

What Do I Do, if I Can't Understand My New Students Language?

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Abstract-

This paper describes successful strategies based on research and practical applications used in the Greater Clark School Corporation in bringing many languages and cultures together. The most reasonable and correct course of action for teachers to take is to include the students in all class activities that will be enhanced by cooperative learning, learning with technology and problem solving tasks.

Keyword-

Constructivism, English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a New Language (ELL), Science Literacy, Science Teaching. Second Language Acquisition. Special Populations.

One of the perplexing challenges to Indiana educators is the increasing number of new English language learners in their classroom. These students are not necessarily recent arrived Hispanic students, but maybe native born Spanish-speaking students who have attended bi-lingual schools, or students from all other parts of the world. In recent years, Jeffersonville High School, of Jeffersonville, Indiana has had the following languages in their school: Bulgarian, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Czech, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Hindi (India), Japanese, Mongolian, Russian, Swahili, Spanish (Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Puerto Rico, and California), Urdu (India) and Vietnamese. Hiring interpreters and securing duo-language texts and guides for all of these diverse languages would be very impractical.

Indiana requires school districts to provide bilingual-bicultural programs for those students whose native language is not English, who speak a language other than English more often, or who live in a home where the language most often spoken is not English. Indiana Academic Standard English 21: “The goal of the program is to assist students in reaching their full academic achievement and to preserve an awareness of cultural and linguistic heritage”(3). Furthermore, federal law: Federal PL 107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title IX, General Provisions, Part A Definitions define the parameters of rights of new languages learners by defining who is a Limited English Proficient student and their rights. The term ‘limited English proficient’, when used with respect to an individual, means an individual –

- Who is aged 3 through 21;
- Who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- Who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
- Who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and “who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency”; or “who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
- Whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual – (i) the ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 11; or (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society(4).

Ignoring or excluding non-English speaking students is definitely not an option for educators and is illegal! As an educator it is important to know that any request for information by anyone wanting to know about a student’s citizenship status is prohibited. School personnel are prohibited from cooperating with immigration officials in any way that may jeopardize an

immigrant students' right of access (with the exception of the administration of F-1 and J-1 visas). Immigration service requests for information can only be released upon the presentation of a valid subpoena. All school personnel should be advised of this policy. Never ask your students of their status nor jest about "green cards". If a subpoena is presented, it may be advisable to check with an attorney to properly check into the validity of the subpoena. After all, our duty is be a teacher, not a policeman.

The most reasonable and correct course of action for science teachers teaching in a multi-lingual class, include all students in all class activities. One such strategy is create learning environments that feature integrated and thematic curriculum, collaborative learning, and an emphasis on language acquisition and literacy that meet the challenge of cultural and linguistic diversity (1). Using constructivism and themes involving science, technology, and society (STS), students can relate science to their world of knowing and acquire literacy skills quickly.

Gonzalez-Espada, W.J., 2004 (2) states that cooperative learning environments contribute to acceptance and to enhanced self-esteem of students who feel like "outsiders." The cooperative nature of learning with technology can provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their strengths and gain class status that would be difficult in traditional competitive-based class environments. Cooperative learning using collaborative learning software, or active learning in problem solving exercises, will involve students in researching

and presenting solutions to their own local concerns Students will work together and overcome shyness that often keeps them apart. Cooperative learning is a natural way to promote student communication.

Another successful strategy for working with new language learners is application of technology which can be used to cross the language barrier that exists in a diverse classroom. Technology can simulate real-life environments and promote learning by doing. This allows for authentic assessment and for students to exchange learning comprehension non-verbally as well. Technology can address equity issues as in the provision of individualized instruction, which allows students to work at their own pace with immediate feedback.

Getting to appreciate our new language learner is more than just teaching. As educators we are appreciated much more by these students. Methods that we can use to help our students close the gap in their achievement in our science classes are thus:

- Gather as much information about your students' cultural background as possible. It helps to maximize those little teachable moments and establish learning connections.
- Give students ownership of their language and culture learning: maximum involvement is the best source of motivation. Do not forbid the students from using their native language in class.

- Demonstrate; use manipulatives. Whenever possible accompany your message with gestures, pictures, and objects that help get the meaning across. Give an immediate context for new words.
- Make use of all senses. Write new words as well as say them. Give students a chance to touch, to listen to sounds, even to smell and taste when possible. Make use of multiple intelligences in your classroom.
- Use visuals. Movies, videotapes, pictures, graphs, charts, photos, or authentic materials from newspapers and magazines. Bring in the real objects when possible. Use audio cassettes.
- Pair or group the ELL students with native speakers. Much of a student's language learning comes from interacting with peers.

Finally, enjoy your students; embrace the diversity and work ethic that they will bring to your classroom. You will never have a group of students that will appreciate you and your efforts so much.

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