🌟 Why Sentence Starters Work for English Learners

This handout summarizes the benefits of using sentence starters and word banks for English learners across proficiency levels, and explains how they support both language development and social-emotional learning (SEL).

Why Sentence Starters Work for English Learners

• Scaffolded Support – Provide a structure so beginners can speak without needing full sentence mastery (Gibbons, 2015).

• Confidence Builder – Reduce fear of mistakes by giving a safe, simple entry point into conversation (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2017).

• Vocabulary Expansion – Word banks introduce new, meaningful words in context (Nation, 2013).

• Differentiation – Adaptable for beginners (short answers) and advanced learners (longer, detailed responses) (Zwiers, 2014).

Why Sentence Starters Support SEL

• Emotion Naming – Help students express feelings, reducing anxiety and building self-awareness (Brackett & Rivers, 2014).

• Connection – Promote sharing and listening, building classroom trust and belonging (CASEL, 2020).

• Empowerment – Show students their voice matters—even simple sentences carry meaning (Durlak et al., 2011).

Why This Works for Learning & Speaking English

• Repetition with Purpose – Frequent practice with structured frames builds fluency (Swain, 2005).

• Practical Use – Connects English practice to real-life goals and emotions—the learner's WHY (Snyder, 2002).

• Active Speaking Practice – Encourages all students to participate, not just the confident ones (Zwiers, 2014).

• Bridge to Independence – Over time, students move from sentence starters → independent sentences → natural conversation (Echevarría et al., 2017).

📚 References

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