



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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- What are the needs of ELLs in the classroom?
- How do I create a positive, welcoming classroom environment?
- How can I welcome an English language learner to my classroom?
- What should classroom management look like?
- What are some instructional approaches I can use in the classroom?
- What are the nine principles to culturally responsive teaching?
- How do I grade an ELL student?
- How do I obtain and use an interpreter?
- What are some strategies for working with an interpreter?
- Where do I find district documents translated into other languages?



❖ WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF ELLS IN THE CLASSROOM?

Classroom teachers are one of the first significant contacts of English language learners with the English language and they are, therefore, key to successful language learning.

English language learners come to the classroom from many different and varied backgrounds but with one thing in common - their inexperience with the English language. Whether the teacher has one English language learner or several, the following information is provided to assist the teacher in recognizing students' needs, welcoming these students to the classroom, and approaching instruction for language learning through content.

Despite the differences among English language learners, the classroom teacher can respond to some basic commonalities:

1. **Accepting Environment** - The English language learner needs a warm, accepting environment that encourages risk-taking in learning a new language.
2. **Recognition of Culture/Educational Background** - The cultural heritage of the student needs to be recognized as an asset to the class. The diversity of ethnic and cultural groups in the classroom can provide a fruitful resource from which classroom learning can be enhanced. If possible, it is also important for the teacher to obtain information about the educational background of the student. This background may include the amount of formal education and the educational level reached. Information about the style of schooling may also be helpful. For example, some students arrive from countries, which stress an authoritarian style within the school. Placing such a student into an environment in which there is a degree of physical and academic freedom may cause confusion on the part of the student.



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3. **“Silent Period”** - The student may have a “silent period” or a period of time during which he or she listens to a great deal of language in order to get a sense of the new sounds before speech is attempted. This stage may last from one day to one year. Putting students on the spot at this time may increase their fear and self-consciousness. The most effective method for examining whether or not students are emerging from this state is to push them to speak in a low-risk environment and observe their reaction. The teacher will be able to draw conclusions based on these observations.
4. **ELL Instruction** - The student will need appropriate ELL instruction according to his or her level of English proficiency. Such instruction will stress both communicative and academic language skills.
5. **Meaningful Context** - The student needs contextualized material that makes abstract concepts comprehensible and meaningful.
6. **Alternative Ways of Making Meaning** - The English language learner may need an alternative way of achieving the meaning of the lesson or concept being taught.
7. **Consideration for Testing and Daily Assignments** - The student may need special consideration in terms of daily assignments and tests. Language demands will make it difficult for the student to complete many activities within a certain period of time.

❖ HOW DO I CREATE A POSITIVE, WELCOMING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT?

Imagine the stress and anxiety of entering a new school, in a new country where you do not know the language. Most of the English language learners in the classroom will be dealing with stress. In addition, many of these students will be coming from extremely stressful situations, such as war, famine, homelessness, and poverty.

In recognition of these feelings, it becomes the teacher’s responsibility to ensure that the English language learner be made to feel as comfortable as possible that first day in order that the foundation is built for a positive school experience in the future.

❖ HOW CAN I WELCOME AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER TO MY CLASSROOM?

1. If you have been advised in advance about the student’s native language, welcome the student with a greeting from that language.
2. Familiarize yourself with the student’s cultural background.
3. Introduce the student to the class using his/her native language name and not changing “Juan” to Johnny or “Quyen” to “Gwen.”
4. If possible, show on a map where the student’s native country is located.
5. Arrange for a peer to orient the student to the school, (ask for a volunteer), and to show where the lunchroom, restroom, office, and playground are located. The peer can also explain or demonstrate classroom procedures. Each week or every other week, assign a different student to be helper, partner, buddy, or tutor to the new student. The student can help by:
 - Conferring with the teacher about the assignments for the new student;
 - Explaining instructions and procedures;

- Helping the student start vocabulary lists in subject areas;
- Showing prescribed methods for date, name, headings;
- If the student is literate, showing him or her how to use the text, table of contents, chapters, units, index, glossary, boldface type.

❖ WHAT SHOULD CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

If planning instruction to be presented to a classroom of English language learners and English - speaking students, it is helpful to have the room organized to that students can easily work together in small groups.

