

Research Questions from the Book by Chapter

Introduction

Often ELLs are quiet in class because they lack well-developed proficiency in English to respond. However, they might become more engaged if you have them work in subgroups with other students who share the same language. Try doing a brief experiment in your class in which you ask students to describe what they most like about school (or a question related to a topic in one of your subjects, like science). First of all, ask all the students to do this only in English, and then group the ELLs into groups that speak the same language and tell them they can formulate an answer among themselves using their home language. They should work together to prepare a response to the whole class in English. See which method results in a higher rate of engagement among your ELL students.

Chapter One

No Questions Posed

Chapter Two

Research Question 2.1

Research on the importance of learning letter-sound correspondences and phonological awareness has tended to look at teaching these skills in isolation. Teachers could do their own in-class research to gauge the effectiveness of teaching word-level skills in isolation in contrast to teaching them in the context of a science or social studies lesson or as part of an activity related to the students' own experiences; for example, name all the animals that live in your home country or in your neighborhood whose names start with the letter *b*.

Research Question 2.2

Teachers may want to explore this question by teaching one group of students to print first and then introduce cursive, while taking another similar group of students and teaching cursive first. There may be factors that affect the response of learners to each manner of teaching handwriting, such as age of the learner, motivation to write in ways similar to peers, motor control, and so forth. These factors, once identified, could guide teachers in which method to select for a particular group of emergent writers.

Research Question 2.3

Research on effective strategies to engage parents in their children's literacy is not extensive. Therefore, teachers may want to explore what works best with the parents of their students by devising different activities to be done at home and monitoring how effective each is. By sending alternative activities to parents with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, you could even see if each group is more responsive to some activities than others.

Chapter Three

No questions posed

Chapter Four

Research Question 4.1

To answer the question, "Does collaborative instructional planning result in better plans than plans devised by only one teacher," try doing the following simple action-research. Compare a unit or lesson plan you have devised on your own with the same plan after you have consulted with an ESL specialist and/or the reading

specialist in your school. Identify ways in which the plan is different and then go on to identify improvements that have resulted from collaboration.

Research Question 4.2

An important question when devising classroom instruction is whether ELLs make better progress in mastering academic objectives if they can draw on all of their linguistic resources, including those related to the home language. To answer this question, do the following classroom experiment. Teach two lessons in science during separate weeks. Divide the ELLs who speak Spanish into small working groups of about four so that some of them speak English and Spanish quite well while others speak mainly Spanish. During one of the lessons, encourage the students to use Spanish along with English to figure out word equivalencies in the two languages; during the other lesson, stick to English. Observe whether the students who speak mainly Spanish are more or less engaged when their home language is used and whether they grasp the material better if Spanish is used along with English or if only English is used. Several days later, examine the students to see how well they have retained what you taught and whether they acquired new English vocabulary associated with the lessons. Also, observe how your native English-speakers respond—do they show interest in the other language and/or does it interfere with their learning.

Research Question 4.3

Try a simple experiment in class during storytime to answer the following question: “Are ELLs more engaged and do they use more language during storytime when they select the pictures used to tell the story and when they can draw on their home language in comparison to storytelling that is based on a teacher-selected picture without the benefit of using their home language to fill in gaps in their English?” On one day, give students a picture that you have chosen from a magazine and ask them

to describe and talk about it—perhaps to tell a story about it. On another day, ask students to bring a picture that they like from a magazine and ask them to do the same thing. Allow the ELLs to use their home language if they want or need to, with other bilingual students providing translation when they do. Observe how much your students, and especially your ELLs, are engaged when they describe a picture they have selected and when the other language is used. Does use of the other language interfere with the activity? Check to see if the ELLs are learning new English vocabulary from other students who are translating for them. See if the mainstream students are interested in the other language when it is used. Do they learn some words in the new language?

Research Question 4.4

We have argued that ELLs are more engaged and can advance more quickly in their English development and mastery of new concepts and knowledge if they are encouraged to make connections between their home language and English. To see if this is true, try using the Frayer method with and without the option of ELLs using their home languages and see which condition results in more elaborated and sophisticated definitions and descriptions of new concepts.

Chapter Five

Research Question 5.1

We know from our experience as teachers that students enjoy writing about something that comes from them much more than about pictures or topics that teachers impose on them. However, we do not know how the two kinds of texts differ from one another, and to what extent text elicited from a personal illustration or topic is better than text from an outside source. A comparison of the two kinds of texts would be valuable.

May be copied for professional use. © 2009 by Nancy Cloud, Fred Genesee, and Else Hamayan from *Literacy Instruction for English Language Learners* (Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH).

Chapter Six

Research Question 6.1

To assess what your ELL students have learned following a social studies lesson or unit, try assessing some ELLs using the same procedure you would use with native speakers of English; and assess some ELLs using an adapted version of the native-speaker test in which you simplify the language to administer the test and you allow the ELL students to respond using alternative methods (e.g., in the native language, drawing, pointing to pictures). See if student performance in response to these different procedures differs. Which procedure results in more responding and which produces more evidence of learning?

Research Question 6.2

Research indicates that accommodations for ELLs during subject matter testing are most effective when they are tailored according to individual learner profiles, taking into account factors such as the student's level of proficiency in English, prior schooling, and proximity of the home culture to mainstream culture. To examine which language accommodations are most effective for ELLs who differ with respect to proficiency in English, try using simplified instructions in English and the kinds of instructions you would use with native speaker to see which ones allow ELLs to perform optimally; remember, these kinds of accommodations are appropriate when assessing ELLs' content-based skills and knowledge.

Research Question 6.3

To see if the reading material you select to assess students' reading makes a difference, do a running record using different book selections—use a book that you choose with some ELLs and a book that they choose with others. See if the students' reading behavior changes with these two different books. Focus especially on their level of engagement, their self-corrections, and their comprehension.