Teach ELLs to Deconstruct Writing Prompts

Visible Literacy Series

This goal of this infographic is to share a process to help ELLs understand the writing assignment and map out their initial ideas.

Research Suggests

For students to produce work and demonstrate skills, teachers must communicate their ideas and expectations in a way that is comprehensible to ELLs. [Krutchen, 1961]

If ELLs don’t comprehend the writing prompt, they won’t produce writing that aligns with the assignment.

The Process

1. **Read Sentence by Sentence**
   - Establish a common understanding of the writing prompt by reading aloud and guiding students to comprehend one sentence at a time.

2. **Identify the Thinking Verbs**
   - Locate and point out the "thinking verbs" from the writing prompt.

3. **Visualize the Thinking Verbs with Mind Maps**
   - Share a diagram of the identified verbs with the ELLs.

4. **Mind-Map Ideas**
   - Invite the ELLs to use the diagram to generate ideas.

5. **Collaborate**
   - ELLs present their mind maps in small groups. Presenting ideas orally prepares them to write [Bedi, 2016].

**Takeaways**

1. Writing prompts are loaded with complex academic language.
2. Writing can be scaffolded to support ELLs thinking and communication of ideas.
3. Use diagrams and mind mapping to support ELLs generation of ideas.

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