Foundational Skills

Resources

FABRIC

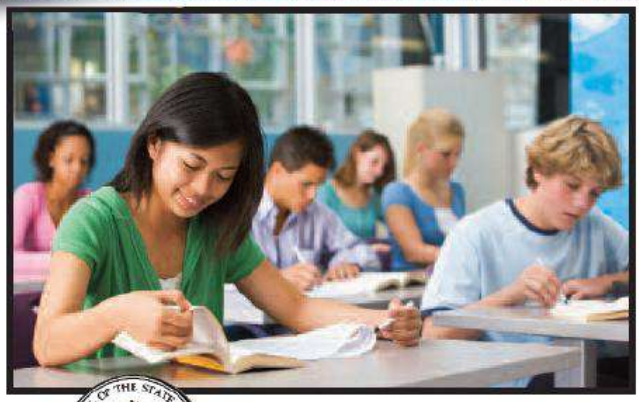
A Learning Paradigm for ELLs

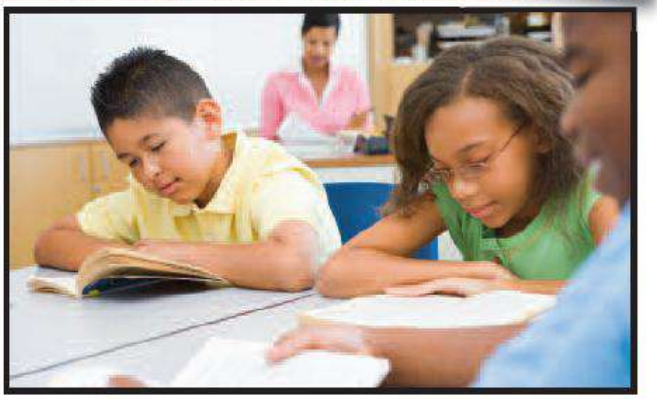
Academic Discussions

Individualized Assessment

Background Knowledge

Culture





New Jersey Department of Education

Division of Student Services and Career Readiness • Office of Supplemental Education Programs

FABRIC – A Learning Paradigm for ELLs

Foundational Skills **A**cademic Discussions **B**ackground Knowledge **R**esources **I**ndividualized Assessment **C**ulture

Introduction

Educating students who still are acquiring English proficiency can be complex in an age of high stakes evaluations and assessments as well as college and career-ready standards. English language learners (ELLs) are not monolithic in their educational background, cultural experiences, and ability to adapt to learning environments. However, through well-planned instruction, ELLs can attain challenging academic standards. There are many factors to consider when educators work to equip students with the skills for rigorous, academic learning.

- Some students come to class performing at or above grade level in their home language while others have interruptions in their education.
- Some students are close to reaching English proficiency while others are just beginning their quest toward fluency.
- Some students thrive in the culture of the classroom while others withdraw because they feel disorientated.

The FABRIC paradigm allows teachers to provide diverse groups of ELLs with access to classroom content while they acclimate to an English learning environment. The six learning threads in the FABRIC paradigm provide a structure that teachers can use to address the needs of ELLs. The threads are:

Foundational Skills
Academic Discussions
Background Knowledge
Resources
Individualized Assessment
Culture

Foundational Skills

Students learn by building their understanding of foundational content, phonics, vocabulary, language structures, comprehension skills, and technology so that they are able to access grade level material.

Academic Discussions

Students acquire academic language skills by interacting frequently in real-world discussions that enable them to use content vocabulary and language structures.

Background Knowledge

Students learn new content by using their existing knowledge, academic competencies, and prior experiences.

Resources

Students learn by using scaffolds and strategies that lower the language complexity of the content they experience in the classroom.

Individualized Assessment

Students learn through instruction that is informed by formative and summative assessments. For assessments to provide the most useful information, they need to be in the students' dominant language and/or at the students' level of proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Culture

Students learn in school environments that value the richness of diverse perspectives and cultivate cross-cultural knowledge and awareness.

