

Supporting English-language Learners —Strategies for Instructors

Students who are English-language learners contribute new ways of thinking and seeing based on the additional languages they speak; that asset can help the whole class so it is important to maximize their engagement. In addition, providing information in a variety of modes, giving students time to consider their responses to questions, and actively promoting vocabulary development—especially helpful for English-language learners—can benefit all students.

● Multimodal teaching

Visual support: Include visual elements in lectures and assignments, in explaining rules of the classroom, and in readings and any information that is crucial for the course.

Auditory support: Read aloud anything that is written on the board, in presentation slides, and in assignment sheets. Make sure assignment sheets clearly outline expectations. As you walk through each component of an assignment, ask questions and break the assignment into sections.

Kinesthetic elements: Break up lectures and class time. Introduce new material, then do an activity, then revisit the material and do another activity. Then you're ready to introduce more new material and do another activity, and so on. Include moments where students can “pair and share” or work briefly in groups if possible. Have them get up and meet each other. Language learning happens most easily when people interact.

● Group work

Make sure language learners are in groups with students beyond their comfortable circle and groups that include native speakers so they get appropriate language input and support from fellow students.

● Wait time

Silence is golden. It's OK for a class to remain silent for a while after a teacher asks a question; this gives all students time to think about their responses. When having students discuss concepts from a lecture, ask a question and give students time to think, write, and then share so that the discussion reinforces various language skills—listening, writing, and speaking.

● Vocabulary

For each lecture, post a “word bank” of new vocabulary to appear in that day's class on the board. Read through the list at the beginning of class so students connect a visual of the word with its spoken equivalent. This builds context so that students internalize the word more quickly when they hear it again in the lecture or see it in readings.

Background

Multiple factors influence language learning, including access to the new language, reasons for learning it, and how supportive a student's environment is.

It is crucial for English-language learners to have access to both social and academic language interactions and to talk and learn with native and other fluent speakers (Hakuta, 1986; Cummins, 1994; Wong-Fillmore, 1996). Collaborative learning is particularly effective for adolescent and young adult language learners and for students who are “long-term English learners” (a classification that means they have studied in American schools for more than six years but are not progressing toward fluency in English).

Educators can enhance academic experiences for all students by creating opportunities for them to speak, listen, read, and write together (Cummins, 1986).

Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. Harvard Education Review, 56, 18-36. Hakuta, K. (1986). *Mirror of language; The debate on bilingualism.* New York: Basic Books Inc. Olson, L. (2010). *Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California's Long Term English Learners.* Long Beach, CA: Californians Together.

Resources

Find full references to the research cited in the background box and links to more information on supporting English-language learners at www.careerladdersproject.org/dual-enrollment-links