Shell Education

50 STRATEGIES for Supporting Multilingual Learners

Mandy Manning

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Welcome 5
Basics about Multilingual Learners 6
Understanding English Language Acquisition 7
Levels of English Language Proficiency 8
Comprehensible Input and Output 10
The Importance of Enunciation 11
How to Use This Book 13

Strategies

Strategies Table of Contents 14
Creating a Supportive Learning Environment 15
General Language Support Strategies 30
Strategies for Listening and Speaking 53
Strategies for Reading 67
Strategies for Writing 76
Visual Literacy Strategies 78
Supportive Assessment 89

References 96



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Welcome

Being a teacher is a tremendous gift exchange. Not the exchange of physical things, but of what really matters in our lives—human connection and the gifts we receive when we share our cultures, our experiences, and our talents with one another to make our classroom communities places in which every student feels valued, welcome, and able to learn. At the heart of effective teaching are the connections we have with our students and our knowledge of who they are as learners and as individual human beings with a variety of strengths and dreams. Being open to who our students are helps us meet their needs, and in return, we gain so much.

Over the years in my classroom, I have had the privilege of meeting newcomers to our community. These students enriched our classroom through their cultures, languages, experiences, and perspectives. It was my honor to welcome them and help them transition to learning in a new environment and living in a new community.

Students remind us every day that each of them is an individual and that we must be open to connecting with them and finding out who they are, so we can effectively teach them. It is only through reaching across differences, embracing one another's diversity, and accepting one another as we are that we are stronger, safer, and more connected as a community.

My hope is that this book will help you connect with and support culturally and linguistically diverse students—and all students—in your classroom. These strategies come from my 21 years as a classroom teacher (most of which were spent teaching multilingual learners), collaborations with and learning from my colleagues, reading research, and pure trial and error. At the heart of each approach are connecting with students, building relationships, and teaching students the strategies for being independent, lifelong learners. Whether you have one multilingual learner or a whole classroom full, add these approaches to your practice and adapt them based on the needs of your students to make them your own.

—Mandy Manning
2018 National Teacher of the Year

Teaching Multilingual Learners



This book is designed to support you in your work with multilingual learners (MLs) by providing an overview of concepts of language acquisition and language proficiency, as well as foundational knowledge of how to support the MLs in your classroom. While many of the strategies in this book may be familiar, the key difference is in the inclusion of language learning and intentional scaffolding to support MLs in learning content while also learning content-related language.

I began my career in education as a paraeducator working with special education students, moved on to become an English language arts teacher, and eventually I became a full-time English language development specialist. Each of these experiences taught me that building relationships, creating community, and focusing on connection are paramount to ensuring every student has access to learning in the classroom. That is why this book begins with strategies for creating school and classroom environments where multilingual learners feel a sense of welcome and belonging. The remainder of the strategies are focused on language and content support for MLs. First you will find general language support strategies, followed by targeted strategies for the four domains of language: listening and speaking, reading, and writing. These are followed by strategies for developing visual literacy and implementing supportive assessment.

This resource begins with basic ideas related to multilingual learners. It is important to understand social versus academic language, the impact of the affective filter, the difference between English language acquisition and English language proficiency, the meaning of comprehensible input and output, and one key practice, enunciation. The foundational knowledge in this introduction will help frame how you serve and support your students.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills



Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are the social language skills students use during face-to-face social interactions (Cummins 2008). These skills develop quickly. Students can become adept at social English anywhere from six months to two years after arriving in the United States. Social language is less demanding than academic language and is context embedded, meaning the language comes from a shared understanding of the topic of conversation. During these everyday conversations, gestures and facial expressions help create the meaning. When students have proficiency in BICS, educators may be misled into believing students have stronger academic English-language skills than they actually do.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) refers to the skills and knowledge students have in using content-related academic language (Cummins 2008). Students with CALP can function effectively in a classroom and are able to engage in language that is abstract and not always context embedded. They can engage in complex critical thinking, using advanced academic language. CALP takes longer to acquire than BICS, requiring up to five years to become proficient.

