, when appropriate.

Remember: Online tools have limitations when it comes to holding complex discussions using academic language and may not always provide an exact translation. Use caution when relying on information obtained from such tools. Online translation should be used only for simple classroom translations and communication and should never be used for signed documents or important information.

Try This:
TALKING CHIPS
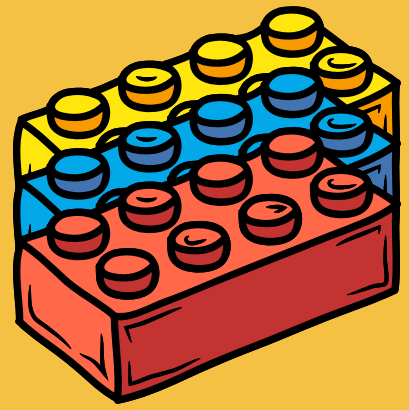
In order to encourage focused conversations on content, students need to have a reason to speak to each other based on the task itself or the critical thinking level associated with the topic. Activities such as information gaps, debates, visual puzzles, card sorts, talking chips, and anticipation guides encourage students to interact in order to complete the assignment. Structuring the lesson tasks such that students have only part of the material and therefore must converse to exchange information deepens their content knowledge and can be a bridge to reading and writing tasks.

Talking chips is a strategy for student oral language interaction by Dr. Spencer Kagan (Barkley et al., 2014). Imagine the math lesson on shapes is followed by this activity:

- Print out the shapes and cut them from cardstock or use math tiles representing each shape.
- Pass one to each student.
- Ask the students to label each shape and walk around the room until they form a trio with the two shapes they do not have (rectangle, rhombus, and square will form a trio).
- Once seated as a group, have students use the sentence stems to describe each shape as they place it in the center of the table. When one person is talking, this is their "talking chip"; therefore, everyone else must listen.
- Once each group has placed all of their shapes in the center, they can compare and contrast the shapes. The teacher may choose to provide additional sentence stems or allow students to speak authentically based on the descriptions of each shape.
- Students may be tasked with using these shapes – and additional ones provided along with tape – to create a cube, experimenting with the shapes and using the vocabulary to determine the number of sides needed.

Variations on Talking Chips

- Print or provide the shapes in different colors and have students use different sentence stems or language features based on the color of the shape they received (such as asking questions vs. giving statements; fact vs. opinion; or restating what was said).
- You may also give more than one talking chip to each student, depending on the task.
- You can use any sort of manipulative (paper clips, coins, candy, or dominoes) to form the talking chips.

By completing this activity in small groups, each student has a chance to speak about the content.

Try This:
ANTICIPATION GUIDE

This is a pre- and post-reading comprehension activity that builds conversation around a text. It can also be used before or after listening to a lecture or video clip. Imagine high school students are about to read *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Before the activity, the teacher copies and pastes the text into WordSift to capture the 50 most frequent words in the text. Students partner to predict what they think the text will be about based on the words. They also note any words they would like to translate or define.

Then they discuss the statements in the anticipation guide and in the first pre-reading column, they select a tentative answer. Next, they read the article. While reading, students adjust their answers by marking their new thinking in the post-reading column. Finally, they write why they did or did not change their original answer by citing from the text in the fourth column. Note that higher-order thinking or ambiguous questions and statements elicit more language.

PRE-READING	SAMPLE STATEMENTS	POST-READING	DID YOUR ANSWER CHANGE AFTER READING THE TEXT? WHY OR WHY NOT? ADD CITATIONS FROM THE TEXT.
True False	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spent time in jail.	True False	
True False	Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believes that the issues affecting Birmingham are unique and should be dealt with locally.	True False	
True False	In the early 1960s, Birmingham, Alabama, had more violence than anywhere else in the country.	True False	
Agree Disagree	Tension is necessary for change, as long as it is nonviolent and constructive.	Agree Disagree	
Agree Disagree	I am willing to peacefully protest for the causes I believe in.	Agree Disagree	
Agree Disagree	I am willing to go to jail for the causes I believe in.	Agree Disagree	

Online variations of the anticipation guide can include offering the statements or questions through Google Forms or online polls to accomplish the same steps. **The important aspect is that students are discussing and making sense of the material in pairs or small groups.** For lower elementary grades or newcomers, anticipation guides can include pictures or translations. They can be as long or as short as required and can include true/false, agree/disagree, multiple-choice items, open-ended questions, or a variety of these options.

Now It's Your Turn!
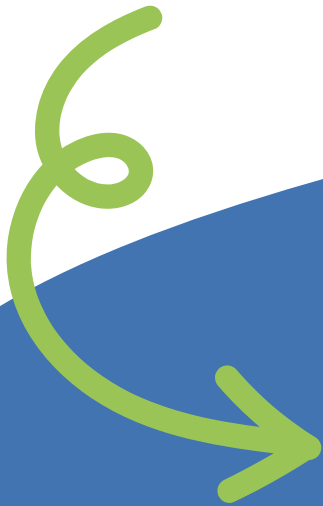
In this session, we have explored ways to support ELLs as speakers. In the following session, we will explore ways to support ELLs as writers. In both instances, we are leveraging the benefits of home languages and supporting the production of English.

In your choice board and workbook, we will continue to explore scaffolds that support the oral participation of ELLs across learning environments.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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