

Chapter 4: Effective Instruction for ELs - Additional Support and Resources

Primary Language Instruction

Use of the Primary Language in Instruction: What the Research Says

It is important to recognizing that students arrive to school with “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Acknowledging students’ languages and cultures and treating these as resources in the classroom can build bridges between what students already know and what they are learning in school (Trueba, 1989). Drawing on students’ languages, literacies, and cultures and affirming their identities within the classroom can expand their learning and help them to succeed academically (García, 2009; Gutierrez, 2008).

Effective and Ineffective Primary Language Support

Primary language support is ineffective when it inhibits, but effective when it supports, students’ efforts to obtain comprehensible input from oral or written English.

Effective Primary Language Support
<p>Label the classroom in English and the students’ home language(s): charts in the home language(s), or translations added to English charts and displays</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrating acknowledgment and valuing of home languages <p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and/or their parents can help make the labels • Use a bilingual dictionary or online translation tool (But ask native speaker to check before posting)
<p>Accept students’ contributions in the home language during class discussions</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and value contribution • Opportunity to model back in English what student said (if the language is comprehensible to you)
<p>Pull students aside to re-teach concepts</p>
<p>Read aloud home language books that reinforce concepts taught in English</p>
<p>Create cognate word study lessons (depending on the home language(s) of your students)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially beneficial in helping Spanish-speaking ELs quickly acquire English vocabulary and improve their English reading comprehension
<p>Use home language to support writing in English</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help ELs figure out what to write about • Help ELs organize their thoughts <p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prewriting activities can be done (and may be easier to do) in home language • Allow students to use home language in initial drafts
<p>Bilingual glossary or dictionary</p> <p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students create their own

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students create a partially completed bilingual glossary (or dictionary) • Provide one for them
<p>Provide primary language and dual language books for at-home reading programs</p> <p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a classroom lending library • Enlist the help of the school librarian to obtain dual language books
<p>Seek bilingual parent or community volunteers</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide occasional assistance in the classroom <p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a running list of questions or concerns for them to go over with students • Have ready some work that students have been struggling to understand • Plan ahead to maximize volunteer’s time • Establish a system for volunteers to report back to you
<p>Ineffective Primary Language Support</p>
<p>Concurrent translation</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No need to attend to the English
<p>Substituting written English text with oral home translation</p> <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No correspondence between the text and the spoken language

Questions for Determining Effective Primary Language Support

- Does the strategy allow the EL student to quickly grasp a concept that was previously inaccessible when taught or explained only in English?
- Does the strategy prepare the EL to attend to instruction or print in English and receive greater amounts of comprehensible input?
- Does the strategy lower the affective filter of ELs and thus allow greater amounts of comprehensible input?
- Does the strategy enable greater interaction between the EL student and others in the classroom for social and academic purposes?
- Does the strategy enable the teacher to determine the EL students’ understanding of content taught in English?

Wright, (2010). Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners: Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice. Philadelphia: Caslon Publishing.