

Six Key Strategies for Teachers of English-Language Learners

The New Teacher Center (NTC) was established in 1988 at the University of California at Santa Cruz, with the goal of supporting new K–12 teachers and administrators during their first two years in the profession. In the NTC program, schools release a cadre of exemplary teachers and site administrators full-time in order to mentor and observe beginners. The program pairs beginning teachers with mentor teachers from a similar grade level or subject-matter expertise. Mentors are trained to work with new teachers and administrators using research-based instructional methods. The NTC model has been adopted by almost 200 school districts in more than 30 states, including the entire state of Hawaii and all New York City schools.

Addressing the Language Needs of Every Student

The New Teacher Center works with teachers in every grade and subject area, each of whom faces daunting challenges. One difficulty that many beginning teachers consistently discuss with their mentors is that English-language learner (ELL) students lack the basic literacy skills needed to grasp grade-level content. A statewide survey of teachers in California identified the top three challenges facing secondary teachers regarding English-language learners:

- 1) communicating with English-language learners about academic, social, and personal issues;
- 2) encouraging and motivating English-language learners; and
- 3) addressing the individual and diverse needs of English-language learners in both academic skills and English-language acquisition.

In response to these challenges, the NTC developed a resource titled “Accelerating Academic Language Development: Six Key Strategies for Teachers of English Learners.” The six strategies are based on multiple research studies from the past decade that identify effective methods for developing English-language learners’ content knowledge, use of the academic language associated with math, literature, history, and science, and basic interpersonal communication skills in English.

Two Birds, One Stone: Improving Language Development and Adolescent Literacy

The six key strategies not only help students develop English as a second language, they also help native speakers learn words that are not part of everyday English (for example, words such as *algorithm*, *allegory*, *Avogadro's hypothesis*, or *filibuster*). Using this tool, beginning teachers, their mentors, and administrators plan, reflect, and observe classroom instruction with students' language development and content learning in mind. The NTC introduces the tool in workshops that establish a common language among educators regarding effective methods for language-focused instruction. District teachers, mentors, and administrators use the six key strategies to identify good teaching skills that help them plan lessons that are accessible to a range of students.

- The first of the six key strategies is *vocabulary and language development*, through which teachers introduce new concepts by discussing vocabulary words key to that concept. Exploring specific academic terms like *algorithm* starts a sequence of lessons on larger math concepts and builds the student's background knowledge.
- The second strategy is *guided interaction*. With this method, teachers structure lessons so students work together to understand what they read—by listening, speaking, reading, and writing collaboratively about the academic concepts in the text.
- The third strategy is *metacognition and authentic assessment*. Rather than having students simply memorize information, teachers model and explicitly teach thinking skills (*metacognition*) crucial to learning new concepts. Research shows that metacognition is a critical skill for learning a second language and a skill used by highly proficient readers of any language. With *authentic assessments*, teachers use a variety of activities to check students' understanding, acknowledging that students learning a second language need a variety of ways to demonstrate their understanding of concepts that are not wholly reliant on advanced language skills.
- The fourth strategy is *explicit instruction*, or direct teaching of concepts, academic language, and reading comprehension strategies needed to complete classroom tasks.
- The fifth strategy is the use of *meaning-based context and universal themes*, referring to taking something meaningful from the students' everyday lives and using it as a springboard to interest them in academic concepts. Research shows that when students are interested in something and can connect it to their lives or cultural backgrounds they are more highly motivated and learn at a better rate.
- The final strategy is the use of *modeling, graphic organizers, and visuals*. The use of a variety of visual aids, including pictures, diagrams, and charts, helps all students—and especially ELL students—easily recognize essential information and its relationship to supporting ideas. Visuals make both the language and the content more accessible to students.

[See page four and five for further detail on the six strategies.]

All Means All: A Second Application of the Strategies

When working with beginning teachers, the New Teacher Center realized that native English-speaking students learning academic language (such as *algorithm* or *allegory*) faced many of the same challenges as students learning English as a second language. Research has even referred to subject-specific academic language as a possible third language for ELL students. Therefore, the same strategies that are used to assist ELLs can also help native speakers understand the complex language used in their math, literature, science, and social studies classes. Through the mentoring program, the NTC has begun to use the six key strategies with teachers of native speakers as well.

The New Teacher Center provides beginning teachers and administrators with comprehensive professional development that demonstrates how to improve diverse students' academic literacy skills. Armed with this information, a school administrator may set a goal of raising the math achievement of current and former English-language learners, by encouraging math teachers to use the appropriate teaching techniques. With the school goal in mind, teachers and mentors might consider possible challenges in an upcoming lesson on graphing. They could explore essential concepts about graphing, aspects ELL or other students might find difficult in the math textbook's description of graphing, and a combination of the six key strategies that best supports students in attaining the ability to better understand and apply graphing skills.

The NTC believes that students' language development and subject knowledge flourishes when teachers, mentors, and administrators are supported to equip students with academic language skills, prerequisites for understanding subject-matter concepts, and motivational, culturally responsive resources for learning.

Results

It is difficult to discern the specific impact of the six key strategies on teacher practice and student achievement, because this tool is only one element in an array of training and assessment tools provided by the New Teacher Center. However, as the program continues to expand, more formal evaluations will be completed. For now, a long-term teacher retention rate as high as 95%—compared to a nationwide average around 50%—for teachers supported by the NTC model is a testament to the program's positive impact on the teaching profession. And the program's rapid expansion testifies to the belief by educators that it is effective. In the past year, use of the six key strategies have extended from Santa Cruz to the entire Silicon Valley, and into state and national mentor and administrator training programs provided by the New Teacher Center.

