

Four Stages of ELL Language Development and Accompanying Selection of Level-appropriate Strategies

The [ELL Proficiency Levels](#) represent what an ELL can do linguistically at each stage. They are collated with an accompanying selection of level-appropriate strategies teachers may wish to embed in their instruction for the advancement of an of ELL's comprehension and learning of curriculum content.

1. Pre-production

The preproduction phase applies to ELLs who are unfamiliar with English. They may have had only anywhere from one day to three months' of exposure to English. ELLs at this level are trying to absorb the language, and they can find this process overwhelming. Often they are linguistically overloaded, and they get tired quickly because of the constant and intense need for concentration. They are trying to make sense out of their new linguistic environment to meet their basic needs. An ELL's language skills are at the receptive level, during which they enter a "silent period" of listening. ELLs at this stage are able to comprehend more English than they can produce. They are focusing on Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)ⁱ development (production of single words and formula, emergence of interlanguage, codeswitching). An ELL can engage in nonverbal responses, follow simple commands; point and respond with movement; and utter simple formulaic structures in English such as "yes", "no", "thank you", or names. ELLs have may have a receptive vocabulary of up to 500 words. Teachers at this level must use strategies that include pantomime, yes/no questioning, realia, simplified speech, gestures, pointing, acting out, frequent repetition, visuals, modeling and demonstrating.

Possible Questioning Techniques:

- How many.....?, Point to..., Find the..., Put the _____ next to the _____.
- Do you have the _____? Can you name.....?, What is.....?,
- Is this a/an _____?, Who wants the _____?, Who has the _____?

Suggested (Listening/Speaking) Instructional Strategies:

- *Total Physical Response (TPR) with basic commands and with pictures*
- *Gouin Series Method*
- *Using big books & reading stories aloud with picture clues*
- *Completing cartoon strip dialogues*
- *Using games: grammar games, pronunciation games, story games, drama*

games, simulation games, writing games

- *Listening to a story in English and retell a partner in the home language*
- *Using verbalizing experiments*
- *Matching pictures with words*
- *Engaging the ELL in lots of English language exposure*
- *Sorting and/or classifying objects and pictures*
- *Using simple cloze activities with pictures and labels & using word matching*
- *Using word sorts based on phonics or concepts*
- *Naming characters from stories or pictures*
- *Using structured overviews with simple definitions*
- *Employing directed reading: using a buddy to read to the ELL*
- *Associating sentences to pictures*
- *Rehearsing*
- *Using KWL charts*
- *Writing numbers from dictation*
- *Drawing objects from discussion*
- *Finding points on a map from oral directions*
- *Guessing names of objects from oral descriptors*
- *Labeling objects in a picture or photograph*
- *Following a set of directions*
- *Repeating & teaching formulaic classroom directives*
- *Reading aloud to complete a task, recipe, or art project*
- *Plotting points on a graph from dictation*
- *Completing dictated problems with/without a calculator*
- *Patterning responses using audio-lingual strategies*
- *Sequencing of events based on pictures or familiar short narrative*

Suggested (Reading/Writing) Instructional Strategies:

- *Using sight word recognition activities: word families, murals, clustering, mapping, story boarding with pictures and labels*
- *Using graphic organizers to build vocabulary*
- *Using vocabulary clustering activities*
- *Employing writing response groups*
- *Picture labeling*
- *Using different forms of print materials, including: lists, order forms, labels & captions, junk mail literature, comics*
- *Using modified cloze procedures using familiar paragraphs or narratives*
- *Employing language experience stories using omissions, identifications or associations*
- *Using sentence completion and transformation*

Suggested (Global) Instructional Strategies:

- *Using a buddy system*
- *Using cooperative groupings in class (mixed or heterogeneous)*

- *Using information gap and jigsaw activities*

Taken and adapted from numerous sources including Mora, 2002; Erben & Sarieva, 2004; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005.

