2012

Grounded Technology Integration: ESOL Teaching Strategies

Marcela Van Olphen
Saint Leo University

Judi Harris
College of William and Mary

Mark J. Hofer
College of William and Mary

Recommended Citation

Van Olphen, M., Hofer, M., & Harris, J. (2012-2013). Grounded technology integration: ESOL teaching strategies. Learning & Leading with Technology, 40(4), 37-39.

Grounded Technology Integration: ESOL Teaching Strategies

Teachers working with English language learners can and should help both ELLs and monolingual students meet the same curriculum-based learning goals. To do this, instruction for ELLs—not learning objectives—should be modified using specific teaching strategies that provide needed, developmentally appropriate language support. To do this, choose the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) instructional strategies after identifying curriculum-based learning objectives and the types of learning activities that will best help both ELL and non-ELL students to meet those objectives. Then select the technologies that best support each and all in service of student learning. That is the key to effective instructional planning and technology integration in any curriculum that seeks to promote ELLs' academic development.

Tech Integration via Learning Activity Types

One way to help teachers integrate technology effectively is to focus on instructional planning. Research tells us that teachers plan instruction primarily according to students' curriculum-based learning needs in the form of content-based learning activities. To assist teachers with content-based technology integration, we have developed a comprehensive set of learning activity types in 10 curriculum areas, with suggestions for specific educational technologies that can best support each type of learning activity listed. We have organized these activities into subcategories within each curriculum area, so that each content-based collection of learning activity types forms an informal taxonomy. Taxonomies in 10 curriculum areas are available on the Learning Activity Types wiki (activitytypes.wmwikis.net).

Once teachers have determined the learning goals for a lesson, project, or unit, they review the activity types in the taxonomy for that content area and select, combine, and sequence the learning activities that will best help students meet those learning goals. In this way, teachers choose technologies in practical, and usable ways. We think of this as "grounded" technology integration, because it is based on content, pedagogy, and how teachers plan instruction.

Social studies, mathematics, world languages, secondary English language arts, science, K–6 literacy, physical education, and music learning activity types were described in the September/October 2009 through May 2010, plus September/October and November 2012 issues of *L&L*. Here is information about ESOL teaching strategies that you can use with the learning activity types in each of those curriculum areas:

Once teachers have determined the learning goals for a lesson, project, or unit, they review the activity types in the taxonomy for that content area and select, combine, and sequence the learning activities.

ESOL Teaching Strategies

You can adapt curriculum-based instruction for ELLs by using specific ESOL teaching strategies—supported by educational technologies—that correspond with students' language proficiency levels. Given that language acquisition is a developmental process and that planning for adapted instruction should be designed according to students' developmental needs, the ESOL teaching strategies taxonomy described below is organized according to four sequential stages of language development: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency. This helps teachers choose developmentally appropriate strategies that complement the curriculum-based learning activity types used to plan a particular lesson, project, or unit.

The taxonomy overviewed on page 38 organizes 67 specific ESOL teaching strategies into eight general recommendations for working with ELLs:

- Communicate clearly
- Make content understandable
- Check students' understanding
- Elicit students' responses
- Demonstrate and model
- Encourage interpersonal communication
- Group students to assist their learning
- Promote cross-cultural awareness

Once teachers select the learning activity types and accompanying ESOL strategies to incorporate within a specific lesson, unit, or project, they consider the suggested technologies associated with each.

Due to space restrictions, we have included an illustrative example of one teaching strategy in four of the eight

By Marcela van Olphen, Mark Hofer, and Judi Harris

Make Content Understandable

Making content understandable allows teachers to offer instruction in an ESOL-friendly format while fostering students' understanding of curriculum content.

Sample Strategy

Strategy	Possible Technologies	STAGE 1	2	3	4
Activate students' background knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and interests	Presentation software, video clips, digital images	✓	✓	✓	✓

Elicit Student Responses

Eliciting students' responses helps teachers perform periodic informal language assessments. You can then use information from these assessments to further adapt instruction to students' language proficiency levels and needs.

Sample Strategy

Strategy	Possible Technologies	STAGE 1	2	3	4
Request written responses in different formats such as answers to questions, poetry, news stories, picture books, letters, skits	Word processor, drawing software, animation software, video/audio creation software	✓	✓	✓	✓

Encourage Interpersonal Communication

All learners need to interact with peers, teachers, and others involved in the learning process, regardless of their language backgrounds. By interacting with peers, teachers, and others, ELLs can expand their content knowledge while strengthening their English reading and writing skills.

Sample Strategy

Strategy	Possible Technologies	STAGE 1	2	3	4
Exchange written documents such as letters, stories, dialogue journals, peer feedback	Word processor, wiki, email, blog, discussion forums	✓	✓	✓	✓

Promote Cross-Cultural Awareness

ELLs arrive with diverse cultural backgrounds. Helping them to develop understanding and appreciation of their adopted country's culture should not be pursued at the expense of fostering respect for and maintenance of students' own cultural identities.

Sample Strategy

Strategy	Possible Technologies	STAGE 1	2	3	4
Extend opportunities to conduct interviews with students from different backgrounds	Audio/video recorder, word processor, videoconferencing, discussion forum	✓	✓	✓	✓

Combining Activity Types, ESOL Strategies, and Technologies

How might elementary school teachers help students learn science while integrating digital technologies and addressing the needs of both English-speaking and English-learning students? The table below presents science learning activity types selected for a project about healthy nutrition beside complementary ESOL teaching strategies that can support ELLs' language development.

Science Learning Activity Types	Corresponding ESOL Teaching Strategies
Students draw/create images of what they understand about healthy breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack plates using paper-and-pencil drawings or drawing software. This helps determine their' prior knowledge.	Teachers explain instructions step by step and activate students' background knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and interests using digital images and presentation software.
Students view a presentation (by the teacher) of some of the information at the ChooseMyPlate.gov website to become familiar with healthy eating, dietary guidelines, food groups, and the importance of physical activity.	Teachers analyze curriculum goals and instructional materials before using them to identify potential comprehension difficulties using website annotation tools. Teachers provide/construct graphic organizers with words and/or pictures using concept-mapping software.
Students conduct background research about health problems caused by poor or unbalanced nutrition and present their findings to their peers.	Teachers provide tools and resources (dictionary, thesaurus, etc.) to help students with assignments. Teachers ask students to do oral presentations, reports, skits, etc., using presentation software.
Students play a game (Blast Off at www.usda.gov) as part of a learning assessment.	Teachers challenge students slightly beyond their current comprehension levels using web-based interactive tools.

recommendation categories. Visit the Learning Activity Types wiki to download the complete ESOL strategies taxonomy.

Strategies for Success, An Example

Strategies that assist ELLs' learning are familiar to teachers, but their importance to students' academic success is not often addressed. Using these strategies intentionally can help improve learning for both ELL and non-ELL students. The ESOL Teaching Strategies Taxonomy, used in conjunction with one or more curriculum-based learning activity types taxonomies, can help teachers to address ELLs' language development and all students' curricular learning needs while integrating use of educational technologies effectively.

—Marcela van Olphen (Marcela.VanOlphen@saintleo.edu) is an associate professor of Spanish and Portuguese in the School of Arts & Sciences at Saint Leo University. Mark Hofer (mark.hofer@wm.edu) and Judi Harris (judi.harris@wm.edu) are faculty members in the Curriculum and Educational Technology program at the College of William & Mary.