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Stages of New Language Acquisition



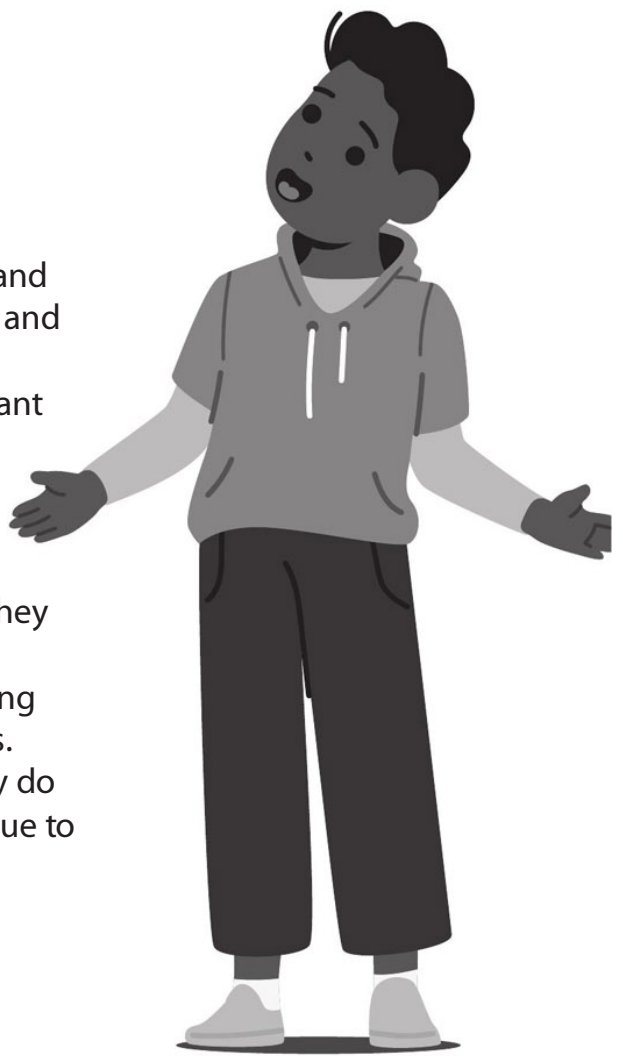
New language acquisition is the process by which learners acquire an additional language outside of their first language. This process includes learning the grammar, structures, and functions for oral and written language production. There are six stages of acquiring a new language (Robertson and Ford, n.d.). Learners move through each stage at their own pace depending on fluency and skills in their first language, prior formal education, academic skills, and individual learning differences. Stages of new language acquisition are not measured using a test; they are assessed formatively.

Pre-Production

During pre-production, students are learning receptive language. This is also known as the "silent period." Learners are receiving language through listening and reading but producing little to no oral or written language. This stage lasts six weeks or longer. Learners at this stage need the space to be silent and focus on familiarizing themselves with the new language.

Early Production

During early production, learners use single words and short phrases, and tend to make a lot of mistakes. Their responses are brief, and they struggle with conversation. They are still working heavily on their receptive language skills. Continue to be patient with students in early production, supporting them in vocabulary development and in learning words and phrases in context, while allowing them this relatively quiet period in their development.



Speech Emergent

When learners become speech emergent, they use more complex sentences and can have longer conversations. They are most successful with social language and language used in context. These learners are acquiring more vocabulary and making fewer mistakes. They are gaining confidence. At this stage it is important to be supportive and to avoid overcorrecting mistakes.

Beginning Fluency

Learners at the beginning fluency stage are adept at social communication. They appear to have strong receptive and productive skills. However, students are still acquiring academic language skills and continue to struggle with producing language in new contexts with unfamiliar vocabulary and language structures. This is a tricky stage as it can appear that students have more ability than they do because they so easily communicate with their peers. It is important to continue to support students as they acquire academic language skills.

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