



# 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. 5

## ASSISTING ELLs IN THE CLASSROOM

# Active Listening to Develop Academic Language Proficiency

Listening is often a neglected domain of language in content instruction. It can be useful to incorporate active listening as a strategy for building an English Language Learner's (ELL's) academic language proficiency. Active listening is the ability to listen to the message in meaningful ways, principally through restating or paraphrasing. Listening can be *transactional*, i.e., based on a message that has no negotiated response (e.g., a radio commentary, video-taped program, etc.); or it can be *interactional* (i.e., dialoguing for clarification and greater understanding). This *Bulletin* explores the dimension of active listening and provides suggestions for instruction.

### ACTIVELY LISTENING TO NARRATIVES

There is a universal appeal to narratives for connecting individuals and transporting them into a world of imagination. This powerful tool can be incorporated into a variety of techniques to build listening proficiency after a story is recounted by the teacher. These techniques are:

*Labeling and describing* - learners name items in pictures or ask for names of things or their attributes;

*Recounting past events* - learners retell

personal experiences or information derived from a story;

*Following directions* - learners provide a running narrative of events at hand or forecasts;

*Obtaining information* - learners seek an interpretation or provide an explanation;

*Story Retelling* - learners combine the above in the form of retelling a story in spoken or written form. The list of possible sources for stories is almost endless: picture books, short stories, internet sources, myths, and legends, etc. As a result, there is an important "golden rule" to consider: *Read to students! Reading is an excellent opportunity, in any grade or content and with the assistance of aids such as graphic organizers, to enhance vocabulary knowledge and familiarity of authentic, complex use of language.*

### ACTIVELY LISTENING TO EXPOSITORY LANGUAGE

Of equal, if not greater, importance, is the need for learners to practice active listening to expository information. Content information can be processed through a variety of listening behaviors and techniques to practice this important function:

*Attending, acknowledging* - for interac-

tional listening, learners provide appropriate nonverbal or simple word/phrase responses to the message;

*Restating, paraphrasing* - learners respond to the message by providing a more extensive response, either verbatim or in their own words;

*Reflecting* - learners express their feelings or relate experiences connected to the message;

*Interpreting* - learners offer a tentative response to what they have heard;

*Summarizing, synthesizing* - learners combine their feelings with their experiences and the content information;

*Probing* - learners request more information to clear up confusion; and

*Giving feedback* - learners share their perceptions of others' ideas or feelings.

Learners can engage in a variety of activities to demonstrate their understanding of content:

*Attending, acknowledging*: simple eye contact, head nodding; "10-2" summary with a partner (brief sharing of information just listened to) or responding to a multiple choice response;

*Restating, paraphrasing*: dictogloss, i.e., reconstructing the original message with other partners;

*Reflecting*: responding to content in a writing journal;

*Interpreting*: providing an oral or written response to the content prompt;

*Summarizing, synthesizing*: collaborative or cooperative group sharing such as "think-pair-share" or "round robin";

*Probing*: question posing in response to the content; and

*Giving feedback*: providing an oral or written opinion in response to a question prompt.

An excellent active listening strategy for expository language is dictations. Dictations can be fun, creative activities for reviewing content while simultaneously reviewing vocabulary use, developing an intuitive sense of language, and emphasizing

meaningful listening. Sample dictation activities include:

Word level dictations: *categories* - Read aloud a passage on a review topic at normal conversational speed. Learners write down only words they hear that are connected to the topic. They can then compare lists with each other.

Sentence level dictations: *dictogloss* - Create an appropriate but challenging sentence about a topic under review. Read it once, with learners listening only. Then have them reconstruct the sentence, first individually, then in groups. Repeat the sentence in the same manner as many times as necessary until learners believe they have replicated it exactly.

Text level dictations: *Reconstructed paragraph* - In reviewing a topic, select a paragraph for dictation. Read it once at normal rate, with students listening only. Then have them write down what they remember from the dictation, followed by working in small groups to further reconstruct the original paragraph. Teacher reads the paragraph as many times as necessary, repeating the process.

## ADDITIONAL LISTENING IDEAS

Doing, choosing, transferring, answering, condensing, extending, duplicating, modeling, and conversing are all daily manifestations of comprehensible listening in the classroom. By consciously attending to and designing these classroom performances around content, teachers can support students' ability to listen academically.

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