Meeting the linguistic needs of gifted English language learners: should teachers of all content areas teach language?

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Overview of this Presentation

- English language learners (ELLs) intro
- Gifted ELLs
- Identification issues
- Teachers
- Strategies
- Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)
- Examples and Application

Introduction

- Doctoral student in Gifted Education
- English teacher in Brazil for twelve years
- Coordinator of student programs
- Research interests: gifted English language learners (ELLs); language testing; social and emotional issues
- Dissertation

Questions for Discussion

- What has been your experience with gifted English language learners?
- How can understanding your students’ cultural backgrounds and educational experience help in dealing with gifted ELLs?
- How can we teach ELLs English while also teaching them the different content areas?

A limited English proficiency student:

“A student's language background is in a language other than English, and the student's proficiency in English is such that the probability of the student's academic success in an English-only classroom is below that of an academically successful peer with an English language background.” (Iowa Department of Education)
Students who speak a language other than English at home comprise 19.2% of the entire population of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)

Between 1993 and 2004, Indiana had the fourth largest rate of growth in the number of Limited English Proficient children in the entire U.S. or 438% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)

**Characteristics of Gifted ELLs**
- Highly curious
- Unusual ways to solve problems
- Independent and self-sufficient
- Highly verbal
- Understanding the importance of family/culture
- Preference for older playmates
- Engaging in abstract reasoning
- Absorbed in self-selected tasks
- Demonstrating social maturity at home and community

(=Gallagher, 2007)

**Stages of Language Acquisition**
- Preproduction
  - Does not talk at all or says only isolated words or phrases
  - Cannot understand initially, but begins to associate sound and meaning
  - Does not follow directions
  - Easily distracted or frustrated
  - Uses contextual clues for meaning

- Early production
  - Uses simple words or short phrases
  - Understands some of what is said or written
  - Starts to get involved
  - Follows a few directions
  - Minimal academic achievement in English

- Speech emergent
  - Begins to speak in longer phrases
  - Noticeable gaps and errors in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation
  - Understands most of what is said in general conversation
  - Responds in English more frequently
  - Participates more in class discussions

- Intermediate fluency
- Fluency

(Robisheaux, 2002)
**Intermediate Fluency Student**

- Native or near-native speaking ability
- Understands most of what is said
- Needs expansion and refinement in more complex vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding and expressing abstract concepts and the academic language
- Produces fewer errors in speech

**Fluent SL Student**

- Native speaking ability
- Understands everything that is said in English
- Uses the academic language with facility
- Able to understand and express abstract concepts
- Produces few errors in speech

**Second Language Learning**

- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS): everyday language needed in social situations. Children can acquire social English in 6-18 months.
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP): used in academic learning. Includes speaking, reading, and writing about materials in different content areas. Acquisition may take 5-7 years or 3-5 years for gifted individuals.
  
  (Cummins, 1979; Gallagher, 2007)

**Identification Issues**

Scores on verbal or nonverbal tests of intelligence are the traditional criteria for identification and placement in G/T programs (Harris et al., 2007)

Advanced language cannot be one of the main selection criteria if students have limited English proficiency!

**NAGC Pre-K – Grade 12 Standards**

- Assessment instruments must measure the capabilities of students with provision for the language in which the student is most fluent, when available.
- Assessments must be culturally fair

**Suggestions for Identification**

- Multiple Measures: Achievement, Aptitude, and Ability
- Rapidity of English Language Acquisition
- Checklists
- Portfolios
- Recommendation (parent, teacher, peers, student)
- Student interests, motivation, and persistence

(Laing, 2007)
### Challenges of Teachers of ELLs

- Getting students to understand directions and idiomatic expressions
- Teaching the subject matter
- Assessing students work
- Meeting the needs of different students
- Lack of opportunity for one-on-one instruction
- Lack of knowledge of the best practices and methodologies for teaching ELLs

(de Oliveira & Pereira, in press)

### Needs of Teachers of ELLs

- Hands-on experiences implementing techniques and strategies learned
- Need for information (i.e. guidelines for dealing with ELLs)
- Crucial vocabulary in the students' first language
- Interpreters and aides in the classroom

(de Oliveira & Pereira, in press)

### Culturally Responsive Teachers

- Socioculturally conscious: multiple ways of perceiving reality
- Affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds: resources for learning
- See themselves as both responsible and capable of bringing about educational change

### Culturally Responsive Teachers (cont.)

- Understand how learners construct knowledge and promote learners’ knowledge construction
- Know about the lives of their students
- Use that knowledge to design lessons that build on what students already know

(Villegas & Lucas, 2002)

### Strategies

- Flexible grouping
- Promoting first and second language development
- Fostering questioning strategies
- Promoting home/school partnerships
- Differentiated instruction
- Focus on advanced literacy

(Gallagher, 2007; Schleppegrel, 2004)

### Strategies (cont.)

- Assess and incorporate interests and background knowledge
- Model reading and thinking strategies
- Strategies promoting higher level and creative thinking
- Show rather than tell (graphic organizers, field trips, videos)
- Direct instruction for basic skills and developing automaticity

(Kitano, 2007)
L2 Teaching Methods

- Grammar-Translation Approach
- Direct Approach
- Reading Approach
- Audiolingual Method
- Communicative Approach
- Eclectic Approach (Brown, 2003)

A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

- Language is the medium through which students learn and express their knowledge
- Teachers of all content areas can and should focus on language skills
- One way to include language in all content areas is by explicitly discussing the language in textbooks (not only technical words)

Schleppegrell, 2004

Systemic-Functional Linguistics

- Systemic-functional grammar is concerned primarily with the choices that are made available to speakers of a language by their grammatical systems. These choices are assumed to be meaningful and relate speakers' intentions to the concrete forms of a language

(Halliday, 1994)

Systemic Functional Linguistics

- Meanings are divided into three broad areas (metafunctions):
  - Ideational (presenting ideas)
  - Interpersonal (taking a stance)
  - Textual (structuring a text)

(Schleppegrell, 2004)

Ideational Choices

- Participants (noun phrases, nominal groups, subject, object)
- Processes (verbs)
- Circumstances (prepositional phrases, adverbial adjuncts, and other resources for information about time, place, and manner)

(Schleppegrell, 2004)

Interpersonal Choices

- Mood (statements, questions, demands)
- Modality (modal verbs and adverbs)
- Intonation
- Resources for appraisal (evaluative meanings)

(Schleppegrell, 2004)
Textual Choices

- Cohesive devices (conjunctions and connectors)
- Clause combining strategies (dependent, subordinate, independent)
- Thematic organization (theme and rhyme)

(Schleppegrell, 2004)

Goal

- "Provide teachers with ways of talking about language that enable to them to focus on the history content at the same time that they offer students opportunities to develop academic language proficiency"

(De Oliveira, 2006)

Science

- Technical vocabulary
- Logical relationships: causal, spatio-temporal
- Different genres used in science: procedure (imperative mood, thematic markers of sequence in time [next, then]); science report (generic participants, timeless verbs in simple present tense)

Schleppegrell, 2004

Mathematics

- Multiple semiotic systems (natural/ordinary language; mathematics symbolism, diagrams)
- Words that are not solely mathematical, but that have particular meanings in mathematics (borrow, product)

Schleppegrell, 2007
Teaching the metalanguage (types of texts/genres)  
- Christie, 2002
- An SFL framework can help develop advanced literacy (grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, metalinguistic knowledge)
- Vocabulary: teaching not only the forms and meanings of words, but also the grammatical features that govern the use of words  
Scarcella, 2002

References