- Cooperative groups - allows the student to be involved in natural active practice in all language areas, but it also allows the teacher to circulate around the room to observe interaction and to help where needed.
- One-on-one peer tutoring - can also promote the acquisition of language and academic skills for the English language learner. An English proficient student can be paired with the English language learner or an older student with a younger student. A student who has basic competency in a target skill can serve as a model and tutor for the other. It is important to rotate the tutoring responsibilities among several members of the classroom and to give those responsibilities to those students who are eager and willing to work with the English language learner.
- Small group presentations - While it is often appropriate as well as efficient to present whole group instruction for classroom activities such as demonstrations and discussions, it is essential for the teacher to plan for other ways of presenting and reinforcing the main concepts of the lesson with the goal of ensuring comprehension on the part of the English language learner.

❖ WHAT ARE SOME INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES I CAN USE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Much of what the English language learners need to know, such as basic interpersonal communication skills will be learned in the normal and natural interaction between students and the teacher in the classroom. This “natural” acquisition is the critical foundation for the more rigorous language learning required for academic content.

Academic competence takes a longer period of time to evolve than communicative competence. While English language learners can attain proficiency in interpersonal communication within two years, attaining proficiency in cognitive-academic language skills may require five to seven years. Thus, even though a student may “sound good” and interact in ways that suggest good English language comprehension, he or she may be ill prepared for the demands of the academic environment unless specific formal instruction is provided.

Research supports that content-based instructional approaches are most effective in developing an English language learner’s English language competency as well as academic abilities. In addition to giving focus to the vocabulary and technical terms associated with subject matter, the language skills required for academic success can be



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presented such as informing, explaining, classifying, and evaluating. In a content-based approach, the emphasis is still on the communication of meaning through English rather than on the drill and practice of grammatical forms. This approach often employs small group activities where students can participate in cooperative problem-solving learning situations.

APPROACHES

Sheltered English
Language in Meaningful Contexts
Providing Choices
Alternative Instruction



Sheltered English is a process or an instructional approach that can be used to make academic instruction in English understandable to students of limited English proficiency. This approach utilizes props, visuals, media, and body language as clues to clarify the meanings of new words and ideas. In a sheltered English classroom, teachers use the environment, activities, and pictures to teach new words that are later used as the basis for concept development in subjects such as math, science, history, and health.

Teachers using sheltered English techniques have found that *grouping* is a critical part of the process of teaching students. The teacher guides the small groups by facilitating language, clarifying terms, and providing a variety of opportunities for students to define, experience, review, and generalize the content while relying on each other as “experts.”

Specifically, the sheltered English approaches that are described below will provide the English language learner, as well as the English proficient student, with an instructional program that will benefit learning.

Language in Meaningful Context: The level of language complexity is influenced by two major factors: the number of *contextual cues* that are present to assist comprehension, and the *cognitive complexity* of the task. Language that is accompanied by the use of non-verbal embellishments, concrete objects, and visual aids assist in providing context cues. Examples of relatively cognitively undemanding, context-supporting activities are observing a chart, demonstration, display, or model that helps the English language learner form a mental picture of what is to be learned.

The language demands that the English language learner faces in the classroom increase in difficulty as the contextual cues become fewer and the cognitive task becomes more complex. Instructional activities at this level might include reading a chapter from the text, completing worksheets, or writing a report. It is apparent that this kind of language proficiency becomes more challenging in its comprehension requirements, in contrast to language surrounded by context cues where meaning is more easily accessed through concrete referents.



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The following strategies will help to place language in a more meaningful context for the English language learner:

- Use visuals - the visual allows the listener one more cue to comprehension.
- Provide hands-on activities - The English language learner needs the opportunity to explore and discover things through multimodal input. Student should be involved in activities such as drawing maps and charts, conducting experiments, and using manipulatives.
- Use a model or sample of a finished product - A model or sample of a finished product is helpful as a guide to what is expected and when the language of the teacher is not understood by the English language learner.
- Nonverbal embellishment - The student is provided with additional reinforcement when pointing and hand gestures are integrated into the instruction.
- Activate the prior knowledge of the student - A person's background knowledge and experiences have a direct influence on what is comprehended. It is important to relate new learning to what students already know.

