Developing a Media Program That Meets the Needs of English Language Learners!

The "NO WORRIES" Approach

A white paper by:

Dr. Thomas Doyal

Developing a Media Program That Meets the Needs of English Language Learners!

The "NO WORRIES" Approach

"You've got to be kidding!!! You want me to rearrange my media center, change my lesson plans, order different material……….for just a few kids? What's next? More training?"

This is one understandable way of responding to the latest in a long line of challenges that media specialists have faced. The latest challenge is to modify media centers to create an environment that better addresses the literacy needs of English Language Learners (ELLs, AKA TESOL or ESOL students).

According to Janeen Pelser, the Director of Library Media Services for Palm Beach County Schools (personal communication September 4, 2007) other responses to this challenge by media specialists may include, "I've already met ESOL requirements because we have books in Spanish in our collection," or "We don't have any ESOL classes at our school so I don't need to worry about it," or "I don't read Creole or Spanish... so I don't know how to select good titles," along with "I don't know where to go to get good books in Spanish [Creole, etc.]." As a media specialist, I see the validity in each of these responses and can think of others of my own. We must also remember that we are mandated to provide equitable services to all of our students (Cohen, D. K., Fuhrman, S. H. & Mosher, F. 2007). Before you make a final judgment regarding this important issue, I would ask that you consider some alternative ways of viewing this topic and reflect on some easily implemented steps that do not require considerable time nor expense.

As media specialists we are responsible for running what amounts to a million dollar business. Managing the thousands of books, magazines, reference materials, electronic media, multimedia materials, technological hardware, software, television studios, media production facilities, teaching classes, checking out and shelving books, are just some of the things we do on a daily basis. If the truth be told, we are busy!!!! By doing all that we do, we prove we are not just specialists, we are SPECIAL!

The fact that we are entrusted with these responsibilities and fulfill them is a testament to our skills and certainly to our dedication to our profession. We have seen our responsibilities change through time especially as the nature of information storage and dissemination has changed. As the "Information Age" has blossomed around us, our profession has been greatly affected. We have already proven we are adaptable when necessary. Compared to these monumental shifts in policies and procedures, some simple changes to our media center outlined in this paper should pose a minimal challenge.

We are in the midst of another wave of change that provides another opportunity to exhibit our abilities to stay ahead of the curve while providing our patrons unparalleled access to the information they need. The latest change is related to the demographics of the population we serve (it is vital to the discussion to remember we do *serve* our patrons). According to the Census Bureau website, there are 10.5 million school-age children (5 to 17) who speak a language other than English at home, about one in five in this age group. Most of them (7.5 million) speak Spanish at home. (Source: 2005 American Community Survey). The question is not whether this influx of students lacking in English language proficiency is coming, but how will we best deal with this growing population of people that truly need our services.

I have heard Media specialists and other educators voice other legitimate concerns about working with this population. Some of these concerns include their feeling ill-equipped and untrained to help them, lack of support by TESOL or ESOL support staff, already tight budgets, staffing shortfalls, etc. As a media specialist in a public school, I can attest to the fact that all of these things are true. The goal of this paper is to provide realistic workable solutions to the problem of creating a media center environment that supports literacy development for ELLs without unduly taxing already over-worked and under funded media centers. As you read this paper, you will see that much of what you already do and have will work well with ELLs. You merely need to modify the way you present the material. This paper offers a number of suggestions to improve the media environment for ELLs and help improve their literacy skills. I hope you choose the ones that will best suit your program's needs.

The Media Center's Vital Role

Media centers play a vital role in the education process. Education is a series of individual quests requiring plans for each individual student. Because of the array of needs, including those of English Language Learners, the media center must be versatile, flexible, inclusive and willing to adapt and accommodate. As educators, we are responsible for developing plans to address the needs of every student we service. Since each student we work with has unique cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and developmental skills and emotional issues of various kinds, we need to equip ourselves with an assortment of pedagogical tools and delivery methods.

English Language Learners often present unique academic challenges for a variety of reasons. They are struggling not only with the same academic issues of their

fluent English speaking peers, but they often face additional challenges, such as cultural differences, language barriers and racial prejudices (Darling-Hammond, L & Bransford, J. (eds.) 2005).

