

# **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