ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNERS, FAN COMMUNITIES AND 21st - CENTURY SKILLS

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Abstract:- The article discusses how technology and media can be utilized to promote 21st-century and digital literacy skills for English language learners (ELLs). The author discusses how globalization and technological diffusion require that students develop 21st-century skills and notes a study investigating the role of fan fiction in developing print and information literacy skills. He comments on how Internet use by young immigrants affects literacy practices and notes that technological literacy is required to participate in online fan communities. He discusses how fan communities can influence teaching methods.

Key Words: English Language, Language Learners, Literacy skills, Technological literacy

Introduction

In her classroom our speculations ranged the world. She breathed curiosity into us so that each day we came with new questions, new ideas, cupped and shielded in our hands like captured fireflies. When she left us, we were sad; but the light did not go out. She had written her indelible signature on our minds. I have had lots of teachers who taught me soon forgotten things; but only a few who created in me a new energy, a new direction. I suppose I am the unwritten manuscript of such a person. What deathless power lies in the hands of such a teacher!

John Steinbeck, recalling his favourite teacher Teaching and learning in the 21st century is filled with challenge and opportunity, especially when teaching students for whom English is a new language. Let's begin by showing you one school's continual effort to bring their English learners into the 21st century using the Internet and other technologies in ways that support their academic and language learning, while promoting social development, self-esteem, and individual empowerment.

This vignette describes a very different kind of classroom from the one many of us enjoyed in the past. Indeed, we live in awesome times filled with rapid changes-changes that proffer both grand opportunities and daunting challenges affecting everyone, including K–12 teachers. Technological advances are changing the way

we live and learn, from interactive Internet to social networking sites to smart phones with built-in cameras and beyond. Communication has become available instantaneously worldwide.

As the world grows smaller through communication, people are becoming more mobile in a variety of ways. For example, international migrations have changed the demographics of many countries, including the United States, Canada, and the European countries. The coexistence of people from diverse cultures, languages, and social circumstances has become the rule rather than the exception, demanding new levels of tolerance, understanding, and patience. Even as immigration has changed the face of countries such as the United States, occupational mobility has added another kind of diversity to the mix. Earlier generations planned on finding a job and keeping it until retirement at age 65. Today, the average wage earner will change jobs as a many as five times prior to retirement. These changes are due to the rapid evolution of the job market as technology eliminates or outsources some jobs, while creating new ones that require retooling and retraining. Even as immigrants arrive and people change jobs, the gap between rich and poor continues to widen in the United States, threatening social mobility for those in poverty and the working class. These changing demographics thus add another element to the ever-shifting field on which we work and play. Now, more than ever, the education we provide our youth must meet the needs of a future defined by constant innovation and change.

Into this field of challenge and change, teachers provide the foundation on which all students, including English learners, must build the competence and flexibility needed for success in the 21st century. The vignette illustrates some of the technological tools now available to young people as they envision themselves in a personally productive future and express their dreams in a multimedia format to share with others. It is our hope that this book will provide you the

foundations to help your students envision and enact positive futures for themselves. To that end, we offer you a variety of theories, teaching strategies, assessment techniques, and learning tools to help you meet the needs of your students and the challenges they will face today and in the future. Our focus is K–12 students who are in the process of developing academic and social competence in English as a new language.

English learner education:

There are a number of basic terms and acronyms in the field of English learner education that we want to define for you here. We use the term English learners (ELs) to refer to non-native English speakers who are learning English inschool. Typically, English learners speak a primary language other than English at home, such as Spanish, Cantonese, Russian, Hmong, Navajo, or other language. English learners vary in how well they know the primary language. Of course, they vary in English language proficiency as well.

Those who are beginners to Intermediates in English have been referred to as limited English proficient (LEP), a term that is used in federal legislation and other official documents. However, as a result of the pejorative connotation of "limited English proficient," most educators prefer the terms English learners, English language learners, non-native English speakers, and second language learners to refer to students who are in the process of learning English as a new language.

Over the years, another English learner category has emerged: long-term English learner (Olsen, 2010). Long-term ELs are students who have lived in the United States for many years, have been educated primarily in the United States, may speak very little of the home language, but have not developed advanced proficiency in English, especially academic English. They may not even be recognized as non-native English speakers. Failure to identify and educate long-term English learners poses significant challenges to the educational system and to society. In this book, we offer assessment and teaching strategies for "beginning" and "intermediate" English learners.

 New Learning Tools as Technology Evolves Many of your students in K-12 classrooms have substantial experience with computers, cell phones,   the Internet, and other   digital technologies. Other students may have

little or no such experience at all. In any case, all your students will need to become proficient at using the Internet and other technologies for academic learning. In particular, they will need to learn safe, efficient, and critical Internet use, and they will need to acquire the flexibility to adapt to new applications that develop each day. For example, consider the advances in the Internet itself that have occurred over the decades. Early on, the Internet provided one-way access to websites, creating what amounted to a very large Encyclopaedia, sometimes referred to as Web

1.0. You will want to help your students use Web 1.0 to access, evaluate, and use information appropriately, while applying the rules of safe and ethical Internet use. The term Web 2.0 is used to define the more collaborative capabilities of the Internet that became available as Internet technology evolved. Using blogs, for example, students may create an ongoing conversation about subjects they are studying. With wikis, students may collaborate to create a story or an Encyclopaedia for the class similar to Wikipedia. We mention these two tools briefly here and offer details on how to use them in subsequent chapters.