There are a number of methods designed to aid educators in effectively teaching English Language Learners. As educators, it is important to be familiar with as many techniques as possible so that as we work with this diverse population, we can incorporate these methods or any part of them in to our lesson plans. This paper will highlight some of the methods currently being used in classrooms around the world and offer suggestions for creating and implementing a dynamic media program designed to service today's diverse population.

Creating the Environment

Factors for Learning

Getting experts in any field to agree on a concept or idea can be quite a challenge. There is one example in the field of education where we can find harmony among experts. They posit that the climate in which students (and teachers) find themselves has a profound affect on attitudes toward learning (Cambourne, B. 1995, Holdaway, D. 2000), self and collective efficacy (Goddard, R. G., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, W. A. (2000), social interaction (Trickett, E., & Moos, R. H. (1973), democratic values (Kahne, J., Rodriquez, M., Smith, B., and Thiede, K. (2000), Apple, M., & Beane, J. (1995), Dewey, J. (1916) and ultimately, academic achievement (Gruenert, S. 2005).

Vygotsky claimed that learning is a social endeavor (Vygotsky, L.S. 1978). A well-crafted learning environment (media center, classroom, etc.) capitalizes on this social nature of learning. An environment that is conducive to learning has specific

characteristics. Educator, Brian Cambourne has identified 8 learning environment factors or characteristics that promote literacy and academic growth. These factors include *immersion* – providing the learner with a wealth of literary experiences, *demonstration* - modeling literate actions and activities (formally and informally), *employment* – providing occasions to use and practice newly gained skills on an individual basis or with others, *responsibility* - learners choosing things they will explore intellectually or academically as they continue to be absorbed in displays of literate behaviors, *engagement* – learners actively participating in literacy experiences, *approximations* – learners attempt literacy behaviors at their own developmental levels without being expected to demonstrate total proficiency but using the skills they currently possess, *expectation* – learners are encouraged to believe that they can and will learn and *response* – formal and informal feedback (Cambourne, B. 1995).

Don Holdaway, identified 4 other conditions conducive to learning. He believed they were *demonstration* - the extensive modeling of skills that results in the learners' approximating the observed skill, *participation* – learners decide which demonstrations (responsibility) to approximate while the teacher responds in real time formally or informally, *role play or practice* – a style of self-correction and self-response designed to encourage "learning-to-learn," and *performance* – seeking group acknowledgement not a competition with others (Holdaway, D. 2000).

Though the media center is a unique learning environment with its own attributes, all of the strategies that work to create a classroom conducive to learning can be applied there. Because of its unique attributes and responsibilities, applying these strategies to the media center requires special consideration and planning.

The media center is more than a repository for documents, multimedia, literature, etc. It is the epicenter of academic activity. It should be dedicated to fusing all of these entities of information into the individual packages that assist students in their personal quests for knowledge, entertainment, literacy development, or any other pursuits.

The following chart offers simple suggestions how to apply Cambourne's learning environment factors to media programs or to a classroom.

Learning Conditions

1. *Immersion* – providing the learner with a wealth of literary experiences

2. *Demonstration* - modeling literate actions and activity (formally and informally).

3. *Expectation* – learners are encouraged to believe that they can and will learn

Apply the Zone of Proximal Development theory. Know students' literacy levels and provide material just beyond that level. Provide the help and encouragement to elevate beyond their current level.

4. *Responsibility* - learners choosing things they will explore intellectually or academically as they continue to be absorbed in displays of literate behaviors,.

Allow for and encourage students to make their own literature choices in addition to providing required media. Encourage the consumption of a wide range of materials.

5. *Approximations* – learners attempt literacy behaviors at their own developmental levels using the skills they currently possess

Each student is working at their own pace, exhibiting their own skill level. Continue to model the desired behaviors. Monitor student progress.

6. *Employment* – providing occasions to use and practice newly gained skills on an individual basis or with others.

Encourage project based initiatives that allow for the creation of tangible products. Allow the students to express themselves in the ways that best represent their thinking (apply Multiple Intelligences theory).

7. *Response* – formal and informal feedback.

Give specific quantitative and qualitative responses and feedback that inform and encourage the students.

8. *Engagement* – learners actively participating in literacy experiences

Encourage reading, writing, re-writing, performing, producing multimedia, etc. that is relevant to the students' literacy development.

Suggested Actions

Provide massive amounts of books to ELLs. Encourage "buddy" or "partner" readers. Provide books on tape or Podcasts and dual language books.

