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Soleado

Promising Practices from the Field

Accessing Students' Knowledge and Experience: Developing Schema in Sheltered Instruction

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In the fall 2014 issue of *Soleado*, we revisited the notion of sheltered instruction. In the offices of Dual Language Education of New Mexico, the discussion regarding sheltered instruction, its components, its strategies, its application ... its very name, are all fodder for deep conversation. These articles are providing a practical outlet for all this thought, talk, and practice!

In this issue, our focus will be on the sheltered instruction components of *accessing prior knowledge/creating shared knowledge* and the *use of realia*. It seems fitting to be thinking of these component areas as we consider the very diversity of the students in our classes. Here in New Mexico and across the United States, English learner students reflect a continuum of proficiency



Using realia, students work together to explore the properties of rocks.

we already know so much about this student, we do little to tap into prior knowledge. Perhaps we begin a KWL chart at the beginning of a unit, but we rarely go back to the chart at the end of the unit to fill in the last

column. Perhaps we lead the class in some brainstorming or pre-reading activities that get the students to begin thinking about their prior knowledge. But the activity is fairly brief and we do little to elicit the thinking and the language that surround the students' recollections and ideas. We might even follow our usual unit plan and schedule a field trip to the zoo at the end of a unit on animal adaptations.

At first glance, these activities seem very appropriate. First of all,

the chances are pretty high that we'll still have many students in our classrooms who are either first generation or the children and grandchildren of immigrants from rural Chihuahua. Any activity that engages the students in a consideration of prior knowledge is good, and a field trip at the end of the unit—what's not to like?

But, let's think a bit deeper ... what if a student enrolls tomorrow from Iraq, or Eritrea, or Korea? What if they're Mexican, but from a large city in the more central state of San Luis Potosí? What are their experiences? Their prior knowledge? What are their ways of knowing and how representative of their culture are they? Why is it so important to tap into those experiences?

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