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## Teaching Second Language Students in the Mainstream Classroom

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Research data reports that close to 18% of the entire US population speaks a language other than English at home. Schools are scrambling to find ways to accommodate these students in a manner that will accentuate the target language without sacrificing the beauty and elegance of their native language. ESL students mainstreamed into core academic areas outperform those who remain in the traditional, “pull-out” bilingual programs; but how can a core academic teacher completely engage a student who does not know the basics of the language? Below are some simple strategies teachers can use to help second language learners in their classroom.

### Using the Total Physical Response



Second language learners require Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR is a student’s reaction to language input through physical motions. This usually provides students with

the opportunity to react to educational stimuli in a kinesthetic manner. TPR eases the students’ levels of anxiety since they will not have to respond in the unfamiliar language.

One great TPR activity is the use of tableaux. Tableaux are dramatic techniques where each student receives a word or concept and then acts it out without talking. For example, a simple math word like “circle” might inspire an ESL student to pose by making a circle with the arms. Use this activity as many times as it takes to develop the students’ receptive language.

However, TPR doesn’t just go one way. Teachers who answer questions or give explanations while acting out what they are saying experience greater success from the student than those who just talk. For example, while requesting that a student take out his/her pencil, the teacher acts out what he/she is asking, helping the student associate the act of taking out a pencil with the verbal cue, “Take out your pencils.”

### The Language of Learning



Do not assume that every student coming into your classroom knows the simplest terms associated with learning. For an ESL student, everyday classroom words such as bulletin board, sit, pencil, backpack, and chalkboard can be as complex as a series of nonlinear equations. By teaching classroom vocabulary first, teachers can ensure that future lessons will present minimal confusion for the student.

In core academic areas, teachers can focus on a more specialized set of words. For example, a science teacher can teach students about the meanings of the words beaker, scale, and Bunsen burner before actually touching upon their concepts. A good way of focusing on academic



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vocabulary is to create a word wall. Word walls provide excellent visual cues for students having difficulty with developing academic vocabulary. Write vocabulary words on cards along with basic, visual representations (drawings or pictures). Then place the cards on a bulletin board where students can easily refer to them when confused about their meanings.

## Preview and Preteach



Preteaching is a simple strategy that teachers use to prepare students for learning. This is particularly helpful for the ESL student. Before beginning to read a chapter (or unit), glean the pages for any

pertinent vocabulary that students may find challenging. Compile these words into a list or word wall and have students participate in various activities to attain their meaning.

One great preteaching activity is the Four Square. To do this, students fold a piece of paper into four separate sections. In the first section, have students write the word. Have the student illustrate the words with any type of visual (e.g., a drawing or a magazine cutting). In the second square, help the student list examples. Examples can be anything that the student associates with the original word. In the third box, help the student write the definition. Definitions can come

from the dictionary, a textbook, glossary, or any other informational text that the student uses in the classroom. Finally, in the last box, have the student draw what the vocabulary word actually looks like. For example, in the case of the word "peninsula," the student can draw Florida. Students can place each four square in their vocabulary folder or use it as a word wall entry. Four Squares is also a great way of gauging a student's prior knowledge in a particular subject area.

ESL teachers are in high demand and in short supply. With more and more ESL students moving into the mainstream classroom, core academic teachers (untrained in ESL instruction) are accountable for their progress as well. By focusing on vocabulary and making sure that lessons are both kinesthetic and interactive, teachers can ensure that students will understand the crucial concepts in the development of knowledge in a specific academic area. ESL students deserve great teachers, and by including these interactive strategies in your teaching arsenal, you can be sure that your students will always look forward to walking through your door.

For more information regarding activities for academic instruction of ESL students, please refer to the resources below.

### Related Handy Handouts®:

[58 –Communication and the Bilingual Child](#)

[71 –General Overview For Pre-Referral and Assessment of English Language Learners](#)

[82 –Common Articulation Variations Between English and Spanish](#)

### Resources

Jana Echevarria and Deborah Short. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The SIOP Institute. <http://www.siopinstitute.net/>

Joanna Haskins et al., Decreasing Anxiety and Frustration in the Spanish Language Classroom. Chicago, IL: St. Xavier University, 2003.

Shelley Spaulding et al., Immigrant Students and Secondary School Reform: Compendium of Best Practices. Washington D.C.: Council of Chief State School Offices, 2004.

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