THINKING MAPS®

Mapping What Works for English Language Learners

Thinking Maps Alignment to What Works Clearinghouse Evidence-Based Practice Guides

English Language Learners (ELLs) need extra support in the classroom to unlock their learning potential. Thinking Maps and *Path to Proficiency* help ELLs improve language proficiency, build academic vocabulary, and access grade-level content.

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) has developed Evidence-based Practice Guides for ELLs based on reviews of available research, experiences of practitioners, and the expert opinions of a panel of nationally recognized experts. There are two guides specific to English Language Learners, each with a range of recommendations for both school leaders and classroom teachers. Thinking Maps is aligned with many of the recommendations for classroom instruction and practice.

Practice Guide: Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School

Recommendation #1: Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.

Thinking Maps is an effective tool for vocabulary study for English Language Learners (ELLs). The visual format makes the Maps accessible for ELLs of all English proficiency levels. Newcomers can integrate pictures and native language translations with new vocabulary words on the Maps as they build their understanding of word meanings. As their vocabulary grows, Maps can be combined to define words, compare and contrast related terms, classify vocabulary words, or create analogies. The *Maps as Vocabulary Word Games* module in the Thinking Maps Learning Community (TMLC) introduces game-based activities that leverage the Maps for vocabulary development.

Recommendation #2: Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching.

Thinking Maps makes grade-level content accessible for students of all backgrounds and ability levels, including English Language Learners. *Path to Proficiency for English Language Learners* training shows teachers how to leverage the Maps to help ELLs expand their academic vocabulary, improve comprehension of content-area material, and meet grade-level academic standards. Combining visual and linguistic information on the Maps activates "dual coding" in the brain to improve understanding, retention, and recall. The Maps can be used by students of all language proficiency levels. As their language proficiency grows, the Maps become springboards for oral communication and written work products. Using the Maps to organize their thinking and solidify their language skills helps ELLs become better thinkers, writers, and communicators across all content areas.

Recommendation #3: Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills.

Thinking Maps helps ELLs organize their thinking and clarify their understanding of vocabulary and ideas before they write. *Write from the Beginning...and Beyond* training shows teachers how to use the Maps throughout the writing process. Students use Maps to gather and organize information and plan their writing products. They learn how to "write off the Maps" to translate their thinking into formal writing. Thinking Maps makes the writing process easier and more effective for all students, including ELLs.

Practice Guide: Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades

Recommendation #3: Provide extensive and varied vocabulary instruction.

Thinking Maps is an effective tool for vocabulary study for English Language Learners (ELLs). The visual format makes the Maps accessible for ELLs of all English proficiency levels. Newcomers can integrate pictures and native language translations with new vocabulary words on the Maps as they build their understanding of word meanings. As their vocabulary grows, Maps can be combined to define words, compare and contrast related terms, classify vocabulary words, or create analogies. *The Maps as Vocabulary Word Games* module in the Thinking Maps Learning Community (TMLC) introduces game-based activities that leverage the Maps for vocabulary development.

Recommendation #4: Develop academic English.

Thinking Maps builds a foundation for academic language development. The Maps are aligned with core cognitive skills, including Defining, Describing, Comparing and Contrasting, Classifying, Sequencing, Cause and Effect, Part/Whole Relationships, and Analogies. Students learn to listen for key vocabulary and questions that are associated with each cognitive process. As they gain proficiency with the Maps, they also gain proficiency with the academic vocabulary associated with each Map type. This creates a universal "language for learning" that crosses all content areas.

Recommendation #5: Schedule regular peer-assisted learning opportunities.

Thinking Maps provides a springboard for peer discussion both among ELLs and between ELLs and English-speaking peers. Thinking Maps is used by all students in the school, creating a universal "language for learning" that encompasses both ELLs and native English speakers. Students with varying language proficiency levels can all create Maps adapted to their own level of English proficiency. The Maps may look different; for example, some students may rely more on images and simple vocabulary terms, while others will show a more sophisticated use of language. However, all students are able to engage with the same grade-level content through the Maps. This provides a basis for discussion between students of different language proficiency levels. Students learn how to organize their thinking using the Maps and "talk off the Maps" in peer discussions. Students can also create Maps collaboratively for small group projects and other peer-assisted learning activities.