New York Collective of Radical Educators

A Guide for Educators of English Language Learners

"The struggle for justice does not end when the school bell rings"

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A General Overview of ELL Education K-12 in New York City

Who are English Language Learners (ELLs)?

ELLs are students who speak a language other than English at home, and testing indicates these students have some limitations in their English language abilities, whether it is speaking, listening, reading, writing, or a combination of two or more. Other terms oftentimes used interchangeably with ELLs are *Limited English Proficient* (LEP) and *English as a Second Language* (ESL) student. ELL is the preferred term in most of the literature because of the negative connotation seen in LEP and the fact that ESL more accurately expresses a type of program that ELLs can be placed in. However, some argue that emergent bilingual would be even more preferable because it identifies the competence that immigrant students already come with and does not limit their identity to the acquisition of the English Language. Because ELL is still the most commonly used term in New York City it will be the term used throughout the rest of this document.

How are ELLs identified?

Parents/guardians are required to fill out a home language survey when registering their child for school. Any child who comes from a household where a language other than English is spoken must be administered the LAB-R. Students who fail the LAB-R are designated ELLs and by law must receive some type of language support either in the form of ESL or bilingual education (see below for more details on these different programs).

Where can I find information on my ELLs such as level of proficiency, prior education, and biographical information?

This information can all be found on ATS, the database used by the New York City Department of Education. A user name and password is required to access the system. Administrators and administrative assistances at your school will usually have access and can provide you with the needed information. However, if you are the only ESL teacher at your school or the ESL Coordinator you may want to request your own user name and password through the principal. In addition, a new database system called ARIS is now available at many schools, which is supposed to be more comprehensive and user friendly than the old ATS system. You should inquire with your principal about whether it is available at your school.

How are ELLs designated as English Proficient?

Students must continue to receive language support services until they score Fully English Proficient on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), which is administered to ELLs every spring.

<u>**The New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSESLAT)**</u>

What is the NYSESLAT?

The New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSESLAT) is an annual exam administered to students who have previously been identified as ELLs based on their score on the LAB-R given at initial placement. It is administered in April and May of every year and consists of four sections: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students can score at four levels on this exam: beginner, intermediate, advanced, and proficient. If a student scores at the proficient level he/she is exited from an ELL designation and is entitled to transitional services in support of his/her complete mainstreaming. Any student who scores below proficient will continue to be designated as ELL and will be required to take the exam again the following year.

Preparing for the NYSESLAT

There are several ways that teachers of ELLs can help their students with the NYSESLAT. Because the exam is based on the New York State ESL standards, the guide to these standards is the best resource for preparing your students for this exam. This guide can be found at the New York State Department of Education website at the following link: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/biling/resource/ESL/standards.html.

In addition test samples are also available from the State Ed website at the following link: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/nyseslat/

What else should I know about the NYSESLAT?

Many students have taken this exam for several years and may be frustrated at having to still take it. In addition, because the exam begins at an extremely basic level, more advanced students oftentimes do not take it seriously and consequentially fail to reach the proficient level for yet another year. On the other hand, students have also purposefully failed the exam in order to continue to participate in ESL or bilingual programming where they feel safer and more comfortable. Teachers should beware of all of these phenomena and encourage their students to do as well as they can on the NYSESLAT. It is important for students to do as well as they can to avoid being placed into classes that are not challenging enough for them, impeding their academic progress and possibly leading to their disengagement from school.

CR Part 154

Mandated Services for ELLs

The major state regulation that dictates how ELLs should be services is CR Part 154. The major components of this regulation are:

- Students in bilingual programs or free-standing ESL programs must receive a certain number of periods of ESL a week based on their language and grade level as follows:

    - K-8
        - Beginner—2 periods a day (360 minutes per week)
        - Intermediate—2 periods a day (360 minutes per week)
        - Advanced—1 period a day (180 minutes per week)

    - 9-12
        - Beginner—3 periods a day (540 minutes per week)
        - Intermediate—2 periods a day (360 minutes per week)
        - Advanced—1 period a day (180 minutes per week)

- Students in bilingual programs must also receive 1 period of Native Language Arts (NLA) per day.

The entire regulation can be found at
http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/biling/pub/Part154Amendments.pdf.

