ALTELLA
ALTERNATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Academic Language Lesson Activity:
Best 'Holiday' Ever

ALTELLA Tool   September 2018

Jonathan L. Gibson

The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment (ALTELLA) project researches instructional practices, accessibility features and accommodations, and assessment of English learners with significant cognitive disabilities to develop an evidence-centered design approach that informs our understanding of alternate English language proficiency assessment for these students.

The ALTELLA project is a partnership of five state departments of education and the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This collaboration involving Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, and West Virginia is funded by an Enhanced Assessment Instruments grant from the U.S. Department of Education awarded to the Arizona Department of Education. ALTELLA is housed within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

altella.wceruw.org

ALTELLA Staff

Laurene Christensen, principal investigator, laurene.christensen@wisc.edu

Erin Arango-Escalante   James Mitchell
Kristen Burton   Sarah Ryan
Indira Ceylan   Kristopher Stewart
Elizabeth Cranley   Sonia Upton
Melissa Gholson   Cha Kai Yang
Jonathan Gibson
Miguel Hernandez

Publication Coordinator: Indira Ceylan
Graphic Designer: Janet Trembley

Acknowledgments

The author thanks a large number of educators who participated in earlier iterations of this activity and helped refine it. The author also acknowledges authors of similar activities for providing inspiration.

Academic Language Lesson Activity: Best 'Holiday' Ever

Objective

This tool can be used to help participants understand the experience of learning in a new language. Actively engage participants to experience their own use of language in order to recognize, discuss and reflect on the nature of academic language and the process of academic language development.

Purpose

Establish a foundation of individual and shared experience to explore elements of academic language and academic language development. Use this foundation to anchor instruction, training, and guidance regarding any lesson purpose engaging academic language or academic language development.

Materials

- Handout: English language proficiency level speaking or productive performance definitions or descriptors (preferably consistent with the participants' state English language proficiency assessment for English learners, for example, ACCESS for ELLs, AZELLA, or ELPA21).
- Prepared set of questions for the debrief phase that emphasize the lesson purpose.
- Optional: time keeping device or display; PowerPoint or other static display of the task.

Activity
Best 'Holiday' Ever

1. Introduction – Set the Stage

    a. Guide participants to choose a partner and identify 'Partner A' and 'Partner B'.
    b. Inform them that they will be telling each other about their best vacation ever – either real or imagined.
    c. Before allowing them to talk to each other, invite them to remember or to imagine the feel, the sounds, the sights, the smells, the tastes, and every sensory and emotional experience of the most amazing vacation ever.
    d. Give them a few seconds to prepare how they will share.
    e. Introduce that while they talk, they are not allowed to use the letter 'n' or any words that contain the letter 'n'.
        - They cannot just omit the letter or the sound of 'n'.
        - No words with the letter 'n' exist.
    f. Instruct the listening partner to help and to monitor.
        - Ask them to be kind – they will have their own turn.
        - Instruct them not to understand any words with an 'n'.

2. Experience – Do It

    a. Give 'Partner A' a predetermined amount of time to share (1–3 minutes).
    b. Switch, give 'Partner B' the same amount of time.
    c. Wander and listen for exchanges you may want to highlight or ask about during the discussion; gauge if you need to extend or end actual time for the experience.

3. Debrief – Set the Lesson Foundation

   a. Whole Group Discussion: What just happened?
      • Encourage shared introspection of language process: emotional, psychological, neural, linguistic, interpersonal, etc.
      • Interweave prepared questions into the discussion. Sample topics for questions may include:
         o Difference between ideas and ultimate expressions
         o Time to formulate ideas
         o Rate of speech/fluency
         o Distinctions between intelligence and language stage of development
         o Parallels between this experience and the experience of learning a second language
         o Academic language as a "second language" for many students
         o Supports needed to succeed
         o Emotions
         o Be sure to discuss the experience of the listening partner
   b. Proficiency Level Definitions or Descriptors – Self Evaluation
      • Have the partners use the handout (English language proficiency level speaking or productive performance definitions or descriptors) to evaluate and discuss their level of language proficiency in the speaking domain.
      • Lead a brief whole group discussion to segue into the lesson purpose. Sample topics may include:
         o Proficiency level may vary by prior experience relative to the content area.
         o Proficiency level may vary by interest in the content area.
         o Proficiency level of English-only students in different content areas.
         o Supports needed for students to participate and produce at proficiency levels above their current developmental stage.
         o Potential advantages for multilingual students to develop academic language proficiency.

Review

Make note of any unique questions, ideas, or occurrences to include or revise the activity for the next time you plan to use it.