

Implementing CALLA: Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach

The CALLA approach was designed to provide comprehensible instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs) in ESL or bilingual programs. CALLA integrates language development, content area instruction, and explicit instruction in learning strategies. With content as the primary focus of instruction, academic language skills can be developed as the need for them emerges from the content.

How does the CALLA approach work?

Through a comprehensive lesson plan based on cognitive theory and efforts to integrate academic language and learning strategies with content, CALLA lessons rely on content to determine the academic language selections and learning strategies to be taught. These lessons rely heavily on scaffolding, or the provision of instructional supports when concepts and skills are first introduced and the gradual removal of supports as students develop greater proficiency, knowledge, and skills.

Who does CALLA serve?

CALLA was designed to meet the academic needs of three types of students:

- ELs who have developed social communicative skills through beginning ESL classes or exposure through English-speaking environments, but have not yet developed academic language skills appropriate to their grade level;
- Students who have acquired academic language skills in their native language and initial proficiency in English, but who need assistance in transferring concepts and skills from their first language to English; and
- Bilingual students who have not yet developed academic language skills in either language.

The basic framework for CALLA is built upon the following concepts:

- Learning is an active and dynamic process;
- Learning can be grouped into three types of knowledge: declarative (knowledge of facts), procedural (knowledge of “how to” do things), metacognitive (relate current learning tasks to past knowledge and learning procedures);
- Declarative and procedural knowledge are learned in different ways and retrieved from memory in different ways;
- Teachers should learn to recognize declarative and procedural knowledge in content materials, identify strategies used by students, and influence strategy use; and
- Students can take control over their own learning and develop independent learning skills.

From The CALLA Handbook: Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O’Malley, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994.

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