Key to developing skills for teaching ELLs is an ability to recognize, effectively work with, and plan teaching strategies for cultural diversity in the classroom. Furthermore, just as cultural differences can cause misunderstandings in the classroom, a lack of awareness of how English language proficiency influences academic performance can lead an instructor down the wrong path when it comes to instructing ELLs.

This week, you will build on the background concepts covered during the first two weeks of the course with more detailed information about theories that influence how ELLs are taught. You will also be exposed to a wealth of practical information on how to specifically address ELL needs.

**Chapter Ten – Lowering the Affective Filter / Chapter Fifteen – Making Content Comprehensible**

Any serious investigation of current methods for teaching ELLs must begin with an understanding of basic theories related to how a second language is learned, or second language acquisition. A good place to start is the work of **Stephen Krashen. Among Krashen’s numerous and well-known contributions to modern ELL pedagogy is the *input theory* and, specifically, the concepts of *comprehensible input*, and *the* *affective filter*, covered in quite a bit of detail in Chapters 10 and 15, and expanded on in the two required videos for the week (***Stephen Krashen on Language Acquisition,* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiTsduRreug&feature=related>, and *Teaching Foreign Languages: Make Your Students Feel at Ease*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-B0B0KWqGMI>).

My brief definition of the affective filter would be any social and emotional factors that can impede a learner’s progress in a second language (Syrja, 2011, p. 73). From my own experience studying languages, I can relate to the overwhelming frustration and tendency to get being tongue-tied that ELLs can feel when trying to express themselves in English (especially in the beginning phases).

Another term which you should research in more detail this week  is ***scaffolding***, which in the context of ELLs has been defined as “providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning” (Bradley & Bradley, 2004).

All of the above will factor heavily in the first Discussion for this week, in which you are asked to “walk a mile in the shoes” of an ELL (so to speak). Using this week’s information and tips as a guide, envision supports an instructor could use within a lesson to make the new language more understandable to you and put you more at ease.

Similarly, your Journal assignment will have you look through the eyes of a language learner as you translate your introduction for the class into another language via an online tool, Freetranslation.com. Through this rather fun exercise, you may get insight into your affective filter and further build empathy for students struggling with English.

To read more about scaffolding for ELLs click the following link for the article, *Scaffolding academic learning for second language learners*: <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Bradley-Scaffolding/>

To learn more about the work of Stephen Krashen, view the following Web page, *An introduction to the work of Stephen Krashen*: <http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/krashen.htm>

**Chapter Eleven – Connecting with Families of English Language Learners / Chapter Twelve – The Importance of Cultural Connections**

In past weeks, we have discussed the roles and levels of accountability administrators, teachers, students, and parents all hold in promoting ELL language proficiency. Most of you agreed that the parents should have some level of accountability in this; however, we also considered factors specific to parents of ELLs that might (regardless of good intentions) interfere with them being as fully involved with their children’s’ education as teachers would like. In Chapter 11 and 12, Syrja will explore this topic in depth and provide many practical suggestions for exactly how teachers can build a culturally inclusive rapport with students that extends from the classroom, to parents in the home, to the community at large.

In Discussion 2, you will explore the idea of community figures you might recruit from your community to visit your campus in the capacity of as ambassadors of cultural diversity. That exercise is similar in spirit to the Week 3 assignment, in which you will flesh out your ideas for some campus-based community events that promote the cultural identities of the student’s in your class—and your own! Keep in mind that you the instructor are in a position to learn as much from your students’ families as they can learn about the school, the community, and how to build upon at home what their children learn in the classroom. To this end, you will come up with a detailed plan for three parent/student-centered presentations or activities. (Don’t overlook some of the Part Three Resources listed on pp. 91-94 of the textbook, which could provide some inspiration.) Also, carefully review the Grading Rubric for the criteria that will be used to evaluate your assignment.This is extremely important to ensure that you include all required elements for the paper.

When preparing all of the written exercises this week, do incorporate support from required materials and outside sources you find through research, but don’t overly rely on direct quotes from our text or other readings as a way of explaining your interpretations and opinions. Instead, I want to see how you process information from academic sources and rephrase it into your own words (still using the required citations, of course!).

Chapter 10

Lowering the Affective Filter

The natural approach theory to language acquisition proposes that we learn best when we acquire a new language in a manner similar to the way we learn our native language: naturally and through regular interaction with others proficient in the language. The theory postulates process of language acquisition, students acquire language best when they are provided with comprehensible input in an environment with a low affective filter. The affective filter is defined as a screen of emotion than can block acquisition or learning if it keeps the users from being too self-conscious or too embarrassed to take risks when they speak. In fact, Krashen writes, “The best methods are…those that supply ‘comprehensible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production.” Comprehensible input refers to input that is at the right level for an ELL to remain engaged in the learning. In other words, it is neither too challenging nor too easy.

Establishing a Low Affective Filter

If, as Krashen theorizes, the learner’s emotional state or attitudes are part of an adjustable screen that allows or impedes necessary input to acquire language, then it follows that a low affective filter is imperative to learning since it blocks less of the input.

