



PROGRAM SUPPORT NOTES

Teaching ESL Students in the Mainstream Classroom

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For Teachers

Introduction

As English speaking nations become increasingly socially diverse, the cultural make up of classrooms in schools and other learning institutions has changed enormously over recent decades. Where teachers may once have felt safe in the assumption that all students shared a common language, this is no longer the case. Given this diversity, it is essential that teachers of all subject areas are aware of the linguistic and cultural challenges facing ESL students, and work to facilitate quality teaching and learning experiences for these students in the mainstream classroom.

This program aims to highlight some tips and strategies for teaching English as second language to learners in mainstream classrooms. The focus chapters are: How to help, Best practice classrooms Strategies for building learner confidence, Tools and tips for teaching content, Building thinking skills. The support notes for this program provide a summary of the essential content provided in each chapter. Additionally, discussion questions for teacher professional development sessions and workshops are included, as well as helpful websites for accessing further information.

Timeline

00:00:00	Introduction
00:01:10	How to help
00:05:35	Best practices in the classroom
00:09:35	Strategies for building learner confidence
00:15:10	Tools and tips for teaching content
00:19:59	Building thinking skills
00:23:54	Credits
00:24:44	End program

Related Titles

The Empty Desk: Identifying and Assisting at Risk Students
The Beginning Teacher – Everyday Realities
Hot Tips for Classroom Management
Student-Centred Learning
Accommodating Different Learning Styles
Accommodating Different Learning Styles

Recommended Resources

<http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/>
http://www.pps.k12.or.us/curriculum/PDFs/ESL_Modifications.pdf
<http://www.cal.org/resources/archive/RGOs/mainstream.html>
<http://www.tesol.org.au/>
<http://a4esl.org/>
<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Mittica-Mentoring.html>
<http://iteslj.org/>
<http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/guide.htm>
<http://www.midlandstech.edu/esl/eslmainstreamhelp.htm>
http://www.islingtonschoolsemas.net/PDF/TESMC_brochure.pdf
<http://teachingtips.nokialife.info/tipsforteachingestudentsinmainstreamclassroom/>

Active Viewing Guide

How to help

For teachers of subjects other than ESL, the prospect of catering for ESL students in their daily lessons may raise legitimate concerns about:

- their lack of ESL-specific training
- the level of their own English language proficiency
- cross-cultural difficulties
- communication breakdowns
- the impact on other students

All teachers, no matter the subject area, are teachers of language and the same rules of scaffolding and support used to assist students in acquiring the “language” of science, economics or mathematics apply also to learners of English.

Teaching ESL students is not about teaching complicated grammar. However, teachers need to:

- actively consider the language used in the subject area from an ESL learner’s point of view
- think about how they, as a subject teacher, can pre-empt or pre-teach any language that will help the students cope with the content
- reflect on the benefits created by a diverse classroom
- understand they have a responsibility to teach all students

Best practices in the classroom

ESL students will have the best chance of success in a mainstream classroom where:

- teachers make some effort to learn about their students and their backgrounds
- content is presented in a variety of ways, including visually, and caters to a number of different learning styles
- language learning is valued and supported via tools such as ‘Word Walls’ displaying the current unit’s vocabulary
- the teacher speaks clearly and provides a good model
- learning is interactive and hands-on, so that the importance of verbal language is not over-emphasised
- the learning and teaching stimulates and challenges students and is not ‘dumbed down’
- the goal of teaching and learning is the achievement of academic standards by all students, regardless of their language background

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- the development of overall learner confidence is valued and planned for
- the subject teacher thinks through their lessons in advance, and considers what language demands the lesson will place on ESL students.

Once teachers have identified the language demands, they can then consider the following points:

1. How can challenging language (e.g. subject specific vocabulary) be made comprehensible to an ESL student?
 - use visual aids such as charts, graphs or diagrams
 - use concrete examples
2. What opportunities are there for ESL students to make use of content specific language in the classroom?
 - partner or group work /discussions, questions and answer activities
 - peer correction – modelling
3. Have comprehension checks been built into each lesson to confirm that the students understand the language? E.g. ask students to:
 - give usable examples
 - paraphrase content
 - demonstrate understanding in a hands-on, non-verbal way

Strategies for building learner confidence

Confidence is key to language acquisition. This is because language, like other areas of learning, is acquired most easily when used, that is when the learner 'has a go' at communicating. An ESL learner is more likely to 'take risks' if:

