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The fact that the nation’s teachers are encountering and will increasingly encounter a diverse range of learners requires that every teacher has sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and range of skills to be able to meet the unique needs of all students, including those for whom English is not their primary language. While it is true that there are educational specialists who have expertise in supporting ELs—English as a second language and bilingual teachers, for example—many teachers do not. Yet the reality is that most, if not all, teachers have or can expect to have EL students in their classroom and therefore must be prepared to best support these children.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR TEACHERS OF ELS

SUPPORT ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

- Oral language proficiency allows students to participate in academic discussions, understand instruction, and build literacy skills.
- Students with more developed first language skills are able better able to develop their second language skills.
- Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in oral language proficiency. ELs require direct teaching of new words along with opportunities to learn new words in context through hearing, seeing, and saying them as well as during indirect encounters with authentic and motivating texts.
- Building oral proficiency in a second language can be supported by the use of nonverbal cues, visual aids, gestures, and multisensory hands-on methods. Other strategies include establishing routines, extended talk on a single topic, providing students with immediate feedback, opportunities to converse with teachers, speaking slowly, using clear repetition, and paraphrasing supports oral communication.
- Students should receive explicit instruction and preparation techniques to aid in speaking with others by teaching words and grammatical features that are used in academic settings.

EXPLICITLY TEACH ACADEMIC ENGLISH

- Academic language is decontextualized, abstract, technical, and literary. It is difficult for native speakers and even more difficult for ELs.
- Academic language is not limited to one area of language and requires skills in multiple domains, including vocabulary, syntax/grammar, and phonology.
- Understanding the differences of informal language and academic language is important. Opportunities to learn and practice academic language are essential. Students must be exposed to sophisticated and varied vocabulary and grammatical structures and must avoid slang and idioms.
- Opportunities and instruction on using academic language accurately in multiple contexts and texts is of critical importance for all ELs.
- School-wide efforts and coordination of curriculum across content area helps teachers build on a foundation of prior knowledge.

VALUE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- ELs typically face multiple challenges in the transition from home to school as most are from culturally diverse backgrounds. Schooling experiences should reaffirm the social, cultural, and historical experiences of all students.
- Teachers and students should be expected to accept, explore, and understand different perspectives and to be prepared as citizens of a multicultural and global society.
- Opportunities for teachers and students to interact with diverse cultures can be created in multiple ways through inclusive teaching practices, reading and multimedia materials, school traditions and rituals, assembly programs, and cafeteria food that represent all backgrounds.
- Involving parents and community in a meaningful way with outreach and letters to homes, bulletin boards, and staff helps build appreciation of diversity.