

Strategies to support beginning English language learners

Classroom organizational strategies

- Brainstorm with the class ways in which all students can make the classroom a welcoming place.
- Practise and model the correct pronunciation of the student's name.
- Assign buddies, mentors, and peers to support and encourage class participation.
- Seat students where they can hear and see well, and near classmates who will provide support and language modelling.
- Take students on a tour of the school and provide the school's floor plan.
- Gather learning materials that students can use independently or with a buddy, such as picture books with tapes, math activities, interactive CD-ROMs, and word games.
- Label the objects in the classroom environment in English and in the students' first languages.
- Post timetables where students can refer to them.
- Provide key visuals to support themes, and to help bring language to life (e.g., from magazines, newspapers, posters, flyers, the Internet).
- Give newcomer students classroom jobs to perform, to assist with socialization and orientation (e.g., distributing classroom materials, monitoring attendance, going on errands).
- Give students positive feedback for their efforts.
- Demonstrate ways that all students in the class can be helpful to the ELLs.
- Set short-term goals for students based on observations. In the early days after arrival, they might be learning the classroom routines and survival English.
- Find out what the new students' interests are and use this information to create related assignments to engage them and to encourage the learning of English.

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- Encourage participation in extracurricular activities as increased opportunities for language acquisition.

Instructional strategies

- Provide bilingual and picture dictionaries and picture cards to assist students in creating their own bilingual dictionary.
- Encourage the use of the first language in journal writing, personal dictionaries, word lists, prewriting activities, and when preparing outlines or drafts.
- Create a word wall (with first language translations) with pictures to introduce and reinforce unit-specific vocabulary, and teach students how to use it as a tool to increase understanding.
- Teach students to use the computer and/or level-appropriate computer software.
- Pre-teach key vocabulary associated with a walking tour of the school community.
- Take students on a walking tour of the school community. Record a languageexperience story on chart paper, based on class responses to simple questions about the trip. Ask students to copy the story and then practise reading it aloud to a peer.
- Use desktop picture alphabet charts to aid beginning writers and those whose first language alphabets differ from that of English.

- Model all activities for students.
- Find out about the student's prior knowledge about a topic and use it to make connections and address gaps.
- Allow students to demonstrate their understanding of a concept in alternative ways (e.g., demonstration, speech, picture, writing in the first language).
- Check often for comprehension.
- Give clear instructions (e.g., number and label the steps in an activity).
- Adapt lessons to the individual ELL's level of English proficiency.

Explicit language-teaching strategies

- Simplify vocabulary, using simple, straightforward words that are in everyday use.
 - Teach the English for important personal information (e.g., address, phone number).
 - Teach key survival phrases such as: "Where is...?", "Hello," and "Goodbye." Use pictures and actions to reinforce meaning.
 - Teach essential vocabulary using a variety of supports (e.g., models, charts, pictures, diagrams, word cards, picture books, toys, posters, banners).
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- Recycle new words. reintroduce new words in a different context, or use recently learned words to introduce or expand a concept.
 - Simplify sentence structure.
 - Pre-teach key vocabulary associated with a new assignment or topic.
 - Ask bilingual peers and volunteers to help clarify instructions.
 - Explicitly teach the Roman alphabet to those students whose first language uses a different alphabet.
 - Use real objects to teach vocabulary (e.g., articles of clothing, leaves and acorns, fruits and vegetables).
 - Ask students to match pictures to vocabulary or to draw pictures that go with the words.
 - Introduce musical chants that reinforce everyday expressions and patterned speech.
 - Use themes to develop vocabulary (e.g., the classroom, the school, the family).
 - Learn and use words and phrases from the student's first language to clarify instructions and key concepts.

Ongoing strategies for supporting English language learners

Instructional strategies

- Design lessons and activities and choose resources that take into account students' background knowledge and experiences.
- Adapt programs to enable students to be successful. This may include modifications to some of the curriculum expectations and/or accommodations which might include the use of bilingual dictionaries or extra time for completing tests.
- Encourage students to share information about their own languages and cultures to raise awareness for all.
- Allow sufficient response time when students are interacting orally with the English language.
- Demonstrate procedures and provide related hands-on activities.

- Use graphic organizers to show how ideas are related. T-charts, Venn diagrams, flow charts, story maps, and timelines are examples of organizers that are not dependent on language knowledge and that promote the development of thinking skills, such as classifying, relating cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, or following a sequence.

- Design all lessons to include a component which activates prior knowledge (e.g., K-W-L chart, brainstorming) and a review of key concepts).

- Encourage ELLs to ask for assistance from peers.

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- Chunk information by breaking tasks down into smaller, more manageable pieces.

- Provide feedback on one kind of error at a time. Note specific, habitual errors and provide direct instruction later.

- Select common errors as the language feature of the week, teach them explicitly, and provide opportunities for practice.

- Encourage ELLs to keep an editing checklist containing examples of errors and corrections, for their reference.

- Give clear directions. Explain them explicitly. Assign one step at a time, allowing students to complete each step before introducing another. Further reinforce directions by writing them on the board or on chart paper.

- Model the process and the product.

- Provide multiple opportunities for practice.

Explicit language teaching strategies

- Use subject content as a vehicle for English-language instruction. Provide students with opportunities to acquire language in a context that is interesting and relevant to encourage and enhance language learning.

