

VOCABULARY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Transcript

My name is Mariela Páez and I am an Associate Professor at Boston College in the Lynch School of Education. My area of research includes bilingual learners and early childhood education.

As researchers have pointed out, effective approaches with native English speakers are also likely to be effective for bilingual learners. One of the approaches that I think is very effective for all students, but especially with bilingual learners, is Michael Grave's four-part vocabulary comprehensive program. However, there are important modifications and adaptations that can enhance their learning. For example, when students come in in kindergarten and first grade, we can't assume that they know the basic words or level-one vocabulary words that typically native English speaking students might know. So we need to think about instruction that is explicit, that covers these different levels of vocabulary, and includes review and reinforcement to enhance their learning.

There are three ways that teachers can improve their vocabulary instruction for English language learners. First, they need to get to know the students. Each bilingual learner comes into the classroom with unique strengths and needs and so getting to know those students will be very important. Second, teachers need to talk—talk, talk, talk—engaging students in conversations and using rich vocabulary words. It allows you to get to know the students and at the same time you're engaging and interacting with the use of new words. Third, reading. Read-alouds are an effective strategy for teaching vocabulary to English language learners. You need to think about activities, pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading—for example, selecting a few words from a book that are salient and important to the story teaching those words prior to reading the book. Then, during the reading, you can reinforce the meanings of those words. After you finish the book you can review the words and talk to students about the meanings and the story in the book.

There are new tools and resources that teachers can use for teaching vocabulary in their classrooms. The use of technology and television programs that have been designed to teach vocabulary are very useful.

MARTHA SPEAKS is an excellent show for bilingual learners. It incorporates some of the effective strategies for teaching vocabulary to English language learners. The words are taught in a meaningful context so the storylines are engaging and interesting, and the students can learn new words by watching the show. Also, there are different levels of words—basic and more sophisticated words—that are the target of each episode. Finally, the structure of the program provides a lot of review and reinforcement of the vocabulary words.



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