Teaching Models of ESL

There are three major models of ESL: the pullout model, the push-in model, and the self-contained modeled.

- **Pullout model**: In this model ELLs are taken out of the mainstream classroom for part of the day to receive language support from an ESL teacher.

- **Push-in model**: In this model the ESL teacher comes into the mainstream classroom and works with the content area teacher to provide extra language support to ELLs.

- **Self-contained model**: In the self-contained model ELLs are placed with other ELLs for the entire day where they receive sheltered instruction from teachers trained in sheltering techniques.

The commonality between these models is that neither systematically develops skills in the native language of ELLs. While native language support may be provided, all content is delivered in English and students are expected to use English in both their content classes and in their ESL classes. These programs are by far the most widely available to children in New York City.

Teaching Models of Bilingual Education

In bilingual programs students oftentimes receive at least some of their content area classes in their native language.

There are also three major models of bilingual education: transitional bilingual education, developmental bilingual education, and dual language. Although the native language is used in these programs, New York State law requires ELLs receiving servicing in these programs to receive the same number of minutes of ESL as students in ESL programs.

- **Transitional bilingual education**: In this model ELLs are placed into a bilingual program for no more than 3 years and then are placed into the mainstream classes where they receive ESL support if still required. The goal of this type of program is to transition students into English as quickly as possible. This is considered a subtractive form of bilingualism because while the native language is used initially the final goal is for no use of the native language. This is also the most common form of bilingual education in New York City.

- **Developmental bilingual education**: In this model ELLs are placed into a bilingual program for several years. The major goal of this program is to encourage students to maintain their native languages as they learn English. This is considered an additive form of bilingualism because the program works to develop skills in both the native language and in English. Unfortunately, this model is not an option for the children in New York City schools.

- **Dual Language programs**: In this model ELLs and native English speakers are placed in the same classroom where they are taught bilingually. The major goal of this type of program is to create students who are fully bilingual in both English and the native language of the ELLs. This is also considered an additive form of bilingualism because the program works to develop skills in two languages. While this option is available to children in New York City it is not nearly as widely available as transitional bilingual programs.

Strategies for Teachers Working with English Language Learners

There are many strategies that mainstream teachers can use to help their ELLs follow classroom instruction and acquire English skills. Differentiated instruction for your ELLs will improve the quality of education for all the learners in your room. Just remember to be as explicit as possible. It is also necessary to identify specific difficulties hindering ELL students in the classroom. Is it their lack of prior knowledge, the pace of your verbal instruction, new vocabulary or the overall content? This awareness can help you address their specific needs. Also, remember not to "dumb down" your expectations. ELLs can be critical thinkers; they simply need more scaffolding and strategies.

Helping a New Student Adjust to your Classroom

1. Take time to get to know the student one-on-one in the first week. If necessary, bring in another student to translate. The Student Interview at the end of this packet can be a great way to get very helpful information. A teacher's time is precious, but making a student feel comfortable with you will pay off tenfold.

2. Teach your student to say "I don't understand," "Slowly," and "Please repeat."

3. Accept one word answers, drawings and gestures. Do not overcorrect your student or it will increase their anxiety about making mistakes.

4. Allow your student to use a bilingual dictionary or a same language buddy.

5. Whenever possible speak to the newcomer individually rather than in front of the class. The pressure of being in the spotlight interferes with comprehension.

6. Don't insist on eye contact. Eye contact between child and adult is considered inappropriate in some cultures.

7. Make your classroom as low stress as possible. Cut down class assignments and do your best not to overwhelm the newcomer.

Classroom Strategies

Many teachers unfortunately associate quiet classrooms with good behavior. This is especially untrue for ELLs. To learn English, ELLs need to practice it by listening and speaking to each other. They are likely to be more anxious about speaking in front of the class than other students. Give them a chance to talk to a partner before sharing in front of the class. Students can also check in with you before you call on them. Book talks, partnerships, group work, and oral presentations all give ELLs opportunities to practice their English. These types of activities can build support systems through other students, and motivate your ELLs to become interested in what they're learning.

Total Physical Response

Make your lessons less reliant on purely verbal communication. Try to incorporate music, drama, Total Physical Response (TPR) and games. All of these are fun for most students and therefore are great motivators to get children interested in learning. Putting vocabulary and concepts to a beat makes it easy to remember and practice. Games can strengthen language and content concepts you are working on or can introduce new concepts. They are enjoyable and therefore can lower anxiety with students.

