

Intervention: Bilingual/ESL Instructional Strategies for ELL Students

Socio-linguistic considerations when working with ELLs (All Grades)

In addition to learning a new language, LEP students must also adjust to a new culture, often resulting in esteem issues, feelings of marginalization, and even depression. The following is a list of some linguistic and social issues to consider when working with ELLs, suggestions to reflect on your practice and students...

- Learning English as a new language takes time — generally up to two years for conversational fluency and five to seven years for academic proficiency. This difference between conversational and academic English explains why a student might be able to recite an entire Jay-Z song but not write a complete paragraph. Cummins (1979, 1996) first introduced the terms BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) to distinguish between these very different time periods commonly required to achieve conversational fluency versus the ability to perform grade-appropriate class work in a second language.
- When students first begin learning a language, a silent period is normal and can last a few months. Offer opportunities for recent immigrants to interact (especially in smaller groups) but don't force them to speak. At the same time, do not assume the student is not engaged and be aware not to forget about quiet students.
- Students learn a second language through *comprehensible input* that they connect to *prior knowledge*. Some ways to provide comprehensible input include using drawings, pictures, models, gestures, actions, emotions, and voice variety. (See p.5 for more detailed information).
- Language errors are common when learning a language. Errors do not simply point to problems. They may indicate progress as the learner attempts to tackle more difficult language concepts.
- Learning a new language is demanding and can be very frustrating. Be patient. Make sure that your tone and body language reflect your patience.
- Don't jump in too quickly and speak for ELL students if they are struggling to communicate. Encourage them by allowing extra time or to draw or act out their answers. Model correct pronunciation, but avoid the tendency to over correct since this can be embarrassing. Small group interaction and designating a "learning buddy" to work with low-level students are just some ways to keep ELLs engaged.
- Get a bilingual dictionary for difficult words. And teach how to use a dictionary.
- ELL students come from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Get to know your students, perhaps through a regular time for discussion. They can offer resources for projects: information about other cultures, new perspectives and beliefs about the world, and opportunities for exposure to other languages and ways of thinking that might otherwise be taken for granted.
- Children need the teacher's respect and understanding for their family's background. Develop an understanding of each student's family background: culture, geographic region, language, and ethnicity. This will help prevent cultural misunderstandings and make it easier to connect projects to the child's background knowledge.
- Seek collaboration and professional support from licensed ELL teachers in your district. They specialize in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages.

Also, seek out volunteers (especially ones who speak student's native language) to assist in the classroom.

Sources:

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