

Teaching Refugee Students: Practical Solutions

Administration and School Climate
Teaching Strategies

Taken from: Cole, Robert. (2008) *Educating Everybody's Children 2nd Edition: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners*, "Diverse Teaching Strategies for Immigrant and Refugee Children". Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Challenges

Living in transnational families

Acculturating

Arriving as adolescents

Learning in a new and different system

Enduring displacement within the US

Recovering from trauma

Limited previous education



Programs

Curriculum that is:

- Balanced between basic and higher order skills
- Incorporates student's native languages and cultures
- Offers opportunities for student-directed instruction

Teaching methodologies that build on home and community culture



Assessing the Student

Strong initial assessment process to ensure appropriate placement and to inform classroom instruction

- Informal assessments:
 - Observations
 - Portfolios
 - Competency checklists
 - Rubrics
 - Conferences
 - Self-assessments
 - Group projects
 - Questionnaires



Support Services

Addressing war trauma

Orientation to new culture and school system

Community partnerships and referrals

After school clubs

Tutoring

ELL parent nights

English for parents or parenting classes



Supportive Climate

Values students' primary languages and cultures

Making high expectations concrete

Making the education of English learners a priority

Enacting policies and programs that promote positive intergroup relations such as conflict resolution, community building, anti-prejudice programs and curriculum about racism and exclusion

Values diversity and inclusion

Responsive Schools

Build capacity to deliver sustained professional development

Create data systems and processes to support ongoing analysis of immigrant student achievement

Recognize the importance of learning about immigrants' cultures, experiences, and needs

Structures that support optimal teaching and learning for immigrants: such as teacher collaboration, reflection, data discussions, and inquiry

Allow for parents and advocates to come together

Teacher Preparation



Teachers need to be prepared to teach:

1. Second-language acquisition and development
2. Integration of language and content instruction
3. Cross-cultural communication

Professional Development

Driven by student assessment data

Teacher reflection and conversation

Staff development led by teachers from different academic departments

Teacher collaboration should be horizontal and vertical

Establish partnerships between universities and schools that address needed changes in teacher preparation and in-service professional development

Strategies for Teachers

Strengths-based approach:

- Build on student's previous knowledge and best qualities
- Culturally relevant examples
- Social learning and representation

Lopez, S. & Louis, M. (2009). "The Principles of Strengths-Based Education", Journal of College and Character, Vol 10, Is. 4

Build on Student's Previous Learning

- Choose examples that are diverse
- Think about the application of concepts



Culturally Relevant Examples



- School and social environment
- Daily life
- Cultural identities

Social Learning and Individual Learning



- Demonstration
- Modeling/Enacting
- Symbolic (written)
- Iconic (drawing pictures)

Strategy 1: Help Students with limited or interrupted prior schooling develop basic skills

- How to follow schedules
- Expectations in classrooms (staying seated for long periods of time, bringing books and materials to class, raising hands)
- Develop basic literacy skills:
 - Numeric and letter discrimination
 - Understanding sound and symbol correspondence
 - Develop fine motor skills
- Sequenced literacy and academic instruction
- Acquiring literacy solely in English takes more time and steps than acquiring literacy based on substantial oral-language development in student's native language

Classroom strategies

- Many EL's come from cultures of strong storytelling traditions and oral histories
- Linking students' life experiences to needed academic concepts and skills
- Assistance of peer or cross-age tutors who share the students' first language

Warnings

Educators need to distinguish between students with delayed (though normal) literacy development and student's with learning disabilities

Strategy 2: Organize instruction around themes to integrate English language skills with academic concepts across the curriculum

Need to integrate reading and writing into content-area instruction

Studying relevant, meaningful topics increases students' motivation and enhances learning

Develop a thematic unit

Thematic Units

1. Identify a theme or topic
2. Identify appropriate texts to use or adapt
3. Identify needed language, especially vocabulary
4. Identify academic concept objectives
5. Identify critical thinking and study skills objectives
6. Develop activities that draw on students' experience and are relevant to their lives
7. Choose activities that are appropriate for a variety of learning styles
8. Consider activities that develop learning strategies (thinking and study skills) use a variety of grouping strategies
9. Ensure activities involve oral and written language
10. Sequence the activities
11. Determine responsibility for each objective and activity (if more than one teacher is involved)

