## **Learning Support: Responsive Teaching**

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## **September 13, 2019 Theme: Supporting English Language Learners (ELLs)**

## **Seen and heard: “We are all content and language teachers.”**

This was a key lesson for me in a course I took last spring through the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education. A few others from FR took this course, too: Patricia Waltner, Kari Levin, Courtney Caldwell, Corina Rahmig, Annabel Channell-Johnson, Concepcion Lindgren, and Michelle Flores.

The course was excellent in design, evidence-basis, and delivery. The six modules were: Research, Language Acquisition, Instructional Strategies and Techniques, Vocabulary, Culture as Asset, and Literacy.

### **Evidence-based corner**

1. ELLs cannot develop phonological awareness in English until they are familiar with the *sounds* of English.
2. ELLs cannot achieve fluency in oral reading before they have achieved fluency in speaking. Reading instruction should be combined with intensive development of oral language needed to understand text. **Questions**: what might this mean for your class and the tasks you expect students to do? Is there room for differentiating tasks and assessments for ELLs?
3. Repeated readings of texts that contain unfamiliar vocabulary and sentence structure will not increase fluency. Be sure that students are reading texts they are familiar with and can understand.
4. Incidental learning of vocabulary is not reliable for ELLs. They need multiple opportunities to hear, say, read, and write words in slightly different, meaningful contexts. Contextual support (real objects, pictures, drawings, gestures, etc) should be used. Context clues are also not always successful, as they may not understand the context well enough to infer an accurate meaning.

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### **Strategies and structures**

1. **Create and post language objectives** of the course and/or lesson, in addition to the content objectives. This could involve being explicit about the vocabulary of content, action, and strategies. Students may need these words explicitly defined and reminded that these are what they’re learning to do. For example: justify, hypothesize, make predictions, question.
2. **Activate prior knowledge**. This is an oldie but goodie. A few minutes spent on this important task yields a lot of benefits for student learning. [Larry Ferlazzo, expert teacher and prolific writer, has some useful strategies](https://www.edutopia.org/article/activating-prior-knowledge-english-language-learners).
3. **Explicitly teach the components of literacy**: phonemic awareness of vocabulary needed for the task; strategies for how to comprehend the task at hand; words that are crucial for understand a text (in other words, don’t assume they know these).