



# Teaching Newcomer ELs?

## Create a Web of Support and Differentiation

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### ENGLISH LEARNERS AND DIFFERENTIATION

Newcomer students show up in our classrooms from all walks of life and with all levels of academic proficiency in their native language (L1). Statistics show that even states with historically low English learner (EL) populations now receive large numbers of immigrant students into their schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Also, some students may not have had any previous formal schooling.

Teachers instructing newcomer ELs become their educators, mentors, and advocates. They provide support to students who may be experiencing culture shock while acclimating to a new culture and learning a different language. For

many newcomer ELs, their teacher will be the first person to ever educate them in a formal setting. But how is it possible for teachers to provide an education to such a linguistically and academically diverse student population? These four steps help

new educators build the skills needed to succeed when teaching newcomer ELs.

**Develop strong classroom management strategies.** Newcomer ELs are just like any other students; they appreciate being praised in public and corrected in private. Maintaining a positive classroom environment filled with engagement, collaboration, and routines is of utmost importance for this population. Newcomer ELs have different understandings of what is socially acceptable. Establish routines and norms for acceptable behavior from day one. The first week of school is especially crucial because it sets the pace for the rest of the year, and it develops an understanding of what school should be.

Post visuals of what is expected from students and offer definitions in their native languages to ensure comprehension. Involve newcomers in the classroom management process by including projects where they can reflect and demonstrate their knowledge of what is acceptable and what is not. Designate a wall for those projects and make reference to them every time students deviate from acceptable behavior.

**Join them, don't fight them.** Newcomer ELs are exposed to many challenges inside and outside of the school setting, one of them being the language barrier. During the transitional period of adaptation and culture shock, it is normal for ELs to want to speak their L1. Clark-Gareca and Olsen (2016) explain that allowing newcomers to use their native language is beneficial because it helps them make connections with other students in the classroom. In time, social connections become bridges to overcome the initial anxiety and culture shock typical of the adaptation period.

Be open to celebrate your newcomers' culture and diversity. Instead of enforcing an "English-only" policy in your classroom, motivate them to want to speak English. Also, learn a little bit about the students' native languages to create rapport with them and understand their linguistic reality. All educators are lifelong learners. Strive to learn about your students' languages and cultures to better teach them literacy and English.

**Don't assume an L1 based on geography.** Newcomer students come from all over the world, yet they should not be categorized into a specific

group depending on where they originate. For example, not everyone from Latin America speaks Spanish. Your students' L1 may be an indigenous language, and they may have limited to no proficiency in Spanish. Consequently, teaching them literacy and English using the same strategies used for Spanish-speaking students would not be effective. Remember that generalizing students' social, academic, and linguistic reality based on their country of origin takes away from their individuality.

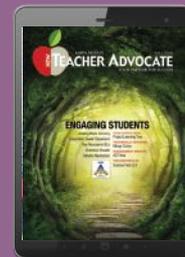
**Encourage parental involvement.** Parental involvement is essential for the academic performance and success of ELs in the United States. Many parents of newcomer ELs have a difficult time participating in their children's schools for a variety of reasons, such as work commitments, language barriers, and not knowing the American educational system. Other cultures understand the concept of parental involvement differently. In some cultures, parental involvement is synonymous with instilling moral values at home with the vision that students will replicate that behavior at school.

The key for involving parents of newcomer ELs is to explain, if possible in their L1, what is expected from them. During the first week of class send home a letter in the parents' L1 (if possible), introducing yourself and explaining your vision for parent-teacher collaboration to help their students succeed in school. Be an advocate for your students and involve parents first. As parents build a rapport with you, they will feel more comfortable becoming involved in school matters.

Teaching newcomer ELs is a challenging, yet rewarding process. Be open to collaborate with your more-experienced colleagues to better assist students in your classes. You will need plenty of support to manage your classroom while involving parents and differentiating instruction to support all learning levels—all the while advocating for the needs of newcomer ELs. 🍎

#### References

- Clark-Gareca, B., & Olsen, C. (2016). The first days: Engaging newcomer ELLs in the classroom community. *Educator's Voice*, 9, 118–127.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). English language learners in public schools. *The Condition of Education 2018*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe\\_cgf.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_cgf.pdf)



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