Choices within a Lesson: Providing choices means that the classroom teacher adapts the same content or concept to two different populations, the English language learner and the English proficient students. While the demands of these two groups of students are different, the same information is prepared for and presented to both groups. For example, a social studies lesson focusing on the history of aviation might require English proficient students to write an essay on how the invention of the airplane has influenced our modern world. The same lesson for the English language learner can require that the student draw a picture or make a time chart illustrating the history of the airplane.

The teacher needs to be aware of the English language learner's abilities and skills so that he or she can feel continually challenged without being frustrated by tasks that are still beyond their abilities.. The English language learner's minimal English skills should not be confused with a lack of cognitive ability.

Alternative Instruction: There are times when a particular lesson will not be comprehensible to the English language learner. On these occasions, the teacher can provide alternative activities such as those identified in the list below.

1. Students can create their own dictionary of words they are learning. The dictionary can be in a loose-leaf notebook so pages can be easily added. The student, when encountering a new word, places it in the dictionary and writes or draws something that will help him or her associate meaning with the word.
2. The student can create an ABC book on a topic of interest. The book may contain written information as well as pictures.
3. The student can listen to story tapes with picture books.
4. The student can work on an independent project such as a diorama or map to show his or her understanding of material covered.



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5. Look at activities in the enrichment or extension portion of the teachers' guide that allow students to demonstrate concepts visually.
6. Make a poster, bookmark, collage or mural) to illustrate a key concept.
7. Wordless books. Students design and illustrate their own wordless books. (Another student may add words.)
8. Introduce open-ended games or even math games to play with another student to reinforce vocabulary from a lesson.
9. Student reads a short assignment from the text into a cassette recorder and listens to his or her voice.
10. Illustrated reports focused around a content lesson.
 - "Mini-reports" - using a folded sheet of paper, the student titles the report, illustrates the cover, and writes a brief summary of new information he or she has learned following a content lesson.
 - "Box reports" - student covers a small box and tells about a topic with pictures and words on the sides of the box.
11. Design a mobile to go with a content lesson.
12. Design a comic book, condensing the story line but containing the plot and high points of a book. You might want to check a "classic" comic for layout and format.
13. Design a map to go with a lesson and label where events took place.
14. Draw an on-going mural as you study a particular topic.
15. Make a collage depicting a concept.
16. Draw a picture of the setting where a particular event took place.
17. Make a timeline of events from an historical account.
18. Illustrate what happened in the beginning, the middle, and the end of a particular lesson.
19. Make a diorama in a shoebox depicting events in history.
20. Make pictures of main events in a story sequence.
21. Illustrate the most exciting events, or most liked events in a story.
22. Illustrate a math concept with pictures or objects.
23. Use a picture file -
 - List items, adjectives, verbs
 - Write stories
24. Within a unit, create a cycle of assignments that will lead to more and more independence of the ELL student.
25. Have students write the story, folktale, etc. from class in their first language.
26. Use individualized spelling and/or have them focus on the initial letter of the new words.

❖ HOW DO I GRADE AN ELL STUDENT?

How do these alterations impact student grading? The ELL and regular classroom teachers should collaborate on student grades. Reading, language arts, spelling and

other applicable areas should be a combined grade from both teachers. This helps students realize the importance of all classes. Beginning students will probably only receive grades from the ELL teacher.

On report cards, if a student is missing a content area class due to English language instruction, an X may be inserted. A note can be made in the "Comment" section as to why there is no grade in that subject. Remember, English is the main priority at this point. If a student has not been in class the majority of a semester, an X may be placed in all subject areas. If a student has been in class the majority of a semester, letter grades may be given with "ELL" written above the grade. On elementary report cards, the computer will not take a letter grade and "ELL" in the grade box. You may place an asterisk by the ELL grades and explain in the "Comment" section.

This flexibility allows teachers the freedom to alter curriculum at different levels to meet the needs of the English language learners.

❖ WHAT ARE THE NINE PRINCIPLES TO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING?

