

**SURVIVAL
SKILLS
FOR
TEACHERS
SERIES**

Children With Limited English

**Teaching Strategies
for the Regular
Classroom**

Ellen Kottler

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for the Regular
Classroom**

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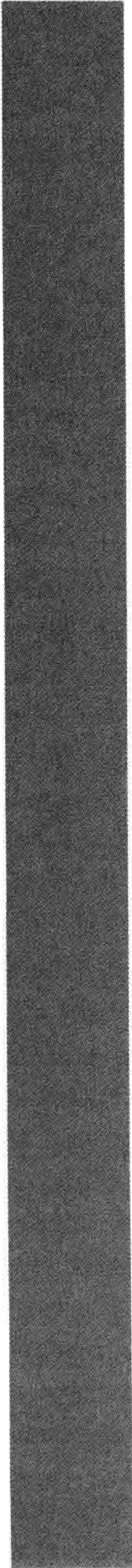
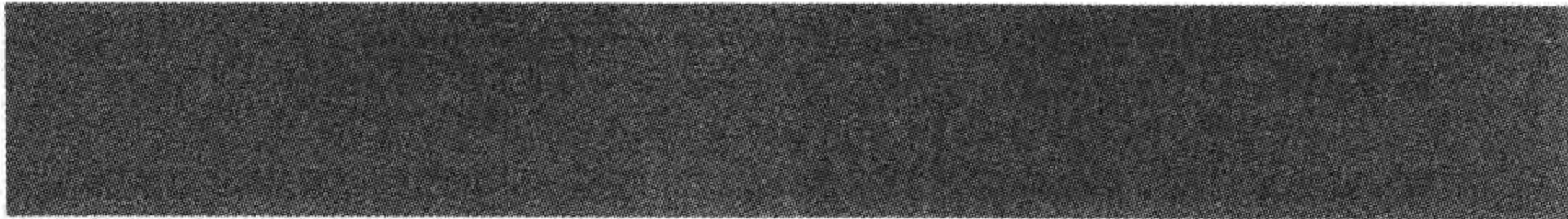
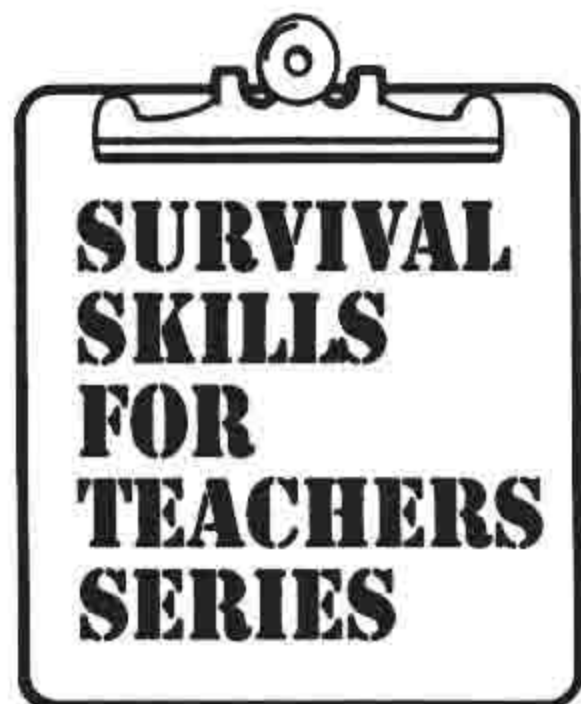
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Children With Limited English



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Teaching Strategies for the Regular Classroom
Ellen Kottler

Preface

One of the greatest challenges in education today is attempting to reach an increasingly diverse student population consisting of children who come from varied cultures and who speak hundreds of different languages. Many of these children, whether recent immigrants or inhabitants of homes in which only native languages are spoken, struggle tremendously with the burdens of not only keeping up with their schoolwork and establishing a social network but also doing so with limited or nonexistent English speaking skills.

When such a child is first presented in the classroom doorway, many questions come to the teacher's mind: How can I possibly help this student when we don't even speak the same language? How will the other children react to having this child in their midst? How can I meet this child's special needs? What can I do to make the adjustment easiest for all of us?

This ever more frequent situation presents challenges, but there are a number of options available to the regular classroom teacher who is looking for some "survival skills," ideas, and resources to better serve students acquiring English. The purpose of this book is to help teachers function more effectively with this student population and do so in such a way as to enhance rather than complicate their classroom environment.

Who Can Use This Book

This book is directed first to the population of beginning teachers who are being initiated into the realities of teaching as a career. It is overwhelming enough to think about managing a relatively homogeneous group of kids without contemplating the added complexities of working with a class in which the children don't all speak the same language! Useful strategies with limited-language students will thus augment a new teacher's repertoire. Indeed, some school districts organize support groups for new teachers in which they can talk about the issues and situations that confront them, such as working with limited-English students in the regular classroom. The survival skills presented here will serve as a handy reference for new teachers facing an increasingly diverse school population.

Next, students in teacher education courses will find this a good primary or supplementary text. As future teachers and student teachers prepare to meet the needs of diverse public school populations, this book addresses the concerns and fears of those who have not had the training or opportunity to work with students who are learning English as a second language.

