

20 Tips for Teachers of Language-Minority Students

Schools in the United States have become diverse in language and cultural backgrounds. While this diversity brings exciting opportunities for a multicultural society, it can also bring frustration to the dedicated classroom teacher of students who are learning a new language, a new culture and new subject matter. Classroom teachers can help language minority students comprehend content subject matter as they acquire English language skills by practicing the following tips.

- 1. Increase your own knowledge.**
Learn as much as you can about the language and culture of your students. Go to movies, read books. Keep the similarities and differences in mind and then check your knowledge by asking your students whether they agree with your impressions. Learn as much of the student's language as you can; even a few words help. Widen your own world view; think of alternative ways to reach the goals you have for your class.
- 2. Simplify your language.**
Speak directly to the student, emphasizing important nouns and verbs. Use as few extra words as possible. Repetition and speaking louder doesn't help; rephrasing, accompanied by body language, does. Avoid slang and idiomatic expressions.
- 3. Announce the lesson's objectives and activities.**
Write the objectives on the board and review them orally before class begins. It is also helpful to place the lesson in the context of its broader theme and preview upcoming lessons.
- 4. Write legibly.**
Remember that some students have low levels of literacy or are unaccustomed to the Roman alphabet. Use the chalkboard or overhead projector to write important words.
- 5. Demonstrate; use manipulatives.**
Whenever possible, accompany your message with gestures, pictures, and objects that help get the meaning across. Use a variety of different pictures or objects for the same idea. Give an immediate context for new words.
- 6. Make use of all senses.**
Give students a chance to touch things, to listen to sounds, even to smell and taste when possible. Talk about the words that describe these senses as the student physically experiences something. Write new words as well as say them.
- 7. Use filmstrips, films, videotapes, and audio cassettes with books.**
Obtain audio-visual materials from the school or district media center to improve a content lesson. It is helpful to preview the audio-visual materials before showing them to the class, both for possible language difficulties and misleading cultural information.
- 8. Bring realia into the lessons.**
Use visual displays (graphs, charts, photos), objects, and authentic materials, like newspaper and magazine clippings, in the lessons and assignments. These help provide non-verbal information and also help match various learning styles.
- 9. Adapt the materials.**
Don't "water down" the content. Rather, make the concepts more accessible and comprehensible by adding pictures, charts, maps, time-lines and diagrams, in addition to simplifying the language.
- 10. Pair or group language minority students with native speakers.**
Much of a student's language learning comes from interacting with his or her peers. Give your students tasks to complete that require interaction of each member of the group, but arrange it so that the language minority student has linguistically easier tasks. Utilize cooperative learning techniques in a student-centered classroom.
- 11. Develop a student-centered approach to teaching and learning.**
Teachers need to become facilitators and let students assume more responsibility for their learning. When activities are planned that actively involve students in each lesson, the students can better process the material presented and acquire the language as well.

12. **Have the students do hands-on activities.**
Plan for students to manipulate new materials through hands-on activities, such as role play and simulations. This includes TPR (total physical response), laboratory experiments, drawing pictures and story sequences, and writing their own math word problems.
13. **List and review instructions step-by-step.**
Before students begin an activity, teachers should familiarize them with the entire list of instructions. Then, teachers should have students work on each step individually before moving on to the next step. This procedure is ideal for teaching students to solve math and science word problems.
14. **Ask inferential and higher-order thinking questions.**
Encourage students' reasoning ability, such as hypothesizing, inferencing, analyzing, justifying, predicting. Language minority students possess higher-order thinking skills.
15. **Build on the student's prior knowledge.**
Find out as much as you can about how and what a student learned in his or her own country. Then try to make a connection between the ideas and concepts you are teaching and the student's previous knowledge or previous way of being taught. Encourage the students to point out differences and connect similarities.
16. **Recognize that students will make language mistakes.**
During the second language acquisition process, students make mistakes; this is natural in the process of learning a language. Make sure that the students have understood the information, but do not emphasize the grammatical aspect of their responses. When possible, model the correct grammatical form.
17. **Increase wait time.**
Give students time to think and process the information before you rush in with answers. A student may know the answer, but may need a little more processing time in order to say it in English.
18. **Don't force reticent students to speak.**
Give the student an opportunity to demonstrate his or her comprehension and knowledge through body actions, drawing pictures, manipulating objects or pointing.
19. **Respond to the message.**
If a student has the answer correct and you can understand it, don't correct his or her grammar. The exact word and correct grammatical response will develop with time, especially with young children. Instead, repeat his or her answer, putting it into standard English, and let the student know that you are pleased with his or her response.
20. **Support the student's home language and culture; bring it into the classroom.**
Your goal should be to encourage the students to keep their home languages as they also acquire English. Many children in this world grow up speaking more than one language; it's an advantage. Let students help bring about a multicultural perspective to the subjects you are teaching. Students might be able to bring in pictures, poems, dances, proverbs or games. They might be able to demonstrate a new way to do a math problem or bring in a map that shows a different perspective than that given in your history or geography book. Encourage students to bring these items in as a part of the subject you are teaching, not just as a separate activity. Do whatever you can to help your fluent English-speaking students see the language-minority student as a knowledgeable person from a respected culture.

