

Suggested Strategies for Teaching and “Reaching” ELLs in Language Arts and Content Area Classrooms

The curriculum standards developed by the New Jersey Department of Education for K-12 classrooms require teachers to focus on five components of language arts: *reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing* (the ability to make sense out of information represented graphically). These five components are essential to any learner, but they are especially critical for English Language Learners (ELLs). These components are also vital because research shows that developing strengths in one area typically develops strengths in all areas. Also, students who develop competencies in these areas become much more economically viable in a marketplace that is information services-based. Following are just a few strategies to be used across all content areas **before, during, and after** a language arts lesson or textbook reading:

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Viewing
Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lead a pre-reading discussion about the topic to elicit students’ background knowledge. ■ List questions about the topic on the board or on a handout that focus the students’ attention during a reading. ■ Ask students to preview a text: Turn subheadings into questions. List unfamiliar vocabulary. “Chunk” the text into manageable concept segments. ■ Make use of a KWHLS chart to elicit background knowledge and to structure the lesson. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make writing activities a part of your usual classroom routine. ■ Engage students in a pre-writing vocabulary discussion (so that they know what words—and concepts—to include in their work). ■ Engage students in brainstorming activities that help them to “structure” their writing. ■ Do more longer writing tasks than shorter ones. ■ Provide students with models of what a finished writing assignment should look like. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide more opportunities for students to speak in class. ■ Provide opportunities for students to meet in small “focus” groups to talk to each other about the content. ■ Give students pre-discussion writing time by listing questions and allowing them to generate answers prior to the class discussion. ■ Offer students opportunities to discuss responses to questions before actually offering the response to the whole class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Intersperse lectures with “focus” group activities. ■ Make use of visual aids: blackboard notes, slides, etc. ■ Make use of outlines. ■ Write questions that will be answered during the course of the lecture. Check them off as they are answered. ■ Model vocabulary pronunciation and contextual use to the students. ■ “Define” vocabulary “parenthetically” while speaking. ■ Repeat key vocabulary and concepts. Be emphatic when doing so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make extensive use of graphic materials. These should include: charts, graphs, timelines, captioned photos, graphic organizers (e.g., Venn diagrams, webs, flowcharts), political cartoons, and videos. ■ Point out the “seemingly” obvious. ■ Ask students questions about important concepts represented in the visual media. ■ “Set up” viewing experiences by providing information about the media to be examined.

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Viewing
Before (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide students with numerous short readings, on a variety of reading levels, to build knowledge about the topic. ■ Use media to build a knowledge base. ■ Place students in “focus” groups. Assign each group focus questions that elicit background knowledge of the topic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide students with a rubric that shows them how their finished products will be graded. ■ Allow students in-class time to brainstorm prior to writing. ■ Review brainstorming materials with students to ensure they are “on the right track.” It’s easier to develop a piece of writing before it’s written! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask questions that can be answered in more than one “correct” way. ■ Probe responses to encourage students to more fully elaborate their thoughts. Do so in a way that validates their thinking. ■ Repeat important phrases from students’ responses to emphasize critical concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify key vocabulary and concepts to the students. Use indicators such as: “An important thing to make note of....” ■ Summarize key points at end of a lecture. ■ Ask review questions at the end of a lecture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When viewing videos, present students with a list of questions to be answered while watching the presentation. ■ When viewing videos, require students to take notes or use double entry journals. Pause the tape at appropriate times so that students can record and share notes.
During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read critical portions of the text aloud to the students. (See listening.) ■ Provide in-class time for text readings. ■ Pause periodically during the reading to ask questions and review key concepts. ■ Provide students with guided reading questions. ■ Teach students to figure out new vocabulary (where possible) from context by using the “cloze” method. ■ Ask students to use strategies like SQ3R and PQRS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow students in-class time to talk about and share writing prior to the due date of the assignment. ■ Ask students to come to class with one page of their papers duplicated for the entire class. Pick a few papers and spend a class discussing the presentation of the content. ■ Have students generate copies of papers for their focus group. Let them share and comment on each other’s work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide students with focused discussion questions. At an appropriate time, direct them to meet with their focus groups. Ask them to share their ideas with the class. ■ At an appropriate time, ask students to meet and discuss newly encountered vocabulary. ■ At an appropriate time, ask students to summarize important information from the text. This can be done in the small focus groups or by individuals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Read critical portions of the text aloud to the students. (See reading.) ■ Encourage students to take notes during lectures. ■ Provide students with time during lectures to reflect upon their notes. ■ Provide students with class learning logs and double entry journals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Direct students to review visual information at appropriate points in the text. ■ Direct students to read sidebars in textbooks at appropriate points in the text. ■ Provide students with class learning logs and double entry journals.

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Viewing
During (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and expect student questions. Set aside a time for focus groups to generate and ask questions about the reading. 				
After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow time for students to review focus questions. Direct students to supportive and alternate texts to reinforce content. Discuss key concepts in a variety of ways: question/answer sessions, discussion sessions, retellings and summaries, character analyses, plot lines, and key events and facts. This can be done individually (allowing process time first) or by first asking students to meet with focus groups to prepare remarks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to do a quick freewrite in response to a reading or lecture. Ask students to list ten most important pieces of information gleaned from a reading or lecture. Ask students to generate short passages using new vocabulary words. Ask students to respond to short-answer questions in writing; limit use of multiple choice and true/false assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After reading, ask students to offer their thoughts about the focus questions. After reading, ask students to summarize important information from the text. This can be done in the small focus groups or by individuals. Ask students to share understandings of new vocabulary with classmates. Ask students to read written responses and summaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recap students' correct answers to focus questions and summaries. Clarify any misunderstood information. Elaborate incomplete thoughts. Ask students to jot down classmates' questions so that they may be answered in class or as an extension assignment. Review key ideas by using blackboard, slides, etc., emphasizing critical concepts and vocabulary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to generate graphic organizers of key information from a reading or lecture. Ask students to create photo montages and responses (where appropriate) to a reading or lecture. Ask students to revisit graphic materials in the chapter or from the presentation and have them explain the visual materials to the class. Invite students to watch videos a second time to identify new information.

It is important to note that it is not possible to do all of these activities for every class assignment. A practical way to implement some of these strategies would be to choose one class each week in which to employ one or more strategies. Remember that spending time on strategic learning is a valuable classroom practice that results in better retention and application of content materials. The same amount of content material can be covered when strategies are integrated into the content of the lesson. By integrating strategy, lessons shift from being teacher-directed to learner-focused. Teaching strategically (once the “knack” has been mastered) is actually less work for the teacher!