

# 2

## Creating a Climate for Literacy Learning

*Children will not remember you for the material things you provided but for the feeling that you cherished them.*

—Richard L. Evans

### **EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND CLASSROOM CLIMATE**

The purpose of this book is to create a toolkit that will help educators increase literacy in students who are learning English as a second language. This increase in literacy, in turn, will increase content-area learning as well. With the increased pressure of high-stakes testing, our hope is that this book will help close the achievement gap and increase yearly progress. Even with the increased pressure of high-stakes testing, the focus of learning is now shifting toward the measurement of annual growth in addition to passing a high-stakes test. We hope this book will provide meaningful strategies for teachers struggling with students who have not shown adequate yearly progress because of a language barrier.

Providing high-quality instruction using research-based strategies is not enough when working with students who are learning English, in large part because the strategies are being applied across the board with little differentiation between student populations. Students who learn English after they start school have a special barrier that cannot be broken down by applying mass instructional strategies.

Educators must steer clear of stereotypes and assumptions when teaching and working with diverse populations. Not only are many stereotypes and assumptions incorrect, but also a teacher can damage the learning environment inadvertently if these biases are not addressed. In planning for successful learning, we need to account for diversity, avoid equity traps, and actively seek out and use bias-reducing tools (see Figure 2.1). Students cannot be successful learners without feeling a connection to the culture, climate, and people of a school; bias, even positive bias, can damage that connection.

**Figure 2.1** Classrooms That Respect the Richness of Diversity\*

<b>Equity Traps</b>	<b>Bias-Reducing Tools and Attitudes</b>
<p><b>Exclusionary Language</b></p> <p>Boys like ....            All Spanish speakers ....            All disabled students have trouble writing.            Asians show respect by ....            Gifted learners have pushy parents.</p>	<p><b>Inclusive Language</b></p> <p>Many students like ....            These words are similar in Spanish ....            Cultural contributions to our language ....            Understanding language acquisition and strategies that support students            Asking clarifying questions            Relationships are key.</p>
<p><b>Assumptions About Groups</b></p> <p>Assuming characteristics about groups            Special education students will only reach a lower level of skill demonstration with the standards.</p>	<p><b>Questions About Students</b></p> <p>Appreciating differences, having high expectations            Given the right tools, special education students will be able to demonstrate the higher expectations required in the standards-based classroom.</p>
<p><b>Isolating Climate</b></p> <p>Allowing students to hide in your classroom            At least they are quiet.            These students can learn by listening            “If you finish early, please help...”            All I know is that she has never had a referral to the office.            If they want to go out for sports or clubs, they just need to sign up.</p>	<p><b>Engaging Climate</b></p> <p>Strategies that invite and insist participation, such as TAPS and Think-Pair-Share            Reinforce for risk taking and celebrate the courage of participation.            “Select a partner to help you think out loud about the quality of your work.”            Students who can identify their role in class, giving students a sense of value and connection            Providing support that students need to reach higher levels of performance and participation</p>

<b>Equity Traps</b>	<b>Bias-Reducing Tools and Attitudes</b>
<p><b>Dated Information</b></p> <p>Assuming your prior knowledge about groups of students is correct            Accepting popular views without question            Using a limited variety of instructional and learning strategies            Believing there is one right way to teach entire groups of students</p>	<p><b>High-Payoff Strategies</b></p> <p>Selecting strategies with research validation            Check out what is really true for particular students.            Question the research.            Conduct your own research.            How do I tap into student differences to enrich problem solving in my classroom?            Opportunities for self-evaluation and revision</p>
<p><b>Survival Mode</b></p> <p>The “Life Raft” approach to teaching and materials: “If only we could find the perfect text or strategy.”            Focus and reliance on one thing, one right way, or one text</p>	<p><b>Eclectic Selection</b></p> <p>Eclectic strategies based on assessed needs of students            Combinations of strategies and materials that meet the needs of a variety of learners            Strategies that allow student choice and selection            Integration of teaching and learning</p>
<p><b>Parts Thinking</b></p> <p>Fragmentation of time, effort, and skills            Thinking about types of learners as one single thing            Teaching skills in isolation            Assuming student background will lead to a predictable outcome            Teacher focus on error detection and the questioning of assumptions</p>	<p><b>Holistic Thinking</b></p> <p>Making connections on a regular basis for both concepts and life application            Thinking about the current needs of learners            Reassessing and choosing the “how to teach or demonstrate learning” strategies            Connecting meaning through every lesson every day            Checking student assumptions and student detection of error on a regular basis</p>

Source: Gregory & Kuzmich (2005a, pp. 20–21).

## BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS

Two of the most important elements in successful teaching are relationship factors and teacher modeling (Tompkins, 2003). Students must be taught the language of the classroom before literacy can be improved, and learning takes place in an atmosphere of need where risk must be controlled for a student to benefit and accelerate learning. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do your students have someone at school every day to speak to and connect with on a personal level who speaks their first language?
- If there is no one on campus who speaks the student’s first language, is there an adult who takes the time to interact with and connect with the student on a personal level?
- Do you know who among your students had their basic survival needs met last night and who did not?

## Relationships and Reinforcement

Kids know who cares and who does not. Students who seek out certain adults in our schools tell us a great deal about those adults. But what about students who do not seek anyone out? What about students who have no one within the school that speaks their home language? Allowing hiding and invisibility is as bad as having no structure or routine. Some teachers feel that every student in the classroom should be able to connect with them and know that their teachers are caring persons. How are students supposed to understand this when they do not understand a word their teachers are saying? How are students supposed to pick up the verbal and nonverbal cues provided in an environment where they do not understand the most basic instructions and where the cultural norms are unfamiliar?

Other adults operate differently, seeking out only those with whom they can form relationships easily. Teachers working with students who do not connect with them will be serving those students well if they seek out mentors or “significant others” with whom the students connect. Establishing a relationship with a positive adult, even if it is not the teacher, is preferable to no relationship at all with an adult. Building on these relationships is a special challenge with English language learners. It is important to realize that *you do not have to speak the same language to build a positive relationship.*

## A Tale of Success

In one Texas school district, an elementary school librarian decided to begin a program for encouraging positive student interactions with teachers and staff by allowing students to come to the library before school, during lunch, and after school for a “brown bag breakfast,” “brown bag lunch,” or “brown bag snack.” The librarian would provide the food and the teachers or staff members would pick books to read with the kids when they were done eating. Members of the school staff identified students who needed positive recognition and rewarded them with invitations that were used as passes to the library during the specified times. Students with invitations were allowed to choose a staff member or friend to eat with them in the library. Students would very deliberately seek out opportunities to do something positive in order to spend this time with staff members. Students earned these tickets in various ways, including having good attendance, avoiding negative hallway behavior, behavior contract success, personal goal-setting success, and other accomplishments.

## Resiliency

Connections that impact a life do not have to take much time or cost much money. Connections that meet student needs and encourage positive behaviors can build resiliency and confidence in remarkable ways (see Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2** Relationships That Provide for Student Needs and Positive Behaviors\*

<b>Type of Student Needs and Behaviors</b>	<b>What Works to Meet These Needs</b>
1. Students feel a sense of control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students meaningful choices.</li> <li>• Let students negotiate conditions for learning or the relationship when appropriate.</li> </ul>
2. Students identify purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give students clarity in understanding purpose.</li> <li>• Respect future purpose, but give current purpose as well.</li> <li>• Explain hidden meanings or responses.</li> <li>• Show relationships and connections.</li> </ul>
3. Students seek out support and reassurance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Model respect.</li> <li>• Cultural sensitivity and acceptance of differences</li> <li>• Use personal stories and events.</li> </ul>
4. Students take risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep the environment “humiliation free.”</li> <li>• Keep private conversations private.</li> <li>• Check on students frequently.</li> <li>• Praise risk taking, however small.</li> <li>• Respectful verbal and nonverbal communication</li> </ul>
5. Students respond to reinforcement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific praise</li> <li>• Celebrate success in a meaningful way.</li> <li>• Celebrate the right things, higher-stakes accomplishments.</li> </ul>
6. Students initiate contact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Unconditional regard</li> <li>• Model positive attributes you want the student to exhibit.</li> </ul>
7. Students choose to be cooperative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce cooperative behaviors.</li> <li>• Show connections of behavior to accomplishments.</li> <li>• Show freedom and choices given when cooperation occurs.</li> </ul>
8. Students ask questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praise questioning.</li> <li>• Help students shape their questions for specificity and clarity.</li> <li>• Ask students meaningful questions.</li> <li>• Know when to answer and when to teach.</li> </ul>
9. Students seek freedom from chaos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide organization.</li> <li>• Rehearse order, use of tools, and finding needed materials.</li> <li>• Provide methods of organization such as the use of color, space, and special materials.</li> </ul>
10. Students benefit from self-advocacy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach the tools of negotiation.</li> <li>• Students need to know their learning style and preferences.</li> <li>• Students need to understand the impact of body language, words, and tone of voice.</li> </ul>

