

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING STUDENTS

First Things First

When a limited or non-English speaking student shows up in a classroom, the teacher usually raised the question, "How can I teach this student? I don't know his/her language!"

The teacher's first matter of consideration when faced by a non-English or limited English proficient student is "school survival."

1. The student should learn to give his name, address and phone number.
2. Find out about students' literacy backgrounds. Students who are already literate in their native languages come to the task of reading in English with an understanding of the reading process.

Also students with native language literary skills will be able to record new information in their native languages, rather than trying to remember everything.

3. Find out about students' schooling background. If your students have not learned in a formal classroom setting before, adjusting to the routines and cultural practices of the American School may take time and lots of energy. Students may see American schools as very unstructured -- they may not be accustomed to moving about the classroom, raising their hands or asking questions. These things and other classroom routines must be taught as students start to feel comfortable in their new context.
4. Teachers and administrators can work with translators to communicate successfully with parents who don't speak English well. The Macomb Intermediate School District bilingual Instructional Assistants can help to involve parents.
5. Meet with parents jointly -- ESL/bilingual and the classroom teacher. Grade students jointly on common projects. Set goals jointly.
6. Recruit and train peer tutors from cross-age classes.
7. Recognize successes. Identify what's working and make it public at staff meetings, in newsletters and in hallway discussions. Write a positive letter to someone who's teaching a bilingual student effectively.
8. Use natural language with bilingual students (contractions, normal speed, tone and pitch.) Be aware of confusing idioms or slang words. Teach students to ask for clarification: "Could you repeat that, please?" "Would you help me, please?"

Avoid asking students: "Do you understand?" They, like most human beings, will almost always say "yes" to avoid negative attention.

- Speaking to the student in short, correct sentences.
 - Attaching meaning to what you say with gestures, actions, pictures, objects.
 - Repeating similar sentences, phrases, words, so the student has more opportunity to hear and learn before going on to something new.
 - Giving clear examples and demonstrations of what you expect before asking a student to perform.
 - Keeping anxiety low (being immersed in a new culture and language is extremely stressful for the whole family).
 - Checking comprehension frequently by giving directions to follow and by asking questions that require only a one or two word answer.
 - Interacting verbally with the student when he/she is doing an activity in the classroom.
9. Understanding the students' culture. How does one achieve status in the student's home culture? Is his family extended (three or more generations living together) or nuclear (parents and children)? Do people in his culture "look you straight in the eye," or avoid eye contact? Who are the folk heroes? Culture is much more than food or clothing, it is a way of perceiving. When your student does something irritating or different, it is most likely a learned cultural trait over which he has no control. As the student learns English, and therefore, American culture conflicts between his new and old culture, himself and his family, the school and the home, and bound to arise. All concerned parties will need patience, understanding and communication.
10. Macomb Intermediate School District Bilingual Instructional Assistants will stress the communicative and whole language approach. If the student is ready to work with written and reading materials, the teacher should provide classroom materials for those more advanced students. If the student is unable to function with regular classroom materials, the Bilingual Instructional Assistant will bring ESL materials for the tutorial lesson.
11. Macomb Intermediate School District Bilingual Instructional Assistants will teach ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE; The student learns academics (science, math, social studies, etc.) in the regular classroom.
12. Try to schedule some time to talk to the Bilingual Instructional Assistant who works with students assigned to your classroom to coordinate the tutorial sessions with what you are teaching in the classroom.