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Improving English Learners Reading Comprehension Through the Use of Vocabulary Strategies

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English learner (EL) Facts:

ELs bring with them unique backgrounds in both language and culture and special challenges to overcome to achieve success in U.S. schools.

Academic abilities transfer between languages

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) - the language used for socializing

- minimum of six months – two years after arrival

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS) - language skills needed for academics

- minimum of four years to acquire fluency; usually 5-7 years

Vocabulary:

- Purposeful, planned instruction of targeted vocabulary words of no more than 3-4 important words being used in the book.
- Increased vocabulary is important to improving reading comprehension
- Solid skills foundation in word recognition, decoding, and spelling
- Teaching words within context
- Solid skills foundation in word recognition, decoding, and spelling
- Idioms are difficult for ELs to understand – explicit teaching is needed
- Bilingual dictionaries can be helpful

Reading:

- Interactive read-alouds
- Social interactions through cooperative learning in group or partner activities
- Comprehension monitoring

- Student summaries of information that they've read (orally or in writing)

Teaching Strategies:

- Teacher modeling of metacognition such as monitoring, rereading and checking meaning construction
- Utilizing the native language of ELs
- Tapping into background knowledge and prior experiences
- Building schemas to create background knowledge for ELs
- Paraphrasing and repeating key points
- Using realia (real objects) to demonstrate meaning
- Acting out meanings
- Scaffolding, explicit instruction, and modeling
- Total physical response (TPR)
- Mental imagery
- Charades to act out words
- Cross-language scaffolding to decipher unknown words as well as cognates or words that have similar meanings and/or spelling
- Teachers must keep in mind the language experiences, culture, and schemata of EL students