Bellevue is a suburban school district in Washington state where students speak more than 80 languages. The Sherwood Forest Elementary School 90:10 Dual Language Program was implemented to help close the opportunity gap for our Spanish-speaking population. Data showed that native Spanish speakers were not passing the state tests, were overrepresented in special education, and were not graduating high school at the rate of their peers. In response, the program started in 2011 with one dual language class, two English instruction classes, and one functional life skills special education class. Students receive 90% of their weekly instruction in Spanish in kindergarten and first grade, with additional English instruction in social studies or science delivered by a partner teacher.

Planning for dual language English instruction is a complex process. Faced with 125 minutes per week of English instruction, K-1 grade-level teams realize that every second must be carefully planned to promote English language development and emergent literacy skills. Science is the only content area taught in English to first graders. In this context, the first-grade team approaches content as the vehicle through which to teach language.

Through backwards mapping we create pacing guides and other essential overview documents for each unit to ensure language and literacy development are intentionally targeted. Pacing documents also provide a road map for new teachers and teachers new to the grade level.

At a first grade planning meeting, teachers bring the Foss Science Curriculum, a list of OCDE Project GLAD® (Guided Language Acquisition Design) strategies adopted by Sherwood Forest E.S., Common Core State Standards (CCSS), English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), and Project GLAD® artifacts previously created for this unit. The ELL Facilitator, also a district Project GLAD® trainer, supports the team with planning, modeling for new teachers, and Project GLAD® artifact creation.

Before creating our unit pacing guide, we identify expected student engagement strategies in a document titled Language Partners and Seating Expectations. Consistent partnering allows a familiar linguistic model for Spanish and English language learning. Students are more successful in taking risks linguistically because they develop a trusting relationship with their partner. Teachers are more likely to attend to thoughtful student pairings when the expectations are explicit.

We begin designing our unit pacing guide by including the content objectives and target vocabulary provided by the Foss curriculum. Next, we identify corresponding Common Core literacy and language standards. In the first grade “Solids and Liquids” unit, students describe...
and sort solids and liquids based on their different properties. We align the content objectives in this unit to Common Core literacy standards in the areas of reading foundational skills and reading informational texts and to a variety of Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards. The ELPS (Washington state, http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/pubs/docs/ELP/WA-ELP-Standards-K12.pdf) provide us with even more specific language standards to include. For this reason, we select those ELPS that best align with the identified Common Core literacy and language standards.

Project GLAD® is our district’s adopted elementary sheltered instruction model. Therefore, it is essential to include those Project GLAD® strategies that will best support our dual language learners in acquiring the target vocabulary and meeting the objectives and standards addressed in the unit. Project GLAD® strategies used in Spanish instruction are familiar to students, allowing them to develop the awareness of language differences between Spanish and English. The strategies are listed in an overview document and more fully explained at the individual lesson level.

Including sentence frames for each lesson in our pacing guide is critical to supporting students in meeting both CCSS and ELPS. Teachers post sentence frames on the board or on individual sheets, depending on whether they are used for turn-and-talks or teamwork. A variety of frames are included to differentiate for English language learners at differing language acquisition stages. The frames promote the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and improve students’ ability to recognize and respond to a summative assessment prompt. Teachers and student peers are more successful in holding students accountable for using target vocabulary when sentence stems are posted.

Since English language development is as important as content in this context, we also make a commitment to posting both content and language objectives on the board. It is important for students to attune to the language expectations as they navigate complex investigations and conversations with peers. Not only do these language expectations help students learn language, they also help students understand and access the content, as the language and content standards are carefully aligned. Students never know how much effort goes into planning! By making a commitment to post the content objectives, language objectives and sentence frames, our planning “comes alive” for students.

In the first investigation, we use Project GLAD® literacy awards designed to teach the three states of matter. Each student earns at least one of these awards during the week, based on adherence to the Three Personal Standards. The target vocabulary for the lesson is matter, solid, liquid, and gas. The content objective is “Matter exists in three states: solid, liquid, and gas.” Realistic visuals are included in the awards to reinforce the key vocabulary and concept. The literacy awards also reinforce the corresponding CCSS K-5.RIT.6, which relates to distinguishing between information provided by pictures and information provided by words and text.

In the next lesson, the content objective is for students to describe the properties of solids and liquids. CCSS K-5.SL.1, “participating in collaborative conversations with diverse peers about grade-level topics and texts,” aligns perfectly with our content objective. The target vocabulary listed includes property words for solids.
and liquids, such as bubbly, foamy, viscous, transparent, and rigid. The Project GLAD® strategy is a pre-assessment strategy called Observation Charts. These charts include photos of solids and liquids categorized and mounted on posters. ELPS 2 aligns with our Common Core Speaking and Listening Standard. To support students in reaching this standard, we include differentiated sentence frames on each poster. The simplest frame says, “This (noun) is (property).” Students collaborate with their opposite language partner to say and write a sentence related to the photos.

The FOSS curriculum does not include abundant literacy activities, but we know we need to reinforce the unit’s academic vocabulary and concepts through engaging texts. The Observation Chart responses confirm this. As a form of text, we write a variety of Project GLAD® chants aligned with CCSS K-5.RF.1.b, which relates to reading grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expressiveness, based on repeated readings. Students access grade-level text by chanting daily and processing the vocabulary they identify as new or high level through sketches and Picture File Cards. For the second week of our unit, our ELL Facilitator creates another form of engaging text called the Project GLAD® Teacher Made Big Book, which supports students in meeting CCSS K-5.RI.10, relating to using pictures and text to understand the main ideas and to read informational text appropriately complex for first grade. ELPS 1.1 corresponds to this standard. We make several smaller copies of this text for students to reread independently or in pairs throughout the unit. This, coupled with the chants, allows students multiple opportunities to learn new vocabulary and more deeply understand core concepts related to solids and liquids.

The first core FOSS investigation in this unit asks partners to play a game in which they take turns identifying a common property shared by two solids. The content objective is “Students can sort solids by different properties.” The target vocabulary remains the properties of solids. In order to play this game effectively, students need to make comparative statements. CCSS K-5.SL.6 and corresponding ELPS 1.7 align with this activity. ELPS 1.7 requires students to use complete sentences. Rather than using a Project GLAD® strategy for this lesson, the team develops a sentence frame protocol. A handout of the frames and a word bank of properties are available to students. As students work with language partners to play the game, player one says, “Can you say the common property?” Player two responds, “Both items are ______.” Player one then responds, “I agree,” or “I disagree. They are both ______.” By carefully planning for these supports, emerging English speakers use high level content and language processes to access science content.

Ultimately, the development of a pacing guide integrating content objectives, target vocabulary, Common Core Literacy and Language Standards, ELPS, Project GLAD® strategies, and differentiated sentence frames increases student achievement in the areas of science content, English language, and literacy skills. Student engagement is high, as kids interact enthusiastically through literacy awards, chants, Teacher Made Big Books, interactive games, and other strategies listed later in our pacing guide. Students use comparative language with their peers and Tier 2 vocabulary words while sorting properties. The dual language students, receiving 90% of their instruction in Spanish, will not master the content and standards in English without teachers intentionally embedding the language and literacy components. The team purposefully and creatively uses every second of the 125 instructional minutes each week to improve student outcomes. We challenge you to do the same!

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