References: Short, D.J. *Integrating Language and Content Instruction: Strategies and Techniques* (Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1991).
Sullivan, T. *Sheltered English Techniques in the Mainstream Class: Guidelines and Techniques for Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics; ERIC Clearinghouse on Language and Linguistics, 1993).

SIOP Model: A Sheltered Instruction Model for Academic Achievement

(Adapted from Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000)

PREPARATION

<p><i>Clear Content</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly define content objectives Base objectives on national and state standards 	<p><i>Clear Language Objectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly define language objectives Reinforce listening, speaking, reading and writing 	<p><i>Content Concepts Appropriate</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan concepts to match students' age and educational background (pre-assessment) 	<p><i>Supplementary Materials</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use graphs, models, and visuals to make lessons clear and meaningful 	<p><i>Adapting Content and Texts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt assignments and use graphic organizers, outlines, study guides, and jigsaw reading strategies to make content accessible 	<p><i>Meaningful Activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate real-life problem solving, surveys, simulations, modeling, and real data
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BUILDING BACKGROUND

<p><i>Link to Student Background/Experience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use KWL charts, journals, and think-pair-share strategies to encourage meaningful connections 	<p><i>Link to Past Learnings/Concepts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and build on prior knowledge Connect current lessons to previous lessons Provide relevant context for new concepts 	<p><i>Key Vocabulary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build and strengthen vocabulary through word walls, vocabulary cards, concept maps, and word books
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COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT

<p><i>Speech</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be sensitive to specialized vocabulary Use slower rate, enunciation, and simple sentence structure for language learners 	<p><i>Explicit Description of Academic Tasks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain academic tasks and expectations clearly Clarify terms to enhance understanding 	<p><i>Instructional Strategies/Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a variety of techniques to make concepts clear (modeling, visuals, hands-on activities, demonstrations, gestures, and body language)
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LEARNING STRATEGIES

<p><i>Metacognitive/Cognitive Learning Strategies</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage students to use mental imagery and/or to draw a diagram or picture of the problem 	<p><i>Scaffolding Techniques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the right amount of support to move students from one level of understanding to a higher level Encourage thinking aloud 	<p><i>Variety of Questions Used for Higher Order Thinking</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use resources such as: PBS Teacherline questions, Bloom's Taxonomy, and KSDE cognitive categories to enhance questioning
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INTERACTION

(Social Affective Learning)

<p><i>Provide Multiple Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include jigsaw, think-pair-share, debates, justifying reasoning, literature study groups, and group problem solving experiences 	<p><i>Group Configurations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify concepts Vary groupings from whole class to small groups to pairs Group heterogeneously based on language and skills 	<p><i>Allow for Wait Time</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide adequate time for problem solving and thinking aloud Write individually then share ideas 	<p><i>Give Opportunities to Clarify Key Concepts In First Language</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support through paraprofessionals, peers, or first language texts
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PRACTICE/APPLICATION

<p><i>Hands On Opportunities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include multiple opportunities to use manipulatives, models, and representations 	<p><i>Apply Content & Language Objectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities to dialogue solution strategies Restate peer solution strategies Discuss mathematics content, processes, and new vocabulary during debriefing sessions 	<p><i>Integrate Language Skills (listening, speaking, reading & writing)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage writing in math journals Share solution strategies verbally and in writing
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LESSON DELIVERY

(Well-planned, clear explanations, appropriate application time, strong management skills, meaningful activities, active learning)

<p><i>Content Objectives Supported by Lesson Delivery</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State content objectives orally and in writing Teach to objectives Align teaching strategies, classroom activities, resources, and assessments with objectives 	<p><i>Language Objectives Supported by Lesson Delivery</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State language objectives orally and in writing Provide opportunities to practice language within lessons Include concrete, visual, and verbal definitions 	<p><i>Students Engaged 90% of Period</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage students both intellectually and physically Include active learning, problem solving, and inquiry-based learning Create smooth transitions to provide more engagement time 	<p><i>Pacing Appropriate to Ability Level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide appropriate amount of time for students to construct knowledge and develop deep understanding of concepts Pacing should not be too slow or too fast
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REVIEW/ASSESSMENT

<p><i>Review Key Vocabulary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model vocabulary in context of real life Reinforce vocabulary through concrete and representational examples 	<p><i>Review Key Concepts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peers model concepts physically and/or visually Avoid over reliance on symbolic representation 	<p><i>Give Feedback to Students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide frequent and timely feedback Feedback should be specific to task Try to avoid red ink ☺ 	<p><i>Assessments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnose if student is struggling with language, content, or both Spot-check regularly Use a variety of assessments including verbal, visual, and performance-based
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