

Developing A Classroom Friendly Personal Philosophy For ELD

A Five-Step Plan

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Moll (1994) identifies three key characteristics of effective teachers working with English learners. They are able to 1) articulate theory and tell why they did what they did, 2) argue with administrators to allow them to select materials and implement curriculum according to their professional judgment, and 3) draw on support from colleagues who share their approach to teaching.

All three of Moll's characteristics have one thing in common and that is an underlying personal philosophy of ELD instruction. This paper will focus on the five steps to developing one. The background information needed for each step will be presented as well as a list of questions that focus on the classroom applications of the concept.

### **Step 1-- ESL / Bilingual Education**

Educating the youth of California is extremely challenging. There are 6.9 million students in the K-12 system of which 92% are enrolled in the public schools. Of this number, more than 25% of the students are English language learners. Whites make up only 31.3% of the students. The population is not evenly spread throughout the state and more than half of the students are in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego and San Bernardino counties. About 50% of the students in the state qualify for the National School Lunch Program. (Education Data Partnership)

Peregoy, & Boyle (2005) describe the many different programs that serve these students. Transitional Bilingual Education involves primary language instruction from 1-3 years. The students transition into English language classes and no further instruction in the home language is offered. Another program is Maintenance Bilingual Education where both English instruction and the primary language are offered throughout the school experience. The program goal is full bilingualism and biliteracy. Immersion Programs serve language majority students, and instruction is in the second language. Two-way Immersion programs use both native language and second language. The goal is full bilingualism. For half of the students L2 is the primary language and for the other half English is the primary language. Newcomer Programs are available in many districts for initial adjustment of immigrants.

English Language Development programs include traditional ESL programs and Specially Designed Academic Instruction In English (SDAIE) classes. In ESL programs, students are grouped by language

proficiency level to learn English. ESL pullout involves taking students out of mainstream classrooms for special help. SDAIE is a sheltered content program and works best with students who have achieved intermediate English language proficiency.

#### Questions to Consider

1. What are my feelings about bilingual education? ESL instruction?
2. Will I let students speak their native languages in my classroom?
3. Will the students be able to use their native languages to complete group assignments?
4. Will I support the students' cultures in my classroom through classroom decorations, and recognition of their holidays?

### **Step 2 -- Language Acquisition**

Dr. Elliot Engell (1997) in a video lecture discusses the history and complexity of the English language. When the Romans left England in about the third century, three tribes invaded--Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Their language was Anglo Saxon German (ASG) and thus the core of the English language is Germanic. In 1066, William the Conqueror invaded England. He spoke French/ Latin, and this language was added to ASG. A new language called English was formed. Resulting from the combining of the two languages, today, English has over 600,000 words. In comparison, Russian has 150,000 words and French has 180,000 words. Of the 200 most common English words, 183 are ASG.

Jim Cummins (2000) theorized that there are two aspects to learning a second language. The first is BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and it is the language for social purposes and includes conversation, and informal interactions. BICS can be learned with two or three years. CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) involves formal academic language. It takes from five to seven years to develop CALP.

Behaviorism as associated with BF Skinner emphasizes stimulus, response, and reinforcement as the basic elements of learning. The audio-lingual approach is an example. Chomsky argues against the behaviorist theory and states that we have a language acquisition device that allows us to learn language. This innatist approach, as advanced by Krashen advances the notion that language teaching should focus on communication in a low-anxiety environment. Students learn when the input is made comprehensible. The

interactionists advance the idea of comprehensible input and view the communicative give and take of natural conversations between native and non-native speakers as the crucial element of the language acquisition process. The chart below illustrates the relationship among the three theories.

Instructional Components	Behaviorist	Innatist	Interactionist
Source of linguistic input	Language dialogues and drills from teacher or audiotape	Natural language from the teacher, friends, or books	Natural language from the teacher, friends, or books
Nature Of input	Structured by grammatical complexity	Unstructured, but made comprehensible by teacher	Unstructured, but focused on communication between learner and others
Ideal classroom composition	All target language learners of similar second language proficiency	Target language learners of similar second language proficiency so $i + 1$ can be achieved	Native speakers together with target language learners for social interaction aimed at communication
Student output	Structured repetitions and grammar pattern drill responses	Output is not a concern; it will occur naturally	Speaking occurs naturally in communication with others
Pressure to speak	Students repeat immediately	"Silent period" expected	No pressure to speak except natural impulse to communicate
Treatment of errors	Errors are corrected immediately	Errors are not corrected; students will correct themselves with time	Errors that impede communication will be corrected naturally as meaning is negotiated; some errors may require explicit corrective instruction

(Perogoy & Boyle p. 58)

Questions to consider.

1. How do oral drills and behaviorist imitation fit into my teaching?
2. How often will I correct student pronunciation and grammar errors?
3. Will I allow for a silent period in my classroom?
4. Will my classroom environment be low-stress?
5. Will I provide comprehensible input?
6. How often will I put my students into natural situations so that they can negotiate meaning with others?

### **Step 3 –Constructivism**

According to Constructivist Theory, we construct or create knowledge for ourselves. Vygotsky (1962) adds to the theory by proposing a framework in which social interaction plays a basic role in the

development of knowledge. The discrepancy between what the student can do independently and what the student can do with help is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In the ZPD, teachers employ such techniques as modeling, questioning, pair share, and small group instruction, tutoring, and graphic organizers. Through the use of these scaffolds, the students progress to the point where the activity can be done independently.

Peregoy and Boyle (2005, p. 100) define scaffolding as "a metaphor based on the temporary structures put up around buildings so that construction can take place. Assisted participation offers practice and development of a skill as an integrated whole, rather than drill on smaller aspects of the skill one at a time. Once proficiency is achieved, the scaffold is no longer needed."