Who Are English Language Learners? Students who speak English as a non-native language live in all areas of the United States, and their numbers have steadily increased over the last several decades. Between 1994 and 2004, for example, the number of ELs nearly doubled, and has continued to increase in subsequent years. By 2008–2009, the number had reached 5,346,673. Between 1999 and 2009, U.S. federal education statistics indicated that EL enrolment increased at almost seven times the rate of total

student enrolment. States with the highest numbers of English learners are California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois.

In recent years, however, EL populations have surged in the Midwest, South, Northwest, and in the state of Nevada. For the 2000–2001 school year, the last year for which the federal government required primary language data, states reported more than 460 different primary languages, with Spanish comprising by far the most prevalent, spoken by about 80 percent of ELs.

How Can I Get to Know My English Learners? Given the variety and mobility among English learners, it is likely that most teachers, including

specialists in bilingual education or ESL, will at some time encounter students whose language and culture they know little about. Perhaps you are already accustomed to working with students of diverse cultures, but if you are not, how can you develop an understanding of students from unfamiliar linguistic and cultural backgrounds? Far from a simple task, the process requires not only fact finding but also continual observation and interpretation of children's behaviour, combined with trial and error in communication. Thus the process is one that must take place gradually.

Getting Basic Information When a New Student Arrives

When a new student arrives, we suggest three initial steps. First of all, begin to find out basic facts about the student. What country is the student from? How long has he or she lived in the United States? Where and with whom is the student living? If an immigrant, what were the circumstances of immigration? Some children have experienced traumatic events before and during immigration, and the process of adjustment to a new country may represent yet another link in a chain of stressful life events (Olsen, 1998). What language or languages are spoken in

the home? If a language other than English is spoken in the home, the next step is to assess the student's English language proficiency in order to determine what kind of language education support is needed. It is also helpful to assess primary language proficiency where feasible.

Second, obtain as much information about the student's prior school experiences as possible. Some school districts collect background information on students when they register or upon administration of language proficiency tests. Thus, your own district office is one possible source of information. In addition, you may need the assistance of someone who is familiar with the home language and culture, such as another teacher, a paraprofessional, or a community liaison, who can ask questions of parents, students, or siblings. Keep in mind that some children may have had no previous schooling, despite their age, or perhaps their schooling has been nterrupted. Other students may have attended school in their home countries. Students with prior educational experience bring various kinds of knowledge to school subjects and may be quite advanced.

Be prepared to validate your students for their special knowledge. We saw how

important this was for fourth grader Li Fen, a recent immigrant from mainland China who found herself in a regular English language classroom, not knowing a word of English. Li Fen was a bright child but naturally somewhat reticent to involve herself in classroom activities during her first month in the class. She made a real turnaround; however, the day the class was studying long division. Li Fen accurately solved three problems at the chalkboard in no time at all, though her procedure differed slightly from the one in the math book. Her classmates were duly impressed with her mathematical competence and did not hide their admiration. Her teacher, of course, gave her a smile with words of congratulations.

Classroom Activities That Let You Get to Know Your Students

Several fine learning activities may also provide some of the personal information you need to help you know your students better. One way is to have all your students write an illustrated autobiography, "All about Me" or "The Story of My Life." Each book may be bound individually, or all the life stories may be bound together and published in a class book, complete with illustrations or photographs. This activity might serve as the beginning of a multimedia presentation, such as the one described in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. Alternatively, student stories may be posted on the bulletin board for all to read.

This assignment lets you in on the lives of all your students and permits them to get to know, appreciate, and understand each other as well. Of particular importance, this activity does not single out your newcomers because all your students will be involved.

Conclusion

Finally, many teachers start the school year with a unit on a theme such as "Where We Were Born" or "Family Origins." Again, this activity is relevant to all students, whether immigrant or native born, and it gives both you and your students alike a chance to know more about themselves and each other. A typical activity with this theme is the creation of a world map with a string connecting each child's name and birthplace to your city and school. Don't forget to put your name on the list along with your birthplace. From there, you and your students may go on to study more about the various

regions and countries of origin. If Internet access is available, students might search the Web for information on their home countries to include in their reports. The availability of information in many world languages may be helpful to students who are literate in their home languages. Clearly, this type of theme leads in many directions, including

the discovery of people in the community who may be able to share information about their home countries with your class. Your guests may begin by sharing food, holiday customs, art, or music with students. Through such contact, the studies, life stories, and reading about cultures in books such as those listed in Example, you may begin to become aware of some of the more subtle aspects of the culture, such as how the culture communicates politeness and respect or how the culture views the role of children, adults, and the school.

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