2. Early Production

After ELLs have had opportunities to receive meaningful and comprehensible English, they will begin to respond with one or two word answers or short utterances. ELLs may now have internalized up to 1000 words in their receptive vocabulary and anywhere from 100-500 words in their active vocabulary. In order for ELLs to begin to speak, teachers should create a low anxiety environment in their classrooms. Young (1991) identifies six potential sources of anxiety for second language learners to be aware of (personal & interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language learning, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures and language testing). ELLs are on their way to developing BICS (production of single words and formula, emergence of interlanguage, codeswitching, recognition and response to new combinations of known words, internal translation to and from first language, emergence of silent reading for basic comprehension). At this stage, ELLs are experimenting and taking risks with English. Errors in grammar and pronunciation are to be expected. Pragmatic errors are also common. Teachers need to model/demonstrate with correct language responses in context. Redundancies, repetitions, circumlocutions, and language enhancement strategies are important for teachers to use when speaking with ELLs at this level. Teachers need to develop task-based lessons, and engage the ELLs in role playing and labeling.

Possible Questioning Techniques:

- Yes/No questions, Either/Or questions, One-word response questioning
- Questions that encourage lists of words, Two-word responses
- Questions that elicit lists/main events (what happened after...?)
- Describing questions (can you describe?), Definition questions
- Comprehension questions (can you write in your own words....? What do you think...?, Can you give me an example of....? What is the main idea...?)
- Who...what...where questioning

Suggested (Listening/Speaking) Instructional Strategies:

- *Using role playing*
- *Employing Reader's Theater*
- *Labeling a picture, scene, or event with short sentences*
- *Describing a picture, scene, story, or event*
- *Using drama, dramatizing poetry or school texts (role play of historical characters in social studies or science)*
- *Finding picture differences*
- *Estimating*
- *Using different genre literature (recipe books, teacher-made books, collections)*

of songs on specific topics that illustrate specific vocabulary, science centers)

- *Responding to how and why questions*
- *Making word associations*
- *Engaging in language experience stories*
- *Recreating wordless books*
- *Repeating phrases or filling in rhyming words in poetry being read aloud*
- *Predicting outcomes of common situations, stories or narratives*
- *Having ELLs write endings to stories*
- *Solving simple story problems*
- *Grouping discussions to generate lists or short stories*
- *Taping and dubbing TV shows on specific topics, or working in groups to recreate the narrative for a TV show*
- *Sentence expansion & transformation activities*
- *Pattern practice drills (word substitution, word transformation, word ending, metaphor and idiom building activities)*
- *Story telling based on familiar events or personal experiences and routines*
- *Retelling instructions, Retelling main points of teaching, Retelling stories*
- *Using exercises that build vocabulary (synonym / antonym / homonym exercises)*
- *Creating sentences and descriptions based on classroom/classmate information charts*

Suggested (Reading/Writing) Instructional Strategies:

- *Writing sentences based on graphic organizers*
- *Using writing response groups*
- *Cloze dictation*
- *Writing descriptions based on guide questions or template*
- *Using multiple print examples in class: cheques, ledgers, labels & captions, personal journals, buddy journals, record keeping journals, notes, personal letters, business letters*
- *Introducing familiar stories with different language*
- *Using literacy scaffolds*
- *Verbalizing experiments: question boxes, message boards, wall dictionaries*
- *Sentence building*
- *Engaging in Chain Writing*
- *Completing dialogues based on prompts or clues*
- *Using Guessing games based on descriptions*
- *Writing recipes or short series of directions*
- *Creating a paragraph based on a sequence of pictures*
- *Completing a story using substitutions for characters and parts of speech (nouns, adjectives, verbs)*
- *Encourage practice in one grammatical structure a day*

Taken and adapted from numerous sources including Mora, 2002; Erben & Sarieva, 2004; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005

3. Speech Emergence

At this stage, speech will emerge in the form of short phrases and sentences. ELLs will begin to use the new language to interact more freely. ELLs at this level are successful in subject matter classes when comprehensible instructional strategies are used. ELLs have a 7000 word receptive vocabulary and recognize many words by sight. They may have up to 2000 words active vocabulary. By this time, ELLs may have had between 1-3 years exposure to English, and BICS is developing. It is possible that they have a receptive understanding of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (use of information to make inferences and draw oral conclusions, better able to evaluate accuracy, development of expressive language and rhetorical conventions), however, in order to provide understandable subject matter content, teachers should begin the presentation of new concepts by using advance organizers. Teachers should attempt to modify their delivery of subject matter by using realia, modeling, encouraging ELLs to predict and describe, demonstrate, problem-solve, continue to use visuals and teacher-talk focused on key points. Teachers must provide an opportunity for ELLs to work in structured small groups. And allow ELLS to engage in listing, charting and graphing of new content materials. Assessment should include frequent oral comprehension checks. Since ELLs will be engaged in a variety of individual and small group handson activities, evaluation should be performance-based, as opposed to solely traditional paper and pencil assessment.

