Research Based Strategies in Reading and Writing for Content Area Teachers:

A Website to Support Growth in Academic Language

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 2021

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Research Question

The question that I chose to answer for this research was: *What are the best practices in reading and writing for content area teachers to use to make academic language accessible to middle school and high school ELLs that will result in increasing proficiency on standardized tests and close the opportunity gap*?

Project Summary

When I began teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) many years ago, it became evident to me that classroom teachers need support in the classroom to assist them in making content comprehensible to their ELLs. I found myself being asked the same questions every year. Teachers wanted to know how to support ELLs in specific reading and writing skills. Not only do they want support with what to do with newcomers but they also want support with students who have been in the ELL program for a long time. Therefore, I created a website as a resource that teachers could access when they had questions about the ELLs in their classroom. The website address is ellsupportforclassroomteachers and it provides teachers with information on language levels of language learners, the challenges they face in and out of school, plus a description of what students can do at each of the language levels in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The main content of the website includes research based reading and writing strategies in the form of videos and instructional handouts that teachers can use to boost academic language proficiency in the classroom and helpful hints section.

The website that I have created is designed for middle school and high school content area teachers in my school district. The content of the website could also be useful for our elementary teachers as well.

The Project

The format chosen to use for the website is Google Sites as this is the platform our school district uses. Templates on Google Sites were used to design the web pages. According to Krug (2013), user experience is important to good website design. Krug discusses that a good website should be learnable, memorable, effective, efficient, desirable, and delightful. These principles were used as a background for the website design. A sitemap was also utilized to determine how the webpages were to be laid out.
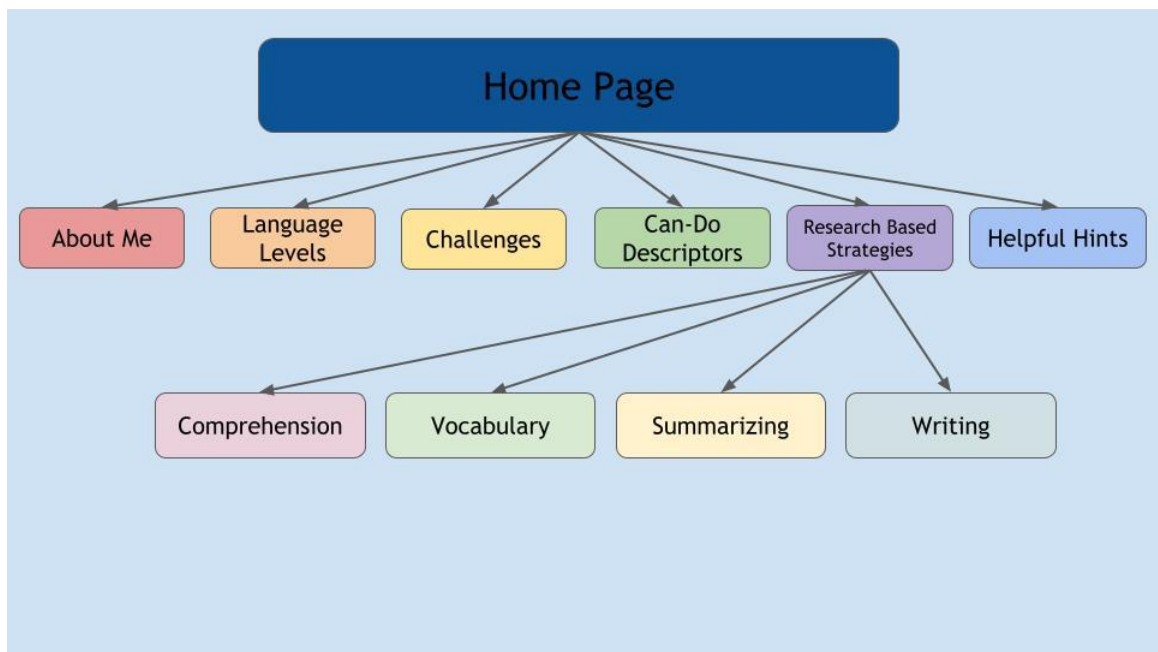
As shown on the sitemap, the website contains a home page with a navigation bar that leads to five main sections. The five sections are: *About*, *Language Levels*, *Challenges*, *Can-Do Descriptors*, *Research Based Strategies*, and *Helpful Hints*. The information presented on these pages is based on research and supports the goal of the project to provide information and strategies to content area teachers as they work to support the ELLs that are in their classrooms.