Finally, veteran teachers who are experiencing professional transitions in their work, who may have logged years of experience in the classroom but who have had few opportunities to work with students new to the English language, will also find many of the concepts and methods described in this book quite useful.

Content and Process

The progression of chapters follows a pattern that resembles quite closely what practicing teachers actually do when they face the challenge of helping non-English-speaking children. Chapter 1 addresses the crucial task of developing a relationship with students in such a way as to build trust and establish a comfortable environment. Chapter 2 reviews principles related to second-language development, with attention to setting reasonable expectations in the classroom. Chapter 3 presents a number of practical

teaching strategies. Many of these include borrowed techniques from foreign language methodology as well as technological innovations. Finally, chapter 4 encourages expanding the classroom by networking with other professionals in the school and in the community as a way to involve others in the learning process.

It is quite clear that the future of our educational system in this country will be determined largely by our willingness and ability to help an increasingly diverse population of children who want their chance to reach their dreams.

I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of President Gracia Alkema, reviewer Judy Stobbe, copy editor David Dexter, and the entire production staff of Corwin Press.

This book is dedicated to Jeffrey A. Kottler.

ELLEN KOTTLER

About the Author

Ellen Kottler received her BA degree from the University of Michigan and her MA degree from Eastern Michigan University and is working toward her Ed.D. degree at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She has been a teacher for over 20 years in public and private schools, alternative schools, adult education programs, and universities. She has worked in inner-city schools, as well as in suburban and rural settings, and holds teaching endorsements in psychology, history, social studies, Spanish, and teaching English as a second language.

She is the co-author of *Teacher as Counselor* (1993), also published by Corwin Press.

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- Community Resources • Language for All
- Suggested Activities • Suggested Readings



Getting to Know the Student

Michel is a new arrival in your classroom; he has been with you for the past 2 weeks. While the other children are working on an assignment, you notice that he is intensely occupied looking around the room. Wanting to offer him all the encouragement you can, you approach his desk and ask if he needs any help. At first he looks at you with a blank stare, hesitates a moment longer, and then shakes his head. His eyes move back to the page on his desk in front of him. As soon as you turn your back, his eyes resume their travels around the room.

You sit at your desk, bewildered yourself: Did he understand what you asked him? Does he have any idea what is going on with the assignment? How are you supposed to help him when you can't even communicate in such a way that he will respond? Does he have some learning disabilities or perhaps some deficit in his social skills? You notice he has yet to interact with the other children. How are you supposed to make any of these determinations when you are not even aware of the extent of his English communication and comprehension?

Sensitivity to Cultural and Linguistic Differences

The United States Census Bureau has reported that 32 million people, or one American in seven, speak a language other than English at home. This trend can be traced to a number of patterns—shifting populations throughout North America; increased immigration, especially from Latin America and Southeast Asia; and rising birthrates of non-English-proficient (NEP) or limited-English-proficient (LEP) populations.

Some of your students will be members of minority groups who are multilingual in languages other than English; others will have minimal language proficiency that impairs their ability to be academically or socially successful. Whatever the case, teachers in regular classrooms are facing increased numbers of students with limited English-speaking ability.

As you watch Michel from your desk, you reflect on some of your impressions so far. You have noticed he smiles when he enters the room. He seems shy and rarely speaks, but you believe that is to be expected, given the new situation he finds himself in. You note he follows the other children in carrying out routines, yet his schoolwork has been minimal. You realize that you actually know very little about him. How did he end up where he is? What is important to him? What does he think about when he is daydreaming? How does he feel inside? You resolve to find some way to get to know him better.

In order to carry out an effective plan for any of your students, you will need to assess the skills, abilities, and interests they bring to the classroom, with special attention to their cultural background and language proficiency. In the collection of diverse peoples who make up North America, it has become more and more important to be sensitive to individual learning styles, communication patterns, and interaction styles that are reflective of various minority cultures. Thus the approach you might take with a Mexican American student would be quite different from one you would choose with a Moapa Paiute Indian, a Maori child from the Cook Islands, or a new arrival from Korea. Before you can ever expect to reach any of the limited-English-speaking children in your class, you must first become a functional expert in their backgrounds. Such a system-

atic interest will become a foundation from which to structure your teaching efforts.

For each of the specific practical suggestions for working with children of limited English presented here and throughout the book, it is assumed that you will wish to make a number of adaptations to your particular teaching situation, student needs, and individual preferences. In order for any techniques to become part of you as a person, and as a professional, it will be necessary for you to integrate what is offered in such a way that it fits with the way that you like to work and relate to others.

Getting to Know the Student

The first phase in any helping effort involves learning about the person you are intending to reach. All communication is based on a sensitivity to a person's needs. Before you can ever hope to connect with and influence a child, you will first have to know about what it is he or she considers most important. This background information involves not only assessing academic skills in verbal or quantitative areas but also learning about family, cultural, and social customs that are an integral part of the child's life.

Here are a number of suggestions for getting to know your students. What makes many of these strategies so helpful is that they do not require a high level of language proficiency to get started.