Foundational Skills

CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1,2,3,6
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A2, A5, A6, A10, A14
UDL Connection: Guideline 6: Provide options for executive functions; Guideline 8: Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence

Introduction

ELLs are an especially diverse population of learners. Some ELLs come from settings where former schooling is nonexistent. Other ELLs come from school systems that outperform U.S. schools. As newcomers to the U.S., learners from every background need foundational English and content skills to master content goals as well as comprehend the language used in school.

Language skills

To understand ideas and content in English, ELLs need to learn the systems of the English language by mastering the following:

- Letters and their corresponding sounds (especially when different from native language);
- Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling;
- Word meanings, affixes, and morphemes; and
- Structures of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and conversations.

While students may acquire some of these skills on their own, they also need to receive systematic, consistent instruction related to these areas. Teachers should, "Provide small group instruction that focuses on the five core reading elements (phonological awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension)" (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2007, p. 15). The more fluency ELLs have in these areas, the better equipped they are to learn in English. As students become more fluent, their growth should be tracked to determine if more intervention is needed to help gain language proficiency (IES, 2007).

Foundational content skills

Students with a limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFEs) are students who are "over aged and under educated" compared with their U.S. peers. Although SLIFEs often have extensive knowledge in areas related to life in their home country, they lack home language literacy skills and grade level content knowledge. These students must gain beginning literacy skills, print awareness, and background concepts that are the foundations for content learning. The unique needs of SLIFEs are often addressed through supplemental instruction that takes place in:

- Newcomer classes,
- Extended day/year programs,
- Differentiated center work, and
- Small group instruction.

(Short & Boyson, 2012)

Classroom Example: Karen and Henri are newcomers. In their home countries, Karen was educated in an academically challenging school whereas Henri did not have access to formal schooling. A large academic gap between them was shown by a native language math and language arts basic skill test they completed on arrival. Their teacher realizes that Henri will need additional basic skills math and language arts instruction in addition to the newcomer ESL class that both students attend.

Technology skills

Students are expected to learn in classrooms and complete assignments that are embedded with technology. ELLs must have the skills they need to access the technology platforms used in school. It is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that students have the abilities needed to use devices at school as well as access to necessary technologies outside school.

Classroom application questions:

- **What skills, not mentioned above, might you need if you were learning academic content in a new language?**
- **At what levels have ELLs in your classes acquired the three skill categories (language, foundational content, and technology)?**
- **Of the three categories in this section, which one is the hardest for you to develop? Why?**

Academic Discussions

CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1-6
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A4, A9, A11, A13
UDL Connection: Guideline 5: Provide options for expression and communication; Guideline 7: Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence; Guideline 8: Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence

Introduction

ELLs need time to discuss the content of the learning objectives in a lesson. They generally gain oral language skills first then transfer those skills to reading and writing. Therefore, academic dialogue is crucial for students as they learn English.

Grouping

Frequent, extended pair discussion must be allowed so that students can nurture complex linguistic and cognitive abilities (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Discussion pairings must remain flexible. When students have discussions with partners of higher proficiency, they learn to use complex vocabulary and structures. During dialogues with partners of lower proficiency, students are challenged to think about how to adapt speech while communicating complex content. Discussion partners should use key academic words and structures in real-world contexts. Providing approximately 90 minutes of pair activities a week has been shown to positively affect vocabulary acquisition, content knowledge, and the ability to think logically (IES, 2007).

Negotiating meaning

ELLs need the freedom to express language independently. Language skills expand as ELLs of all proficiency levels use original language to explain their ideas (Spada, 2013). Students should speak and comprehend using their own range of language proficiency. Scaffolds (see "Resources") are essential for ELLs, but they should be reduced as soon as they are no longer needed. This allows students to be challenged to process through new language without encountering frustration (Zwiers, et al., 2014).

Create, clarify, fortify, and negotiate ideas

Conversations should start with a prompt that is authentic and builds on lesson objectives. Students should use the following steps to help focus on the prompt and grow in their language proficiency.

1. **Students should create ideas** as they respond to well crafted prompts, state their own ideas, and listen to their partner's ideas:
2. **Students should clarify ideas** to make sense of their previous statements and elaborate on their views with specific explanations:
3. **Students should fortify ideas** to build the conversation by providing real-life examples and evidence from the text: and
4. **Students should negotiate ideas** to build consensus and discuss points of disagreement.

