

P-4: Differentiate your plans to fit your students

English Proficiency

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A Brief Introduction and History

In light of our responsibility to ensure that *all* students are successful in reaching learning objectives, teachers must make instructional modifications and provide support systems for students who are English Language Learners (ELLs). All teachers must prepare for the fact that they will very likely have at least some English Language Learners in their classroom.

Bilingual Education

In some schools, a “bilingual education” approach is used, which means that students are instructed in both their first language and in English. The theory behind those programs is that students will ultimately have enhanced literacy and learning skills if they first obtain some reasonable level of proficiency in their first language. (The National Research Council recommends that wherever possible students should be provided initial reading instruction in their first language.)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Of course not all schools have the resources or the critical mass (or the political will) to have full-blown “bilingual education” programs. And many older students arrive at school with some basic proficiency in their first language. Thus, another approach for English language learners is called English as a Second Language (ESL). ESL programs, unlike bilingual programs, focus primarily on teaching students English. In fact, under traditional ESL modes, the students’ native language is largely irrelevant to the teacher and the classroom. An ESL teacher should be able to teach a room full of students who speak a number of different languages.

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Levels of Language Acquisition

Level	Students have:	Students can:
1: Beginning (Pre-Production)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal comprehension No/limited verbal production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nod answers to questions Point to objects or print Move to show understanding Categorize objects or pictures Pantomime Draw pictures or cartoons Match words or objects Gain familiarity with sounds, rhythm and patterns of English, give one or two word responses Try to make sense out of message
2: Early Intermediate (Early Production)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate increased confidence Listen with greater understanding Respond in short phrases

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited verbal production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak in a sentence given a model Identify people, places, and objects Repeat, recite memorable language Use routine expressions regularly List and categorize
3: Intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good comprehension Enough proficiency to make simple sentences (with errors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak with less hesitation and increased understanding Produce longer sentences and phrases Use and define new vocabulary Participate more in class discussion Describe events, places, people Explain, compare, describe, and retell in response to literature Engage in independent reading based on prior experiences Use writing for a variety of purposes
4: Early Advanced (Transitioning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent comprehension Few grammatical errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use more extensive vocabulary and higher order language Demonstrate increased levels of accuracy Give and defend opinions Justify views and behaviors; persuade Negotiate and debate with others Read a wide variety of literature Explore concepts in subject matter Produce narratives

Level 5 (Advanced) exists in some states. Students at this level produce near-native speech. These students do need continued academic language development through scaffolding.

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Instructional Modifications for ELLs

In the most literal sense, modifying instruction for ELL students is simply an extension of the principles of “differentiation”. Your responsibility is to modify your teaching strategies to accommodate your students’ language development. That may include helping them build their speaking, writing, and reading skills in English while also increasing their learning in various content areas.

Suggested Instructional Strategies for Each Acquisition Level

Level	Students have:	Teachers should:
1: Beginning (Pre-Production)	Minimal comprehension No/limited verbal production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide ample opportunities for active listening Surround students with comprehensible language in a print rich environment Pair students with more proficient students Use physical movement whenever possible (TPR) Provide visuals, realia, and props whenever possible Encourage expression and aesthetics, integrating music/art
2: Early Intermediate (Early Production)	Limited comprehension Limited verbal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide active listening opportunities within a rich context Ask <i>yes/no</i>, <i>either/or</i>, and <i>who? what? where?</i> questions Have students label and manipulate pictures and objects

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	production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use predictable, patterned books • Expose students to a variety of experiences • Provide opportunities for creative expression • Introduce interactive dialogue journals
3: Intermediate	Good comprehension Enough proficiency to make simple sentences (with errors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on communication in meaningful contexts • Ask open-ended questions • Have students describe personal experiences • Conduct shared reading, guided reading, and storytelling; use predictable text • Support the use of content area texts with pictures, realia, role-playing, retellings, etc. • Assist students create books • Respond to student writing in conferences
4: Early Advanced (Transitioning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent comprehension • Few grammatical errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure group discussions • Facilitate advanced literature studies • Guide use of references materials • Provide opportunities for authentic writing • Have students create oral and written narratives • Publish students' writing • Encourage creative expression through art, drama, and music

Level 5 (Advanced) exists in some states. Students at this level produce near-native speech. These students do need continued academic language development through scaffolding.

