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Seven Teaching Strategies for Classroom Teachers of ELLs

by Judie Haynes

Learn 7 key strategies classroom teachers must know to provide an effective learning environment for ELLs.

In *Teaching English Language Learners Across the Content Areas* (ASCD, 2010), Debbie Zacarian and I listed seven teaching strategies for mainstream teachers of ELLs. These seven strategies are designed to help teachers meet the needs of all the students in their classes and to help make the mainstream classroom more inclusive for ELLs.

1. Provide comprehensible input for ELLs. Language is not "soaked up." The learner must understand the message that is conveyed. Comprehensible input is a hypothesis first proposed by Stephen Krashen. (Krashen, 1981) He purports that ELLs acquire language by hearing and understanding messages that are slightly above their current English language level. When newcomers are assigned to a mainstream classroom and spend most of their day in this environment it is especially critical for them to receive comprehensible input from their teachers and classmates. If that teacher provides information by lecturing in the front of a classroom, the English language learner will not be receiving this input. Teachers need to speak more slowly, use gestures and body language to get across the meaning to ELLs.

2. Make lessons visual. Use visual representations of new vocabulary and use graphs, maps, photographs, drawings and charts to introduce new vocabulary and concepts. Tell a story about

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information in the textbook using visuals. Create semantic and story maps, graphic organizers to teach students how to organize information.

3. Link new information to prior knowledge. Teachers need to consider what schema ELL students bring to the classroom and to link instruction to the students' personal, cultural, and world experiences. Teachers also need to know what their students do not know. They must understand how culture impacts learning in their classroom.

4. Determine key concepts for the unit and define language and content objects for each lesson. Teachers write the key concept for a unit of study in student-friendly language and post it in the room. New learning should be tied to this concept. Additionally, teachers should begin each lesson by writing a content objective on the board. At the end of the lesson, students should be asked if the objective was met. Classroom teachers also need to set language objectives for the ELLs in their class. A language objective might be to learn new vocabulary, find the nouns in a lesson, or apply a grammar rule.

5. Modify vocabulary instruction for ELLs. English language learners require direct instruction of new vocabulary. Teachers should also provide practice in pronouncing new words. ELLs need much more exposure to new terms, words, idioms, and phrases than do English fluent peers. Teachers need to tie new vocabulary to prior learning and use visual to reinforce meaning. Content area teachers should teach new vocabulary words that occur in the text as well as those related to the subject matter. Word wall should be used at all grade levels.

6. Use cooperative learning strategies. Lecture style teaching excludes ELLs from the learning in a classroom. We don't want to relegate ELLs to the fringes of the classroom doing a separate lesson with a classroom aide or ESL teacher. Working in small groups is especially beneficial to ELLs who have an authentic reason to use academic vocabulary and real reasons to discuss key concepts. ELLs benefit from cooperative learning structures. Give students a job in a group. Monitor

that they are participating.

7. Modify testing and homework for ELLs. Content area homework and assessments needs to be differentiated for ELLs. Teachers should allow alternative types of assessment: oral, drawings, physical response (e.g., act-it-out), and manipulatives as well as modification to the test. Homework and assessment should be directly linked to classroom instruction and students should be provided with study guides so that they know what to study. Remember that the ELLs in your class may not be able to take notes.

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