TPR can be done simultaneously with music or on its own. TPR is when students physically move to practice meaning of English words and phrases. The teacher can work on concepts such as commands or action verbs. When students see these acted out or act them out themselves they are more likely to remember. Students can also show that they comprehend even if they cannot express their comprehension verbally. Drama is when students take the action of TPR but incorporate even more such as storytelling and role-play. Drama can help ELLs verbally work on their English skills while also using facial expressions and body language as a support.

Speech in the Classroom

The speed and level of expression you use with your students can have a bigger impact on your ELLs than other students in the room. Students may struggle a great to catch what you are saying. Changing this is a very difficult task and will require time and mindfulness. However, here are some things you can try to get you be more aware of your verbal habits in the classroom. Try to monitor your speech. Speaking too quickly can confuse ELLs. If you speak more slowly they have more processing time. Use clear, slow yet natural speech and simple sentences. Use the names of people rather than pronouns. Pause after each sentence, but not after each word as that distorts the rhythm of the language. Give directions one step at a time.

When you want a response from an ELL give them appropriate wait time. They need time to think of their answer and then think of how to say that answer in English. Often they will translate in their heads. Show your patience through your good eye contact and a smile.

Try to check for comprehension frequently. Support what you are saying by acting it out, pointing, using body language, using gestures, and modeling whenever possible. Also put printed words on the board as frequently as possible or point to somewhere they are up in the classroom. Accept these types of responses from students in the early stages of English acquisition.

Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP)

In terms of lesson planning, the SIOP model is an approach in which you work on content and language objectives within the same lesson. The Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) is a research-based model of sheltered English instruction. It is both an observation instrument and a model for lesson planning and implementation of sheltered instruction for ELLs. Some components of the program are the posting of both content and language objectives. These objectives are explicitly reviewed at the beginning and end of class. It also encompasses strategic introduction of content vocabulary, explicit literacy instruction, and the use of hands-on manipulative. More info on this program can be found at www.siopinstitute.net.

Set content and language objectives and make sure the objectives are known both by verbal and written means. Review key vocabulary that you expect your ELLs won't know. That may be a daunting task if you expect there are many words they will not know. Don't barrage them with too many words. Choose ones that are integral to the concept and make sure you revisit them. Make sure you assess your ELLs to guide further planning and teaching.

Good teaching practices, such as concrete goals, visual aids and ample time for practice are excellent ways to support your ELLs. If your students lack prior knowledge try to plan for explicit instruction including supplementary materials. When possible, make things visual with pictures, photographs, and real objects. Try to relate the concepts you are teaching to real-life experience situations. Making it hands-on will make it easier for them to understand. If the text you want to use is too difficult try to modify it for your ELLs.   Also make sure you are using correct pacing for the lesson especially when it is a topic in which your ELLs do not have much prior knowledge about. Also try to include opportunity for the four modalities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Literacy Strategies

       English Language Learners face a variety of challenges when learning to read in English. Literature is usually culturally bound. Students who have been educated in America are familiar with a variety of genres and the conventions of those genres. If teachers do not activate prior knowledge or explicitly give background information students can really struggle. They are often not aware of what the author leaves unsaid, what "everyone knows."

Before Reading Strategies

 1. Previewing the text helps build background knowledge.   As a class look at headings, captions, charts, diagrams, sidebars-information in the margins, and boldface words in chapter. Then analyze these clues and make connections.

2. Introducing vocabulary first helps ELLs better understand the content being taught. Put the words on a words wall and discuss possible meanings. In early grades these words should be accompanied by a picture. Do not overdo vocabulary introduction, rather make it a quick exercise before the reading.

3. Give students a purpose before they read. Discuss a big idea before the text is even in front of them. For example, talk about one word (i.e. Honor) that is written on the board before students begin reading. This will automatically give students something to tune into as they read.

4. Whenever possible, chart student responses as they give them to you in pre-reading discussions. This can support ELL students by putting the vocabulary on the chart or overhead. It also gives you something to refer back to when discussing predictions or thoughts students had before reading.