Source: Gregory & Kuzmich (2005a, p. 23).

Resiliency is an essential characteristic of successful learners. Students who persevere even when “the going gets tough” are resilient. Students become resilient through positive relationships, especially with teachers, and reinforcement. Hallinan (2008) found that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement increases when positive relationships with teachers increase. A classroom where teachers reinforce students for persevering is a creative and supportive classroom. In classrooms where organization and negotiation are modeled and taught, learning takes place more easily and with less interference. Also essential are equity and respect for diversity: “It is important that, as part of the negotiation, the culture of origin is not denigrated, but rather the ability to negotiate is seen as a survival tool for the work and school setting” (Payne, 2001, p. 107).

Students’ attitudes about learning are highly influenced by caring adults, both in school and outside school. Not all home environments can stop long enough from survival-level activity to provide a positive disposition to learning. Teachers can influence what happens during the students’ school hours and school days, however. Academic achievement and higher test scores start not with materials, teachers, or strategies; it starts with healthy connections to adults in positive learning environments where diversity is respected and is not just a buzzword or excuse. Building relationships with students extends far beyond speaking a common language. If there is no such language, teachers must find alternative methods of communication. Students understand love, and they understand acceptance. The teacher must make sure that her nonverbal cues show love and acceptance.

## **THE BASIC TOOLKIT FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

When we think about diverse groups of learners, it is difficult to establish hard-and-fast characteristics. Establishing when a student’s verbal struggles result from disability, language acquisition, poverty, other causes, or all of the above come from the use of logic and experience. We can use specific strategies to accommodate any kind of learning struggle. The best way to select strategies to increase student learning is to think in terms of student struggles and student attributes. While students need to experience a variety of strategies to maximize learning, it is essential that students also experience success. Students who understand their own needs as learners benefit twice—once by getting adults to understand their needs, and another time by providing self-adjusting techniques for themselves.

## Basic Strategies for Accelerating Growth for English Language Learners

The English language learner program must run parallel to the literacy program to increase student success. These strategies, in addition to traditional literacy strategies, can help accelerate growth and learning.

- Avoid making assumptions.
- Teach students how to ask the right questions.
- Encourage student questions.
- Ask for help from specialists.
- Provide no-fault practice.
- Allow students who speak the same language to speak that language in class.
- Use peer translation (during instruction and when checking for understanding).
- Make connections in the first language and with other learning.
- Create a respectful climate for learning.
- Require modeling and self-evaluation.
- Check for errors.
- Provide positive redirection and reteach.
- Access learning through multiple modalities.

Figure 2.3 provides a chart of research-based methods for diverse groups of learners is organized by roadblocks that should be avoided or removed as well as by strategies that accelerate the growth of these particular students. The research sources for these strategies are also

**Figure 2.3** Research-Based Strategies That Accelerate Learning for Diverse Groups of Learners\*

<b>Racial and Cultural Diversity</b> <b>Sources: Miller (2003); Reissman (2001); Stasz and Tankersley (2003); and Stevenson, Howard, Coard, Wallace, and Brotman (2004)</b>	
<b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b> Prejudice and negative attitude Preconceived attitudes, stereotypes Lack of respect Culturally specific experiences and language that are different from traditional U.S. language and experiences Exposure to school-specific resources	<b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b> Establishing an accepting climate. Use stories for many cultures and groups. Use art and history to establish connections. Idiom avoidance Source of materials Ritual and celebration Peer coaching Use of personal narratives Questioning assumptions as a rule. Use situational or pun-based humor rather than personal and group humor.

