



## Exc**EL**lent Educators: Tidbits for Teaching English Learners in YOUR Classroom

### It's All About Perspective

At a recent training, a new “label” was introduced for students in our classrooms who are learning English as an additional language. You may now hear “Linguistically Gifted” instead of English learners, ESL, English Language Learners, and the like. Although it is still a label, this new term carries a more asset-based connotation and helps people understand the students really are advanced in their language. How many of you can say you are bi/multi-lingual?

Our linguistically gifted and immigrant students bring so many potential learning opportunities to your classrooms. Consider the many ways you can tap into students’ and families’ global knowledge and experiences to enhance your instruction.

Consider adding at least one strategy or scaffold each week or month for your English learners. Start with one strategy you feel is manageable and work on it until you become comfortable and confident. Here are some considerations:

#### 1. Giving Instructions

When giving students verbal instructions, speak slowly and get into the habit of including consistent visual cues and written instructions for a period of time after a new English learner enters your classroom. You can then remove the visual cues and eventually the written instructions. In the case of more complex instructions, you may want to continue to provide the written form for all students.

#### 2. Oral Discourse

Of course, this begins with building relationships and creating a safe learning environment. Stay away from IRE – initiate, respond, evaluate. This is where the teacher initiates a question, one student responds, and the teacher responds. In this scenario, only one student is learning. Give all students the opportunity to answer individually first using whiteboards, apps, numbered fingers, thumbs up/down, etc. This allows you to assess individual knowledge.

When planning lessons, consider ways students (rather than the teacher) can do the talking. You can post diagrams of different student sharing/discussion strategies and refer to the one you will use. Be sure you give students personal think time (not just wait time) and *structured* talk time, so ALL students participate. Turn and talk is fine if it includes a structure of how all have a partner/group and each person does some talking.

For new ELs, consider allowing them to respond in their L1 (first language) and then work on the translation to English. Be sure to prepare them prior to the lesson for their talk turn. These scaffolds can be removed as the students gain more English.

For more ways to support English learners in the classroom, check out this [article by Kristina Robertson in Colorin' Colorado](#).