- he or she feels confident they will not be made to look foolish, and that their effort will be rewarded
- the classroom environment ensures that ESL students feel comfortable taking risks
- students are seated where they can see and hear clearly and can easily access the instructional input the teacher is providing
- opportunities are created for peer-correction and feedback situations, which may be less intimidating for ESL students than a whole class approach
- the teacher thinks carefully about each lesson in terms of both the content outcomes and the language that needs to be scaffolded to make these outcomes achievable for all students

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Language modelling is a scaffolding strategy teachers can use to facilitate language learning in the classroom. Successful strategies include:

- cut a model answer or piece of text into pieces and ask students to think about how to put it together
- ask students to focus on understanding the content of the text or answer, as well as how the language is used to express the content
- have students work in small groups where all group members contribute towards producing a model answer
- allow ESL learners to make mistakes. Refrain from correcting grammar in oral language
- repeat the student's question or phrase in the correct way while modelling correct pronunciation
- model the correct written answers, with the correct grammar, on the whiteboard
- encourage ESL learners to copy the correct model and compare it with their own answer
- differentiate your feedback - keep the red pen for comments about the student's comprehension of the subject matter
- use a separate piece of paper, a post-it-note or a page in the student's exercise book to leave any comments or suggestions about the student's spelling, grammar or punctuation.

Tools and tips for teaching content

Subject teachers can help ESL learners access and engage with the subject's content by:

- using non-verbal clues, such as pictures, maps, diagrams, graphic organisers and hands-on demonstrations to give meaning to the words in textbooks and other text
- pre-teaching background knowledge and key vocabulary - display on a topic 'Word Wall'
- "chunking" learning, that is, breaking tasks into smaller parts
- having students highlight any words or phrases that are unclear
- asking students to paraphrase the text. This helps students to clarify important points and provides a comprehension check
- allowing 'rehearsal' time e.g. using the "think, pair, share" strategy
- checking concept understanding throughout the lesson. This allows the teacher to make any necessary adjustments before the end of the lesson when the students are asked to produce work;
- designing tasks to engage *all* students - don't exclude ESL learners from language-based activities

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Building thinking skills

A challenge for classroom teachers of ESL students is to refrain from 'dumbing down' material that would otherwise stimulate and challenge a student's cognitive development. Challenge students by:

- modelling, teaching and using cognitive and cooperative thinking skills
- encouraging students to add to class Mind Maps and to create their own to help them better understand relationships, make new connections and recall information more easily
- planning lessons based on Bloom's Taxonomy to provide a scaffold for thinking at different levels
 - **Knowledge and remembering:** Students can retrieve, recall, and recognise knowledge from memory.
 - **Comprehension and understanding:** Students show their ability to grasp or construct meaning from material.
 - **Applying:** Students can use learned material in new ways such as through models, presentations, or simulations.
 - **Analysing:** Students break material or concepts into parts, determining how the parts relate to one another or to an overall purpose.
 - **Evaluating:** Students show their ability to judge, check, and even critique the value of material for a given purpose.
 - **Synthesis and creating:** Students put parts together in new ways to form a coherent or unique new whole through generating, planning, or producing.

Teachers can also ensure lessons stimulate all students by designing tasks and activities that support individual learning styles and preferences and incorporate students' prior knowledge, experience and skills into planned activities.

Conclusion

The education of ESL learners in the mainstream system is the responsibility of all teachers. Incorporating helpful and effective strategies into mainstream classroom practices can have an enormous impact on ESL students' language and learning development.

Extension Activities

Discussion Activities

1. Use a 'Think, Pair, Share' strategy to discuss the current challenges you face in working with ESL students in your classes.
2. Record on one side of a T-Chart the challenges identified by your group and then brainstorm solutions for each challenge.
3. What is one successful strategy you use for teaching ESL students in your subject area?
4. What is one successful strategy you use for building learner confidence and encouraging risk taking?
5. What is one successful strategy you use to engage ESL students in higher order thinking?
6. Reflect on the opportunities you have to find out about an ESL student's prior experiences. What strategies or practices have you tried that have helped you to understand specific challenges facing ESL students in your classroom?
7. Select a general lesson or topic that you would typically teach in your subject area. Working with others in your department, brainstorm 5 to 10 different ways this content could be taught to support ESL students. You may want to consider multiple intelligences and learning styles among your students. Aim to come up with engaging ideas that you think could really appeal to the diverse needs of your students.
8. What personal changes can you make in your teaching to help ESL students you work with? Make a list of three strategies you plan to implement: one will be for the next teaching day, one for a week from now and one for a month from now.