INTRODUCTION

Working in collaboration with professor Chad Leith of Salem State University, the SEI teaching team at the Nathaniel Bowditch K-8 school in Salem, MA, created a writing rubric for ELLs at ELD levels 1-3. The goal of the process was to inform instruction by providing teachers with more nuanced information about their ELLs’ reading and writing skills than might be obtained through the administration of standardized interim assessments that are more appropriate for students at higher levels of English proficiency.

The team met bi-monthly to engage in the task of creating and using the new rubric, which was successfully implemented and analyzed.

DESCRIPTION

Collaborative Process: Designing and Testing the Rubric

Achieving the goal of developing an assessment and a procedure for analyzing student responses involved the following steps:

- The SEI team examined the ELA curriculum frameworks and reviewed sample text-based writing assessments to develop a writing prompt appropriate for ELLs at ELD levels 1 & 2. It was decided that Massachusetts Reading Standard 2 would be our focus:

  "Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas."

- The SEI team reviewed and developed a draft writing rubric that was designed to be appropriately nuanced for students at ELD levels 1 & 2. The group also agreed to the same three categories as WIDA, Linguistic Complexity, Vocabulary Usage, and Language Control. The last column, Task Response, was added to account for the correctness of the students’ answers.

- Teachers administered writing prompts to their respective students, using texts selected by different groups within the SEI team. Grade level bands were created and implemented. Grades 2 and 3, grades 4 and 5, and grades 6 through 8 were banded together. This allowed the teachers to collaborate in choosing the books and in writing the prompts. A key point was to make sure the prompt was asking for evidence that supports reading standard 2.

APPLICATION

Both the SEI writing rubric and the process undertaken to create and implement it have potentially significant implications for other schools and districts.

The rubric: The SEI text-based writing rubric provides a nuanced tool for measuring and monitoring ELLs’ emerging abilities to respond to text through writing. By zooming in on WIDA ACCESS levels 1-3, it enables teachers and teaching teams to more accurately measure progress and target skills for re-teaching and/or intervention. The SEI text-based writing rubric is particularly advantageous because it can work with any text, allowing teachers or teams to select texts that are appropriate for their students’ ELD levels. While many popular interim assessments are aimed at native speakers of English, this writing rubric – when paired with an appropriate text – can allow teachers and teams to reduce language interference which often hinders the ability to draw accurate conclusions about the needs of individual ELLs.

The process: The process undertaken by the Nathaniel Bowditch SEI team also offers an easily replicable template for teacher collaboration. As described previously, the process of administering and scoring the first prompt led to rich collegial conversations about how to develop the writing proficiency of ELLs across specific skill strands (i.e. organization, language complexity, vocabulary). More experienced members of the team, along with the SSU facilitator, offered helpful suggestions around specific instructional techniques to help ELLs at different levels of proficiency. While data for each writing prompt was collected and analyzed, it was often these collegial conversations – as the team sought to perfect the rubric – that some of the most valuable professional growth among teachers took place.