(Zwiers, et al., 2014)

Classroom Example: Jamie and Susana, who are at the developing and bridging levels (P3 and P5*), are discussing reasons the United States entered the Vietnam War. The prompt is: "Take the perspective of news reporters creating a nightly news program, and discuss the most compelling reason for/against entering the war." First, the teacher demonstrates how to keep a discussion focused on the prompt. Then, referencing a word wall with key terms and related pictures, Jamie and Susana take turns constructing an argument. They state their position, explain why they chose their position, use facts from the article used in class, and determine areas of agreement/disagreement.

*Click link or see "Resources" for information

Classroom application questions:

- **What ideas do you have for modeling academic discussions for your students?**
- **Does your classroom experience support the ideas about partner work? What classroom examples justify your position?**
- **How can your teaching be informed by observations of student discussions?**

Background Knowledge

CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4,6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A3, A7
UDL Connection: Guideline 3: Provide options for comprehension; Guideline 9: Provide options for self-regulation

Classroom Example: When teaching a lesson on dividing decimals, Ms. Capuano helps Javier (an emerging/P2* student) connect what he learned in Argentina to her lesson. After researching math education in Argentina, she provides him:

- translations of the key terms (e.g. decimal point – coma de los decimals);
- an explanation that periods are used to represent decimal points in the U.S. instead of commas, like in Argentina ; and
- division problems set up in an alternate, Latin American format alongside the U.S. format.

*Click link or see "Resources" for information

Introduction

To become an expert in a subject, background knowledge is essential. Existing background knowledge is rendered useless, however, if language or culture makes it impossible to link background knowledge to a task. For example, a seasoned astrophysicist would have difficulty passing a fourth grade math exam if it was in an incomprehensible language or if it used unfamiliar math symbols. Every learner sees the world through a lens of what he or she already knows. It is important for teachers to understand students' backgrounds in order to assist students in activating existing background knowledge and building the new background knowledge needed to meet lesson objectives.

Leveraging academic competencies

ELLs come to class with their own level of academic achievement. It is important to help them see how their background competencies can be used to learn in their current academic environment. Educators need to relate new material to ELLs' school experiences from their native countries.

Leveraging native language

Language and thinking are closely linked. As ELLs learn English, it is important for them to make connections to their native language. If they are allowed to develop their native language in concert with English, they will be able to better transfer their prior knowledge. Bilingual labels, texts, supports, and teaching have the potential to provide greater long-term gains for ELLs than an English-only environment (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Identification of similar or identical words across languages, known as cognates (e.g. decimal – los decimals in the example), also can support ELLs' learning.

Integrating prior experiences

As students transition between cultures, they bring with them unique experiences. Educators must plan to integrate ELLs' skills and interests into lessons to motivate them to learn new content. As ELLs are able to use their skills and interests, their confidence grows.

Academic vocabulary

Key content vocabulary needs to be systematically highlighted for students. ELLs need to be able to define terms and use them in academic settings. To help ELLs acquire academic vocabulary, teachers should relate new terms to ELLs' background knowledge (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). As learners grow more familiar with this process, they should be challenged to independently decipher new vocabulary by using context clues, word parts, glossaries, dictionaries, etc.

Classroom application questions:

- **How can you cultivate students' abilities to transfer academic knowledge from their native language(s) and previous school background(s)?**
- **What resources are available for incorporating native language(s) into your students' learning experience?**
- **What can you do in your school to plan opportunities for students to learn and practice key academic vocabulary?**

