With the delivery of instruction, there are many possible areas of miscommunication between teacher’s intent and learner’s comprehension. In particular, English Language Learners (ELLs) are susceptible to a variety of perceptual mismatches - cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, attitudinal - common to daily teaching. This Bulletin discusses ways in which teachers can minimize miscommunication by examining how lessons can be "tweaked" to become more comprehensible.

LESSON PREPARATION

1. Clearly state the content objective orally and in writing using language the students will understand. This mirrors in some way the state or local content objective upon which the lesson is based. The written objective should be referred to and discussed before, during, and after the lesson.

2. Clearly state the language objective orally and in writing using language the students will understand. Process (e.g., "explore", "discuss", "recognize") or product-based ("define", "write", "orally present") uses of language displays how learners will use language as they engage in learning the content in the lesson. It may refer to key vocabulary to be learned; language functions (e.g., "comparing and contrasting", "summarizing", "describing"); a listening, speaking, reading, or writing task; an aspect of English grammar; or a language-learning strategy (e.g., "making a prediction", "relating to personal experience", "posing a question").

3. Use jump start mini-lessons with student(s) who lack background knowledge or experience with grade-level concepts. These mini-lessons include the requisite knowledge a student must have in order to understand what is being taught.

4. Activate or build background knowledge by reading something about the topic; view a video related to it; or using supplementary materials such as pictures, models, demonstrations, etc.

5. Consider three types of academic vocabulary which students need to know as part of the lesson: content words, academic words, and process/function words (e.g., transition words).

6. Make explicit connections with previously learned material and the new concepts in the lesson. Posing questions such as "Who remembered what we learned about..."
Whenever possible, develop written materials, realia, etc., to enable learners to physically work with models or their written representation.

5. Promote engagement through think-pair-share, 10-2 sharing (after teaching concepts, have students review material in pairs), idiot questions (posing a ridiculous question such as "So the leader of the U.S. is called 'king', right?" to elicit a correct response).

LESSON REVIEW & ASSESSMENT

Review, review, review(!) through a variety of activities: ABC summaries (asking students to write a word, phrase, or sentence beginning with key letters), learning logs, 'best test' (students create a test around the information they have learned), erasable response boards, special assignments in lieu of taking a test, etc.

CAUTIONS

1. Beware of polysemous words or words with multiple meanings such as: arm, band, bank, bar, cabinet, cap, cell, change, chest, chip, club, cross, cup, date, deck, fall, hand, land, mine, note, nut, park, plate, pen, race, roll, set, shot, slide, slug, spring, story, string, table, tie, trunk, vice are examples of words with meanings across content area and are therefore problematic for many ELLs.

2. Beware of words that sound the same but have different meanings: brake, break; cell, sell; facts, fax; heal, heel; steal, steel, etc. These words confuse many learners.

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SOURCES