Krashen and Terrell identify three types of affective variables related to second language acquisition: self-confidence, motivation, and low anxiety. They conclude that learners who have self-confidence and a positive self-image tend to be more successful, highly motivated learners who outperform those with low motivation, and a low anxiety environment is more conducive to second language.

While Krashen’s theories are still among the most respected in the field of second language acquisition, there has been much need for concrete strategies that lower the affective filter---strategies that help create a stress-free environment where mistakes are accepted as part of the learning process and where students can engage in communication. Here are some ways to create a classroom environment that supports natural acquisition in a low filter environment:

* Use objects, photographs, or illustrations that reinforce spoken or written words and make the content you are presenting comprehensible.
* Employ gestures for added emphasis and to provide clues to meaning.
* Adjust and simply your speech: speak slowly and enunciate; use longer natural pauses, shorter sentences, fewer pronouns, and simpler syntax; and repeat words or phrases. Remember that the key is to simplify, not water down, the content.
* Stress high-frequency vocabulary words.
* Clarify the meaning of words or phrases in context.
* Use fewer idioms.
* Use cooperative learning.
* Be enthusiastic and maintain a low anxiety level.

Lowering the Affective Filter

Although establishing a low affective filter classroom environment is important for all English learners, this section focuses on ELLs at the beginning levels of basic English skills. We begin with a section on helping you assess whether you have all the pieces in place to implement this strategy.

Ensuring the Environment Is Conducive to Learning

Take a moment to answer the following questions about your own classroom environment and then work with your colleagues to reflect on your practice as a team.

*Are all of the students in my ELS classed appropriately?* If they were placed based on the state’s ELL assessment, consider how recently that the assessment was administered. Remember that students are in level 1 for a relatively short period of time (up to six months), and having students misplaced raises the anxiety level of those students who are truly level 1, especially if they feel that the other students maybe more proficient in English than they are. Use the English Language Learner Profile worksheet in the Part Two Resources section to help you ensure appropriate placement of English Learners.

*Are all teachers aware of the levels of each ELL in their classroom?*

Is a process in place to disseminate the most current Ell level information to all content-area teachers? ELLs most likely spend the majority of their day with mainstream content teachers learning math, social studies, science, and reading/language arts. Teachers need to know which students in their classes, if any, are ELLs so that they can work to establish a low affective filter for them. Use the information in the Part Two Resources section, particularly in English Language Learner Profile Sheet, to organize your students by level and help you disseminate this information to all teachers on your team who have beginning-level EELs.

*Am I differentiating my content especially for beginning-level ELLs?*

Once you have identified your beginning-level EELs and disseminated that information to all teachers who work with students, ensure that you are appropriately differentiating task, assignments and questions for any beginning-level students. Remember that asking students to produce language before they are ready to do so raises their anxiety. Beginning-level students should be labeling, drawing pictures and diagrams, and writing one-word or short phrase responses. When questioning them, you should be asking them to point or indicate with gestures their responses or preferences. ( The chapters in part Five offer more strategies appropriate to beginning EELs in your grade span and content area.)

Strategies for Lowering the Affective Filter

Use this list of strategies as a starting point, and brainstorm other strategies that can help you lower the affective filter for your English learners:

Take time to get to know your students

Learn about their countries of origins and cultural traditions.

Find ways to include information about your student’s countries and culture in your lessons.

Pronounce your students’ name correctly. This is part of their cultural identity, so honor them by asking them to teach you how to pronounce their names.

Use total physical response (TPR) as much as possible to help ELLs access the content you are teaching, whether that content is ELS or math. A key component of the affective filter theory states that we should be making content comprehensible for students so that they can better access the information we are trying to teach them.

Give students the opportunity to share something about themselves or culture with the entire class. This does not need to involve speaking if they are not comfortable enough to speak to an audience. Instead, they can create collages with pictures and information about their native countries that they post and share with the class. Opportunities for students to share their culture can be ongoing.

Establish an environment of respect within the classroom. This involves more than saying “We value diversity,” or “we respect everyone.” It means deliberately working to create an environment in which each student feels validated, respected, and valued, regardless of language acquisition level or country origin. As the teacher, we need to model respect on a daily basis and always remember that students are watching our cues.

Creating a low affective filter is a process. Your ELLs will be more likely to take risks with English when you have worked to develop an environment where they feel safe.

A Peek into Two Classrooms

The two scenarios that follow allow us to take a closer look at instruction for English learners. Note not only the implementation of strategies but also the affective filter in each of these classrooms and the strategies each teacher uses to maintain a low affective filter.

Scenario 1

Mrs. Lee has taught at least one section of ELL math for the past ten years and especially enjoys working with beginning-level students it’s so gratifying to see their progress. She has recently received professional development on research-based strategies for math instruction. She heard the message loud and clear: students need vocabulary instruction, and she knows that this is especially true of ELLs. She decides to add math vocabulary notebook to all her math classes.

She also decides that she will teach her students a structured method for note taking, since she has learned at another professional development institute that this is a high-impact strategy. That’s enough to sell her on it.