Resources

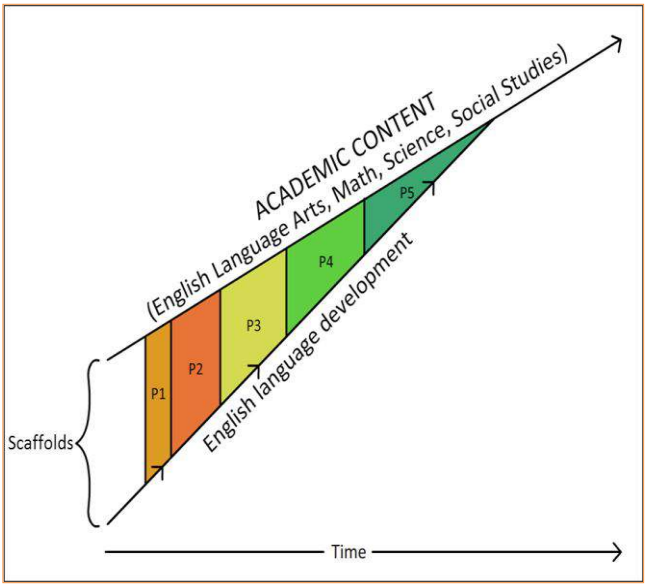
CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A8, A12
UDL Connection: Guideline 1: Provide options for perception; Guideline 2: Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols

Introduction

Learning to utilize available resources is an important skill in any college or career context. ELLs must learn to use provided resources (i.e. scaffolds and strategies) to access content and be taught how to leverage their own resources to complete school-related tasks.

Scaffolding

"In order to develop the ability to read complex texts and engage in academic conversations, ELs (an alternate term for ELLs) need access to such texts and conversations, along with support in engaging with them" (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2012, p. 3). Students need to use complex language, but to do so they need scaffolds and supports. As ELLs transition through the proficiency levels of English, the scaffolds to which they have access should gradually diminish; they also should become more independent as they apply scaffolds to their work (Gottlieb, 2013).



Adapted from:
http://assets.wceruw.org/assessmentSystem/ASSETS-Framework.pdf

For more on proficiency levels (P) see:
http://www.wida.us/standards/RG_Performance%20Definitions.pdf

Classroom Example: Mr. Sosa is gathering both scaffolds and strategies to help Julian, who is at the developing level (P3), comprehend his science text. He provides Julian a graphic organizer to help organize his notes, an audio recording of the text, key sentences (using a highlighter), and bilingual definitions of key terms. He also shows Julian how to identify key ideas using illustrations, headings, captions, and bolded words.

As seen in the graph on this page, fewer scaffolds are needed to access academic content as ELLs grow in their proficiency (shown as "P"). There are three categories of scaffolds:

- **Sensory support:** e.g. real objects, manipulatives, pictures, drawings, physical activities, and videos;
- **Graphic support:** e.g. charts, graphic organizers, tables, graphs, timelines, and number lines; and
- **Interactive support:** e.g. pairs, small groups, cooperative work, technology, and native language

(Gottlieb, 2013)

Strategies

Strategies are learned systems of processing information that are taught to students. Unlike scaffolds, strategies do not need to be provided by a teacher for each individual activity. Students internalize them and apply them in appropriate situations. Some examples are:

- repeated readings, underlining, and mental imagery;
- locating cognates, transition words and repeated words that may expose key ideas/meanings; and
- using learned structures like graphic organizers and mnemonics to organize, express, and revise (Echevarria et al., 2008).

Classroom application questions:

- **Which example scaffolds from each of the three categories of support are most suited for the content area(s) you teach?**
- **What strategies would you teach students unaccustomed to the features of U.S. textbooks?**
- **How would you describe the difference between strategies and scaffolds to a colleague?**

Individualized Assessment

CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A5, A6, A8, A13
UDL Connection: Guideline 1: Provide options for perception; Guideline 2: Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols; Guideline 3: Provide options for comprehension

Introduction

Assessments for students of all language proficiencies should be based on rigorous, standards-based lesson objectives. The language demands of assessments, however, should be individualized to students' language proficiency levels.

Formative assessment

Students need ongoing monitoring during each class to determine if they will be able to accomplish lesson objectives. These ongoing assessments must be individualized for students according to their English proficiency. Questioning, observations, practice, visual representations, discussions, and activities are all examples of formative assessments that can measure individual student growth.

Summative assessment

At the end of a thematic unit, chapter, or term, students often are given summative assessments. Some summative assessments are mandated by an educational agency. However, when teachers have control over summative assessments they should make sure they are tailored to the language capabilities of students (Echevarria et al., 2008).

