



The Kindergarten Chronicles

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Who Are English Learners?

The number of students who speak English as a non-native language has increased greatly in recent years. Many English learners (ELs) are the children of immigrants who left their home countries to seek a better life. Some immigrants have left their countries because of political strife. Others have immigrated for economic reasons. Most likely, you have students in your kindergarten classroom who are ELs. In this issue, we will skim the "tip of the iceberg" and share some suggestions and strategies for working with ELs in your classroom. More ideas will be shared in future editions of *The Kindergarten Chronicles* as well.

Whether immigrants or native born, each group brings its own history and culture to our schools. Our first task as teachers is to become aware of our students' personal histories and cultures, so as to understand their feelings, frustrations, hopes, and dreams. However, as teachers we also need to look closely at ourselves to discover how our own culturally ingrained attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and communication styles influence our teaching and affect our students' learning. By developing such an understanding, we create the essential foundation for meaningful instruction.

How Can I Get Acquainted with My English Learners?

When a new student joins your classroom, there are three initial steps to help ease the transition for both the student and you. First of all, find out basic facts about the child. The six questions in the box on the right will help get you started. Second, obtain as much information about the student's prior school experiences as possible. Infinite Campus is a resource within CCSD to help you find this information. The third step is to become aware of basic features of the home culture, such as customs, food preferences and restrictions, and roles and responsibilities of children and adults. Finding out basic information provides a starting point from which to interpret your newcomer's responses to you, to your other students, and to the ways you organize your classroom. Click [here](#) to see *10 Tips for Teaching English Language Learners*.



Family Engagement

Questions to Ask



- What country is the child from?
- How long has he or she lived in the United States?
- Where and with whom is the child living?
- What language or languages are spoken in the home?
- Is the child literate in his or her home language?
- What were the circumstances of immigration?

Idea for Building Background

Realia, Photos, & Illustrations

The purpose of using realia (objects and materials from everyday life), photos, and/or illustrations, is to enable ELs to develop a clear and precise understanding of an unknown word or unclear concept. Providing hands-on and 3D realia makes key content concepts and key vocabulary come alive for students. The use of realia, photos, and illustrations, along with sentence frames, helps scaffold ELs when they are learning and using new vocabulary words. Click [here](#) to view a short video of a teacher using realia to introduce new vocabulary words for the text, *Burro's Tortilla's* (a Southwestern version of *The Little Red Hen*).



BICS vs CALP

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (**BICS**) are language skills needed for day-to-day social interaction with other people. ELs use BICS when they are on the playground, in the lunch room, on the school bus, and talking on the telephone. These types of interactions occur in a meaningful social context and are not very demanding cognitively. These language skills usually develop within six months to two years after arrival in the U.S. However, problems can arise when teachers think that a child is proficient in a language when they demonstrate good social English. There is more to consider.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (**CALP**) refers to formal academic learning. This includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing about subject area content material. This level of language learning is essential for students to succeed in school. Students need time and support to become proficient in academic areas. This usually takes from five to seven years. For strategies on teaching academic language, click [here](#).

Helpful EL Websites

<http://www.4teachers.org/> This website has a "Resources in Spanish" link that allows you to write notes to parents in Spanish. Click [here](#) for the "Casa notes" link to discover all of the possibilities! See [sample award](#).

http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/ell_resources/k-3/ This website contains Parent Tip Sheets and classroom resources to support early elementary English learners.



Did You Know?

The Clark County School District is a minority majority school district? Visit elip.ccsd.net to learn more EL statistics, as well as view resources for parents, teachers, and students.

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