(Continued)

**Figure 2.3 (Continued)**

<b>Students Who Experience Poverty</b> <b>Sources: Carter and Strickland (2001); Payne (2001)</b>	
<p><b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b></p> <p>Don't know the hidden rules of the middle class</p> <p>Speak in casual registry as a rule</p> <p>Do not have emotional and spiritual resources</p> <p>May not have role models</p> <p>Basic survival needs may not be met.</p> <p>Purpose for learning may not be established outside of school.</p> <p>May have emotional reactions that do not include "school expected" control and attitude</p> <p>May not have access to health options</p> <p>May not be very mobile</p>	<p><b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b></p> <p>Teach the differences between</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• job language and</li> <li>• social language.</li> </ul> <p>Rules should be personalized and relevant.</p> <p>Building background knowledge</p> <p>Rules behind words</p> <p>Implications and unsaid assumptions</p> <p>Providing choice</p> <p>Project-based learning, integration of learning</p> <p>Small-group interaction</p> <p>Personnel connections and relationships</p> <p>Establish relevant purpose.</p> <p>Acknowledge diversity and things teachers don't know.</p> <p>Teach patterns and the exceptions to the patterns regarding both content and implications for content as well as for social situations.</p> <p>Create translations between casual and formal registry (language).</p> <p>Clearly define when and where choice is possible.</p> <p>Use personal goal setting and adjust goals as needed, then create opportunities for celebration.</p>
<b>Special Education Students</b> <b>Sources: Andres and Lupart (1993); Council for Exceptional Children (2004); Kuzmich (1980,1987); Pascopella (2003)</b>	
<p><b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b></p> <p>Has an identified disability that interferes with learning</p> <p>Needs accommodations and modifications that some teachers may not know how to deliver</p> <p>Stereotypes can interfere with learning.</p> <p>Teacher expectations that are preset lower without benefit of fact</p> <p>Classrooms that support nondisabled students are not fluid or prone to change.</p> <p>Parents' level of expectations and knowledge of resources</p> <p>School's ability to provide adequate resources and accommodations</p>	<p><b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b></p> <p>Cognitively able with learning disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variable time</li> <li>• Variable response mode, such as verbal strategies versus mind mapping and other visual tools</li> <li>• Assisted structure and organization</li> <li>• Use of multiple-intelligence strategies</li> </ul> <p>Cognitively disabled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content adjustment</li> <li>• Developmental stages</li> <li>• Multiple intelligences</li> </ul> <p>Physical disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using cuing through sign, Braille, body language, etc.</li> <li>• Specialized assistance</li> <li>• Specialized access to materials and communication tools</li> <li>• Capitalizing on residual hearing, vision, and physical abilities where possible</li> </ul>



<p>Level of specialized service to provide replacement and compensatory skill development Student understanding of disability and learning needs</p>	<p>Emotional disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cuing behavior</li> <li>• Specialized schedules</li> <li>• Specialized routines</li> <li>• Replacement strategies for anger or depression</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gifted and Talented Students</b> <b>Sources: Colorado Department of Education (2004); Sternberg (1996); Torrance (1998)</b></p>	
<p><b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b> These may not match:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student expectations and goals</li> <li>• Parent expectations and goals</li> <li>• Teacher expectations and goals</li> </ul> <p>Perseverance related to tasks that are not a passion or talent Perfectionism Student self-evaluation Student ability to self-advocate Pace Lack of choice</p>	<p><b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b> Teach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perseverance</li> <li>• Fluidity</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> </ul> <p>Teach students transforming or constructivist strategies. Allow students to pursue passion and interests. Foster creativity. Self-created organizers Offer tiered assignments. Establish learning contracts. Don't hold back for the sake of the larger group or the "group experience." Preassess Compact or adjust time, content, and demonstrations of learning.</p>
<p><b>Gender Differences</b> <b>Sources: Blackburn (2003); Broughton and Fairbanks (2003); Brozo (2002); Smith and Wilhelm (2002)</b></p>	
<p><b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b> Boredom with selection of materials Seeing relevance and purpose Pace Resources and materials may not match interests and needs. Lack of choice Lack of autonomy</p>	<p><b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b> Interest-based menus Integrated learning approaches Variable lengths of writing Varied types of writing Project and problem-based learning Personal purpose and relevance Use of texts that are self-selected when possible, even within a prescribed genre or topic K-6: developing major language tasks (Epstein, 1978) 7-12: developing adaptive and reflective thinking (Paul and Elder, 2003)</p>
<p><b>English Language Learners</b> <b>Sources: Benjamin (2002); Eakle (2003); Gonzales (1995); Grognet (2000); McCune (2002)</b></p>	
<p><b>Roadblocks to Literacy:</b> The "quirks" of the English language, including inflection, idioms,</p>	<p><b>Accelerating Student Growth:</b> Use sheltered English strategies. Visual representations</p>

