Module: Writing (ESOL)

Lesson Title: The Power of Words

Objectives and Standards

Students will:

- Intentionally select words to enhance and support their writing skills and effectively share their message with a target audience.

Standards

This lesson supports the following standard(s):

- Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
- Distinguish shades of meaning among related words that describe states of mind or degrees of certainty (e.g., knew, believed, suspected, heard, wondered).

Materials

- Advertisements from local newspapers
- Short newspaper articles
- Board and markers
- Projector or chart paper/newsprint and markers
- Word web (or similar graphic organizers)

Resources for Teachers

For more information on the power of words, please see the following links:

- Miller, Susan. *Promoting Learner Engagement When Working with Adult English Language Learners*. (2010). CAELA Network Brief. http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/pdfs/LearnerEngagement.pdf
- Parrish, Betsy & Johnson, Kimberly. *Promoting Learner Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Work: Developing Academic Readiness Skills From the Beginning* (2010). CAELA Network Brief. http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/transitions.html
- Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Developing Reading and Writing (2012). http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13468
- What is a Semantic Gradient?: http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/semantic_gradients/
- Word Choice: The UNC Writing Center: http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/word-choice/
- Graphic Organizer: Word Matrix. ReadWriteThink. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/word-matrix-30071.html
- Writing Traits: Teaching the Skills of Word Choice. The Writing Fix: http://writingfix.com/6_Traits/Word_Choice.htm

Instructional Plan

Note: Steps in this lesson plan follow the explicit instruction model. Please see https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/applyingresearch.pdf for additional information about explicit instruction.

Overview

In this lesson, students will

Process

Step 1: Activating Background Knowledge

Provide students with ample opportunities to reflect, early in the lesson, on what they already know. Show students advertisements from your local newspaper or magazines (if the resources allow, utilizing the internet is a great way to include technology) with tag lines or short phrases. Elicit responses from students about what the advertisement makes them think or feel and if the slogan makes them want to buy the product. This should generate a discussion.

Prior to the class, change key words in each ad. For example, if you select the cereal Frosted Flakes, change the slogan to "They're Good!" and "They're ok!". Elicit responses from the students about how the change of one word impacted their reaction.

Draw a semantic gradient on the board. A semantic gradient can be as simple as the following horizontal line with antonyms at each pole:

Horrible   **Outstanding**

- Using the initial term from the cereal advertisement (or whatever ad you choose), ask students to give you synonyms and antonyms.
- In collaboration with the students, decide where the words should go on the gradient and why.

Step 2: Explanation

Provide explanations to students regarding the strategy they will be learning: why you are teaching them this skill and how it will help them be successful language learners and college and career ready (i.e. where will they encounter a need for this skill *outside* of the classroom).

Explain to students that selecting words in their writing has a great impact on the reader. Because learning vocabulary is an essential language skill, students need to be aware of the importance of selecting the best words to express themselves and their ideas.

Step 3: Modeling

Model what you want students to be able to do. For this strategy, it is best if you have access to a projector screen so the text and the marks that you demonstrate can be viewed by the class. If you do not have access to this, prewriting the text on newsprint will work.

- Preselect words to demonstrate using a semantic gradient with students. It would be especially useful if the words you selected were previous vocabulary words or words you know your students have mastered.
- Work through the thought process of ordering the words from positive to negative out loud so that students can understand your thought process.
- Repeat as many times as necessary, and elicit participation from students.

Step 4: Practice Opportunities

Provide ample practice opportunities so that students can master this skill.

- Provide students with sample semantic gradients. Provide them with the most positive and most negative words (i.e. hate/love; novice/expert). In groups or pairs, ask students to determine which words should go in between and why. Share.
- Now, ask students to repeat the process completed in the "activating prior knowledge" section with an advertisement of their choice. Provide students with a graphic organizer such as a word web for synonyms/antonyms, as well as a semantic gradient scale. If you choose to do this in class, you will have to provide students with ads, or it can be an out of class assignment and they can choose their own. Students should share this in groups or for the class during the next session.
- Next, pass out a short newspaper article and read with students. Preselect 3-4 words that are essential to the author's purpose and topic. Replace those words with other options based on your own semantic gradient and ask students how the message was changed for each. The purpose is to 1) demonstrate that language is not neutral; 2) word choice impacts message received from the reader.

Writing Activities for the Lesson

- Using students' previous writing, ask students to begin editing their work based on what they have just learned about word choice.
- Assign a short writing assignment based on what you are studying in class. The following class, students should exchange writings and highlight 3-5 words in each other's paper as a suggestion for changing the word choice. Students should be able to explain *why* they feel a change is needed.

Step 5: Student Independent Application, Reflection, and Self-Assessment

Option 1:

This option allows for the inclusion of technology and would take a few classes. Assign students with creating a poster or brochure for their program. Since word choice is especially critical when space is limited, this is a strong task based activity. It is recommended that a rubric be made to provide a clear outline of expectations.

Option 2: Six-Word Memoirs

In brief, students would need to create a memoir in six words; selection of words is crucial here. In addition to each student creating this product, teachers could incorporate technology by creating a presentation, online book to share, or any other approach that the classroom can accommodate.

Option 3: Cover letter

If students are preparing to enter the workforce or change employment, writing a cover letter as a final assessment for this lesson is appropriate.