

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Information and Tips from the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Programs

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The following principles of instruction for English Language Learners will, if followed, maximize the potential for these learners to succeed academically and socially in school.

Conversational and academic language proficiency should be based on grammar *use*, vocabulary knowledge, and the ability to pronounce English words with enough clarity so as not to impede communication.

Language should not stand alone, i.e., it should be presented within situations and settings in which the language makes sense. For example, the concepts used in a science experiment on photosynthesis should be presented *within* the experiment and not in isolation.

Conversational language, once acquired, needs a vehicle through which learners can learn. Academic content such as literature, math, science, and social studies, can provide learners with specific ways to organize and express ideas and develop critical thinking.

Language should be presented at a level that learners can understand. It is, therefore, the teacher's responsibility to discover what learners already know as the basis for scaffolding new information in ways that connect it with the learners.

Language should be repeated and presented in a variety of ways so that learners can verify understanding. Repeated use of key words, saying the same thing using different words, and simultaneous use of oral and print language help to provide clarity.

Although some information can be transmitted by lecturing, learning should proceed through cooperative, task-based, active discovery *at all levels of instruction*. Meaning can then be negotiated in a variety of ways through interaction and assistance from more informed peers or the teacher.

Language used interactively, by varying groups of learners to provide support, is a way to motivate

learners and to increase language use and knowledge.

Presenting language through content simplistically without increasing the cognitive demand is an inequitable practice for English Language Learners, if other learners are benefitting from more cognitively demanding tasks.

Fostering independent learning through metacognitive strategies such as setting goals, activating background knowledge, predicting, self-evaluation, inferencing, classifying, using resources, summarizing, etc., help students to plan, monitor, solve problems, and evaluate their learning.

The classroom should provide for an affective climate conducive to learning. An environment where learners can interact freely in responsive and responsible ways, with freedom to pose questions, discuss ideas, and engage in meaningful activities, is an ideal learning climate.

Creating a learning environment where all learners are invested in helping each other and where they can share their diversity to expand each other's knowledge and appreciation of differences fosters a sense of community and motivation to learn.

Perhaps most importantly, sensitivity to the diversity of learner's culture, cultivation of an atmosphere of appreciation for the values and assumptions of others, and development of a

curriculum that exemplifies the backgrounds represented in the classroom and school will help to create a learning environment that esteems identity and fosters school success.

This discussion is meant to highlight the complex, interconnecting nature of effective, language- and culture-sensitive instruction to English Language Learners. Many of these underlying instructional principles are the foundation for *all* learners. They are the bases for qualitative planning, delivery, and assessment of learning. They are, in addition, *critical* for all English Language Learners. These learners have embedded knowledge and experiences in their first language and culture of origin. It is powerful and motivating to create a learning environment that transfers or builds upon what English Language Learners already know in their first culture and language context to acquire English literacy skills for learning content.

English Language Learners need to develop the cognitive and affective skills to succeed in school. This includes using language in multiple, daily contexts; striving to become literate, critical users of language in a variety of content areas at grade level; and navigating successfully in the cultural life of the school while simultaneously maintaining a sense of personal and cultural identity. Sensitivity to the 12 Cs can help all classroom teachers maximize English Language Learners' potential for school success.