Read to the students during media time. Model the proper care of books. Teach about fiction, nonfiction, reference material, biographies, etc. Teach the library language and the sections of the library.

Suggestions for Setting up the Media Center

There are a number of physical changes that can be made to make the media center more "environmentally friendly" to ELLs (Bizar, M., & Daniels, H. 2005).

1. Create graphic representations (pictures with captions) for content areas and display those pictures on the stacks (shelves) with those books. For example, create pictures of animals with the matching words in English such as dog pictures labeled "dogs" with the dog books, pictures of cars labeled "cars" with the car books or pictures of dinosaurs labeled "dinosaurs" with the dinosaur books, etc.

2. Creating graphics for fiction books requires more creativity since they are not shelved by subject but in alphabetical order according to the first three letters of the author's last name. There are "series" books such as *A Series of Unfortunate Events, Magic Tree House, Berenstain Bears, Harry Potter,* etc. Graphics related to these groups of titles such as student created pictures, book jackets, color copies of the covers, etc. can be made to highlight their location. Another way to make the fiction materials easier to locate for ELLs would be to establish stacks (shelves) dedicated to grouping fiction titles by area of interest or subject and subdivided by level. Graphics can then be made for these groups of books.

3. All of the dual language or foreign language books can have their own section. They can be divided by language and subdivided by genre and level.

4. A multicultural bulletin board can be created that represents all of the cultures in the school. Historical and cultural photos, representations of art, food, literature and more can be displayed. Throughout the year, family photos, photos from that country or culture, etc., can be added to the board. Encourage the development of teams to maintain these displays.

Special Projects

1. As part of the media time, include one component that is the development of a cultural research project. Create heterogeneous teams for the project. Mix the research teams so they are not segregated into homogeneous groups that only focus on their ethnic background. Highlight the areas in the nonfiction, fiction, reference and biography sections that relate to cultures. Create a rubric that defines the project expectations based on the language and academic proficiencies of the groups. Have the students select a number of books related to the culture they will study. Have them answer a list of questions that exhibit a foundational knowledge of that culture. Based on their language and writing proficiency, have the students either write a paper or create an artistic representation of the culture (poster, diorama, etc.). The culminating activity would be to share their findings with the class and display their artwork in the media center. As a possible extension, the presentations can be videotaped and then played on the school's morning television program or played during the day at designated times and places.

2. Create special workshops for ELLs that welcome them to the media center. Show them the features and sections and give them undivided attention. Arrange to have any staff members such as the TESOL coordinator or anyone assigned to service that population attend the workshops. Partner with them, solicit their input and utilize their expertise. Create a welcoming environment for them as well. The attendance and participation of other staff members that are trained to work with this population and/or speak their language can be a HUGE benefit. Offer to be of help to them in their efforts to service these students. They will surely welcome the help and ultimately, everyone will benefit.

Teaching Library Skills

The old proverb about the benevolence of giving a person a fish so they can eat that day and the greater benefit of teaching them to fish so they can eat for a lifetime truly applies to this discussion. We need to provide ELLs with everything we can and simultaneously teach them to access these media. We need to teach them about the elements, attributes and characteristics of all the forms of literature and media. They need to know what types of material exist and how to find the material they need. Since libraries store these little bearers of information in areas according to specific criteria, we need to first make sure students understand the characteristics of books and other media then where they are located in the media center.

Learning the skills necessary to find and access material is a foundational part of education. According to the National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association (1996), "The ability to identify good topics, to gather information,

and to evaluate, assemble, and interpret findings from among the many general and specialized information sources now available to them is one of the most vital skills that students can acquire."

Before any discussion of where to find materials in the library can be had, two overarching concepts must be taught to the students. They must know what "kinds" of materials are available while also understanding that all materials are shelved with "like" materials and they must know the scheme used to shelve materials in each section. To simply tell them, "This is the fiction section" without explaining the attributes of fiction material and how the books are arranged on the shelves leaves them with an incomplete picture.

Explanations of the "Kinds of Materials," and How they are Shelved

Fiction

Simply said, fiction materials (stories, etc.) are not "real events" even though they can be based in fact or historically accurate (realistic or historical fiction). The question is how best to convey this concept to students with limited English speaking skills. It is important to tailor these suggestions to fit the students' levels academically as well as linguistically.