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Here is a quick survey of some of the basic approaches that teachers find effective. These techniques fall generally under three over-arching principles of ELL instruction:

- (1) [Maximize the Accessibility of Your Lesson](#)
- (2) [Respectfully and Strategically Encourage, Correct, and Assess English Language Learners](#)
- (3) [Proactively Value and Embrace Your Students' Language and Culture in Your Classroom](#)

The instructional strategies highlighted here are effective for a broad range of students, regardless of their language facility or needs.

Maximize the Accessibility of Your Lessons

Constantly build context for new terms and ideas.

Hear your lesson the way students hear it. Modify instruction so that someone learning English can understand the concepts being discussed. Simplifying concepts, expanding on new ideas, and providing students with clear definitions and comparisons may make it easier for students with limited English proficiency to understand what you are teaching.

For example, consider the following implementations of these strategies for a history class, all of which highlight for the ELL student the definition or context of unknown terms.

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	<p>Simplification - “The government’s funds were depleted. It was almost out of money.”</p> <p>Expansion of ideas - “The government’s funds were depleted. It had spent a lot of money on many things: guns, equipment, help for the homeless. It did not have any more money to do anything else.”</p> <p>Direct definition - “The government’s funds were depleted. This means that the government had spent most of its money.”</p> <p>Comparison - “The government’s funds were depleted. If you had five dollars and you went to the store and spent your money on candy then your funds would be depleted, too.”</p>
<p>Use strategies to maximize students’ comprehension.</p>	<p>Good ESL teachers employ a range of techniques to increase their students’ comprehension, including:</p> <p>Clarification checks –Some of your students may be shy or wary of letting you know when they are lost. If you continuously check for comprehension (e.g. with a quick quiz at the end of class) you are less likely to leave students behind. Look for nonverbal responses to gain a sense of the level of comprehension or confusion.</p> <p>Use visual aides to clarify key concepts – Graphic organizers, pictures, graphs, objects, and maps may be a better way to introduce new knowledge or skills to ELL students, as these tools are less language-dependent. The use of media, manipulatives, and other modalities increases the ways your students can follow what you are saying. (If you are reading a story about telephones or jelly, bring in a telephone or a jar of jelly.)</p> <p>Maintain organizational repetition – Keeping a consistent schedule and format for your daily activities and lessons (e.g., always start math after lunch). This predictability helps students orient to the correct procedures and provide a basis for understanding as students know what to expect and how to proceed. Structure and routine help all students to make meaning of what is happening.</p>
<p>Modify your speech</p>	<p>Modify Language – Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and be sure to allow wait time before soliciting answers to questions. Break complex sentences down into more simple sentences, and avoid the use of idioms.</p> <p>Repetition – Don’t repeat the same thing over and over consecutively, but repeat the same phrase(s) throughout the day. (E.g., transition to each new lesson by saying, “Today we are going to continue our work on…”).</p> <p>Paraphrasing – Repeating important words or phrases (without being dull!) or the idea in a new, simpler way.</p> <p><i>Example 1:</i> Repeating important words/phrases Teacher: What was special about Dr. Blackwell? Student: She was a woman. Teacher: Yes! Dr. Blackwell was a woman. She showed the world that a woman could be a doctor. What else can a woman be? Student: President</p>

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	<p>Teacher: OK. A woman can be president. In this example, the teacher repeats the (correct) student responses in a complete sentence, thus providing the student with the vocabulary and phrasing for his/her idea.</p> <p><i>Example 2: An example of repeating the idea in a new, simpler way</i> Teacher: The Gettysburg Address is famous for its brevity. People always comment on how short and sweet it is.</p>
<p>Record your lessons on tape and make these tapes available to your ELL students.</p>	<p>Students with limited English proficiency may have an easier time following what you say if they can stop a tape, rewind, and listen to your words at their own pace.</p>
<p>Use demonstrations or role-plays to show and act out new ideas.</p>	<p>If your ELL students can see the new material in practice or participate in an activity less dependent on English skills, they are more likely to understand the new material. Perhaps your class would act out an historical scene. Perhaps your students would group themselves in numbers to “act out” certain math equations. These sorts of kinesthetic methods are especially important for your ELL students.</p>

