

English Language Learners

The English language learner (ELL) student population continues to grow more rapidly than the student population as a whole. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics the general population has grown 9% from 1993 to 2003, while the ELL population has grown 65% in that same time. The ELL student population now comprises 10% of all students. (see [NCELA Poster](#)).

ELL students face the challenging task of mastering a new language while also learning subject-area content. Although there have been signs of progress, including higher reading and math scores for ELL student as reported on the NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress, more improvement is needed. English language learners receive lower grades, are judged by their teachers to have lower academic abilities, and score below their classmates on standardized tests of reading and math (Moss & Puma, 1995)

The passage of NCLB has brought major implications for mainstream teachers. According to Kathleen Leos of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), "the role of every teacher in every classroom in the nation has never been more important than today." Teachers and administrators must draw from a range of research-based strategies, pedagogy, and instruction to support English language learners in building language proficiency. Education will benefit as it recognizes how technology supports many effective strategies, such as using nonlinguistic representation, helping students recognize patterns, giving them opportunities to practice communicating complex ideas, allowing teachers to participate in ELL instructional chat rooms, and bringing their home culture into the classroom through digital images, music, and other media.

Key Research Findings

- Supporting literacy and language skills in the first language provides a base for successful literacy development in the second language (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
- Teachers of Spanish-speaking students who are learning English found that common visual language is effective in enabling students to transfer their patterns of thinking from Spanish into English. (Hyerle 1996).
- Modifying the language of test questions (for example, to avoid jargon or unnecessarily complex sentence construction) can increase ELL performance by up to 20 percent (Abedi & Dietel, 2004).
- Culturally congruent teaching methods and curriculum contribute to improved learning and outcomes, especially for bilingual and American Indian students (Reyhner, 1992; Stokes, 1997; Tannenbaum, 1996).

Implementation

1. Develop reading skills. Give language learners many opportunities to read and write in meaningful contexts, in their first and second languages. Draw on effective strategies for increasing literacy skills. Integrate technology to support writing instruction and motivate

students to use written language to communicate. Encourage students to develop literacy skills in their native language, then transfer these skills to learning English.

2. Work from strengths. Build on what students already know. Draw on their background experiences and encourage connections between academic concepts and students' own lives. Help students see the value of being able to communicate in multiple languages.
3. Connect with students' families and culture. Use culturally congruent teaching methods. Incorporate culture and native language, introduce multicultural literature, and draw on the expertise of community members. Give ELL students opportunities to teach others about their first language and home culture.
4. Use engaging instruction. Use effective strategies such as project-based learning, thematic instruction, and cooperative grouping to engage learners. Give students opportunities to talk about shared learning experiences. Hands-on, experiential learning experiences will develop understanding. Help ELL students connect words with meaning by using nonverbal clues and nonlinguistic representation of ideas, including multimedia, manipulatives, simulations, and modeling.
5. Vary assessment strategies. Use wide-ranging assessments, including observations, portfolios, and performance assessments.

Additional Resources

National Council of Teachers of English provides extensive online resources for bilingual and ELL teachers. <http://www.ncte.org/elem/topics/content/109318.htm>

Challenges in the No Child Left Behind Act for English Language Learners is a 2004 policy brief from the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at UCLA. It includes key recommendations to help ELL students achieve rigorous NCLB goals. <http://cresst.org/products/newsletters/policybrief7.pdf>

Literacy and language development resources are available online from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. In particular, see Sharing the Wisdom of Practice: Schools that Optimize Literacy Learning for All Children. <http://www.nwrel.org/lld/publications.html>

NCLB requires all states to have proficiency standards for students. For an example, see how Oregon has established standards for language proficiency. <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=36>

Teaching Diverse Learners is a Web site with access to information—publications, educational materials, and the work of experts in the field—that promotes high achievement for English Language Learners. <http://www.alliance.brown.edu/tld/>

West Ed has published Using Flexible Technology to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners: What Teachers Can Do. The .pdf can be accessed online. http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/kn-05-01.pdf

The Evergreen Center for Educational Improvement has conducted research on teaching reading to English Language Learners. The report summarizing the research is available online.

<http://www.evergreen.edu/ecei/projects/rrsll.htm>

The U.S. Department of Education's National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition provides a Toolkit for Effective Instruction of English Learners.

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/practice/itc/>

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence disseminates resources for teaching students learning English. <http://www.crede.org/>