Active Teaching Methods
Communication of High Expectations
Cultural Sensitivity
Culturally Mediated Instruction
Positive Perspectives on Parents & Families
Reshaping the Curriculum
Small Group Instruction
Student - Controlled Classroom Discourse
Teacher as Facilitator



A teacher of diverse learners understands that culture is central to learning. Culture not only shapes the thinking process it defines modes of communicating and receiving information.

In a diverse classroom environment, a culturally sensitive teacher recognizes that cultural conventions inform his or her own approach to teaching, just as they inform a student's approach to learning.

A pedagogy that ignores these fundamental differences gives an unfair advantage to students from the "mainstream," while alienating those with diverse backgrounds.

Although a teacher cannot be expected to gain an in-depth knowledge of the many languages and cultures represented in the classroom, it is essential to attain at least a general understanding of their underlying social and cultural norms.



1. ACTIVE TEACHING METHODS

"In our multicultural society, culturally responsive teaching reflects democracy at its highest level. [It] means doing whatever it takes to ensure that every child is achieving and ever moving toward realizing her or his potential."

--Joyce Taylor-Gibson (*)

In Principle...

- Learning is inquiry-based & discovery-oriented
- Content is socially and culturally relevant
- Dynamic partnership between teacher & student

In Practice...

- Focus on themes of personal interest to students
- Relate questions to real life issues
- Share responsibility for instruction

2. COMMUNICATION OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

"When a teacher expresses sympathy over failure, lavishes praise for completing a simple task, or offers unsolicited help, the teacher may send unintended messages of low expectations."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth (*)

In Principle...

- Instruction is effective, equitable, inclusive & high quality
- All students are respected as eager learners
- Students develop self-esteem, autonomy, self-reliance & motivation

In Practice...

- "Make the familiar strange": question beliefs, assumptions & practices
- Provide extensive feedback, call on students frequently, offer collective praise
- Propose challenging curriculum, provide intensive time on task



3. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

"The increasing diversity in our schools, the ongoing demographic changes across the nation and the movement towards globalization dictate that we develop a more in-depth understanding of culture if we want to bring about true understanding among diverse populations."

-- Maria Wilson-Portuondo ([*](#))

In Principle...

- The "strange" becomes "familiar" through understanding of socio-cultural & linguistic norms
- Cultural differences are bridged through effective communication
- Knowledge is translated into instructional practice

In Practice...

- Conduct research, solicit student input, pose directed questions, identify cultural informants, attend local events
- Coach students to become active participants in their own learning
- Employ practices that draw on students' prior knowledge & communication skills

4. CULTURALLY MEDIATED INSTRUCTION

"Ongoing multicultural activities within the classroom setting engender a natural awareness of cultural history, values and contributions."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth ([*](#))

In Principle...

- Multicultural viewpoints & histories are integrated into the curriculum
- Learning occurs in appropriate socio-cultural & linguistic situations
- Developmentally equivalent patterns of behavior are recognized as such

In Practice...

- Research students' experience with learning & teaching styles
- Speak in student's primary language, employ patterns of management familiar to students, initiate field trips for language learning
- Encourage diverse ways of achieving developmental milestones



5. POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTS & FAMILIES

"Whether it's an informal chat as the parent brings the child to school, or in phone conversation or home visits, or through newsletters sent home, teachers can begin a dialogue with family members that can result in learning about each of the families through genuine communication."

-- Sonia Nieto (*)

In Principle...

- Parents are active participants in the education process
- A forum exists for mutual learning & support
- Effective home-school partnerships are maintained

In Practice...

- Seek to understand parents' hopes, concerns & suggestions
- Apprise parents of the services offered by the school, initiate a parent training component
- Gain cross-cultural skills necessary for successful exchange & collaboration

6. RESHAPING THE CURRICULUM

"[Schools must] take a serious look at their curriculum, pedagogy, retention and tracking policies, testing, hiring practices, and all the other policies and practices that create a school climate that is either empowering or disempowering for those who work and learn there."

-- Sonia Nieto (*)

In Principle...

- Curriculum is integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful & child centered
- Equity in the areas of race, class, national origin & language is sought & promoted
- Higher-order knowledge and skills are developed

In Practice...

