

# Design Instruction for Second Language Learners

Children who are introduced to a second language typically take two years to master skills that enable them to socialize. It takes approximately five to seven years for children to acquire language skills that enable them to use English as a tool for learning.<sup>1</sup>

Jim Cummins, PhD, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, refers to these sophisticated language skills as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).<sup>2</sup>

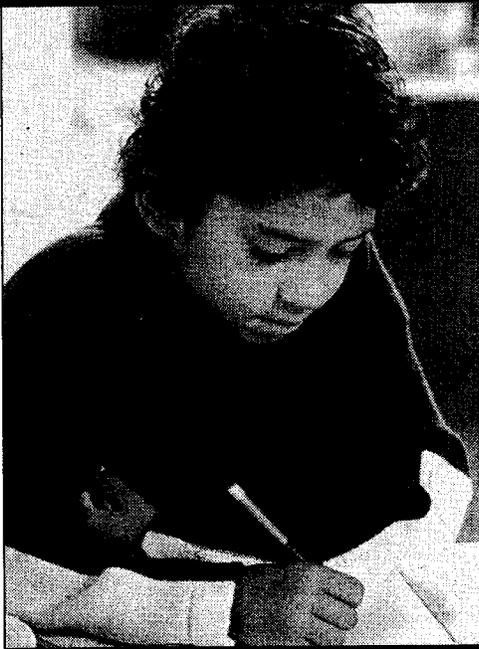
Students need this proficiency in order to master critical content area material. Yet, if academic language skills do not develop for five to seven years, children who are forced to extract meaning from lessons by relying solely on language will be at a distinct disadvantage. They may fail to master basic skills that would enable them to progress to the next grade level.

Students in this predicament need sufficient support to enable them to access the wealth of material presented during instruction. One means of support is to expose them to aids that provide another angle on the lesson, such as charts, pictures, diagrams, number lines, hand-outs, videos, photographs, shows and field trips. Another supportive technique is designing instruction that enables students to master academic language skills.

Academic language functions include seeking information, using language to inform, comparing, sequencing information, classifying, analyzing, inferring, using language to justify and persuade, problem-solving, synthesizing and evaluating ideas.

Teachers agonize over the most efficient way to help their students retain information. One traditional theory advocates determining a child's dominant modality (visual, auditory or kinesthetic) and adapting instruction accordingly. Despite the inherent difficulty in tailoring lessons to meet the needs of many different children, modality theory has been promoted for many years.

This theory has been challenged for some compelling reasons. Cognitive psychologists have questioned its veracity, and studies promoting the theory have come under attack due to methodological flaws.<sup>3</sup> Having investigated the way information is stored,



cognitive psychologists suggest that modalities are stored in terms of meaning, not in terms of whether a person saw, heard, or physically interacted with the information.

As a result of their research, cognitive scientists propose that teachers should provide instruction based on the ideal modality of the content, not the student's preferred modality. Visual and auditory representations often are inadequate for storing meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Although cognitive scientists substantiated these theories in laboratory experiments, their conclusions may have a deleterious impact on the manner in which instruction is designed for students in actual classrooms. A primary reason is that many students come from homes in which another language or dialect is spoken.

The number of bilingual children in the United States continues to rise. By the year 2010, an estimated one in five children will speak a language other than or in addition to English.<sup>4</sup> Instruction for children from dual-language backgrounds needs to be designed carefully.

People often assume that a child who can communicate orally in a second language is proficient in that language. Adequate oral communication abilities do not automatically translate into academic success.

Children can learn to use academic language functions independently if they have an opportunity to listen, speak, read and write

in the second language within the lesson. The teacher can model use of the skill and monitor children's attempts to perform in turn.

A lesson can target one or more specific academic language functions. For example, a lesson on the Industrial Revolution might require students to compare life before that period to life after it. They then can evaluate which changes seem vital for life as it is today.

When collaborative projects are planned, individual students are empowered to express themselves in academic terms. The relaxed formality inherent in discussing a topic with peers lends itself to increased practice in the use of academic language functions. When a group is assigned a task to be accomplished within a specific time frame, the productivity of its members increases. Periodically rearranging group members will provide children who are more timid with the opportunity to voice their ideas.

Children must learn to access content in order to advance in their studies. Teachers and support personnel should provide scaffolding that enables students to reach that goal. The ultimate objective is the ability to rely solely on language to derive meaning.

