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EDIS 6991 Professional Field Project

TEP Component G - Use of Assessment Data

Artifact 1b: Description of how the assessment is administered and why with accompanying graphics, *ESL Assessment Notes for 6th-grade ELA Observations and Documentation.*

The Reading Response Journal assessment was used to track my 6th-grade ELL students' progress. As they read *Wonder* by R.J. Palacios, I used the journal assessment to measure my ELL's understanding of the book after reading each chapter. Two weeks of journal entries are exhibited in this artifact, which has been depersonalized to protect the students' identity. The Reading Response Journal was designed to assess students after each chapter reading. The assessment was designed for all students. Translations were added for ELLs' copies. In addition, the ELLs had two copies of the book, one in Spanish and one in English. The ELLs with whom I worked in the ELA class at my spring placement were level-one ELLs. *Wonder* is a fine selection for 6th -grade readers but is not a very good selection for ELLs.

Background Information

The structure at Carver Middle School in Chesterfield County Public Schools places all ELLs, even level-one ELLs, in mainstream classes. For this reason, there are no ESOL classes, even for level-one ELs. Instead, ESL teachers are expected to push across the curriculum and pull out only when absolutely necessary. The District has a policy that requires teachers to give ELLs a minimum grade of C, provided they show effort. The grading policy protects the ELLs, but it also misrepresents them. I noticed that level-one ELLs know how to “play” the system and are often willing to sacrifice quality and effort in their work, knowing they cannot fail. I am not sure how this policy helps close the achievement gap.

Assessment vs Assessment for ELLs

Assessment is not the same for ESL. Measuring content understanding comprises only a small part of the learning inventory. Language and content objectives are interwoven in an instructional plan that ends in an activity whereby the student can put the learned content into practice. Sometimes, linguistic and cultural nuances go unnoticed by the primary content area teachers.

1. Did the student understand the social language used during the lesson?
2. Did they understand the instructions and the instructor's message?
3. Did they understand the material? The content?
4. Did they understand how the content fits into the learning path for the overall unit and curriculum?

In my push-in support role, I developed brief and swift signals, cues, gestures, and one-word utterances to guide students through the lesson content. When the ELA instructor summarizes instructions, I debrief the ELs using minimal language and gestures again to ensure the ELLs are on track. I will continue seeking this assurance if I sense a student does not understand. This is extremely difficult to do without making some noise in a classroom setting that may necessitate quiet. I always try to contain the noise but sometimes it is not possible. The ELLs have been unfairly blamed for this inconvenience. Measuring understanding of the material is not easy, particularly when assessments are tailored to the mainstream students. The same assessments are used for ELLs. Often, the only ESL accommodation provided is a direct translation. The Google translations often lack context and are sometimes entirely erroneous. Google interprets many metaphors and slang literally, and the translations sound nonsensical.

Limitations

The full-time ELA teacher expressed to me that she felt burdened by the ELs and their unusual circumstances. She was happy to send them to me and assign whatever grade I recommended without doing any assessment work. Her rationale was that she does not speak Spanish and cannot communicate with them. She enjoys the teacher-student discussions with small groups, but only when the conversations are fruitful. This is rarely the case with the ELs because they have language issues. The talks in their group are generally strained because they don't understand the slang, metaphors, and idiomatic expressions. ELLs need to begin learning the social language, but level-ones in a mainstream ELA class should not have to learn it by reading dialogue-heavy fiction where over 90% of the language is slang. Videos and engaging, interactive activities would be better suited for teaching language so rich in slang and metaphors because they would add context. I could not get the ELLs to read through a single chapter of the English version, and based on my observations, they couldn't understand the slang. When this occurs, the ELLs are often excluded from the learning happening in the mainstream classroom. They are not "in the know," whereas everybody else is.

The Assessments

The reading response journal used for the *Wonder* book and the exit Spine Story activity is moderately effective. Even though I prefer not to assign a grade, I can provide a relatively qualitative assessment of understanding of language and content through a rubric, like the one shown in Artifact 1.

Assessment Rubric

My original idea was to develop my rubric, but when looking at various established rubrics, I found the New York State Education's (NYSE) Assessment Rubric for World Languages to balance simplicity with depth. Therefore, I used this rubric to assess ELLs in my clinical placement and the TEP Portfolio.

Final thoughts

The data for the journal assessments was muddy and difficult to interpret for several reasons. I only had three level-one ELLs, which limited my ability to compare data. Moreover, the activity and assessments were not ESL-friendly, making the activity trite and uninteresting to the ELLs. Students were allowed to use Google Translate to complete their journal entries and often had to motivate them to complete this task and stay on schedule. Interestingly, I noticed more about their understanding through observation and our interactions than through the journal entries.