



# LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

*Information and Tips from The Multilingual and Multicultural Center - Donald L. Bouchard*

Portland Public Schools  
Portland, Maine 04103

Donald L. Bouchard

Tel. (207) 874-8135

FAX (207) 756-8421 Vol. 11, No. 4

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## ASSISTING ELLs IN THE CLASSROOM

# SCAFFOLDING FOR ACADEMIC TALK

For English Language Learners (ELLs), scaffolding is the support provided to help learners grow conceptually and linguistically in their learning, through multiple, gradually complex practice opportunities. Lost in the intense focus on print literacy is the equally important emphasis on scaffolding oral literacy for academic learning in the content areas. The focus of this *Bulletin* is on academic talk - the conditions for talk in learning, suggestions for scaffolding, and activities for developing academic talk for *all* learners.

## CONDITIONS FOR TALK IN LEARNING

Oral interaction, either directly between teacher and learner or collaboratively among learners engaged in an activity, is a significant factor in expanding language use as well as in establishing the conditions for making connections in reading and writing. The following are important considerations for generating talk:

- 1. Clear and explicit instructions:* Instructions provided simply *and* written out for support *as well as* modeled will maximize the context for talk to take place.
- 2. Requiring talk for the task:* No task should be assigned *without* allowing learn-

ers to have the opportunity for discussion.

*3. Everyone is involved:* The rules about engagement need to be structured so that all learners will have the opportunity to participate and contribute.

*5. Learners have enough time to complete the activity or discussion:* The typical learning sequence, from introduction, to involvement, and then summarizing, will result in more embedded learning, *especially if opportunity to process orally, as well as in print, is provided.*

## SUGGESTIONS FOR SCAFFOLDING

*1. Thoughtful questioning -* Teachers need to pay careful attention to the types of questions they pose. In addition to posing questions to elicit more critical thinking, minimize "display" questions which have short answers. Rather, allow learners to negotiate what they wish to say.

*2. "Slow down" the dialogue -* Increase 'wait time' and allow more turns before evaluating or rewording the learner's response. Use gambits such as:

*Can you say that again?*

*Tell me a little more.*

*Can you expand on that a little more*

*What do you mean?*

*Can you explain it again?*

**3. Provide key vocabulary and sentence starters:** Key vocabulary can be posted for easy access and retrieval, as can sentence starters. Here are some examples:

*The purpose of this paper is to. . . .*

*It seem likely that. . .*

*It is believed that. . .*

*In general. . .*

*To conclude. . . etc.*

(For a more complete list of sentence starters, please see Bulletin Vol. 9, No. 7.)

### ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING ACADEMIC TALK.

**Information Gap.** With students working in pairs, this activity invites each partner to contribute content information that the other member does not have. To accomplish this, the teacher provides each partner with separate information which will be shared with each other. For example, in social studies, students can exchange map data containing different visual information; in science, students with climate data on one particular region can exchange data with the partner having data from another region, etc.

**Concept Circle.** A useful summary and performance assessment activity done with groups of four, concept circles are circles divided into four quadrants, each with a content word about a given topic. Each student is assigned one word and writes about the connections between the words: For example, why are these words together? Students then share this information in different pairings within the group.

**Dictoglos.** Useful for providing background on content reading, this pair group activity involves listening to the teacher read a content passage twice. Each time the passage is read, students write down familiar words or phrases and share these with their partner. The pairs then share their collected words/phrases to reconstruct a version of the content passage originally read by the teacher.

**Frequent Contact.** This activity invites students in small groups to discuss, think about, and categorize words in terms of their frequency in a particular category. Students are given a list of words and three category labels. They draw three columns on a page with one label at the head of each column. Students in groups discuss each word in the list to choose which category would have the most frequent contact with that word. Some words can be placed in more than one category.

For example, in science, three head words might be *energy, force, and motion*. Students would then place the following words into appropriate category(s): *simple machine, axle, pulley, wheel, wedge, inclined plane, lever, screw, magnet, gears, push, pull, speed, forces, friction, heat, light, sound.*

**Jig, Saw.** Similar to information gap but involving small groups, jig saw involves taking a content reading and dividing it up into the number of parts equal to the group size. Assign each student to learn (i.e., read over more than once and becoming familiar with by taking notes) his/her segment. With more than one group, have students assigned to the similar segment to meet and discuss the information from their shared reading before sharing with the original group. Each member in the group presents the information to the group.

For example, for groups of five students studying the life of Abraham Lincoln, a biography might be divided into: formative childhood experiences; life as law student and legislator; presidency; Civil War policies; and legacy.

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Academic talk is equally important to print aspects of academic proficiency. Practice opportunities are important.

#### SOURCES:

Allen, Janet (2007). *Inside Words*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Gibbons, Pauline (2002). *Scaffolding Language Scaffolding Learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.