Another means of assisting children in the academic arena is to teach them a variety of learning strategies.<sup>1</sup> These strategies increase the focus on the material and augment learning outcomes. Metacognitive strategies, such as previewing a selection to get a handle on the general idea, assists children in organizing their thoughts in advance. Planning to fulfill an assignment or discuss a sequence of ideas contributes to active involvement that cements ideas in a child's mind.

Instruction on various cognitive strategies sometimes is incorporated into classroom lessons. Children can learn to put material in a framework through the use of reference materials and classification systems, such as charts and graphic organizers.

Note-taking is a learning strategy that induces students to pick out important information and weed out extraneous details. Other strategies that successful learners naturally employ are summarizing information gleaned from reading or listening; finding the rule, also known as induction; and

predicting and guessing based on context. Second language learners should be taught to employ these tactics in a variety of learning situations.

Imagery is a cognitive strategy that involves creating pictures in the mind to aid in the comprehension of linguistic material. Research-based programs have been devoted to developing imagery to assist children in elucidating a stream of language-laden material independently.

Decades of research attest to the efficacy of constructing mental images when reading or listening. Perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim said, "In what shape do memory and knowledge deliver the needed facts? In the shape of memory images...experiences deposit images."<sup>5</sup>

This is another compelling reason to design instruction using contextual support whenever possible. Children with limited exposure to English, and just a few academically stimulating experiences behind them, cannot be expected to thrive when knowledge is provided in a predominantly linguistic mode. Scaffolding, contextual aids, academic language functions, and mastery of learning strategies enable students of diverse linguistic backgrounds to tread the path toward success. ■

#### References

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letters to the editor continued from page 5 in his or her mouth to produce the /r/ sound in most cases. If therapy is too intense at this time, the child's natural process for learning this will be disrupted. The child will be trying to make the sound in a manner that is unnatural and will often develop the compensatory behavior of resonating the sound in a posterior location in the mouth.

In some cases the child has developed this behavior from their own auditory feedback and attempt to change the sound. I have also encountered several children who developed this after tonsils and adenoids were removed around this time.

If a child has developed an /r/ production that involves this compensatory behavior of improper resonance, establishing the /r/ from the "sh" sound will be effective in that it will force the airflow so that resonance occurs more naturally.

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Via e-mail

## Examination of the /r/ Sound Revisited

To the Editor:

Bernard Fogel stated in his letter to the editor ["Re-examining the /r/ Sound," *ADVANCE*, 16 (7): 5] that to produce the /r/ sound, "Be certain that the front blade of the tongue goes into the palatal arch." This is the method for the retroflex /r/, which is used by about 40 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> The back /r/ is used by the other 60 percent and, in my 26 years of experience as a therapist, is the pre-

ferred method.

The reason the back /r/ is preferable is that the tongue remains closer to its neutral position. When people talk, the rapid movements that take place during co-articulation make physiological economy an important component. As with most sounds in English production and for the back /r/, the lateral margins of the tongue remain stabilized against the molars, leading to smooth, quick transitions from sound to sound.

With the retroflex /r/ the tongue has to retract into a cupped position, which is not economical. Early in my career, I experienced slow, perfect retroflex /r/ productions at the word level; but some of my students were never able to transfer this /r/ to a conversational rate.

Teaching the back /r/, which is more difficult than the retroflex /r/, is worth the effort. Establishment, generalization and transfer through the use of a systematic therapy system that encourages success through minimal changes from word to word (like the SATPAC program<sup>2</sup>) has led to successful /r/ therapy in my career. ■

#### References

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## E-Newsletter Exclusive

In an upcoming feature story that will appear exclusively on the *ADVANCE* E-Newsletter, parents will share their experiences about raising and obtaining services for children with CHARGE syndrome.

Assistant Editor Jason Mosheim, who reported on early intervention for this disorder in the April 3 issue ["CHARGE Syndrome: Hearing and Communication in Multisensory Disorder," *ADVANCE*, 16 (14): 6-9], talks to parents about the diagnosis, intervention and treatment process from their perspective. Find out how their children are faring today.

The article will be available only to *ADVANCE* E-Newsletter subscribers. To subscribe to our free, weekly e-newsletter, please visit our Web site at [www.advancesweb.com/speech](http://www.advancesweb.com/speech). This exclusive article will appear in the April 21 edition of the e-newsletter.

