2015

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Recommended Citation
Butler, Tracy and Fowler, Michelle, "Improving English Learners Reading Comprehension Through the Use of Vocabulary Strategies" (2015). Publications. 60. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/eugene_pubs/60

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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