

Short, D. (1994). Expanding middle school horizons: Integrating language, culture, and social studies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 581-608.

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Summary: Examining the academic language used within a social studies classroom, researchers observed how teachers prepare ESL learners to enter mainstream classes. Teachers taught content-specific information and English language instruction to middle school students in grades 6-9. Researchers focused on two areas of interest: (1) the L2 acquisition of nonnative English speakers and (2) the teaching methods used to include the students' social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. Since many of the ESL students were from countries that had experienced civil unrest, teachers selected a theme of protest. Through a series of lessons, students studied related events within American history to understand the institution of democracy.

Challenges:

- Can teachers incorporate language and content skills with hands-on activities to make U.S. history more accessible to ESL students?
- How can teachers help ESL students deal with the reading and writing demands of the social studies curriculum?
- How can teachers incorporate cultural diversity into a curriculum that is historically and politically Eurocentric and that largely excludes historical contributions of women and people of color to American history?

Proposed Responses:

- Through carefully prepared lessons, teachers created student-centered activities to support student achievement. For improving vocabulary, teachers incorporated strategies such as explicit vocabulary instruction, using dictionaries, role play, visual representations, and defining vocabulary in context.
- Using Venn and tree diagrams, sentence strips, and other graphic organizers, teachers helped students organize the higher-level literacy demands of the social studies textbook.
- Despite their intentions, teachers were unable to effectively link their students' home, social, and cultural backgrounds to the course curriculum.

Conclusion: Using a thematic unit and many other strategies in the social studies classroom, ESL students systematically practiced English language skills. Such practice prepared them for reading and writing tasks of mainstream classrooms.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- If you work with ELLs, communicate carefully with other teachers who also work with them. Look for ways to coordinate instruction and to enhance students' English language skills.
- Thematic instruction may provide a rich language context to support ELLs' content learning and English language learning.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Arrange schedules so that ELL tutors and teachers have regular opportunities to interact with other teachers.
- Encourage ELL and general teachers to plan thematic instruction together.
- Help general teachers see the role that oral language interactions can play in ELL students' acquisition of English.