Take a Picture!

Photographs are a universal language that everyone speaks. Taken periodically throughout the school year, pictures capture moments in time. They can be easily displayed. They serve as a reminder to the student as to how he or she felt at the beginning of school and how initial impressions and feelings have changed. You can take pictures of the student to record participation in different activities—playing a part in a skit, painting a wall mural, solving a math problem on the board, working on a cooperative learning task, interacting with other children in the lunchroom. Pictures can be taken of projects that are too big to keep on a permanent basis in the classroom.

Pictures are also an excellent way for communicating to parents what happens during the school day. Giving a child a picture of the students and teachers in the classroom will provide him or her with a way to take the events of the school day home to share with parents, other brothers and sisters, extended family, and friends.

Students can also be invited to bring in pictures of themselves and their family to share with the class. These can be used for get-acquainted activities, to stimulate speech or writing assignments, as well as to build self-esteem. Most of all, they allow children to help educate others about the unique circumstances in which they live. Among Maori children, for example, their individual names are relatively less important to their families than the mountain and river near where they are from. Each child has an individual story to tell. With photographs as aids, the description of the background from which the family originates can be rich.

Although videotaping has some special advantages over still photographs, it presents a few additional problems. Students with limited language proficiency may find it difficult to speak under such “performance” conditions. Until the student is comfortable with the taping process, time in front of the camera should be limited.

Develop a Portfolio

Developing a record of the child’s progress in school is the first step toward getting to know the student. Make a list of everything the child can do without using language—build, sort, match, categorize, sequence, copy, draw, listen to music, look at pictures, mimic, make faces, pantomime. Then, look for examples of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. With respect to English, notice and categorize mistakes. Are there pronunciation errors, grammatical or syntactic errors, or comprehension or semantic errors? Include notes from your observations of interactions with other people, samples of student work, descriptions of projects, pictures, as well as grades and outside test results you receive.

Determine which instructional activities the student enjoys most. Which activities does the student try to avoid? Could these preferences be a reflection of cultural values? For example, does the student prefer cooperative learning exercises rather than those

that require competition? Analyze the homework. Does the student seem to be able to successfully complete what has been assigned?

Take your examination one step further and find out what activities the child pursues after school. Is the student a member of a scouting organization, a church group, or an athletic team? Does the student have a pet? Does the student belong to a choir or band or other school club? What does the child do when he or she is alone? By identifying the child's interests, you can later relate lessons to topics the child will be able to identify with and build on the knowledge base already established.

Not only will a portfolio give you a well-rounded picture of the student, it will also help you monitor the student's progress and give you a wide variety of material to present at parent conferences. You will also be able to provide the student with a visual record of his or her progress.

Explore the Student's Family Background

To learn about the student's family background, plan information-seeking activities. For example, through geography lessons you can discover where students came from, whether it was a rural or urban setting, the reasons for moving, and the length of time in this country. Through the use of pictures you can find out how many brothers and sisters are in the family, their ages, sexes, whether they attend school or not, and whether extended family members live in the household. Through conversation you can learn the lines of authority in the family and the patterns of socialization.

On the elementary school level, this information can be elicited through discussion of the family, counting and sorting activities, or responses to children's literature. On the secondary level, the information can be collected through discussion of immigration in a social studies class, the family in a home economics class, genetics in a science class, the concept of role in a sociology class, or reaction to a reading in an English class. Lessons on multicultural topics such as relationships, legends, and customs can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Once students develop some degree of rudimentary writing skills, they can express their ideas through writing assignments, such as journals, autobiographies, or structured work sheets. Those who are not yet proficient in their writing can instead draw pictures to respond to questions or express themselves. One of the best assignments for any age group, also favored by counselors and therapists who are attempting to learn about children's experiences, is to ask them to draw a picture of themselves with their family. Through words, gestures, dramatic enactments, or further drawings, they can then be encouraged to talk about their family.

Learning about the student's position in the family and assigned household responsibilities will give you insight into behavior at school and after school. Does the child care for younger brothers and sisters or elderly grandparents? Does the child cook and clean for the family? Does the child work to support the family? These responsibilities will limit the student's involvement in school as well as in community activities. For example, the student may not have time or money to come to a spaghetti dinner, talent show, or extracurricular activities. However, you will become aware of the students who are capable of fulfilling leadership roles, those who are nurturing, and those who are capable of taking on tasks requiring responsibility in the classroom.

Michel disclosed, through gestures and halting English, that he was left alone much of the time. His parents both worked long hours, leaving him to take care of the house. He was able to communicate that he did understand much of what was said to him. He had been watching a lot of television, especially music videos, and he found that by memorizing the words to the songs, his ear was becoming more accustomed to English. He very much wanted to do his homework, but he was just too busy with things that he had to do around the house. In his spare time, what little he could find, he had started playing around with a harmonica. Music seemed to be an important part of his life.

Exploring the area of home responsibilities will also give you an arena in which to converse with the child, to give him or her an opportunity to practice speaking English in a private setting with you. Furthermore, the child has the opportunity to show off that