Home Page

The Home page includes information about who the website is designed for and a navigation bar on the side. Users can get to each of the subsequent pages by clicking on the link to each page. The Home page also has a link to a survey so users can provide feedback regarding their experience using the website. This will be used to make improvements to the website as needed.

About Page

The About Me page gives the reader some background information about me, my education, my career experiences, and my contact information
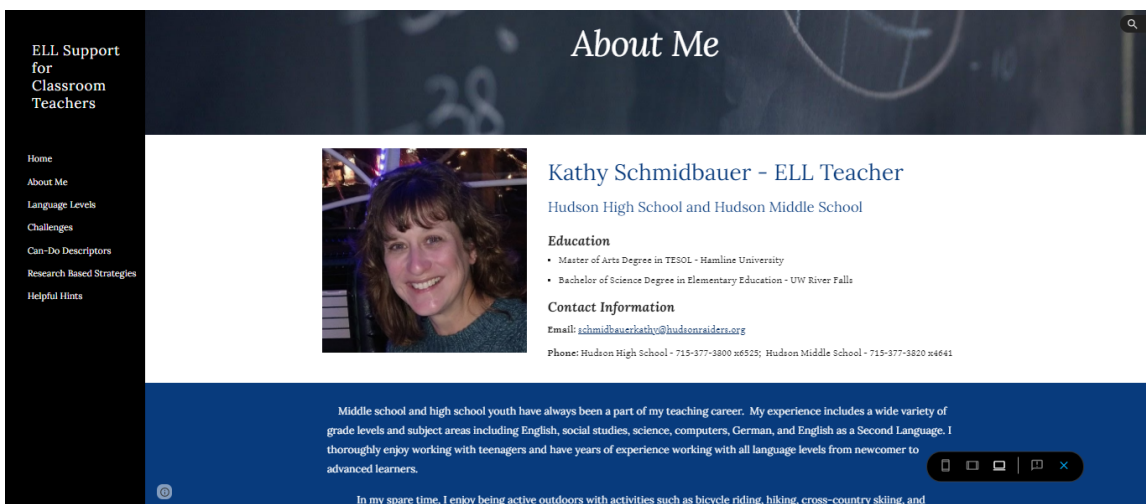
Language Levels Page

This page gives the user information about the six language proficiency levels of ELL students as stated in the WIDA Can-Do Descriptors Booklet, Grades 6-8 (2012). These levels include: Level 1 - Entering, Level 2 - Beginning, Level 3 - Developing, Level 4 - Expanding, Level 5 - Bridging, and Level 6 - Reaching. There is a bullet pointed list of what language acquisition for the learner looks like at each level.


