

Lesson Study, Cycle 2: Literature Synthesis

How do we support EML students without isolating them? By providing visual scaffolding in lessons, we will improve our EML student's ability to engage with the lesson material and advocate for their learning needs.

From my experience as a student, writing was both something I found to be stressful yet also therapeutic for me. I learned to write what I was thinking, which helped me process my emotions better. I believe writing has helped me through my hardships and most heartbreaking moments in my life. It allowed me to create many lists, start but never finish journal prompts, and envision a future for myself only I knew about. When asked to write an essay or a research paper, I would stress over trying to make it the most “perfect” writing someone would come across. When it came to a classroom setting, it wasn't until I asked my teacher if they could scaffold the material for me in a more accessible and understanding way. I needed the question(s) to be rephrased. Now as an educator, I still see how challenging it can be for many students to write a paper themselves. During writing time with my students, I see how challenging it can be for them to be able to write each letter sound they might hear and how difficult it is when you speak more than one language. This is something that made me realize I need to bring more support and tools for my students that will benefit them as writers and lifelong learners.

In my group, we had very similar experiences happening across our classrooms/students when it came to writing as well as accessing the academic content in general. We began to wonder what it would be like if we provided our EML students with scaffolded material as well as additional visuals around the classroom/office spaces. Collectively, through two PDSA cycles and a research lesson, we began to see the positive change in our students. The three themes that emerged through my research for supporting EML students are:

1. Routines, structures and strategy skills
2. Student identity and culture
3. Benefits of practices

Routines, Structures and Strategy Skills

For students to accomplish day-to-day tasks that are required of both the teacher and students, routines, structures and strategy skills help to create smoother transitions. Additionally, they'll know what to expect each day and feel more confident and secure in their daily activities. It became apparent that students benefited from structures and strategies teachers placed in the classroom for students. A strategy that author Kilman found that teachers rely on is that “Lessons are bolstered with hands-on activities and role-playing games, requiring students from different language backgrounds to work together and allowing language learners to use prior knowledge in ways that don't require fluency” (Kilman, 2009). Thus, the lesson study cycle began and the desire for all students to work with hands-on activities sparked. In order for all students to access

hands-on activities and strategies, we needed to make a shift in our teaching practices. We began by using more of our school supplies such as scissors, glue, visuals and graphic organizers. To further develop their understanding of routines and structures, students were given opportunities to listen to the teachers instructions then be given a set of directions on what to do next. Students were given time to work on a specific activity where they work together at their table groups and students connect/communicate with one another problem solving and using prior knowledge. Students were then given a new set of instructions to clean up, put materials away and meet the teacher at the carpet. This leads students to understanding and practicing a routine and set structures in the classroom. Similar to author Hollie writes in *Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning* how teachers should incorporate learning games, manipulatives, flow charts, hands on projects, and graphic organizers to help students connect prior knowledge. This led us to finding another way to scaffold material for our EML students to have easier access towards understanding the content material in a more simpler way. Students again were able to follow these sets of routines and structures and after many weeks of intentional practicing being implemented into the classroom, first grade students began to show growth in their routines. Ultimately, these sets of routines and structures allowed for students to build their listening, behavior and procedure skills.

Student Identity and Culture

A recurring theme throughout this lesson study was the classroom culture built around student identity and the classroom itself. This became more apparent as the lesson study continued because of the activities we were implementing as a group. In *Street Data - A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* agency was mentioned as “It emerges in a learning space where power is distributed, knowledge is democratized, diverse perspectives are welcomed, and children are intellectually and emotionally nourished” (p. 102). This quote emphasizes the importance of students being a part of a learning community where they build on their knowledge and acceptance. We found that by creating a classroom culture where students accept, understand and support different learning styles, students will naturally be supportive leaders and helpers. Through each PDSA cycle, my group and I worked towards incorporating more visuals to support our EML students in understanding the classroom content in a more accessible way. We noticed a change in students' confidence and our classroom community. Students would help each other find clues to classroom materials if one needed support and others would patiently guide classmates through step by step instruction. As mentioned in *Lonely Language Learners?*, the article touches base a lot on how important it is to not only build a classroom culture/class community inside of the school but also outside of the school. Students who are a part of extracurricular activities, after school clubs, plan play dates, etc. get to learn more about their friends' identities, cultures and society as a whole.

Benefits of Practice

Through the many readings and observations within my own classroom, seeing the benefits of these practices was the most rewarding part of this experience. In the article *Supporting English learners in the middle: Culturally responsive and sustaining practices to support student identity*

development and sense of belonging., it mentions “Therefore, culturally sustaining practices are foundational to support English Learners’, as well as other non-dominant groups, identity development, sense of belonging, and overall growth.” The practices students took part in are shaping students to learn not only more about themselves but others as well. Students gain a better understanding of belonging in their classrooms and develop a positive attitude towards themselves. Students were able to access the tools and remember their routine schedules to support them in the classroom. Not only were scaffolds put in place during work time, but students were also able to look for visuals posted around the classroom walls to help themselves and others. Additionally, students build an academic mindset, community to feel successful and are able to collaborate with classmates while strengthening their collaboration skills.

Conclusion

Completing this lesson study cycle was a valuable experience that provided me with many takeaways that will serve as a foundational aspect of my practice as an educator. While I will continue to practice these takeaways to strengthen my teaching, I believe it is also important to take the next step in providing more structure, routines and scaffolding for my students to become successful learners and leaders in the class. A hesitancy I have about scaffolding is finding the time to check in with my EML students throughout the day(s) and how often throughout the week. Nevertheless, I will continue to identify my areas of growth as an educator and be mindful about how much time it will take for my students to pick up routines, structures and content understandings.

References

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