Academic Vocabulary Instruction within Inquiry Science: The Blended/Tiered Approach

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Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to introduce the inquiry approach as an effective way to teach both content and vocabulary to ELs.

The Article
The paper begins by explaining the inquiry approach as an effective way to teach both content and vocabulary to ELs. This allows for them to have the academic learning experience first and then learning the academic vocabulary after the learning experience. Next the authors introduce the blended/tiered vocabulary approach where vocabulary is classified into a three-tier system. This three-tiered vocabulary classification is a helpful guide for teachers in the science classroom. Within an inquiry science lesson, blending vocabulary instruction, or a combination of frontloading and contextualizing vocabulary instruction makes more sense than frontloading vocabulary as the goal of inquiry is to first have the experience to understand the content and then to apply new vocabulary terminology to the experience. The authors utilize a 5E learning cycle using the blended/tiered vocabulary. Phases in the 5E learning cycle include engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation.

What this Means for the Field
By having a basic knowledge of the blended/tiered vocabulary approach teachers can plan inquiry based lesson plans that will encourage students’ to learn via experience first and then labeled vocabulary second. This approach has been used in several different school settings with a number of grade levels and EL proficiencies. The authors’ research shows a statistically significant pattern in students’ learning and retention of tier 3 vocabulary, particularly for ELs, as compared to frontloading and traditional direct instruction models of learning science.

Citation

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