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Accelerating Academic Language Development
Six Key STRATEGIES for
Teachers of English Learners

<p style="text-align: center;">Strategy #1 <u>Vocabulary & Language Development</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategy #2 <u>Guided Interaction</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strategy #3 <u>Metacognition & Authentic Assessment</u></p>
<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new concepts via essential academic vocabulary. • Connect student-accessible synonyms or concepts to these essential vocabulary. • Support students to distinguish word meanings, & their uses for subject-specific tasks & prerequisite language skills. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage beginning-level students in using basic social & school vocabulary, phrases, & sentence structures. • As students progress, continue to contextualize instruction of more complex language forms & uses: subject-specific academic vocabulary, grammatical forms, & sentence structures used in listening, speaking, reading & writing. • Respectfully distinguish differences between primary language use & standard academic English. <p>Sample activities/assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Word analysis: e.g., dissecting words into their parts (prefix, root, suffix). ✓ Vocabulary journals, A-B-C books, word webs, word walls. ✓ Interactive editing, Cloze paragraphs, dictations, subject-specific journals. 	<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure multiple opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions as they learn content & develop their use of academic language in speaking/listening, reading & writing. • Clarify expectations, outcomes, & procedures related to tasks for flexible group activities. • Allow for primary language interactions to clarify concepts. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure multiple opportunities for peer-to-peer interactions to increase speaking, listening, reading comprehension & writing skills. • Support language interactions with review/preview of language forms, use of graphic organizers or other types of modeling. <p>Sample activities/assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Partner interviews, Class surveys, Tea Party, Think-Pair-Share, Numbered Heads Together, Four Corners. ✓ Poster projects, group presentations. ✓ Perspective line-ups. ✓ Readers' Theatre. ✓ (See <i>Metacognition & Authentic Assessment</i> activities.) 	<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students processes for metacognition: i.e., pre-reading & pre-writing skills, word analysis, & methods to monitor their reading comprehension. • Teach & model ways for students to describe their thinking processes verbally & in writing. • Use a variety of activities & tasks to check for understanding. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to components listed above, ensure that assessment tasks are appropriate to students' assessed language development level. • Provide enough time to complete tasks, appropriate feedback, rubrics, & models to guide students' self-assessment. <p>Sample activities/assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guided reading, completing chapter pre-reading guides, reciprocal teaching, Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), Anticipation Guides, double-entry journals. ✓ Think-alouds, K-W-L. ✓ Learning logs/journals, quick-writes.
<p>Activities I use for this strategy:</p>	<p>Activities I use for this strategy:</p>	<p>Activities I use for this strategy:</p>



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Teachers of English Learners

Strategy #4 <u>Explicit Instruction</u>	Strategy #5 <u>Meaning-Based Context</u> <u>& Universal Themes</u>	Strategy #6 <u>Modeling, Graphic</u> <u>Organizers, & Visuals</u>
<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach essential grade-level concepts & build students’ background knowledge as needed. • Connect overarching ideas (whole), then examine components or processes (part), culminating with students’ own applications or synthesis of ideas (new whole). • Explicitly teach academic language & cognitive reading skills needed to complete subject-specific tasks, e.g., analyze, interpret, classify, compare, synthesize, persuade, solve. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach essential language forms & uses per students’ assessed language development level: listening/speaking, reading & writing. • Follow contextualized introduction & explicit modeling of language use with repeated practice. <p>Sample activities/assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Teach/explain prerequisite language applications: reading directions, idioms, sentence starters, essay formats, pattern drills, or completing a story map; check for understanding. ✓ Teach specific reading comprehension skills for completing: task procedures, answering questions, word problems, understanding text & graphics. 	<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new concepts through familiar resources, prompts, visuals, or themes. • Use associated types of “realia” meaningful or familiar to students to affirm the appropriate context for using new language. • Sustain motivation to learn challenging concepts by linking ideas to resources or contexts that reflect student interests & sociocultural or linguistic backgrounds. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use methods listed above for introducing academic vocabulary, sentence structures, & language uses. • Link ongoing language practice or tasks to both school-based & community-based uses. • Respectfully compare & analyze language use, & meanings to other cultures or context, to promote metacognition. <p>Sample activities/assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quick-write responses or recording student responses to visuals, current event stories, real-life models, video clips, teacher read-alouds, thematic prompts, role-play, comparing language uses for similar contexts. ✓ Identifying & analyzing different perspectives & language references re: essential concepts. 	<p>Content knowledge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model how to complete tasks. • Provide graphic organizers & meaningful visuals to support students’ recognition of essential information. • Use graphic organizers to support understanding of specific tasks, & specific uses of academic language. • Use advanced organizers to support metacognition, & overall comprehension. <p>Academic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use methods listed above with the addition of word banks, word walls, & modeling the use of graphic organizers appropriate to ELD level. • Appropriately modulate language delivery, i.e., speed & enunciation, when modeling language forms or presenting content; repetition helps. <p>Sample activities/resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Venn diagrams, story maps, main idea + supporting detail schematics, double-entry journals, semantic attribute matrices. ✓ Jazz chants, read-alouds.
Activities I use for this strategy:	Activities I use for this strategy:	Activities I use for this strategy:
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