One the first day of the next unit of instruction for eight graders, she writes vocabulary words on the board and asks students to look up the glossary and write definitions in their vocabulary notebooks. She also asks them to apply the new vocabulary by writing a sentence using each word. The teacher uses popsicle sticks with students’ names on them to call on students to read their definitions and sentences out loud to the class.

She explains note taking to her students and walks them through the process of setting of their paper. She asks students to help each other and work together. Using an overhead projector, Mrs. Lee walks through three examples and has student’s record notes she’s writing on the overhead in appropriate format. She closes the lesson by asking students if they have any questions before they start their independent practice.

Students then get to work on their problem set. She encourages them to use their vocabulary notebooks and notes to help them complete the assignment successfully. Students work independently. When they ask each other questions, Mrs. Lee reminds them that they are supposed to be working independently.

Scenario Two

Mr. De Rosa also teachers ELL math. He attended the same workshop on vocabulary and note taking that Mrs. Lee did. Like Mrs. Lee, he is always looking for new ways to ensure academic success for his English learners. He loves learning about new strategies, then implementing those strategies in a way that make sense for his student population.

He introduces vocabulary notebooks to his eight grades by showing the students an example that illustrates what he expects their work to look like. He opens math class by listing the vocabulary for the lesson. Students copy the words and complete graphic organizer that includes may strategies, including drawing pictures, diagrams, or writing single words or phrases that help them define the word and remember it. He encourages students to help each other by explaining new concepts or vocabulary to each other in their native language. Mr. De Rosa has some old math textbooks and workbooks in class that have been in his cupboards for many years collecting dust. He allows students who’d rather not draw or cut pictures out of these books and glue those images next to their vocabulary words.

Next, he continues with todays’ concept by putting a problem on the board that is just above the students’ current level of understanding. He has the students open their notebooks and copy the problem. In groups, they work to come to a solution, using their native language support with textbooks and primary language explanations by their classmates. He encourages them to use their vocabulary notebooks to label the steps of their solution. He tells them it is acceptable for the labels to be one- or two-word phrases, and spelling or grammar does not count. Students can come up as a group and, using the document camera, show the steps they followed. Groups are given a few minutes to practice their presentations. Mr. De Rosa has reinforced that mistakes are a part of the learning process and regularly reminds them of this. It is amazing to see all of the different ways that students have arrived at a solution and the way that they are able to demonstrate their math knowledge given the fact that they have limited English skills.

Finally, Mr. De Rosa provides a word bank and asks students to use it and frames that he supplies to write complete sentences reflecting the process they followed to solve the problem. This new note-taking strategy also students to use words or images to represent their new learning graphically. They are then given the opportunity to read their sentences and share their graphic representations with a partner. Any student who would like to share his or her work aloud to the entire class is encouraged to do so. This allows students to hear and process al different representations of new learning.

Mr. De Rosa shows them a few additional examples that they will encounter in the homework and has students copy those examples into their notes. Students then open their textbook and begin working on independent practice. They are encouraged to work with a partner, use their vocabulary notebooks, and use their notes.

Chapter 15

Making Content Comprehensible

Stephen Krashens’ input theory posits that successful acquisition of new knowledge occurs by simply understanding input that is a little beyond the learner’s current level of understanding. He defines current level as i and the ideal level of new material as i +1. In explaining the development of oral fluency, he theorizes that students figure out the meaning of words and grammar that are new to them through the use of context rather than direct instruction. Krashen’s has several areas he draws proof of his input hypothesis. He illustrates how good teachers tune their speech to their students’ level and to communicate. Comprehensible input, or i +1, lies perfectly within the learner’s zone of proximal development, the ideal level at which a student can successfully acquire new learning.

Judie Haynes encourages ESL and bilingual teachers to help mainstream teachers and their students communicate with new non-English-speaking students from the day these students arrive by providing comprehensible input to ensure that students feel welcome. This is particularly important if no or only a few adults at the school speak the language of a new student. You can encourage this interaction to take place by having a group of students who speak the different primary languages represented in your school be partnered with newcomers. These students can help orient the newcomers to the school. Although they cannot provide constant second-language translation during classroom instruction, they can step in to help the newcomer when the teacher cannot get an idea across to the new student.

Krashen reminds us that when planning instruction for ELLs, “The best methods are therefore those that supply ‘comprehensible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready’, recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communication and comprehensible input, and are not from forcing and correcting production.”

This theory does have many critics, mostly disagreeing with Krashen’s idea that direct instruction in such manners as grammar need not be extensive because most language structure can be learned or picked up in context. There is also some disagreement among researchers as to whether all it takes to move students to proficiency is comprehensible input. Some educators believe that this theory promotes the idea that students play a passive role in their language development. They believe that the effort students make in attempting to understand input, not simple comprehension, fuels acquisition of new knowledge.

Do not recommend one approach over another, and leave it to the teachers to decide which ones work best with their students. As with all other things, balance should be the prevailing constant in the application of any theories and approaches.

REFERENCE

Syrja, R.C. (2011). *How to reach and teach English language learners: Practical strategies to ensure success*.  San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.