Working with Students with Limited Formal Schooling

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Definition of Limited Formal Schooling

• “An LFS student is an older youth (ages 12 – 21) who lacks literacy skills in his/her native language because of limited formal education. In most cases, the LFS student possesses less than 2 complete years of formal education and possesses a language proficiency that is either non-English or limited-English.”

» Angelo Alcala, 2000
Definition of Limited Formal Schooling

• David and Yvonne Freeman have become experts in LFS. They use this definition of LFS from California Tomorrow:
  – Recent arrivals
  – Interrupted or limited schooling in native country
  – Limited native-language literacy
  – Below grade level in math
  – Poor academic achievement
Causes of Limited Formal Schooling

- Little or no formal schooling in home country due to war or economic situation
- Missing years of education because of frequent moves after arriving in the US
- Limited education progress because of lack of English proficiency, not benefiting from instruction
- Poor quality of education in native country
- Students who chose work over school
Overcoming the Deficiencies of Limited Formal Schooling

- “Immigrant students with some academic skills are able to make up the years they lost to poverty or political strife in 2 or 3 years of concentrated coursework in content areas that is adapted to meet their language needs. . . .
Overcoming the Deficiencies of Limited Formal Schooling

In contrast, immigrant students lacking rudimentary literacy skills in their native language are especially challenged in secondary school and may need many years of intensive work in order to graduate or make the transition to an appropriate program.”

Academic Program for LFS

• Basic English language development critical with native-language support available if possible
• Basic literacy skills introduced and developed
• Basic numeracy skills introduced and developed
• Introduction to all content areas using sheltered instruction
• Basic school orientation
Building Literacy Skills

• Most critical component of working with LFS students is literacy development
• Some LFS have little or no experience with the basic components of reading
  – Sound/word correlation and spacing
  – Directionality
  – Matching pictures to text
  – Story elements
Suggestions for a Literacy Program

• Homogeneous classes that allow for progression through skills
• Fluid movement as skills develop
• Reading material at an appropriate reading level while mindful of age
• Include background knowledge with instruction
• Pictures, realia, multimedia support
Suggestions for a Literacy Program

• Pace of delivery and vocabulary of instruction appropriate to oral language proficiency
• Picture books used to introduce or support
• Multiple genres covered
• Independent reading encouraged
• Assessment adjusted to reading and writing skills of students
Content Subjects taught through Sheltered Instruction

• Sheltered instruction is teaching a content subject with adjusted vocabulary, extensive support, and alternative assessments

• Classes must begin with basic knowledge and skills for the subject area, and then build up to grade level material

• Textbooks and activities should be adjusted to the reading level of the student
Strategies used in Sheltered Instruction

• Specific attention is paid to building background knowledge and key vocabulary is emphasized
• “Comprehensible input” is provided
• Students practice the skills necessary for success in each content area (map usage, reading word problems, conducting experiments, etc.)
• Lessons are delivered at a slower pace and assignments are scaffolded (presented in steps)
What is Comprehensible Input?

• “Comprehensible input” is a term coined by Stephen Krashen in the 1970s
• It is often described as i + 1, in which instruction should be one step above where the students are now
• It describes the ability to provide information in a format that students will best understand
• It involves using a slower pace, easier vocabulary, and less complex sentences, etc.
How to Build Background Knowledge

• Through discussion and questions
• Through pictures and realia
• Through picture books
• Through short video clips
• Through field trips (real or virtual)
• Through guest speakers
• Through manipulatives and experiments
How to Expand Vocabulary

- Word walls
- Word lists
- Word webs
- Word studies
- Crossword puzzles
- Stories and picture books
- Dictionary and thesaurus practice

- Must be taught intentionally
- Must be taught in reasonable amounts
- Must be used by the students multiple times to be remembered
- Must be taught or at least reinforced through context
Types of Skills Needed in Content Classes

• Math class
  – Basic operations
  – Reading and understanding word problems
  – Using graphs and charts
  – Probability
  – Equations
  – Estimating
  – Following directions

• Science class
  – Reading a textbook
  – Conducting an experiment
  – Using graphs and charts
  – Participating in class discussions
  – Writing lab journals
  – Science equations
How Long will LFS Students Need Special Assistance?

• There is no set amount of time because each student is different. Variables to consider are:
  – Grade level of the student (higher grades are more complex and require more skills)
  – Amount and quality of previous education
  – Age of the student
  – Ability of the student
  – Program dynamics (quality of program and teacher, length of time devoted to instruction, quality of material)
How Successful are Programs for LFS Students?

With enough time for the program and enough motivation by the student, all students can reach a level of success. However, for the oldest students (18 and older), completing a high school diploma program may not be realistic. The state requires that free public education ends when a person reaches their 22nd birthday. Some students max out their time in school and end up in adult programs not designed for LFS.