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Respectfully and Strategically Encourage, Correct, and Assess

<p>Encourage students to speak, but do not force them</p>	<p>Students with limited English proficiency are often self-conscious about their English speaking skills. Research indicates they learn more quickly if they have a period of quiet listening to become familiar with the sounds of the language (called the “silent period”).</p> <p>Be sensitive to these students’ discomfort in speaking, while encouraging them to participate in class and practice their English-speaking skills. Work to create an environment where they feel comfortable speaking in class and making mistakes. As errors are an essential part of language learning, it is important to create an environment in which students do not feel uncomfortable when they make a mistake in English.</p>
<p>Correct speaking errors indirectly or by modeling appropriate language</p>	<p>Although you want students to feel comfortable making mistakes, it is also important to correct students’ errors so they can continue to improve. How you correct those errors, however, is critical to students’ success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model the appropriate language in your response, rather than directly correcting them, and you will help the student identify mistakes without embarrassment. • If they mispronounce a word, use that word in your answer to them and emphasize (slightly!) the correct pronunciation.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If they make a grammatical mistake in their question or statement, work the correct grammar into your answer.
Use hierarchy of questions	<p>Different levels of language acquisition can respond most easily to different types of questions. The hierarchy moves, generally, from questions requiring non-verbal responses, to either/or questions where the choices are provided, to “wh” questions (who, what, where, when, which, etc.). Students can gradually progress in the following order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> non-verbal responses (e.g., point, nod) either/or questions and some 5 W questions open-ended questions open-ended questions; can also generate their own questions in discussions
Use cooperative groups	<p>Cooperative learning has special benefits for students with limited proficiency in the English language. In these groups, ELL students may be able to call on their group members to ask for clarification. These groups may provide the students with a comfortable setting in which to practice English and contribute their thoughts and ideas (opportunities which may not be present in whole-class activities where English speakers may dominate).</p>
Create an environment where help is readily accessible	<p>If students are not always working in cooperative groups, you might want to assign “buddies” to ELL students who can repeat directions or answer basic questions. If possible (but not necessary), these students should be proficient in both English and the ELL student’s native language.</p>
Use appropriate assessments	<p>Create assessments that reflect your students’ mastery of the material being covered and not only their English skills (unless, of course, the purpose of the assessment is to evaluate their English skills). On traditional assessments such as tests and quizzes, it may be appropriate to read the questions to the student and allow them to respond verbally. Consider having a higher percentage of diagrams to label rather than multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, or essay questions.</p>

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Proactively Value and Embrace Your Students’ Language and Culture

Show ELL students that you value their native language(s)	<p>Your students’ native languages are important components of their identities and cultures. Show that you respect and value those languages, cultures, and identities. Demonstrate your respect for your students’ language by using it yourself when appropriate, and/or making an effort to learn phrases of their languages if you do not already know them. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place multilingual signs around the room (e.g., “class library,” “homework,” “today is Monday,” “welcome to math class”).
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow ELL students to teach words from their languages to the native English speakers in your class • Assign homework that encourages students to use their native language to interview community members.
<p>Use rich and varied resources from your students' cultures</p>	<p>Seek culturally relevant books or literature, or bring in a series of speakers who share a cultural background with your students. Be aware of and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the students you are teaching.</p> <p>Develop a diverse resource base. Select resources that will expand your students' awareness and knowledge of other cultures and backgrounds, and show the contributions of individuals of many cultures and languages. Seek diverse materials that are complex and engaging enough conceptually for your students but simple enough linguistically for your students to comprehend.</p>
<p>Avoid erroneous resources</p>	<p>Curriculum materials unfortunately often misrepresent students' backgrounds and history in their portrayals of the social, political, and historical contexts of both indigenous and newly arrived ethnic and cultural groups. Critically review the curriculum you receive and, if necessary, enrich and supplement the materials to include the perspectives of members of your students' cultural groups.</p>

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