

10 THINGS MAINSTREAM TEACHERS CAN DO TODAY

The following tips were adapted from *Help! They Don't Speak English Starter Kit for Primary Teachers* and from *Integrating Language and Content Instruction: Strategies and Techniques*.

1. Enunciate clearly, but do not raise your voice. Add gestures, point directly to objects, or draw pictures when appropriate.
2. Write clearly, legibly, and in print—many ELL students have difficulty reading cursive.
3. Develop and maintain routines. Use clear and consistent signals for classroom instructions.
4. Repeat information and review frequently. If a student doesn't understand, try rephrasing or paraphrasing in shorter sentences and simpler syntax. Check often for understanding, but don't ask, "Do you understand?" Instead, have students demonstrate their learning in order to show comprehension.
5. Try to avoid idioms and slang words.
6. Present new information in the context of known information.
7. Announce the lesson's objectives and activities, and list instructions step by step.
8. Present information in a variety of ways.
9. Provide frequent summations of the salient points of a lesson, and always emphasize key vocabulary words.
10. Recognize student success overtly and frequently. But, also be aware that in some cultures, overt individual praise is considered inappropriate and can therefore be embarrassing or confusing to the student.

A SAMPLING OF TEACHING STRATEGIES

- **Cooperative Learning**—Robert E. Slavin has shown that cooperative learning can be effective for students at all academic levels and learning styles. It involves student participation in small-group learning activities that promote positive interactions.

- **Language Experience Approach** (also known as Dictated Stories)—This approach uses students' words to create a text that becomes material for a reading lesson. Students describe orally a personal experience to a teacher or peer who writes down the story, using the students' words verbatim. The teacher/peer then reads the story back as it was written, while the student follows along. Then the student reads the story aloud or silently. This approach helps students learn how language is encoded as they watch it written down.

- **Dialogue Journals** (also known as Interactive Journals)—In this approach, students write in a journal and the teacher writes back regularly, responding to questions, asking questions, making comments, or introducing new topics. The teacher does not evaluate what is written, but models correct language and provides a non-threatening opportunity for ELL students to communicate in writing with someone proficient in English.

- **Academic Language Scaffolding**—The term "scaffolding" is used to describe the step-by-step process of building students' ability to complete tasks on their own. It consists of several linked strategies, including modeling academic language; contextualizing academic language using visuals, gestures, and demonstrations; and using hands-on learning activities that involve academic language.

- **Native Language Support**—According to Thomas and Collier (2002), ELL students should be provided with academic

support in their native language whenever possible. Even in English-only classrooms, and even when an instructor is not fluent in a student's language, this can still be done in a number of ways. Teachers can use texts that are bilingual or involve a student's native culture, organize entire lessons around cultural content, and encourage students to use their own language when they cannot find the appropriate word in English.

- **Accessing Prior Knowledge**—All students, regardless of their proficiency in English, come to school with a valuable background of experience and knowledge. When teaching a new concept, the teacher can ask students what they already know about a subject. Creating a visual, such as “semantic webs,” with the topic in the center and students' knowledge surrounding it, is a good way to engage students in the topic and to find out what they already know.

- **Culture Studies**—The importance of including a student's home culture in the classroom is a well-documented, fundamental concept in the instruction of English language learners. Culture study, in this context, is a project in which students do research and share information about their own cultural history. Such studies can be appropriate at any grade level and incorporate many skills, including reading, writing, speaking, giving presentations, and creating visuals.

- **Realia Strategies**—“Realia” is a term for any real, concrete object used in the classroom to create connections with vocabulary words, stimulate conversation, and build background knowledge. Realia gives students the opportunity to use all of their senses to learn about a given subject, and is appropriate for any grade or skill level.

SOURCES

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Reed, B., & Railsback, J. (2003). *Strategies and resources for mainstream teachers of English language learners*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved March 30, 2006, from www.nwrel.org/request/2003may/ell.pdf. Copies of the publication are also available for sale; for information, see page 49.

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