Challenges Page

The Challenges page discusses some of the challenges from the research that ELLs at each level encounter as they progress through school and live in our community (de la Riva Whisler, 2015; DelliCarpini, 2009; Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012; Tonogbanua, 2016). When ELLs begin to learn language, they can be classified as newcomers, intermediate learners, or long-term learners. This page provides a bulleted list of challenges they may encounter at each of these stages.
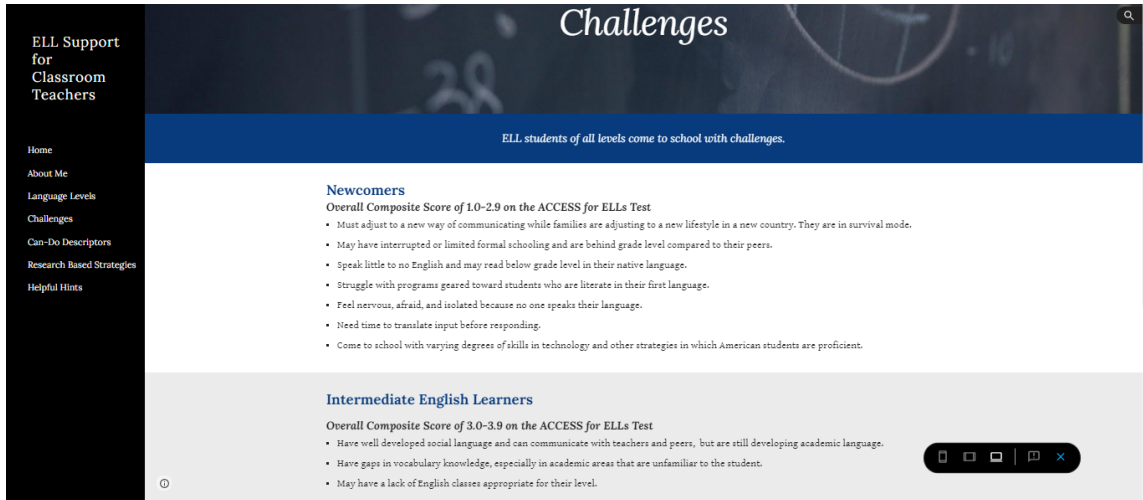
Can Do Descriptors Page

This page uses WIDA's Can-Do Descriptors as a backdrop and informs the reader about what ELLs are able to do based on their language proficiency level with the key uses of recounting, explaining, arguing, and discussing. There is an explanation of each key use and there is a document linked under each explanation that users can click on for more information on what learners can do at each language level.
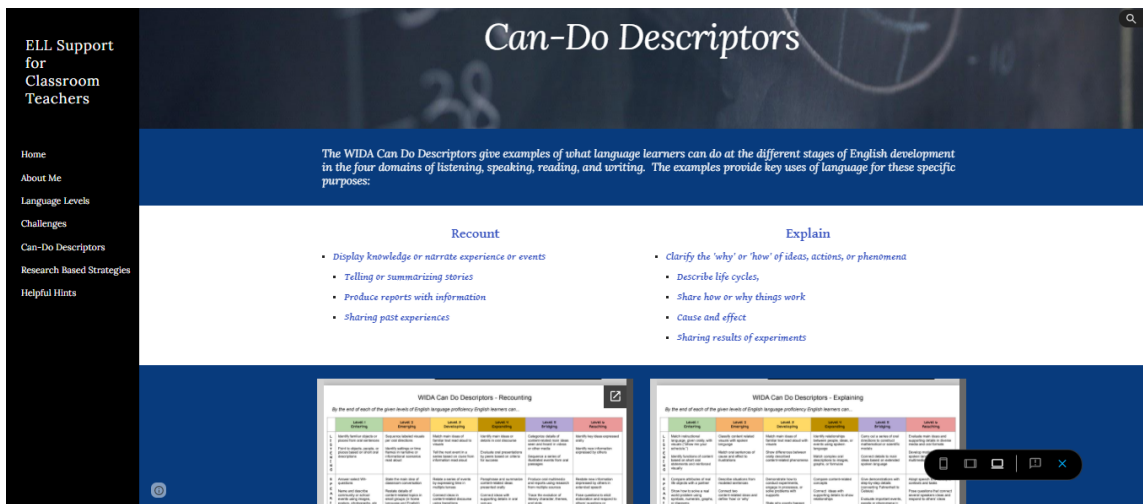
Research Based Strategies Page