Strategy 3: Choose instructional behaviors that promote equity, comprehension, and active participation

- Develop routines for structuring the daily and weekly lesson plans
- Increasing wait time for questions
- Focusing on the meaning of low level EL's contributions rather than grammar lowers anxiety
- Call on students in a systematic way: focus on how students are seated in the classroom and in groups
- Employ many methods of checking for comprehension (thumbs up/thumbs down, etc.)
- Model everything, including procedures and processes

Clarification Statements

Post on the wall for students to see and use:

“I need help with _____, please.”

“I don’t understand this word (or sentence, or paragraph).”

“I am confused about.”

Strategy 4: Use cooperative learning strategies to encourage interaction and interethnic tolerance and acceptance among students of different ethnic groups

- Differences can be a source of rich educational experiences if students can be helped to work together and learn from each other
- Small groups of heterogeneous groups work together to accomplish a task and share rewards
- Think/pair/share, jigsaw, roundtable or round robin, and numbered heads together

Strategy 5: Assess and activate students' prior knowledge

Teachers must ask themselves a variety of questions before they decide which activity to use:

- What prior knowledge do I want to try to activate that ties to the content most directly or powerfully?
- How can I show my students explicitly how the activity links to the theme or content?
- How can I show my students that they can use what they already know to understand something new?
- How can I best elicit my students' opinions, thoughts or ideas about what they already know?
- What experiences can I provide for my students that will allow them to see and feel that what we are studying connects to their personal lives?

Strategy 6: Build conceptual frameworks for new knowledge to ensure that students see how ideas or concepts relate to one another

Schemas are interpretive frames that allow us to make sense of new information by relating it to something we are already familiar with

- Story map: providing a graphic organizer of different chunks of information to be studied -> helps to alleviate anxiety students naturally feel when they encounter new material in their second language
- Using different graphic organizers to help teachers clarify their teaching goals

Strategy 7: Restructure and maximize time to meet student's needs

- Begin instruction at the same time each day
- Establish routines: subjects taught, retrieving and storing materials, moving from one activity to another, from pair to individual to group work
- Teacher modeling

Strategy 8: Nurture a sense of community in the classroom

- Many language groups
- Range of fluency
 - Avoid status developing between more proficient students and less proficient students
- True cooperative learning: don't just form random groups, assign based on a mix of levels and abilities
 - Each student has a role and is accountable to the rest of the group

Conclusions

Focus on inclusion, equitability
Meet them where they're at
Practice patience
Advocacy



Thank you!

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Resources

Welcome to Our Schools Program -- <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/wtos.asp>

Immigration and Refugee Services of America (IRSA) www.refugeeusa.org

Refugees International – USA www.refugeesinternational.org

U.S. Committee For Refugees (USCR) www.refugees.org

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services (BRYCS) www.brycs.org

Cultural Orientation Resource, Center for Applied Linguistics – www.culturalorientation.net

Responsive Classroom – www.responsiveclassroom.org

Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum – www.cfchildren.org/violence.htm

Spring Institute – www.spring-institute.org

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) www.unhcr.ch

Who belongs here? Teachers guide, Margy Burns Knight and Thomas V. Chan
Administration for Children & Families/Office of Refugee Resettlement www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr

Resources continued...

Teaching refugees with limited Formal schooling –

www.teachingrefugees.com/instructional-programming/resources/

International Rescue Committee –

http://www.theirc.org/where/united_states_salt_lake_city_ut/refugee-backgrounders.pdf

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/fsp/ELL-Services/Effective-Programs-for-ELLs-with-Interrupted-Forma.aspx>

Church World Service – www.churchworldservice.org

Colorin Colorado – www.colorincolorado.org

<http://www.margaritacalderon.org>

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition – www.ncela.gwu/webinars/event/38