THE 12 Cs OF SCHOOL SUCCESS:
CLARIFYING LANGUAGE RESPONSES

In the process of delivering content instruction, successful teachers consistently assist and assess learners in their oral and written production. This is no less important for native English language learners than it is for learners of English as a second language. The purpose of this Bulletin is to provide teachers with specific suggestions for assisting English Language Learners in the mainstream classroom: 1) how to clarify presentation of language in delivering content to achieve greater comprehension; 2) how to provide feedback for incorrect oral responses when incorrect ones are given; and 3) how to provide general feedback to learners in their writing responses.

TEACHERS: CLARIFYING DELIVERY
Grade-appropriate use of language is the goal, as well as the norm, in delivering instruction. It may be necessary, however, to consider also the following speech adaptation techniques for varying normal language use to ensure learner comprehension:

Repetition/Rephrasing: Repeat, both word-for-word or using simpler, more concrete language.
Modification if Questions: English Language Learners may understand the content but not the manner of delivery; therefore, be sure to repeat/rephrase questions to ensure comprehension.

Slowed Speech: In addition to normal pace of delivering language, repeat by slowing down the delivery to ensure adequate comprehension of key content words.
Small Units of Language: Vary the explanation of content language by using shorter phrases or sentences as a means of supporting comprehension.
Careful Use of Metaphors/Idioms: If metaphorical or idiomatic use of language is an integral part of content delivery, be aware of the learner's difficulty in comprehending this colorful use of language. Provide more alternative, concrete explanations if/when necessary.
Longer Wait Time for Responses: English language learners may require more processing time to assemble an appropriate response to oral and written questions.

Paraphrasing of Directions by the Learner(s): In order to ensure comprehension of a requested task/activity, have one or more learners paraphrase the directions.
Sufficient Explanation and Example: Be sure to provide enough explanation and modeling for greater comprehension.
Posting and Repeating Instructions: For any task that is multi-faceted, be sure to write and post and/or repeat instructions.
Alerting Learners to Lesson Transitions: Shifts in topics or in tasks should be carefully explained; in addition, be careful when using connectors such as "because," "therefore," etc., as these may need to be carefully understood.

STUDENTS: ORAL RESPONSES

Although they have achieved a measure of oral and written proficiency sufficient to learn in the mainstream classroom, English language learners may still require additional assistance in producing more complex aspects of oral language as required by the content. As they practice these complex language forms, the best way to inculcate correct language use is by the teacher's consistent modeling.

On a one-to-one basis, however, it may be sometimes necessary to consider the following feedback techniques for supporting learner-generated repair of language:

Elicitation: Teacher repeats part of the learner's response and pauses to allow him/her to complete the response at the place where the error occurred (Learner: "I had already went to the library." Teacher: "I had already ____."); or the teacher asks the learner to reformulate the response.

Clarification: Teacher identifies an error, using questions such as, "Pardon me?" or "What do you mean by...?"

Metalinguistic Feedback: Teacher makes comments or asks questions about the form of the learner's response, indicating that there is an error somewhere. ("It isn't said that way. It's said...")

Repetition: Teacher repeats the learner's incorrect response, usually changing the intonation to highlight the error. ("You seed that TV show?")

Explicit Correction: Teacher corrects student directly, indicating what was incorrect. (e.g., "You should say...")

Recasts: Teacher reformulates all or a part of the learner's response except the error. (Learner: "I not go to the movies last night". Teacher: "You didn't go to the movies last night").

Teachers need to exercise caution and diplomacy in using the above techniques, as learners may be very sensitive to overt correcting.

WRITING FEEDBACK SUGGESTIONS

Research in writing clearly reveals that learners, especially older learners, want some measure of feedback to clarify their use of written language. There are two elements in providing feedback: form and content. The following are writing feedback suggestions:

1. Learners benefit from clarification on both form and content of their writing. Both teachers and peer learners can participate in providing feedback in a collaborative environment.

2. If writing feedback is on the form of the language, provide feedback through explanation of correct forms, with the learner responsible for identifying and making corrections of incorrect forms.

3. If there are many errors of form, do not "redline" all errors; rather, provide feedback of one or two types of errors at a time, with the learner providing the appropriate feedback.

4. Remember that learners' writing improves most when they receive clarification dealing with content, not forms of writing.

5. Peer revision can be successful if learners are provided with explicit guidelines for reviewing peer writing.

It is important to remember that writing is the most challenging skill English Language Learners encounter. Much practice and modeling is necessary in all content areas if learners are going to master appropriate and correct use of written language.

CONCLUSION

English Language Learners, as second language users, will continue to make errors in their use of oral and written language, even as they increase their knowledge in the various content areas. It is the teacher's responsibility to be sensitive to their errors and to provide appropriate and responsible opportunities for ELLs to develop correct, error-free oral and written language.

SOURCES:
