INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT OF ESL LEARNERS
PROMOTING SUCCESS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since the first edition of this book was published in 2000, Faye completed her work in Latvia on the Bilingual Education Project with Open Schools. She is currently a co-chair of the International Reading Association Special Interest Group, International Partnerships for Critical Thinking and Active Learning. Catherine and Vicki are both vice-principals with the Vancouver School Board, and Vicki has completed her doctorate in ESL education. The authors continue to be passionate about informed, inclusive education for all learners.
PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Not so very long ago, Faye and Catherine were facilitating a workshop for elementary and secondary teachers on the topic of their new book, Student Diversity: Addressing the Needs of All Learners in Inclusive Classroom Communities. Vicki, then working as an ESL consultant for the Vancouver School District, was at the workshop. At the end of the session she spoke passionately to Faye and Catherine about how important inclusive school communities were relative to the needs of ESL students. "ESL learners need a sense of community and more explicit teaching. In addition, their teachers need an elaboration of these ideas you have been presenting in a book that is specifically about the challenge of teaching increasing numbers of ESL students," she said.

Faye and Catherine queried whether or not such a book had already been written. "No such thing exists," Vicki emphasized. She was completing her doctoral studies in ESL education at the University of British Columbia and was feeling "confidently current" about available materials. "Too often ESL needs are gathered in with those of other students with special needs. We need a book that focuses exclusively on the needs of ESL learners in regular classes."

Soon after this conversation, the three of us asked ourselves, "What does inclusion look like through the eyes of students new to English?" In search of answers, we began organizing our resources and experiences: the recent writing experience and staff development expertise of Faye and Catherine combined with Vicki's recent reading and research.

We have found our collaboration to be exciting. It has refined our thinking and our new beliefs about teaching and learning. We hope that this book fuels your thinking, encourages you to work in a spirit of collaboration with your colleagues, and challenges you to reflect on your practice. Teaching is a responsive activity. We continually challenge ourselves to put into practice the best of what we know as we search for new knowledge for changing contexts.

Good luck and great teaching!
CHAPTER 1

WHERE ARE WE GOING IN ESL EDUCATION?

BEYOND SEPARATE PROGRAMS

Twenty years ago, educators ran separate "new immigrant" classes outside the mainstream of the school for those students learning English as a second language (ESL). ESL learners participated in numerous workbook-type, repetitive exercises and drills of the English language in isolation of curriculum content; the focus was on form, not on meaning. The students seldom interacted in any meaningful way with their age and grade peers.

Despite the isolation, ESL learners were thought to "enrich the culture of the school" merely by being present. Yet, at school these same students were prohibited from speaking in their own languages. To do so, it was thought, would interfere with their learning of English. Often, those who did speak their own languages were punished. Some were inappropriately made to put coins in a piggy bank; others were forced to write lines for failing to speak English "all of the time."

Teachers of English as a second or additional language were also isolated. They worked alone away from the mainstream classroom, either in a separate class or in a "pull-out" situation.

TOWARD INCLUSION

Today, educators know that ESL learners in K-12 classes cannot afford to spend time learning the English language in isolation of the curriculum content the students must master to be successful at school. ESL learners must continue to develop cognitively and academically while learning the English needed to be successful with the content of science, social studies, mathematics, and other curricula. Postponing, for too long, access to the language needed to master the mainstream curriculum promotes failure. ESL students not only learn the culture of the school, they help create it. The better schooled that ESL learners are in their first languages, the better learners and users of English they become in the long term.

In earlier decades in the U.S., we emphasized teaching second language as the first step, and postponed the teaching of academics.

Research has shown that postponing or interrupting academic development is likely to promote academic failure in the long term.

—W. Thomas and V. Collier, School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students
ESL specialists, too, belong in the mainstream classroom where they can monitor student progress. In the classroom, they can also collaboratively plan and model teaching strategies to support the staff development of colleagues so that all teachers in the school work more effectively to ensure the success of all learners, including the ESL learners they teach.

**EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING FOR ESL LEARNERS**

Schools that work most effectively with ESL learners share certain qualities and beliefs about teaching and learning. Our beliefs about school-based planning for ESL learners are supported both by what we, as educators, have observed over many years in these schools and by current research in language education.

- The most effective way to teach ESL students is neither by “sink or swim” mainstreaming without support nor by “pull-out” instruction. ESL learners are best monitored and supported in classrooms where they have the opportunity for an occasional short-term, one-shot lesson in a specific area that they may find difficult.

- Classroom teachers and ESL teachers benefit from each other’s support. In this way, the teachers work together, not side by side on parallel agendas. ESL teachers can model explicit language teaching while classroom teachers model age- and grade-appropriate curriculum content. Both models are necessary in order to provide an effective learning environment. ESL specialists belong in the classroom, collaboratively planning and team teaching to provide the best learning environment for all students.

- Learning requires taking risks. The classroom and the school must, therefore, be emotionally safe places for everyone. Teachers need to model for students that “we are in this together, and together we are better.” Teasing and other negative behaviors are not tolerated.

- The goal for ESL students of all ages is to learn the English of the school curricula (that is, science, mathematics, social studies, language arts, history, music), not the English language in isolation of

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Exemplary ESL programs incorporate cultural aspects of students' backgrounds into meaningful language learning experiences and apply ESL techniques to content areas taught through English. In English as a subject class, for example, vocabulary and grammatical structures are taught in isolation but in meaningful contexts, relevant to students' learning experiences and to their lives as members of linguistically and culturally diverse communities.

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There is little evidence that the isolated teaching of rules and structures has any effect on actual language use.
The process of writing should occur in all curriculum areas, not only in the language arts.

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—P. Gibbons, *Learning to Learn in a Second Language*
these curricula. There is no specific “ESL curriculum”; the language of the subject curricula is the ESL curriculum.

- ESL learners cannot afford to wait several years before being integrated in the mainstream of the school. They need exposure to age-and grade-appropriate content that challenges them intellectually and through which they can acquire English as soon as possible. Schools and teachers need to have high expectations of students who are learning English as a second language; ESL learners must be expected to succeed and be supported in doing so.

- School staff must be interested in and committed to ongoing professional development explicitly designed to serve ESL students more effectively and sensitively. In schools with large numbers of ESL students, every teacher must make their education a priority.

- Schools need to involve families and use translators to offer support. Parents of ESL learners want to be involved in their children’s education but often do not know how to go about it. Many lack the English skills needed to communicate at school or to understand aspects of curriculum and instruction, and they are too embarrassed to ask for translators.

- The support services and extracurricular activities of the school need to be designed to include ESL students. Some students require emotional support while they learn how to become involved in school activities, and they need to know who to seek out for help.

- School staff members must recognize and show that they value the various languages and cultures that students bring to school. The school must be positively responsive to diversity. Research shows that the development of students’ home languages needs to be encouraged in a variety of ways both inside and outside the classroom to support the learning of English at school.

- There is tremendous variability in the language backgrounds of ESL learners. A student’s background greatly influences his/her future learning. Competency in the first language(s) or the language of the home varies from student to student. There will be a range of abilities in the classroom: some students may be able to speak but unable to read and write; others may be more able with pen and paper. Some students will already be speaking more than one language. For others, the acquisition of a second language will be a new experience, and they may be the primary communicator in this language outside the home.

- ESL learners have tremendously different personal histories. Some students may have been born in an English-speaking country (such as Canada or the United States), but do not speak English at home. Others may be new or recent immigrants or refugees. Some may have had extensive schooling in their home country; others may have had little or no formal schooling.
Teachers need to encourage bilingualism. Students who graduate fluent in two or more languages will contribute greatly to the world of the future. Research shows that students who are fully bilingual are at an advantage: they score higher on verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests, and they are able to move easily between two or more languages and cultures, thinking fluently in both.

EFFECTIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLING FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Younger learners do not necessarily acquire English faster than older students. As the curriculum increases in difficulty with subject content over time so, too, do the challenges for the ESL learner.

- Schools need to provide more explicit teaching. All learners – primary as well as intermediate and secondary – need explicit teaching. All learners need to respond to information texts as well as to stories.

- ESL learners arrive at school with five or more years of another language. To ensure that they grow cognitively and academically, their home-language development must continue until their English catches up. If not, they will have difficulty with literacy later.

- Students need explicit teaching to learn how to work with text material; that is, how to organize the information they must learn and how to express in different writing forms what they have learned. They also need to know strategies they can apply to other learning and how to seek out additional resources and materials from the library, the World Wide Web, and other places.

In primary classrooms, the following considerations are helpful to teachers in planning for the inclusion of the ESL learners:

- Encourage students to write in pictures or use rebuses.

- Give students lots of time for play, alone and with others.

- Encourage students to use drawings, clay, and mime to communicate.

- Post "survival language" – visual signs – around the classroom and on the desks of ESL students (e.g., recess, washrooms).

- Encourage students to use the different languages in the classroom.

- Establish routines so students can predict what is going to happen next.

- Invite students to bring in photo albums. They can label the photos, ask and answer simple questions about the pictures, and refer to the photos when they need comfort. Be sensitive to students who have suffered trauma or who have painful memories of the move.
• Have students keep a special toy at their desk.

• Use wordless picture books. Students can use the books to create a story in any language, or they can dictate their story to a scribe.

• When reading with older buddies, try to pair students with another student who shares the same first language. Together, they can read and write in two different languages, English and their home language.

• Be prepared to wait six months to a year for ESL students to develop the English-language skills and confidence they need to participate comfortably in social conversation.

In an intermediate classroom, the following considerations are helpful in planning for the inclusion of ESL students:

• Encourage students to keep a translation dictionary at their desk to assist in finding key words. Some students now use electronic dictionaries for this purpose.

• Encourage ESL learners to draw their ideas or speak in their first language when other students are writing their responses in English. When learners are ready, they can write in their first language or in English.

• Encourage ESL students to respond in their first language while a more fluent English speaker translates. Classroom groupings should change frequently, however, and teachers must be very careful not to “burn out” the translators.

• In groups of three, have students mime idioms and specialized language in the texts being read. This activity helps to solidify the concepts for all students.

• When reading a text that is above the comprehension level of a new ESL student, have the student circle the words he/she knows and also choose two or three new words to learn.

• Encourage new ESL students to keep a sketchbook at their desk. The student draws on one page, and on the opposite page a trusted buddy writes about what he/she sees in the drawing. Alternatively, the buddy can draw in response to what he/she sees in the drawing.

• Have ESL students keep the following in their desk: an easy chapter book in English to read, an easy English content book, a book in their first language for silent reading periods, and a journal for writing in their first language. For some students, it is also appropriate to have a book of maps (unless there has been a trauma associated with the move) and a photo album of “places I have been,” family members, and special occasions (unless these are unavailable or are too painful to recall).

• Have the school librarian show beginners where to find easy-to-read age- and grade-appropriate books in English so they can take them out independently.
Teach students how to work with the individual novel study frame (see chapter 8, pages 94-98). They can use the forms on their own after they have learned how it works. They can respond in words and in sketches to books that they select independently once the librarian has shown them where to find the books.

Have beginners focus more on writing than on the spelling and editing of written work. Encourage them to write in English, where possible, or in a combination of English and their first language, if needed. Save writing samples in a portfolio so that students can observe their own progress.

Have beginning ESL students make word banks in various subject areas (e.g., science, social studies). The word bank can contain new words on index cards with English on one side and a home-language reminder on the other. Students can add a few words each day and practice the words with a buddy.

Have beginners work in cooperative groups where they can learn how activities work from watching their peers.

Have ESL students and their buddies keep response journals. In the journal, they can write to each other, read to each other, and ask each other questions (orally for beginners and in writing for intermediate and advanced ESL learners).

Give beginners the answers and/or a correct model from which to work so that they can complete tasks. Remind students that the emphasis is on completing the task (the process of learning and the language and the task), not on making a product for marking.

Teach how information texts are organized in various subjects. In social studies, for example, time lines and cause-and-effect are frequently used; in science experiments, procedures are sequenced; structure/function diagrams or charts are often used in science texts.

Have high expectations for the success of ESL students. Challenge them with open-ended activities. Think of them as students first, ESL learners second, and expect them to learn enthusiastically when they are interested in school and learning.

**EFFECTIVE SECONDARY SCHOOLING FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

The dropout rate in secondary grades is much higher for ESL learners whose English language support is discontinued than it is for those who receive support. Schools need to be careful not to misdiagnose learners as being proficient in measures of the English language in isolation of the curriculum content. Students often seem proficient orally, but they do not have the English needed to read and master curriculum content.

Create “homework help” clubs, using peer tutors and volunteers from the school community, to provide ongoing support both in the classroom and after school.

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Use of the home language at school for learning enhances the learning of the English needed to master the curriculum of the school. Secondary students who are encouraged to use their first language at school for learning are more likely to be motivated to learn and to complete school. Where possible, organize first-language peer support groups.

Ensure that the cultural and linguistic diversity of ESL students is respected. Create multicultural clubs to provide orientation and support for newcomers.

Make information in secondary texts more accessible to ESL students. Help the students learn strategies to organize and work with the complex ideas presented in texts. ESL students will benefit from explicit teaching that coordinates the learning of language with the learning of academic subject matter or content. Explicit teaching of how and when to use graphic organizers has been shown to be useful for learning ESL (Mohan 1986; Mohan, Leung, and Davison 2001).

SUPPORTING ESL LEARNERS IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM SETTING

In mainstream classroom settings, teachers can do several things to support ESL students. Here are some suggestions.

- Talk more clearly by reducing the speed and complexity of the words while continuing to offer challenges.
- Increase repetition and reinforcement of ideas taught.
- Pause frequently, and check for student comprehension. ESL students are adept at learning to locate bits of information in texts and giving factual answers. However, studies show that they often have a marginal understanding of what it is they are copying or memorizing to fill in blanks and respond to factual statements on worksheets.
- Supplement having students locate and repeat information verbatim from texts with activities that require learners to form opinions, and support their ideas by synthesizing information in written form.
- Use concrete objects and experiences to give students a common context for using language in groups; for example, everyone has experienced the same thing in class.
- Balance explicit teacher-led discussions with opportunities for ESL students to talk with their peers about what they are learning.
- Ensure beginners interact with more advanced learners of the language so that all students are challenged and learn from practicing with each other. Studies show that students benefit from teaching or applying their learning to others.
- Teach grammar in meaningful contexts. "Fill-in-the-blank" worksheets are not effective because they teach language in isolation of curriculum content, context, or meaning.
- Supplement textbooks with other reading materials such as magazine articles and newspapers to expose students to a wide variety of sources.

- Use graphic organizers to support the learner's understanding of concepts in English. Graphics help ESL learners organize both their ideas and the written information in texts.

- Scaffold activities. Present information in a step-by-step, concrete, and clear manner.

- Model the tasks ESL students are expected to accomplish before they begin to work on them.

- Give ESL students more time than mainstream students, if needed, to complete tasks. Reduce the number and complexity of the questions ESL learners are expected to complete.

- Build in a variety of opportunities for students to show their learning – verbally, in writing, on tape, in graphic form – through attention to the multiple intelligences of each learner.

- Teach all students how to work effectively in groups so that ESL students new to working in groups learn what is expected of them and all students work as members of a team, supporting each other's learning.

- Help students understand that becoming bilingual is an asset.

- Make directions clearer for ESL students by writing and drawing instructions on the chalkboard in a step-by-step manner and offering individual support, as needed.