

# Setting the Stage for Supporting our English Language Learners in Collaborative Literacy

By Veronica Vasquez | Categories: English Language Learners

All our students bring such richness to our schools. Second language learners in particular bring unique perspectives to the table. I can attest to this as a second language learner myself. As an ELL teacher, I realized early on that we should consider these unique perspectives as we engage with our students within teaching and learning. As we prepare to plan for instruction within Collaborative Literacy there are some things we can do to get to know our English language learners and set teachers and students up for success!

## Get to know your English language learners and what they bring to the classroom.

- **Their background experiences** Ask yourself some questions: Are students coming to us with some hardship we may not know about? What about their previous education; perhaps in another country? Have they received instruction in their native language? Knowing these answers is critical in building relationships with students as well as informing our approach to teaching them.
- **Their attitude toward learning** Many times we must dig deeper into a specific attitude an ELL student may have about learning. Culture and family belief systems play a part in how each student approaches learning and instruction. Equipping ourselves with this information will open the lines of communication and prepare us to support both the students and their families.
- **Their interests** We know that intrinsic motivation is key, but understanding what motivates a particular student can be a challenge. Because ELL students are bringing their unique experiences and culture to the table, we might not know right away what it is that motivates them to learn and authentically engage in classroom experiences.

## Consider student needs and modify instruction.

We can assess student needs by considering the following:

- **Readiness** Is the student prepared to receive instruction in the specific skill at hand? What information about the student's prior knowledge or skills do I have that I might consider?
- **Interest** What appeals to the student and thus motivates her to learn and participate? How might I present the learning in a way that catches his attention?
- **Learning profile** What do I know about each student approaches learning? Is a student a reluctant writer/reader? How might I provide support so that I can address this before the instruction occurs?

Once we have a picture of our students' needs, we can then make instructional decisions with these elements in mind:

- **Modifying the content** What are the learning goals at hand? How might I analyze those goals so that I make content accessible to my students? What supports within Collaborative Literacy are at my disposal? How might I utilize these supports as I plan for

instruction?

- **Modifying the process** Knowing that my students may need additional time and differentiated experiences, how might I plan for that within my daily lessons? Where might I need to frontload content and/or provide additional background knowledge?
- **Modifying the outcome** Depending on language proficiency, students may not be able to produce an extended oral response or a sophisticated written product just yet. How might I integrate other ways that students can demonstrate learning?

In another post on supporting ELL students, I dig deeper into the supports that are intentionally built into Collaborative Literacy that will facilitate making the content comprehensible to our English language learners. Check it out!