

Meaningful Activities That Integrate Lesson Concepts with Language Practice Opportunities

To the extent possible, lesson activities should be planned to promote language development in all skills while ELs are mastering content objectives. We want to provide oral and written language practice that is relevant to the lesson concepts, but remember that all activities that generate language practice do not need to be identified as language objectives.

Students are more successful when they are able to make connections between what they know and what they are learning by relating classroom experiences to their own lives. These meaningful experiences are often described as “authentic,” because they represent a reality for students. That is, classroom experiences mirror that which actually occurs in the learner’s world. Authentic, meaningful experiences are especially important for ELs because they are learning to attach labels and terms to things already familiar to them. Their learning becomes situated rather than abstract when they are provided with the opportunity to actually experience what they are learning about.

Too often, however, English learners are relegated to activities that are not meaningful and are unrelated to the content and activities pursued by the other English proficient students in their classes. It is essential that content standards that apply to students with English proficiency also apply to ELs, and that the planned activities reflect and support these standards.

Consider a class of middle school students is studying insects, butterflies in particular. While the rest of the class learns the scientific names and habitats of varied kinds of butterflies, the teacher has the ELs color and cut out pictures of butterflies to make a butterfly mobile. This activity is neither authentic nor is it meaningful for these adolescent students. And, in this example, the teacher obviously has not provided meaningful activities that support the grade-level science content standards.