This page brings users to a page where each of the subsections of reading or writing skills are located, each with its own clickable button. Those strategies include: comprehension, vocabulary, summarizing, and writing. When users click on those buttons, they are brought to a subsequent page with research based strategies that have been proven to be successful with that particular reading or writing skill. The individual strategies pages contain a short video explanation of the strategy along with printable directions.
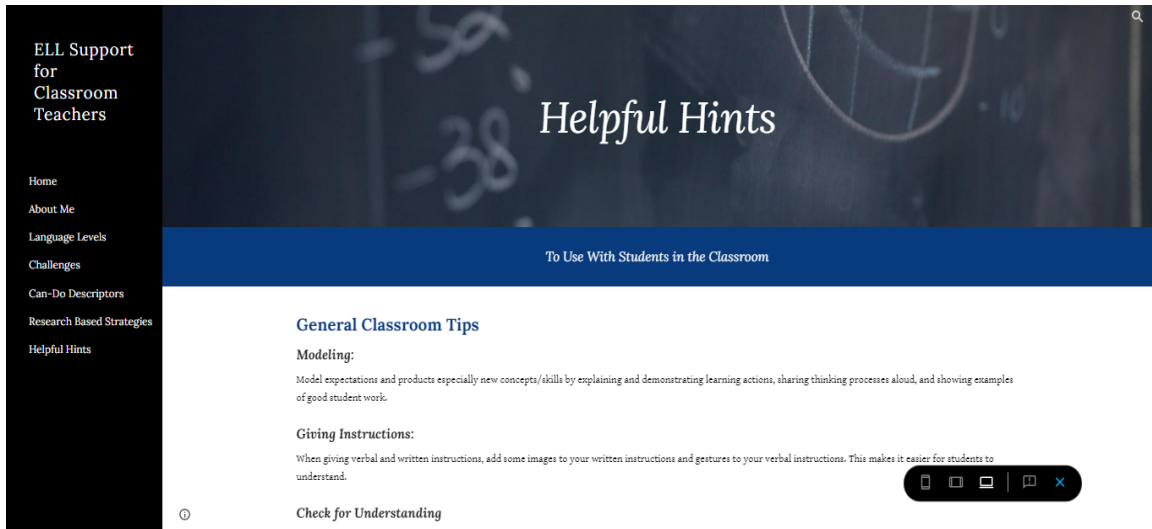

Individual Strategy Page

Each individual strategy page contains links to each strategy in the form of a short video and printable handout. Users click on the Research Based Strategies link to access
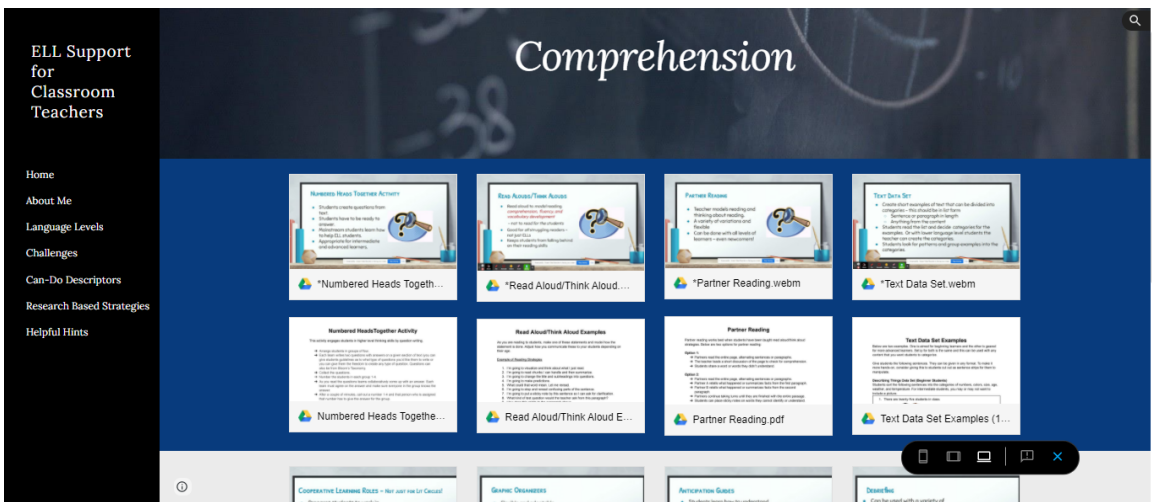
Helpful Hints Page

This page gives users general classroom help and more ideas for use in the content areas as well as language related ideas and information on how to use cognates in classroom instruction.

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