

Language Support for Students in the Home and in School

Students in bilingual and ESL classrooms manipulate more than one language and are influenced by more than one culture. Their experiences with these languages and cultures influence their learning. The more we understand the personal, socio-cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of bilingual students, the better equipped we will be to provide these students with an effective learning environment. This environment should be one that supports learning in a second language and culture, while fostering a positive attitude and respect for the other language and culture.

The responsibility for English language learning, academic progress, and integration of bilingual and ESL learners into the school community should be assumed by *all* personnel at the school, not just by the bilingual and ESL staff. School administrators should make certain that bilingual students have opportunities to integrate both socially and academically with monolingual English speakers (Brisk, 1998). The following practices promote the inclusion of all students in a supportive, educational environment:

1. Create participatory, inquiry-based classrooms
2. Maintain high expectations for all students
3. Teach ESL through content-area instruction
4. Use thematic units
5. Incorporate culturally familiar learning strategies
6. Use a variety of strategies when teaching literacy
7. Provide appropriate and valid assessment
8. Recognize that students use both languages to learn

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1. Create Participatory, Inquiry-Based Classrooms

WHAT

The participatory, inquiry-based classroom engages students in meaningful learning activities and productive interactions with their peers.

WHY

All students, especially English language learners (ELLs), benefit from active participation in their learning. Through conversations and discussions in class with both teachers and other students, ELLs develop their English language skills as they broaden their knowledge and understanding of subject matter.

HOW

Model how to pose questions or make comments in a discussion group, then organize student-directed discussions or sharing time (Brisk & Harrington, 2000).

Use cooperative learning strategies.

- For a research report on the role of informal conversations in cooperative learning environments, see "Collaborative Practices in Bilingual Cooperative Learning Classrooms" by John Gumperz, Jenny Cook-Gumperz, and Margaret Syzmanski at <http://www.cal.org/crede/pubs/research/rr7.htm>
- For information on cooperative learning, visit The Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota at

<http://www.co-operation.org/> and the document on "Cooperative Learning, Values, and Culturally Plural Classrooms" by D. W. Johnson and R. T. Johnson at <http://www.co-operation.org/pages/CLandD.html>

Encourage peer collaboration.

Provide opportunities for teaching and learning through *joint productive activity*. See CREDE's Standards and Indicators for Joint Productive Activity at <http://crede.ucsc.edu/standards/1jpa.shtml>

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2. Maintain High Expectations for the Students

WHAT

Maintaining high expectations for students in schools means challenging and supporting each student to attain his/her personal best.

WHY

Expect the same high standards from bilingual students as from monolingual students. Limited proficiency in English does not mean limited cognitive ability.

HOW

Teach challenging subject matter using simpler language through the use of sheltered English techniques ([Peregoy & Boyle, 1993](#)).

Use instructional strategies that foster higher-order thinking.

Group students heterogeneously for learning activities.

When having small group discussions, allow the use of the first language among students who speak the same language.

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3. Teach ESL Through Content-Area Instruction

WHAT

Teaching ESL through content-area instruction supports English language learners by embedding explicit strategies for language development within content lessons.

WHY

Content-area material can provide the context for acquiring both social and academic English. Your students will learn new vocabulary and linguistic structures as they master important content matter.

HOW

Determine the background knowledge that students need to understand the concept.

Incorporate ESL objectives, when you are planning lessons [[more](#)], and ESL standards (see <http://www.tesol.org/assoc/k12standards/it/01.html>)

Simplify language, not content.

Provide models and demonstrations.

Use graphic organizers.

Display visual representations.

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4. Use Thematic Units

WHAT

Thematic units focus study on one topic, while using a variety of activities and strategies in a series of lessons to explore the common theme.

WHY

Thematic, interdisciplinary units provide the structure needed to integrate language and content.

HOW

Choose topics to investigate from the science and social studies curricula, or from general interests of the students. See Paso Partners at <http://www.sedl.org/scimath/pasopartners>

Collaborate with teachers from other disciplines.

Enhance instruction through various means: filmstrips, videos, Internet, guest speakers.

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5. Incorporate Culturally Familiar Learning Strategies

WHAT

Incorporate culturally familiar learning strategies as instructional vehicles for lessons and assignments in order to link home and school.

WHY

The learning environment to which your student is accustomed may be vastly different from the environment and routines of your classroom.

HOW

Find out as much as you can about the student's personal and cultural background.

Learn more about the educational system of the student's country.

Develop activities and lessons that reflect teaching and learning strategies used in the student's culture. To learn more about students and their experiences, some activities might include:

- Having students write autobiographical books and draw pictures of important events in their lives
- Initiating dialogue journals between you and the students
- Creating thematic units that focus on students' countries of origin, customs, and traditions
- Inviting speakers of different languages and cultures to the class to share their experiences

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6. Use a Variety of Strategies When Teaching Literacy

WHAT

Use a variety of strategies when teaching literacy to access learners' needs, to determine how to proceed with their instruction, and to advance the development of their literacies.

WHY

While some students had excellent and consistent literacy instruction in their native country, others -- for various reasons, including poverty and war -- enter bilingual/ESL classrooms in the United States with limited or no literacy skills in the first language.

HOW

Use guided reading and writing strategies.

Conduct shared reading and writing lessons.

Plan for independent reading and writing every day.

Plan word structure and vocabulary work every day.

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7. Provide Appropriate and Valid Assessment

WHAT

Provide appropriate and valid assessment that aligns with instruction and fits the purpose for which the learner is being assessed.

WHY

Assessment can be a valuable tool for guiding the education of your English language learners. When coordinated with instruction,

assessment provides helpful information that you can use for planning academic content and language learning for each of your students. When assessing academic progress, focus on the content of the answers or product, not on the language structure used by the student.

HOW

Maintain a portfolio of writing for each student to record progress and assess individual needs of students.

Implement performance-based assessments.

Utilize informal assessments such as checklists, observation charts, anecdotal records, learning logs, or interviews to track progress of students.

Assess both the process and the product of students' learning activities.

Provide timely feedback to the students on their assessments

Keep parents apprised of student's progress.

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8. Recognize That Students Use Both Languages to Learn

WHAT

Recognize that students use both languages to learn and that they benefit from classrooms rich with materials and resources in both languages.

WHY

Whether in a bilingual or ESL class, it is easier for bilingual students to learn when they are able to use both their first and second languages.

HOW

In a bilingual class, give equal importance to the first language (L1) and the second language (L2).

In an ESL classroom, allow the use of L1 to support instruction in L2.

Display books in both languages in the classroom library.

Use authentic literature in L1 & L2.

Encourage students to share what they learned in their first language.

References:

[\[return\]](#) Brisk, M. (1998). *Bilingual education: From compensatory to quality schooling*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

[\[return\]](#) Brisk, M., & Harrington, M. (2000). *Literacy and bilingualism: A handbook for all teachers*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

[return] Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (1993). *Reading, writing, & learning in ESL: A resource book for K-8 teachers*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.

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