

Principles for teaching English learners in the mainstream classroom

The following instructional principles were suggested by Russell Gersten, Scott Baker, and Susan Unok Marks in their chapter (Strategies for teaching English-language learners) in the book *Teaching every child everyday-Learning in diverse schools and classrooms* (edited by K. Harris, published by Brookline Books, Cambridge, Mass., 1998). The chapter describes key concepts for effective instruction for English-language learners, such as comprehensible input, meaningful access to the curriculum, and conversational versus academic language. There is a practical focus on concrete ways to provide meaningful access to the curriculum.

Help students to learn vocabulary

- students should not be expected to learn long lists of isolated words; it is better to select a small number (e.g., seven or less) and work with them over a period of a few days
- words should be selected based on
 - a. Utility,
 - b. Relevance for understanding key concepts in a lesson, and
 - c. Relevance for the students' lives
- the meanings of new words should be discussed, so students have a chance to acquire a deep level of understanding
- tools like word banks can be used (i.e., a large piece of paper that is put on the wall and to which new words are added as they are learned - students can refer to this resource as they work on activities)

Use visual organizers

- a semantic map is a graphic representation of the relationships between a group of words (e.g., the word car at the centre of a page, surrounded by clusters of words like bus, train, plane, and engine, wheels, interior)
- a story map represents the elements of a story (e.g., character, goal, obstacle, outcome, theme) in a table or chart, which can be helpful to students before and after reading a story
- completing a K-W-L map (i.e., know, want to know, learned) encourages students to

think about what they know and want to know about a topic before being exposed to the material, and to reflect afterwards on what they have learned

Model

- use lots of examples to support the concept being taught
- show students examples of a finished product before they begin an assignment

Use concrete examples and experiences

- use visuals and films, and concrete experiences like field trips, science experiments, and cooperative learning activities
- relate material and subject matter to students' background experience and interests

Perform on-going assessment

- be clear whether the focus of the assessment is language skills or curriculum content

Consistent language use

- use clear, consistent language (i.e., not childish)
- use figurative language (e.g., metaphors, idioms) carefully and purposefully (e.g., after a concept has been introduced and is being reviewed)
- Balance the language demands and the cognitive demands
- Make use of peer tutors and collaboration techniques