

Exploring ESL

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A Resource for Faculty/Staff at Pontiac Academy for Excellence

Secondary ESL Program Update

Pontiac Academy for Excellence is committed to meeting the needs of all English language learners enrolled in the district. The Title III/ESL Program is designed to systematically increase the language acquisition, literacy development, and core academic achievement of all English language learners (ELLs) enrolled at PAE.

Program Overview

Knowing that, “Our adolescent English language learners are faced with doing double the work in order to succeed in...school,” PAE’s program has two key components to provide the optimal level of support (Short, 2009).

- (1) Students receive the necessary instruction to enhance their social and academic English through sheltered language and literacy instruction, and;
- (2) Students receive additional support to promote their mastery of core content topics based on a standards-based curriculum, which may take the form of push-in bilingual support, pull-out supplementary bilingual core content instruction, or extended day learning services through after-school tutoring, Saturday school, or summer enrichment.

Since research shows that “English language learners need 4-7 years of targeted English language development in order to reach average performance levels on state or national exams,” PAE’s program is designed to lead ELLs to gain proficiency in the most effective manner possible based on a sustained program of specialized instruction (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Therefore, once identified for additional services, ELLs in the district are enrolled in the program until they have demonstrated proficiency in social and academic English as well as the ability to successfully master core content topics and skills without additional scaffolding, at which point, they are formally exited from the program of service. In order to ensure their continued success, exited students are monitored for a two-year period; during this time, if they appear to be struggling in their language and literacy use or their mastery of core content, they are placed on an improvement plan, which may include returning them to their previous program of service.

Program Goals

While the program identifies particular goals for each proficiency and grade level, the overall program is guided by the following set of goals:

All English language learners will...

- 1) Acquire personal, social, occupational, and civic English oral and written literacy skills;
- 2) Demonstrate mastery of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing skills using the English language based on state English language proficiency standards and English language arts standards;
- 3) Demonstrate mastery of core content area skills and concepts through integration of content-area vocabulary and concepts and awareness of language learning process in general education classes; and
- 4) Value their native language and utilize it to support their English language and general academic development.

Overall Program Structure

Viewing our program as the on-ramp for ELLs into the mainstream setting, the program is grounded in the belief that our students will benefit most from curriculum supported by “both language and content objectives...to promote academic literacy and use instructional interventions that can reduce the achievement gap between English language learners and native English-speaking students” (Short, 2009). This guides instruction and assessment in language and core content classes.

At the secondary level, this is accomplished through daily English language and literacy instruction and assessment delivered by a certified ESL teacher and supported by research-based curriculum and strategies. For students enrolled in grades 6-10, these sheltered English classes serve as their required English language arts class, where they are expected to develop both their English language proficiency as well as demonstrate mastery of grade-level appropriate English language arts standards. Because the level of ELA rigor is limited by students’ English language proficiency, sheltered English language classes cannot replace English language arts beyond grade 10; instead, it is an additional class that students qualifying for services in grades 11 and 12 must be enrolled in as an elective.

What is SLOP?

As the number of English learners increases in our district, Pontiac Academy for Excellence is committed to systematically implementing a research-based instructional model to most effectively help our ELLs acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their core content classes and beyond.

The SLOP Model* is a research-based and validated model of sheltered instruction. Professional development in the SLOP Model helps teachers plan and deliver lessons that allow English learners to acquire academic knowledge as they develop English language proficiency.

This past summer, four secondary PAE teachers, Christina Helsel, Devon Sodee, Michele Berry, and Staci Sumner, attended a four-day training seminar to begin building capacity in our district to implement this instructional model. This fall, they returned invigorated by a wealth of knowledge and strategies that will not only support core content mastery for ELLs, but for all students—and had an opportunity to introduce SLOP to the middle and high school staff members.

One takeaway that they knew all staff members would fall in love with is the informational text reading strategy known as THIEVES. Check it out below!

ESL Teaching Toolbox: THIEVES

*From ReadWriteThink
“Using THIEVES” Lesson*

OVERVIEW

Students use previewing skills in their everyday lives to decide what foods to eat, clothes to buy, and movies to watch. In this lesson, students use previewing to activate their prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading. Using a strategy called THIEVES, which is an acronym for title, headings, introduction, every first sentence in a paragraph, visuals and vocabulary, end-of-chapter questions, and summary, students are guided through a preview of a nonfiction text. After guided practice, students can work together to use the strategy to preview a chapter from a textbook.

The Elements of THIEVES

Title

- What is the title?
- What do I already know about this topic?
- What does this topic have to do with the preceding chapter?
- Does the title express a point of view?
- What do I think I will be reading about?

Headings

- What does this heading tell me I will be reading about?
- What is the topic of the paragraph beneath it?
- How can I turn this heading into a question that is likely to be answered in the text?

Introduction

- Is there an opening paragraph, perhaps italicized?
- Does the first paragraph introduce the chapter?
- What does the introduction tell me I will be reading about?
- Do I know anything about this topic already?

Every first sentence in a paragraph

- What do I think this chapter is going to be about based on the first sentence in each paragraph?

Visuals and vocabulary

- Does the chapter include photographs, drawings, maps, charts, or graphs?
- What can I learn from the visuals in a chapter?
- How do captions help me better understand the meaning?
- Is there a list of key vocabulary terms and definitions?
- Are there important words in boldface type throughout the chapter?
- Do I know what the boldfaced words mean?
- Can I tell the meaning of the boldfaced words from the sentences in which they are embedded?

End-of-chapter questions

- What do the questions ask?
- What information do they earmark as important?
- What information do I learn from the questions?
- Let me keep in mind the end-of-chapter questions so that I may annotate my text where pertinent information is located.

Summary

- What do I understand and recall about the topics covered in the summary?

Check out the full lesson plan and accompanying handouts at readwritethink.org. Search “THIEVES” to find the “Using THIEVES to Preview Nonfiction Texts” lesson plan—and other resources.