- Develop a coordinated, building-wide strategy
- Present a variety of learning strategies, responsiveness to the needs of all students
- Establish high expectations for all students

7. SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

"Instructional methods that are student centered, collaborative, and process oriented develop a supportive environment for members of all cultures."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth (*)

In Principle...

- Instruction is cooperative, collaborative, & community-oriented
- Performance, persistence & attitudes improve
- Speaking and self-advocacy skills are strengthened

In Practice...

- Provide non-threatening environment
- Develop higher-order thinking skills and cognitive development
- Create bridge between oral & academic language

8. STUDENT-CONTROLLED CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

"Students and their cultures need to be at the center of teaching and learning. Successful educators acknowledge, respect, and build on the knowledge, beliefs and experiences that children bring with them to class, affirming the value of students' cultures."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth (*)

In Principle...

Students:

- Discover their own thinking and learning processes
- Become self-confident, self-directed & proactive
- Demonstrate cultural negotiation skills

In Practice...

Students are given opportunities to:

- Make decisions and solve problems on their own
- Expand their discourse repertoire through frequent expression
- Develop their understanding of course material using prior knowledge



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9. TEACHER AS FACILITATOR

"A caring adult can make a big difference in the educational outcome of any child that is at risk of experiencing educational failure."

-- Maria Wilson-Portuondo ([*](#))

In Principle...

Teachers should be:

- Guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, advocates
- Empathetic, available, equitable, open, flexible, caring
- Understanding of role played by language & culture in identity formation

In Practice...

Teachers should develop:

- A repertoire of culturally appropriate teaching approaches
- Knowledge about language & culture of students
- Awareness of personal ethnocentric attitudes

* This author's biography may be viewed on The Knowledge Loom (<http://knowledgeloom.org/crt/>) by clicking on her photo. Her quote was excerpted from the panel discussion on Cultural Relevance in Teaching and may be accessed by clicking on "Participate."

For more information about the Teaching Diverse Learners site, send e-mail to:
TDL@alliance.brown.edu
The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory
A program of The Education Alliance at Brown University
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300, Providence, RI 02903-4226
Phone: 401/274-9548 | 800/521-9550 | FAX: 401/421-7650 | TTY: 800/745-5555

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❖ HOW DO I OBTAIN AND USE AN INTERPRETER?

If you need an interpreter for a parent meeting or other event, contact Intake Specialists, Diane Goicoechea-Price or Sue Fornander at (208) 854-5220. ELL staff, other staff, counselors or administrators can call.

All arrangements must be made through the Intake Specialists for approval prior to translation or payment.

If there are concerns related to translator appropriateness, confidentiality, or other sensitive issues, please call Dr. Ann Farris at (208) 854-4133.



Call
Sue or Diane
(208) 854-5220

❖ WHAT ARE SOME STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER?

- Use family and friends when mostly positive, low-conflict information is to be shared.
- When friends and family accompany parents/students, it can actually create a safer, more comfortable atmosphere for them.
- Remind the interpreter to translate exactly what you say without inserting personal comments or feelings.
- If the interpreter and parents/students are speaking and the interpreter is not telling you what they are saying, it is appropriate to ask what they are talking about.
- Use as many context clues as possible when talking (i.e. charts, papers, maps)
- Even though the interpreter is speaking for you, look at the parents/students when you talk with them. This shows respect even if they continue to look at the interpreter.
- Say only 2 or 3 sentences at a time. Information will be lost if you give too much at once. Also, have the interpreter stop the parents/students every 2 to 3 sentences as well.
- Cultural issues often regulate communication regardless of the ability of the interpreter. Some cultures do not share family information with non-family members. In addition, parents/students and interpreters from enemy factions will often not speak to each other at all

❖ WHERE DO I FIND DISTRICT DOCUMENTS TRANSLATED INTO OTHER LANGUAGES?

Many district documents are already available on the District website. These may be downloaded from: <http://www.boiseschools.org/ell/forms.html>. This site is rapidly expanding so check frequently for updates.

At this site, you will also find a link to the U.S. Department of Agriculture with Free and Reduced Lunch Forms in over nineteen languages.