Learning a new language can be a difficult and stressful situation. Taking a non-English speaking student and putting them in a classroom where English is the only language spoken, and then expecting them to keep up with the work at the same level as native speakers of English only makes for more stress.Teachers need to make the extra effort to help ELL students to understand what material is being presented to them. The language barrier is not only a problem in ELA classes, but all across the curriculum. If a student can’t understand the language at the most basic level, they can’t understand the specialized terminology of other classes. In today’s era of technology, there are many ways we as teachers can help students overcome the language barrier and be successful in school.

There are a myriad of strategies that can help ELL students in content area classes (Egbert, 2001). For instance, when teaching, use students that have a good command of the English language to help with learning and vocabulary acquisition. When students collaborate they learn more. In teaching a 5th grade unit on the Civil War, teachers can have students to create a timeline using computer graphics or a program such as Inspiration to keep track of events that happened during that time. This will allow vocabulary integration, a visual representation, and an outline. This particular program would address multiple intelligences as well as different learning styles (visual, auditory, text support). Teaching this strategy in tandem with a strategy such as skimming and highlighting text will allow students to build their comprehension and note taking skills. In the language arts/ reading class setting having a listening center will provide the students with a model of how to pronounce words and connect them with words in print. Teachers can also use adaptive technology programs. A program used in social studies classes gives a pre-test, provides tutorials, and then a summative assessment. This program then gives re-teaching strategies and practice support for the student. The program also provides charts and diagrams as a visual support.

In a study performed in a predominantly Hispanic area of Los Angeles, former language-minority students identified numerous strategies the helped them to become proficient in English (Thompson, 2000). Some of the strategies these students found useful included teaching them the basics before expecting them to perform at grade level, using games to make the learning engaging and fun, and using flashcards to help put pictures with the new words. With the technology we have available in the classroom today, Pearson Education has developed applications for the iPod Touch and iPad to be used to help ELL students to master the language while still getting the content in academic areas. These apps, called Language Central, incorporate many of the useful strategies identified by language-minority students, such as games and flashcards. One of the best things about this software is that Pearson offers it for free, removing the burden from school districts of finding room in the already tight budgets for these helpful resources.

According to Waxman and Tellez (2002), teachers of ELL students must incorporate a variety of strategies to meet the needs of all learners. Such strategies include, but are not limited to, providing multiple representations, creating collaborative learning environments, linking to prior knowledge, and utilizing technology within the classroom. Many ELL students have difficulty communicating their understanding of content and the extent of their knowledge base. Teachers can assist these students by providing alternative methods of assessment. For example, teachers may allow 5th grade students who are learning about the writing process to utilize programs such as Paint, MovieMaker, and Voiceover. Students can create visual representations of their stories using Paint to draw their illustrations. The pictures can then be opened with MovieMaker or PPT to make the pictures come to life, acting out the events in the story. Voiceover can be used to allow students who struggle with English to create text to voice within their stories. Students simply type the script, Voiceover makes it audible. This process is not only enrichment for all students; it provides the vital motivation for ELL students to participate in predominantly English laden classrooms. The use of technology in this example provides ELL students with the chance to use visuals and voice to showcase their understanding of the writing process.

Four barriers to meaningful learning are the cognitive load, culture load, language load, and the learning load(Meyer, 2000). With these four barriers in mind, technology integration into the classroom can come by way of a smart board. Integration of a smart board into the classroom affects student learningin that there are virtually unlimited numbers of tasks you can complete with students that are quite interactive.The language ofan activity on a smart board can be changed to the native language of the student working on the board. New software integration into the classroom could eliminate the language load, decrease the learning load, and allow students to focus on the cognitive load of learning a new concept.Purchasing software that integrates multiple languages into the lesson could be very beneficial to both students and teachers.

With the technology in today’s classrooms, teachers have a wealth of resources at their disposal to assist English language learners. Adaptive technology, smart boards, and specialized programs are available to assist these students at not only become proficient in English, but also at learning the content as an active member of the class, rather than as a passive observer. English language learners deserve the same educational opportunities as their English speaking peers; technology can help ensure they get those opportunities.

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