One way is to learn the terms for "make believe," "pretend," "fiction," etc. in their native tongue (ask for this information from the TESOL support personnel or find other sources) and show them the examples of fiction books saying these words (in their language) in conjunction with the words that define "fiction." These terms can also be posted along with the English signage around the media center. It is important to have them repeat the English words, "fiction", "pretend", "make believe", etc. This is

consistent with the Lexical and Audiolingual approaches to teaching languages (Richards, J., & Rogers, T. (2001), Larson-Freeman, D. (2000).

If you are not comfortable with this approach, you may prefer the Direct Method. The Direct Method of teaching would focus more on the target language. This method would not use the native language at all but would only use L2 or the language being acquired (Richards, J., & Rogers, T. (2001), Larson-Freeman, D. (2000).

Now that we talked briefly about the attributes of fiction, let's talk about the Fiction and Easy Fiction sections of the library or media center. Fiction books are arranged on the shelves in alphabetical order by the first three letters of the author's last name. In order to teach this concept, the students must know the English alphabet and how to alphabetize. This is a skill that must be taught or reinforced in the media center as a part of the media lessons.

Nonfiction

For the sake of continuity, using the same format to teach ELLs fiction can be used to teach the characteristics of nonfiction and the nonfiction shelving scheme.

The Collection

Library/media centers need to offer a very wide variety of materials to meet an ever deepening pool of users. Not only do media centers provide print material, but they must offer an array of multimedia software and hardware, videos, audio productions, audio and video production equipment and more. Though ELLs need to be provided a multitude of material to consume, we also need to consider ways to help ELLs express their learning. ELLs benefit from multiple ways to express their learning and knowledge (Richards, J., & Rogers, T., 2001). The use of traditional methods such as artwork, the

use of multimedia, using MP3 players or iPods for recording their spoken word or any other alternatives to writing can help students express themselves and exhibit their knowledge while they are building their language and writing skills. There are great examples of how iPods are being integrated in to the media center. There are specific applications using iPods that are providing benefits to ELLs. Students are using them as language labs, recording their voice to listen for fluency, storing podcasts and language lessons, and more (Becker & Vinto, 2005).

As we assess the holdings of a media center in an attempt to provide the essentials for servicing all students, including ELLs, you may look for:

1. A wide range (levels and subjects) of nonfiction material
2. Dual language books and other dual language publications
3. A wide range (levels) of material related to specific classroom themes
4. Dual language reference material (dictionaries, almanacs, encyclopedias, atlases, etc.)
5. Access to a wealth of electronic media and databases
6. Books on tape (English and other languages) with many individual players with rechargeable batteries
7. batteries, and headphones (with a willingness to see them as disposable)
8. hand-held recorders (iPods, MP3 players, video recorders, etc.)
9. High interest materials at a wide variety of ranges
10. A rich collection of fiction and nonfiction videos
11. Biographies about people from diverse cultures
12. Professional journals and publications related to TESOL and ELLs.
13. Multimedia production software and hardware
14. Television production facility

Partnerships

Many programs are under-staffed and under-funded. Is that your program? Don't go it alone! Invite and welcome participation of parents, community members, district resource personnel and staff members designated to work with these students.

Students designated as TESOL, ESOL, ELL, etc. have had an educational plan prepared. There is most likely at least one qualified person designated to over-see their plan. In addition, districts offer support by providing in-service training, resource material and even on-sight educational and English language training and support. Partner with these people and see what they can offer you in the way of support for your ELLs.

Do your best to obtain support from families and community members. Integrate their cultural awareness and insight in to on-going tasks and special projects. Create opportunities to include the human resources that exist in your communities.

Invite guest readers from the community to come and read to classes. They can share books about their profession or just books they enjoy. Have people come and share about their culture, bringing literature, artifacts, music or any thing informative and engaging.

Classroom Extensions

Work closely with the classroom teacher to help students access the specific material needed to complete or modify class assignments. Whenever possible, attend meetings regarding the development of individual education plans for your students.

As a routine in the media center, it is likely that teachers communicate with you the special needs of their classes for research projects, book reports, etc. As you are helping to steer staff and students toward the correct media, find out what accommodations the classroom teacher is making for the ELLs. Since they are more aware of the daily language and academic development of the students they work with, they can give you insight in to how best to service their media needs.

It is helpful to create your lesson structure as a template and plug in the specific content of the mainstream classrooms. For example, when teaching reference materials such as encyclopedias, find out specific subject matter the students are studying in their classes. Teach the encyclopedia skills with the focus on specific content they are working on in the class. During media time, spend some time helping students find either fiction of nonfiction material related to thematic units or other classroom academic endeavors.

