

ELL/MLL Essay & Cohort Outline

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Supporting English Language Learners Through Scaffolding, Home Language, and Vocabulary Instruction

Scaffolding classroom discussions is one of the most effective ways to help English language learners (ELLs) and multilingual learners (MLLs) take part in learning. Many ELL/MLL students understand much more than they can express in English, and speaking in front of peers can feel risky. Scaffolds such as sentence frames ("I agree with ___ because ___"), think-pair-share, extended wait time, and structured group roles close the gap between what students know and what they can say. These supports lower anxiety, which Krashen (1982) describes as the affective filter, so students are more open to the language around them. Scaffolded discussion also gives students regular practice with oral language, which is the foundation for reading and writing. Most importantly, it lets ELL/MLL students show their thinking and contribute to the classroom community at every stage of language proficiency.

Using a learner's native language as a classroom resource is equally important. A home language is a bridge to English, not a barrier. Cummins (2000) explains that literacy skills and concepts learned in one language transfer to another, so a student who already understands a concept in Spanish or Arabic only needs the English label, not a new lesson. Teachers can build on this by letting students brainstorm or discuss in their home language before writing in English, teaching cognates such as *family* and *familia*, providing bilingual books and picture dictionaries, and pairing students who share a language. Valuing home languages also tells students that their identity and culture belong at school. That sense of belonging increases motivation and strengthens partnerships with families, who can support learning at home in the language they know best.

When introducing academic vocabulary and content, teachers should be intentional and selective. Best practices include pre-teaching a small number of key words before a lesson, focusing on high-utility Tier 2 words such as *compare* and *describe* along with the Tier 3 content words the lesson requires (Beck et al., 2013). Words should be made visual and concrete through pictures, real objects, gestures, and illustrated word walls. Teachers should give student-friendly definitions, for example, "*Predict* means to make a smart guess about what will happen next." Students also need many meaningful encounters

with each word through speaking, drawing, writing, and games before they truly own it. Finally, new content should connect to students' background knowledge and experiences so that learning builds on what they already bring to the classroom.

Together, these practices create a classroom where ELL/MLL students can understand content, use language with confidence, and feel valued. Scaffolded discussions give every student a way into the conversation, home languages become tools for learning instead of something to leave at the door, and thoughtful vocabulary instruction gives students access to grade-level content. As a future elementary teacher, I plan to use these strategies daily. They are essential for multilingual learners, and they also benefit every student in the room.

References

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.

Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.

Cohort Outline: Using Knowledge of Language Acquisition to Support Students

1. Know each student's stage

- Use the five stages (Preproduction through Advanced Fluency) to set expectations and supports.
- Respect the silent period, and offer nonverbal ways to respond.

2. Make input comprehensible (Krashen)

- Use visuals, realia, gestures, and modeling.
- Teach slightly above the current level ("i+1").

3. Lower the affective filter

- Use partner talk before whole-group sharing.
- Build a classroom culture where mistakes are normal.

4. Use the home language as a resource (Cummins)

- Teach cognates, and offer bilingual books and home-language brainstorming.

- Make family connections and include cultural content.

5. Scaffold academic language

- Use sentence frames, graphic organizers, and word walls.
- Pre-teach Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary, and practice it repeatedly.

6. Remember BICS vs. CALP

- Social fluency can hide gaps in academic language, so keep supporting content vocabulary.