



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BULLETIN

Information and Tips from The Multilingual and Multicultural Center

Donald L. Bouchard

Portland Public Schools
150 Ocean Ave., Portland, Maine 04103

Tel.(207) 874-8135
Fax (207) 756-8421 Vol. 11, No. 1

Assisting English Language Learners in the Classroom **EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION**

Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines *explicit instruction* as "fully revealed or expressed without vagueness, implication, or ambiguity, leaving no question as to meaning or intent." English Language Learners (ELLs), *whether in direct ESL support services or in the mainstream classroom*, need particular attention to explicit instruction, since aspects of either language or culture can impede comprehensible learning. Below are categories through which ELLs can benefit from greater clarity of teacher support.

SETTING - ESTABLISHING ROUTINES CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING

Talk about or post common classroom protocols. The daily management of schooling is embedded in a variety of common protocols that promote expected language and behavior. Among them are: classroom routines; computer use; pencil sharpener use; beginning of the day; collecting items; passing out items; dismissal; attendance; time out; make-up work; permission slips; tardiness; cafeteria use; completing work; getting help; independent work; and use of classroom equipment. *Protocols that are considered important need to be posted in the classroom for reference.*

Use a communications framework. Of

more specific importance to classroom interactions is establishing an environment conducive to maximizing shared discussion. To that end, all learners can benefit from a more reflective approach in talking about content. Direct students to follow this procedure: 1) listen; 2) think carefully before speaking; 3) wait three seconds before responding to anyone; 4) smile and nod to demonstrate interest and attention; 5) be patient with interruptions; 6) ask others questions; 7) don't fidget, act bored, or be impatient. *Post these protocols for student reference.*

LESSON DELIVERY - BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE LESSON

Write content and language objectives. The conceptual information in teaching content can be strongly enhanced through written *content and language objectives*. It includes:

1) Orally stating and writing the content objective of the lesson. The content objective gives focus to the lesson and provides structure to classroom procedures;

2) Orally stating and writing the language objective of the lesson. This is simply what the students will be expected to listen to, talk about, read and/or write

during the lesson. Referring to the content objective establishes the *metacognitive* framework for understanding the conceptual information; referring to the language objective of the lesson establishes the *metalinguistic* framework through which the lesson is delivered. *Refer to both objectives before, during, and after the lesson.*

AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE USE

Use language clearly. Explicitness in actual language use enhances comprehension for all students. Here are some ways in which this can be accomplished:

- use specific transition words (*first, next, in addition, etc.*) when speaking. Point them out in print;

- 'parenthesize' unknown or conceptually dense words with simpler words or expressions;

- provide written directions of tasks on the board as well as saying them orally; and

- when referring to visual information, be sure to coordinate speech with pointing to the specific details.

Teach vocabulary. *Vocabulary needs to be taught in an organized fashion in all subject areas. When teaching vocabulary, write the word, engage the students in pronouncing the word, provide a definition, and use the word in a sentence context. Have good dictionaries for classroom use. Longman advanced-level dictionaries are unique, excellent resources because they also include the defined words in sentence contexts.*

Read aloud. *All teachers, at any grade and any subject area, should read aloud to students. Meaningful content-related print sources are abundantly available and can be used to model expanded language use. Reading aloud provides help in recognizing words in print; hearing good intonation and pronunciation; acquiring language patterns; visualizing, predicting, and making references; and developing imagination.*

ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

Differentiate. *Vary delivery of instruction - never assume there is one best way to teach anything. Students may inherently prefer learning information by learning facts; interacting with others; creating a product; and/or engaging in problem-solving. Culturally accepted ways of promoting motivation for learning, such as competitive games, may not be appropriate, as they place stress on individual achievement; similarly, praise may be more embarrassing than rewarding to students.*

Teach. *Explaining is not synonymous with instruction. Modeling, with gradual release of responsibility to students, is most meaningful. Promote gradual involvement by asking students to provide:*

- underlining, such as topic sentence, supporting quote, or a detail;

- specific punctuation in a sentence;

- an alternative word (e.g., synonym);

and

- confirmation of information in a

text.

Encourage. *Pursue a positive approach to learning. Use comments such as, "This will be easy", "I can show you an easy way to..." "You will quickly catch on to this", and "I'm going to go slowly and help you every step of the way."*

SOURCES:

- "Applications of Cultural Information in Instruction, Curriculum, and Evaluation." www.ncele.gwu.edu/pubs/classics/culture/applications/htm.
- Echevarría, Jana, et. al. (2004). Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Johnson, Kathleen (2004). Strengthening Your ESL Students' English Communication Skills. Bellevue, WA: Bureau of Education and Research.
- MacNulty, Piper. "Communication Styles." 2003 TESOL Presentation.
- Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. www.m-w.com/dictionary/explicit.
- "Understanding Explicit Instruction." www.maupinhouse.com/pdf/twr-ch4.pdf