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Mainstreaming English Language Learners into the Regular Classroom Helping Students Make the Transition

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In 2009, the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) formerly known as limited English proficient (LEP) rose to 10 percent or 4.7 million students. Many schools in the United States have no programs at all for students with limited English proficiency, and others have minimal English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual programs. Therefore, English language learners (ELLs) often become part of the mainstream classroom with teachers that, more than likely, have little or no experience or training in teaching English as a second language.

The most difficult struggle ELLs face, of course, is the total submersion into a new language. The anxiety of entering an environment where he or she is not even close to being proficient in the language is common. Imagine not being able to understand anything said in your classroom, the hallways, lunchroom, playground, or among your peers, etc. These feelings of anxiety become overwhelming at times, not because of the students' fear of making mistakes in understanding or speaking the language, but by the ignorance and intolerance of others when they try. If we, as educators, are to help ELLs become proficient in another language, we must help *all* students embrace the beauty of all languages and cultures outside their own.

Many immigrant children find that speaking their native language works against acceptance by their peers at school. They find that their native language is their

most obvious difference and will go to great lengths to avoid speaking it, not attempt to speak English for fear of ridicule, and unfortunately may become silent and withdrawn in the classroom. Again, there are ways teachers can create a comfortable environment for the ELL to attempt to learn and communicate in his or her new language.

Teachers can help by:



- Pairing the ELL student with a buddy that speaks both languages or with a buddy that is open, welcoming, tolerant, patient, encouraging, and wants to be a trusted friend and helper.



- Taking the ELL students on a tour of the school. Introduce them to all administration, teachers, and all staff they may encounter during the day.



- Teaching *essential* vocabulary first: library, cafeteria, restroom, office, nurse, principal, teacher, etc.



- Labeling classroom items with simple English terms: door, chair, map, light, bookshelf, etc.



- Not speaking loudly when the student doesn't understand. He or she isn't deaf. Speak slowly and clearly. Use plenty of repetition which is essential to learning language.



- Putting yourself in the students' shoes. They may not be following your directions because they don't understand you; they are not being defiant. Most ELLs learn quickly by watching other students for cues on what to do – socially and in the classroom.



- Learning about a student's culture. It may disrespectful in their culture to look at you directly while you speak, raise their hand to answer, or call you by your name rather than "teacher."



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Help Make the School Year Easier for Students by:



- Allowing students to speak in their native language when on the playground or when being helped by another student that speaks their language. Communicating in their native language is nothing they should be made to feel ashamed of or incompetent for doing.



- Understanding that acquiring a new language doesn't happen quickly. Research says it takes 7-10 years to be fully proficient in a different language. Have realistic expectations for progress.



- Never assuming that ELL student's understand – always confirm. For example, if an ELL student is having problems on the bus, have another student or staff member that speaks the same language explain the rules.



- Understanding that for ELLs, specialized vocabulary within content areas (Math, Social Studies, Science, etc.) may take years to internalize and truly understand. Take opportunities to relate vocabulary in a kinesthetic manner; for example, have the student *weigh* him- or herself and other items on a scale. Repeat the term *weigh* as the student reads and/or records the weight.



- Present curriculum goals in a variety of ways. Besides having an ELL try to read materials, listen to others read, or try to write notes, use multi-media presentations which helps all students.

Help the ELL Parents by:



- Sending notes, homework, and other information in the native language. Search for parent liaisons, interpreters, or translation assistance in the form of software. Some translation programs found on internet search engines can help you, but be careful. *They are not always accurate.*



- Consulting the district's ELL teachers. Each school may not have an ELL teacher, but your district will have someone overseeing ELL students. They may have printed materials or handouts that have already been translated or other resources available to you.



- Having a meeting with parents soon after the student enrolls and on a regular basis. Have an interpreter present. Make eye contact when speaking. Share good things about the student first before sharing your concerns. Set up the next meeting while everyone is together. Write the date and time on a card for parents to take with them. Give them your contact information.



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If you are the Teacher:



- Contact the district ELL/ESL(English as a Second Language)/TESOL(Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) person as soon as the student enrolls in your class. Have the district person come by to meet the student. This person can help you collect valuable information about the student and give you strategies for teaching particular subjects.



- Invite the district person to parent meetings and to assist you with translations, acquiring information for records, suggesting interventions, and monitoring progress.



- Get help from school volunteers, volunteer tutors, or high school students that may be proficient in the student's language. These volunteers can help with teaching basic skills like counting or learning the alphabet. This is easy for the little ones, but a lack of these basic skills can hinder students in the upper grades. These volunteers might also be able to help ELL students after school with homework or other assignments.

GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS. Most are very bright, creative thinkers. Learn about their families, their hopes and dreams, where they come from, their culture and history, and teach them about ours. Everyone will benefit from the experience!

Resources:

- Pruitt, Debi. August 2, 2012. *The New English Language Learner (ELL) in the Mainstream Classroom*. Retrieved April 1, 2013 at <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/esl-teaching-tips/60547-tips-for-teaching-ell-in-the-mainstream-classroom/>
- Alleyne, Audrey. Updated 7/12/2012. *Super Tips for Teaching ELL Students*. Retrieved March 2013. <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/esl-teaching-tips/99677-best-practices-for-teaching-ell-students/>
- U.S. Department of Education–Institute of Education Sciences. National Center for Educational Statistics. August 2012. *The Condition of Education*. Retrieved March 2012 at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ell.asp

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