- Highlight the ways in which language is used in specific subject areas to assist students in acquiring the specialized vocabulary and language skills appropriate to each discipline. For example, in science and technology, students need practice in using the passive voice to write reports or describe processes. In mathematics, students need to understand and use expressions for comparing quantity, speed, and size, as well as the words and phrases related to mathematical operations.

- Recycle new words, reintroduce new words in a different context, or use recently learned words to introduce or expand a concept.

- Encourage students to retell instructions in their own words.

- Have students review main concepts and vocabulary with partners in a Think-Pair-Share task and in whole-class sessions at the end of each lesson or activity.

- Teach language structures by highlighting specific structures (e.g., the imperative, the simple present), using a variety of strategies, such as flashcards, repetition, role play, charts with pictures, and guided writing.

- Make all students aware of phonetic structures through think-aloud questions (e.g., “What sound does classroom begin with?”).

- Point out contextual clues that help students with meaning. For example, in mathematics, words such as area, table, and into have a different meaning from their everyday meaning.

- Have students create subject-specific bilingual dictionaries for mathematics and science and technology.

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- Provide writing prompts to help students complete specific tasks (e.g., for letter writing).

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- Provide writing scaffolds, such as the cloze procedure, to help students use new words and phrases, and to produce sentences, paragraphs, and other forms of writing at a more sophisticated level.

- Use guided reading strategies in which prompts are used to encourage the students to use reading strategies to deepen comprehension.

See *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators, Grades 3 to 12*, 2008, for additional strategies that are specifically designed for the English language learner with ELD needs.

Assessment

Through assessment, teachers gather information about their students' prior knowledge, language needs, and learning progress. The educational strengths and needs of ELLs can be identified most effectively through multiple forms of assessment.

Because language learning is developmental and involves experiment and approximation, the educational strengths and needs of ELLs can be identified most effectively through the use of a variety of assessment tools. Teachers should provide students with a wide range of opportunities to demonstrate what they know and what they can do.

Assessment of English language learners should:

- focus on improving student learning;
- be linked directly to curriculum expectations (as modified for each ELL's degree of English language proficiency);
- recognize linguistic and academic progress, while taking into account realistic and varying rates of second-language learning;
- incorporate student self-assessment;
- actively involve students and parents.

To determine if their assessment procedures for ELLs are appropriate, teachers should consider:

- Do assessments reflect appropriate program adaptations?
- Are assessments based on clear statements of expectations?
- Do assessments take into account the student's developing understanding of English?
- Do assessments take into account the cultural and linguistic background of the student?
- Do assessments allow for the use of the student's first language as appropriate?
- Do assessments include clear guidelines for program monitoring?

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ELLs bring a wealth of prior knowledge and experience that, when tapped, enriches the knowledge and understanding of all learners in the classroom.

Assessment *for* learning

Assessment *for* learning is assessment that informs instruction. Teachers gather information about their students' prior knowledge and language learning proficiency. They can monitor the ELL's progress while targeting and modifying instruction to support the individual's needs.

Some tools and strategies:

- anecdotal records of teacher observation;
- anticipation guides;
- cloze exercises;
- demonstrations or experiments;
- problem solving;
- sequence or matching exercises;
- interactive journals;
- interviews or surveys.

Assessment *as* learning

Assessment *as* learning is focussed on the learner and the interactive processes by which students reflect on and make meaning from new information. Teacher monitoring and feedback guides and supports students' learning as ELLs build on prior knowledge, develop critical literacy skills, and set personal learning goals that are developmentally appropriate.

For ELLs in particular, conferencing is a very effective way of allowing them to communicate their understanding and demonstrate their acquisition of the

knowledge and skills outlined in the curriculum expectations. Use conferencing to determine how well students are progressing toward achieving the expectations, and make adjustments as necessary.

Collecting and maintaining a portfolio of student work is an excellent way to record and demonstrate a student's progress over time. Portfolios allow students to see various stages of work in progress and help them begin to recognize quality work. Writing portfolios can offer students insight into the process of writing. As well, this information is easily shared with parents to demonstrate progress.

See *TIPS for English Language Learners in Mathematics*, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006.

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Some tools/strategies:

- student-teacher conferences;
- portfolio assessment;
- teacher observations (ongoing);
- direct and timely feedback from the teacher;
- peer feedback;
- self-assessment checklist;
- reflective journal entries;
- paragraph frames to guide reflection.

Assessment of learning

Assessment of learning has a summative purpose and uses a collection of evidence to evaluate each student's achievement of curriculum expectations. It is used for reporting to students and parents.

Assessment of learning for ELLs should:

- be based on clear statements of expectations;
- take into account the cultural and linguistic background of the student;
- allow for the use of the student's first language as appropriate;
- include clear guidelines for program monitoring;
- reflect appropriate program adaptations.

Teachers should adjust their expectations according to the length of time students have been in Canada, students' previous educational and social experiences, and the amount of cultural adjustment required. Evaluation procedures should be clear and purposeful and should distinguish between ELL needs and program content needs.

Some tools/strategies:

- portfolio assessment;
- oral reports or presentations;
- retellings;
- journals;
- role plays or simulations;
- demonstrations/experiments;
- peer teaching (e.g., students teach a skill or idea to a peer);
- tests in which the language requirements for understanding and expressing content knowledge have been reduced, appropriate to the student's current degree of English language proficiency;
- rubrics, including those modified for ESL or ELD.