

Praxis Paper for The Multiliteracies Project

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In the context of ELL teaching, the goal of our lesson is to help first grade students whose native language is not English learn biological knowledge about plants and English vocabulary with the use of maple trees and leaves as an example.

ELL students at a very young age tend to have limited vocabulary of English. Therefore, the pedagogical tool of this lesson is an activity box with four different activities inside. The first activity is comparing the dead leaf with living leaf and writing their differences on the comparison chart provided with the activity. In the third activity, students are asked to use different colors to represent four seasons and color the leaf with their favorite color. These two activities both provide visual scaffolding to assist students in learning.

Visual scaffolding is an approach in which the language used in instruction is made more understandable by displaying drawings or photographs that allow students to connect spoken English words to visual images being displayed (Herrell & Jordan, 2020, p. 38).

In this context, two pictures of a living leaf and a dead leaf were presented to students. This activity asks students to list five differences they spot between the living leaf and the dead leaf.

Apart from visual scaffolding, realia have also been heavily deployed in this lesson. Realia is a term for real things—concrete objects—that are used in the classroom to build background knowledge and vocabulary. Realia provide students with opportunities to build on their learning using all their senses (Herrell & Jordan, 2020, p. 42).

In activity three, the instructors give students drawings of leaves to cut out and color with different colors. In this context, leaves serve as realia to assist students' learning. Different colors visualize the four seasons and provide students with appropriate visual aid. Additionally, in this activity, students are required to cut out a leaf, colour it, draw themselves, then write either three

words or phrases that describe them on the back of the cut-out leaf. These options within the lesson plan serve as language standards variations depending on the different English language literacy levels students enjoy. For beginning level students, responding to the simple directions by cutting out the leaf, drawing themselves and colouring would be within their language standard. However, students with an intermediate language level can actually use expanded vocabulary in conversations with the teacher to describe themselves verbally. As for students who enjoy an early intermediate language use level, they can simple use writing to convey meaning as a way of describing themselves in either words or phrases depending on their language standards.

Throughout the lesson, multimodality, as a teaching approach, has been deeply imbedded. In *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, the author Gunther Kress used an example of road sign to illustrate the role and advantage of multimodality.

Using three modes in the one sign – writing and image and colour as well – has real benefits. Each mode does a specific thing: image shows what takes too long to read, and writing names what would be too difficult to show. Colour is used to highlight specific aspects of the overall message. Without that division of semiotic labour, the sign, quite simply, would not work. Writing names and image shows, while colour frames and highlights; each to maximum effect and benefit (2010, p. 1).

The example used by Gunther Kress vividly illustrates how different modes are used in daily life. In our lesson, activity one and activity three both used linguistic and visual modes. Activity four deploys gestural mode as well, teaching students the steps of making syrup taffy.

In summary, the lesson we created utilized several relevant teaching strategies and theories, including multimodality, realia and visual scaffolding. The goal is helping ELL students in first grade learn basic biological knowledge while learning and practicing English.

References

Herrell, A. L., & Jordan, M. (2020). *50 Strategies for Teaching English language learners (Sixth edition.)*. Pearson.

Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: a Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*.
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