

Video Transcript

Part 5 Tutorial: An Instructional Example: Text Reconstruction (with Pam Spycher)

I'm going to show you an example I've been sharing with teachers. But first, I want to make sure I contextualize the lesson example in a larger unit of study where lessons are sequenced in order to build students' abilities to independently write texts. In this case, fifth graders are preparing to write an information report on an animal they select. The teaching and learning cycle takes students through four stages where they are immersed in rich content learning, learn about the text type they'll be expected to write, jointly construct texts with the teacher in a facilitated way, and then independently construct their own texts.

What I've often seen in classrooms is very rich content knowledge building, which is wonderful, and then students are asked to write a text independently. What the teaching and learning cycle is proposing is that we slow down and take some time between steps 1 and 4 to scaffold English learners' understandings of how English works to make meaning in different text types so that they can make informed choices when they go to write independently.

Just to make sure we're on the same page, this is what I mean when I talk about rich content knowledge building. It involves immersing students in rich learning about particular topics:

Lots of reading, writing, and talking about the topic is going on; inquiry-based practices for hands-on experiences could be happening; field trips for grounding the information in real contexts are ideal, but videos and other media can also be used for simulating actual contact with the topic; graphic organizers are a great way to organize information about a topic (for example animal characteristics, behavior, or habitats); structured collaborative conversations about the topic are critical; and finally, intentional domain-specific and general academic vocabulary instruction is going on.

So, students are immersed in this rich content learning, and now we're going to make sure they learn about how texts work, or how they're put together. This is one idea, adapted from Pauline Gibbons, that we call Text Reconstruction. It's an approach we've used in elementary, middle, and high schools in different content areas, so it's quite flexible.

In steps 1-3, you read a short text, or excerpt from a text, which is no more than 60 seconds long. The text is on the topic the students are studying so they have lots of background knowledge on it. The students just listen the first couple of times. The third time, they take notes on key words and phrases. Step 4 is the heart of the lesson. In step 4, the students share their notes with one another, which is always very interesting because typically, one person will have notes that the other person doesn't have. Then, the real fun begins. The idea is for the students to work together to reconstruct the text they just heard three times using their combined notes.

This is an opportunity for students to apply their growing understandings of English and of the content knowledge they're immersed in. As they engage in the task, they're talking a lot about content because the text has to make sense and be accurate, and they also have to talk about language because they have to decide together how to construct the text so that it's meaningful. They're also using the academic terms and grammatical structures taken from their notes. This is what it looks like when kids are engaged in the task. There's lots of talking about content and lots of talking about language.

In step 5, you show the original text to students, which they always love. And you invite them to discuss differences or similarities between what they reconstructed and the original and their texts. This is a great opportunity to point out some key language features that students may have found challenging as they were reconstructing that text. During the text reconstruction task, a teacher might notice that her English learners are challenged by some of the domain-specific or general academic vocabulary used. She could design vocabulary lessons that teach these words more explicitly and give students practice using them in meaningful ways. These lessons could be taught to the whole class, if they need it, or they could be tailored for designated ELD.

A teacher might also notice that some English learners find some sentences to be difficult to read. Science texts, in particular, can have very long sentences, often because they have long noun phrases with a lot of information packed into them. Some English learners might find it challenging to "unpack" the meaning of these long sentences. Teachers can support them to see the boundaries of phrases and clauses and also help them to see the relationships between words and chunks of words in sentences. Here's an example of something that might be tricky for an English learner. Teachers might want to spend some time talking about the meanings in this long sentence. They also may want to show students that the word "them" is referring way back to the word, fingers. Just pointing this type of thing out from time to time can help students read their texts a little easier.

Another thing that's helpful for teachers to do is to help students see how texts are organized. This can be done by analyzing a text students are already reading, a mentor text, for example. Students may not see these larger meaningful chunks unless we support them to do so.

Here's what one fifth grade English learner wrote by herself after reconstructing three sections of the "bat" text with partners over the course of a few lessons. The great thing about this type of task is that as a teacher, I can get a lot of information about the content and language understandings students have, as well as where I need to take them next. And I can use the California ELD Standards as a guide for formatively assessing what students are doing in writing, as well as in speaking.

That was just a very quick preview of what you'll be seeing in the remaining units in this module. The approaches I shared and the ones you'll see are not exclusive to either integrated ELD or designated ELD. Content teachers can and should attend to language development. Designated ELD provides a structured time where we can focus intensively on the language learning needs of English learners at different proficiency levels.

In Units 2-5, you're going to be reading vignettes that illustrate the relationship between integrated and designated ELD even more.