Individualizing the language of assessments

When individualizing assessments according to students' proficiency levels…

- hold students accountable for the content and language they have been taught;
- find ways to make assessments authentic and related to ELLs' background knowledge;
- adjust question wait time, structure (e.g. change open-ended questions to multiple choice), and language complexity;
- add features like word banks, simplified language, pictures, graphs, checklists, and glossaries to tests;
- give all students assessments that look somewhat similar so that ELLs don't feel singled out; and
- offer alternative ways to answer questions (e.g. graphic organizers, sentence frames, and drawings).

Classroom Example: Mr. Williams has ELLs who are at entering (P1) through developing (P3) levels of proficiency. For his end-of-unit math exam he quickly individualizes the test for these students. For beginners, he represents the word problems using simple hand drawn pictures/symbols, provides sentence frames for students' explanations, has a bilingual instructional assistant translate when necessary, and modifies questions that have language that is too complex. Intermediate students receive a test with key terms underlined, a math picture dictionary, and a cause/effect graphic organizer for their explanations. All ELLs receive extra time to process the language in the test.

When individualizing assessments do not…

- use "baby talk" when asking a question (e.g. making references to oneself/student in the third person);
- talk more loudly to lower-proficiency students;
- surprise students in front of the class with a question that has hard-to-process language;
- water down content demands;
- expect students to speak and write using conventions they have not yet learned; or
- single out ELLs as being different because of their differentiated assessments.

Classroom application questions:

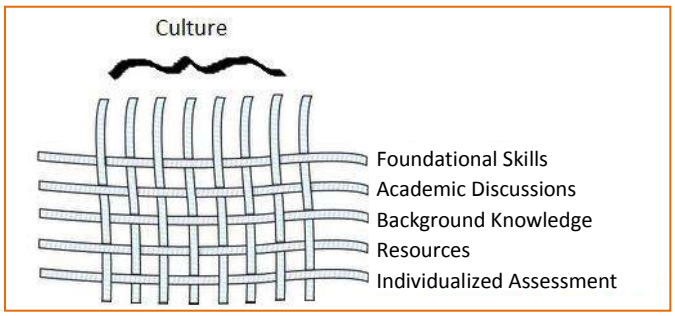
- **How are you currently individualizing assessments for ELLs?**
- **What can you do to minimize preparation time when individualizing student assessments?**
- **Which of your assessment practices could be adjusted to achieve better individualization?**

Culture

CCSS Connection: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1-3
WIDA Essential Action Connection: A1, A7, A14, A15
UDL Connection: Guideline 7: Provide options for recruiting interest; Guideline 9: Provide options for self-regulation

Introduction

Culture must be "woven" through each of the other threads of the FABRIC paradigm. Culture informs the way all people see the world around them, including education. Students, teachers, and parents interpret each other's actions through its lens. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is important for teachers to learn how the behaviors exhibited by ELLs and their families are influenced by culture. With this in mind, students must be taught to develop the cultural understandings and skills needed to communicate accurately and appropriately in U.S. schools.



Cultivating cross-cultural understanding

Cross-cultural understanding is based on having knowledge of one's own culture and appreciation of other cultures. School personnel should learn about the values of their students and their students' families, as well as become sensitive to the challenges they face in adapting to a new culture. Stakeholders in the school and community should be lifelong learners seeking to grapple with the motivations behind what they perceive in others (Gottlieb, 2013).

Culturally responsive environments

Cultural adjustment can be a difficult process, and ELLs often find themselves disoriented as they try to fit into their new environments. Students, staff, and community members need to find ways to demonstrate they appreciate and understand ELLs and their cultures.

Classroom Example: Ms. Armenta decided to hold a classroom debate in her high school class. Through research, she found out that some Asian cultures discourage expressing personal feelings and opinions in a group and that open discussion is not a customary practice in classrooms. While students were in centers, Ms. Armenta pulled her Asian ELLs aside and showed them a movie clip of a classroom debate. She then let the students practice debating their side of the argument in pairs before they had to debate in a whole group setting.

Support can be shown through empathy for their experiences, activities that integrate their cultural backgrounds, and awareness of cultural traditions. A sense of belonging may take students years to develop, so teachers need to be understanding while they hold ELLs to rigorous, ability-level appropriate standards.