Student Workers

Include, include, include, students as media center aids. Partner them with students that speak the same language (or others) that may be a bit farther along in their English language skills development. Have them assist in book shelving, check-in and checkout of books, copying, minding the front desk, etc. Value their help, be willing to let them make mistakes and reward them for their assistance.

Another great way to include students in the excitement of the media center is to train them to work all of the audio and video equipment. Train them how to work the videotape recorders, audio recorders, editing equipment and sound reinforcement (microphone and public address systems) equipment. There may be multiple things going on simultaneously at your school. You can only be in 5 places at a time. One solution would be to hire more people. Since we know that is not likely due to budget restraints, the best solution is to train students to do those jobs.

It is far more beneficial to every one to give the students an opportunity to learn and serve and simultaneously build pride in their school and themselves. When you show them you trust them and are willing to train them, they develop a sense of ownership and

citizenship. From my experience, giving students this kind of responsibility has had the most beneficial and significant impact on student engagement an achievement than any other program or strategy.

Give-away Materials

Get donations of books (new or used) from the community. Give the students books as gifts. Have a shelf full of them and let them pick what they want. Relate the value of your relationship with them (students) to the value YOU place on these books. These are your treasures and sharing your treasure with them tells them they are valued.

Make any weeded material "available for adoption" or "in need of a good home." Have students come to the media center on their birthday either at a designated time or to the TV studio (if you have one) during your announcement program. Acknowledge their birthday and give them a book. Let them choose the book they want.

Make it known to parents that as students "outgrow" books, you have a wonderful use for them. Encourage the PTA and others to buy extra books at the Book Fair and donate them. Don't be afraid to express your excitement. Enthusiasm is contagious and you want to infect your entire school, community and this diverse world of learners.

Conclusion

As media specialists, we understand the value of literacy. Improving the literacy of all of our students is our essential goal. It is inherent in our job that we service a diverse group of students. Students with all academic levels, cognitive skills and now more than ever, language differences rely on us to provide the information they need from an ever widening spectrum of media. To add this additional dimension to an already heavily taxed library system can seem daunting. However, as we have read in this paper,

making some simple modifications, soliciting help from those responsible for this

growing population of ELLs, and simply using the skills and instincts as educators we

already possess can make a world of difference in our media programs.

References

Apple, M., & Beane, J. (1995). *Democratic schools.* New York: Association for
    Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Becker, V. & Vinto, V. (2005). *Learning world languages: iPod lesson plan.* Retrieved
    May 15, 2006, from http://www.apple.com

Bizar, M., & Daniels, H. (2005). *Teaching the best practices way: Methods that matter,*
    k-12. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Cambourne, B. (1995). Towards an educationally relevant theory of literacy learning:
    Twenty years of inquiry. *The Reading Teacher*, *49*(3), 182-192.

Census Bureau Retrieved September 5, 2007 from http://www.census.gov/Press-
    Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/010218.html

Cohen, D. K., Fuhrman, S. H. & Mosher, F. (2007). *The state of education policy*
    research. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Bransford, J. (eds.) (2005). *Preparing teachers for a*
    changing world : What teachers should learn and be able to do. San Francisco,
    CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of*
    education (1966 edn.), New York: Free Press

Goddard, R. G., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, W. A. (2000). Collective teacher efficacy: Its
    meaning, measure, and impact on student achievement. *American Educational*
    Research Journal, 37, 479-508.

Gruenert, S. (2005). Correlations of collaborative school cultures with student
    achievement. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 89,*
    43-55.

Holdaway, D. (2000). Affinities and contradictions: The dynamics of social or acquisition
    learning. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, *5*(1), 7-25.

Kahne, J., Rodriquez, M., Smith, B., and Thiede, K. (2000). Developing citizens for
    democracy? Assessing opportunities to learn in Chicago's social studies
    classrooms. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *28*(3), 311-338.

Larson-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching (Teaching*
    techniques in English as a second language), (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford
    University Press, USA.

National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association. 1996. *Standards for the English Language Arts*. Urbana, IL: NCTE. Retrieved July 17, 2007 from http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=18

Richards, J., & Rogers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Trickett, E., & Moos, R. H. (1973). The social environment of junior high and high school classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *65*, 93-102.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.