During and After Reading Strategies

1. Think alouds, when you model out loud your thought process during reading are very helpful. This can be done if you are reading out loud. It can also be done before a discussion, referring to a particular line in the text. Think alouds give a verbal example of what type of comments you are looking for. They also give a format for how comments can be expressed.

2. Read, Pause and Retell helps students with their reading comprehension. Again, model how this should be done in your classroom.   Students can work with a partner which gives practice for a whole class share.

3. Graphic Organizers allow students to create a visual of a word essential to ideas, details, or concepts from their readings.

Challenges for ELLs in Content Areas

In addition to the challenge of learning a new language while being held responsible for content, ELLs are dealing with a new culture in the classroom. In all content areas it is important to consider that ELLs may have been taught in a different style. Some of our tasks and expectations in the classroom are very culturally bound. ELLs may not have much practice giving an opinion of a text, for example. Cooperative learning might be very new to them. Drawing conclusions may not be something they are very used to, and students may not have been trained to make guesses.

In math they may be more concerned with getting the right answer and not worried about the process. In turn, they may find it much, much more difficult to justify their answers. Our measurement system is brand new to most all students. In many cultures math is not taught spirally, so students may not know a lot about geometry, for example. Mental math might be more the norm, as many countries teach math by rote memorization. Students might not have been expected to show their work. Many students have never worked with manipulatives and might not take this work seriously.

Social studies and US history are very difficult for ELLs. They have no context in which to place events and lack necessary prior knowledge. Facts do not have much relevance for ELLs and can be quickly forgotten. Social studies texts are often written in the passive voice and use a lot of pronouns in addition to complex sentence structure. Taking notes can also be stressful for a student who has difficulty understanding what is being said by the teacher. Often there is a large amount of text covered, and it is challenging for ELLs to tell what is important. Finally, concepts such as privacy, rights of citizens, democratic process may not exist in their culture.

In Science students are expected to have a very large vocabulary. Even simple words that students may already know might have a different meaning in science. Like social studies, material is covered very fast. Students may not be familiar with cooperative learning. Directions are often several steps and difficult to follow. Science textbooks present a variety of concepts on every page.

–Adapted from "Challenges for ELLs in Content Area Learning" by Judie Haynes.
www.everythingesl.net

ELL Myths

General education teachers have an obligation to understand the English Language Learners in their classrooms. A good place to start is with the preconceived notions that we may have picked up through cultural stereotypes or old research. Barry McLaughlin (1993) lists common myths about English Language Learners:

*For his complete article go to: http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/ncrcdsll/epr5.htm

Children learn second languages quickly and easily: Teachers should assume that young students struggle as much as adults or more when learning a new language. Do not assume that young students are less inhibited than older ones. Also, most students will not make huge growth over one year. Learning a language takes many years.

The younger the child, the more skilled in acquiring a second language: Younger students may acquire better pronunciation, but older students may learn a language faster than younger ones.

The more time students spend in a second language context, the quicker they learn the language: Giving students support in their home language is helpful so that they can make a connection between home and school. They can also continue to learn content while they are in a context where vocabulary and grammar are not such a challenge.

Children have acquired a second language once they can speak it: Children should pass more than an oral assessment before they leave an ESL program. Fluency requires skills in reading and writing, and those must be assessed as well.

All children learn a second language in the same way: Learning styles *and* culture influence how quickly students learn a language. Teachers may gain insight into what instructional strategies will be the most effective by taking the time to learn the background of their students.

ESL Websites for Teachers

- http://www.siopinstitute.net/: Site covering the SIOP model as method for lesson planning

- http://www.colorincolorado.org/: Site for teachers and parents in English and Spanish

- www.damand.com: Curriculum materials for ELLS

- www.benchmarkeducation.com: Curriculum materials for ELLS

- http://www.eslcafe.com/: Site with resources for students and teachers

- http://community.scholastic.com/blog?blog.id=ELL_strategies: Teacher Blogs on strategies for English Language Learners

- http://www.eslteachersboard.com/cgi-bin/lessons/index.pl?noframes;read=1285: Site with many resources for ESL teachers

- http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/nyseslat/: Site About New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)

- Instructional Strategies for English Language Learners: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/biling/lpacmanual/p98-107InstructionalStrategies.pdf

- http://www.region15.org/curriculum/graphicorg.html: Graphic organizers in English and Spanish

- http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/: Graphic organizers