Examples of areas that vary across cultures include:

- Body language
- Ratios of student talk to teacher talk in class
- Classroom rules, discipline, and wait time
- Roles of parents in schools and education
- Views of time and lateness
- Context-appropriate dress
- Views of gender, class, and race
- Expectations for homework completion
- Intellectual property and plagiarism
- Cultural connotations of certain vocabulary words

Classroom application questions:

- **Where do you see areas of cultural responsiveness to native cultures in your school?**
- **How can you enhance the areas of responsiveness using the concepts from this text?**
- **What steps could you take to encourage students who are experiencing difficulty as a result of adjustment to a new culture?**

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Website:

http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/

Conclusion

While ELLs face many challenges, schools can take active steps to help them understand what is being taught. The steps outlined in this document, ELLs' hard work, and the advocacy of educators enable students who are learning English to realize success in school and become fully participating members of American society.

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FABRIC Connections

Each thread in the FABRIC paradigm is linked to the following frameworks.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): A set of standards developed to promote college and career readiness in math and language arts.

World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment's (WIDA's) Essential Actions: Evidence-based strategies for implementing standards-referenced, language-centered education for ELLs.

Center for Applied Special Technology's (CAST's) Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines: A set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn.

Helpful Links for Learning More about ELLs

The following list contains sites that allow teachers to further explore best practices for ELLs. :

- http://www.brycs.org/ is a resource for educators who are working with refugee students and newcomers.
- http://www.cal.org/ contains specific, research-based information on immigrant groups, dialects, and best practices for ELLs.
- http://www.colorincolorado.org/ is a site with resources including articles, practice guides, book reviews, and information about specific ELL populations.
- http://ell.stanford.edu/ is an organization based at Stanford University that develops resources, research, and professional development to help teachers who work with ELLs.
- http://www.nabe.org/ is a professional organization for bilingual educators.
- http://www.ncela.us/ is a federally funded clearing house for research and best practices having to do with ELLs.
- http://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/ provides New Jersey educators with policy information and valuable teaching tools.
- http://www.njtesol-njbe.org/ is the New Jersey TESOL and NABE affiliate.
- http://www.tesol.org/ is the professional organization for ESL educators
- http://www.wida.us/ is a consortium of states that has developed preK-12 standards for ELLs, the ACCESS for ELLs test of language proficiency, and many other resources for ELLs.

Helpful Links for the Classroom

The following list contains no-cost, content resources for teachers who work with ELLs:

- http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/ contains leveled English news articles for older ELLs.
- http://drewseslfluencylessons.com/ contains activities and worksheets for older students.
- http://www.elcivics.com/ offers social studies resources to help ELLs build their understanding of social studies themes.
- http://www.englishclub.com/ provides teachers lesson plans and activities for ELLs.
- http://www.everythingesl.net/ features lesson plans, teaching tips, downloadable classroom activities, 'Ask Judie' forum questions, and resource picks.
- http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/?8qa provides step-by-step lesson plans based on the day's news. It is for intermediate to advanced level ESL students.
- http://www.learningchocolate.com/ offers a vocabulary learning platform that provides picture dictionaries and audio.
- http://www.nj.gov/education/modelcurriculum/ includes scaffolds and a list of 99 supports for ELLs.
- http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki presents a great reference site for ELLs.
- http://www.windows2universe.org/ provides science and culture articles at the beginner, intermediate, and advance levels.
- http://www.wordsift.com/ makes available a tool from Understanding Language that analyzes texts to find content-related, key vocabulary.

FABRIC Classroom Feedback Guide

I saw the students…	I saw the teacher(s)…
I heard the students…	I heard the teacher(s)…
1. Students are able to build foundational skills as a result of…	
2. Students are able to have academic conversations as a result of…	
3. Students are able to use and grow their background knowledge as a result of…	
4. Students are able to use resources that help them understand classroom content as a result of…	
5. Students are able to demonstrate what they know through individualized assessment as a result of…	
6. Students are able to learn in a culturally appropriate environment as a result of…	

I thought you did a great job when you…

_____

_____

_____

_____

You might want to consider…

_____

_____

_____

_____