Possible Questioning Techniques:

- Providing examples questioning (do you know another instance where..?)
- Tell me about..., Talk about ...Describe...How would you change this part?
- Can you group...?, From the information given.....classify/show/use/complete/illustrate.....Can you compare...?

Suggested (Listening/Speaking) Instructional Strategies:

- *All activities used at levels 1 and 2 can be used with greater complexity and with more vocabulary words*
- *Expansion activities (predicting, comparing, describing)*
- *Jokes, riddles and word games*
- *Using Language Experience Approach*
- *Simulation activities*
- *Listening to speeches based on a topic, communicative function or purpose*
- *Analysis of charts, graphs, tables*
- *Oral panel presentations*
- *Speechmaking to describe, narrate or inform*

Suggested (Reading/Writing) Instructional Strategies:

- *Creating monologues/dialogues under teacher guidance*
- *Engaging in literature response groups*
- *Creating journal entries based on personal experiences*
- *Short descriptions of objects, scenes from photographs*

- *Engaging in peer drafting and editing processes*
- *Establishing writing circles*
- *Using language templates to paraphrase stories, events, texts*
- *Engaging in imaginative narrative and expository writing using anecdotes, captions, pictures, TV shows as prompts, telephone messages, postcards, directions or steps in a process, advertisements and commercials*
- *Drafting letters to the editor*
- *Drafting letters of inquiry to a business or organization*
- *Encouraging practice in one grammatical structure a day*

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4. Intermediate Fluency

Intermediate Fluency ELLS may demonstrate nearnative like or native like fluency in BICS but not in CALP. Consequently, ELLs may experience difficulties in understanding and verbalizing cognitively demanding, abstract concepts at school. At this stage ELLs can engage readily in conversations and may have developed up to a 12000 word receptive vocabulary and a 4000 word active vocabulary. Teachers of ELLs at the intermediate fluency level need to proactively provide relevant contentbased literacy experiences (brain storming, clustering, synthesizing, categorizing, charting, evaluating, and journal or log writing, including essay writing and peer critiquing).

Possible Questioning Techniques:

- What would you recommend/suggest?, How do you think the story will end?
- What is the story mainly about?, What is your opinion (on this matter)?
- Create..., Invent..., Predict..., Propose..., Formulate..., Judge..., Justify...
- Can you defend....?, Do you think...?, How effective are...? Evaluate...

Suggested (Listening/Speaking) Instructional Strategies:

- *All levels 1, 2, and 3 activities can be used with greater complexity and with a higher level of critical thinking and comprehension*
- *Negotiating opinion in classroom discussions, debating*
- *Expressing opinions when analyzing context-reduced graphs and tables*
- *Creating and performing skits and role-plays*
- *Problem-solving simulations*
- *Short speech making to persuade based on linguistic template*
- *Engaging in literary analysis*
- *Enabling learning that fits into Quadrant 3 & 4 of Cummin's Quadrants*
- *Oral reports*
- *Impromptu speech and recounting efforts*
- *Storytelling, story paraphrasing and re-telling*

Suggested (Reading/Writing) Instructional Strategies:

- *Engaging in monologues/dialogues*

- *Creating character sketches and eyewitness memoirs*
- *Writing biographical essays of self or other familiar person or literary character*
- *Being involved in school and/or classroom plays, skits*
- *Engaging in writing using different genres, for example, essays (enumeration, contrast & comparison, problem & solution, cause & effect, thesis and proof), news reports, report of information based on research of a topic, letters (complaint, order, informational), summaries, editorials, memoirs,*
- *Writing and engaging in interviews & applications*
- *Writing Single or multi-paragraph assignments to describe, narrate, analyze, compare or contrast based on an outline or graphic organizer*
- *Writing to define, support, interpret, or evaluate information from a newspaper article*

Taken and adapted from numerous sources including Mora, 2002; Erben & Sarieva, 2004; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005

ⁱ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are two terms commonly used in ESOL. Both were coined by Jim Cummins in 1979. They are used to denote the difference in everyday speech (BICS) used in the home and in other informal situations and formal/academic speech (CALP) used in school settings.