#### Questions to Consider

1. How will I group students?
2. Will modeling the expected outcome be part of the teaching process?
3. Will questions be asked that force students to progress in the zone of proximal development?
4. Will graphic organizers and realia be used to enhance learning?

#### **Step 4 --Oral Language**

Listening speaking, reading, and writing should be integrated into classroom assignments. Perhaps the most challenging of the four is oral language because many ELD students are shy and others are not easily understood. Further complicating this matter is that group work and oral presentations are a relatively new innovation in public school classrooms. I have taught over 500 pre-service candidates and one thing that seems to hold true is that before 1998, group work and presentations were not very common in high school. Students spoke in foreign language and debate class, but generally, high school involved sitting and taking notes.

Students need to be exposed to oral language. Teachers need to have students report to the class at the end of a group work assignment, explain problems to the class, provide the opportunity to read their work, do dramatic readings to summarize material read and to express their opinions in debates and discussions.

Questions to consider.

1. How often will there be oral language activities in my classroom?
2. What types of activities do I support?

### **Step 5—Sociocultural**

ELD students are part of a larger community with many subgroups whose issues and values often differ from the mainstream society. John Ogbu's (1991) Cultural Discontinuity Thesis divides the students into two broad groups, immigrant and involuntary minorities. The immigrant minorities are recent arrivals and are not influenced by attitudes/values of "mainstream" society because success is measured by the standards of homeland. They have a high rate of success in school because they believe education leads to success. Members of this group expect to be treated differently and they largely ignore prejudicial treatment. They find ways to succeed despite obstacles, and they feel that they have it "better" here.

In contrast, the involuntary minorities have lived in U.S. for years, often for generations and place a low value on education. They are not sure that education leads to success. Successful members of the group move away creating a lack of positive role models. This group is very aware of prejudicial treatment, and they resent discriminatory treatment and find ways to oppose it. The dominant society has all the power, and they see themselves as having little opportunity for success. Since the language spoken in the home of involuntary minorities is often not English, they qualify for ELD services. Often, both immigrant and involuntary minorities are found in the same SDAIE classes and the teacher cannot use the traditional strategies of grades, disciplinary referrals, and calls to parents to motivate both groups.

Freeman and Freeman offer a method to deal with students through their Four Keys to Success (2002.) Firstly, engage students in challenging, theme-based curriculum to develop academic concepts. Through the use of themes, the students can see the thread that runs through all the activities. Secondly, draw on students' backgrounds, their experiences, cultures, and languages. Most of the involuntary minorities are not motivated by grades. So making personal connections helps tremendously. Thirdly, organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build academic English proficiency. Fourthly, create confident students who value school and value themselves as learners.

The concept of theme often presents a challenge to teachers whose classes are content specific. Peregoy and Boyle (2005, p. 94) provide a broad definition. "We define thematic instruction as a learning sequence organized around a theme or a topic offering students opportunities to use oral language, reading, writing, and critical thinking for learning and sharing ideas." In their model, the thematic unit must have meaning and purpose, build on prior experience, integrate oral and written language, provide scaffolding, provide collaboration and provide lots of variety.

Questions to consider.

1. How will I engage students in challenging, theme-based curriculum to develop academic concepts?
2. How will I draw on students' background, their experiences, cultures, and language?
3. How will I organize collaborative activities and scaffold instruction to build students' academic English proficiency?
4. How will I create confident students who value school and value themselves as learners?

Part of the American Dream is to provide a meaningful education to all students. Perhaps our greatest challenge is to work with immigrants where poverty and language skills are extraordinary barriers. The process is one grand experiment, and we will suffer defeats as well as successes. By grounding oneself in a solid philosophy of ELD instruction, the chances for success greatly improve.

#### A Sample Philosophy Statement

Based on the questions from each section

I have a very solid philosophical basis for my beliefs on ELD instruction. In terms of using an ESL or bilingual instructional model, I don't think that it matters. I believe if the teacher respects the students, their language and their culture, then either system will work. Students, of course, will be allowed to speak their native languages in the class and the room will be filled with items that represent their cultures.

I realize that drill will be part of my mode of instruction, but I will keep that activity to a minimum. Most of the time, I will encourage students to interact with me and with each other. Whenever possible I will try to negotiate meaning with the student, only correct oral errors that get in the way of communication and provide activities that create a low stress environment. I will use lots of realia and speak slowly so that the students will receive comprehensible input. Those students not ready to speak will be allowed to listen.

Group work will be part of every unit. My instruction will be divided into small group and large group instruction. The students will have the opportunity to practice in the small group and then present to the large group. Sometimes I will divide the students into pairs. All assignments will start with my modeling the expected outcomes and I will use graphic organizers so that students can visualize the concepts being taught. I will try to ask questions that help students to explore the issue at hand and help them to reach their own conclusions.

Oral work is important in my class. Students will practice in small groups and then report out to the class. I plan to use groups, panel discussions, debates, skits, individual presentations, and oral reading in my classroom.

I realize that my students are involuntary minorities and immigrant minorities, so I won't insult them with material below their levels. My instruction will be theme based with listening, reading, writing, and critical thinking embedded into each unit. I will ask the students to draw on their backgrounds, and I will motivate them by taking an interest in their cultures and by relating their experiences to the lesson. I will scaffold instruction through materials and techniques appropriate for the lesson. Also, I will have lots of group work. Lastly, I will create confident learners by providing lots of positive feedback and by publishing their work in booklets, posting their work on the classroom walls and by publishing their work on my school web page. There will be lots of practice before an exam, so that most of the students will receive high grades.

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