(Continued)

**Figure 2.3 (Continued)**

<p>possessives, gender, word order, unique sounds, and other confusing attributes</p> <p>Reinforcement of new language acquisition outside and inside school</p> <p>Speed of acquisition of survival-level social language</p> <p>Skill of teachers and staff in dealing with English language learners</p> <p>Skill of teachers in introducing vocabulary and concepts to English-speaking students</p> <p>Teachers' understanding of root words, pronouns, expressions, metaphors, similes, and other hard-to-access ideas for English language learners</p> <p>Lack of privacy for a student to practice without embarrassment</p> <p>Norms to support nonbiased behavior from students and staff</p> <p>Incorrect assumptions about groups of foreign students</p>	<p>Use of nonverbal cuing</p> <p>Schema</p> <p>Use effective research-based vocabulary strategies</p> <p>Teach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• phonological awareness,</li> <li>• phonemics,</li> <li>• fluency, and</li> <li>• spelling.</li> </ul> <p>Show and use language patterns.</p> <p>Explain and demonstrate idioms, similes, and metaphors.</p> <p>Demonstrate the implications of social language.</p> <p>Use cross-linguistic strategies.</p> <p>Allow penalty-free risk taking and sheltered practice opportunities.</p> <p>Give students some private or like-group immersion time to practice.</p> <p>Highlight word parts.</p> <p>Early use of nouns and key verbs of action with gestures and pictures</p>
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Source: Gregory & Kuzmich (2005a, pp. 25–28).

identified within the chart. English language learners are not immune to other learning difficulties, so the chart addresses multiple needs.

## **YOU CAN'T LEARN TO READ IN ENGLISH UNTIL YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH**

The first stage of language acquisition is learning receptive vocabulary. Students must first learn to understand basic vocabulary and simple academic language. This is best done through making connections to the students' current language and through providing students ample opportunities to listen to English. Students will be able to parrot and copy language in this

stage of learning. Physical interaction is appropriate as students learn to follow simple directions and to ask questions when they do not understand. This level of language acquisition parallels early literacy.

## Early Literacy

We know that the comprehension of words emerges prior to the ability to produce these words in the first or second year of a child's life. In following Whitehead's (1967 [1929]) development language stages, we can see the following progression of language acquisition and use:

*Ages 2 to 4 years.* Transition from achievement of perception to acquisition of language

*Ages 4 to 7 years.* Classification of thoughts, improved accuracy of perception

*Ages 7 to 12 years.* Development of powers of observation tied to manipulation of the environment and thoughts

*Ages 12 to 15 years.* Precision in language development, notion of scientific constants

*Ages 15 to 17 years.* Generalization in language precision and in science, transfer to inferences and implications in real-life situations

*Ages 17 years and older.* Integration of past development with new knowledge, sophistication of the interrelationship of new and old experiences

So what does this mean in relation to second-language learners? Because most children who are exposed to the language of the classroom exhibit the skills necessary for reading success through speaking and listening first, that is where second-language learning also begins. The developmental constructs are not always in place for academic and content learning by the time a child reaches elementary school, requiring students to take more time to acquire the new language during neurological development. This means that students are required to learn content while acquiring language, making academic learning a challenge. The more complicated the content, the more challenging the literacy development becomes, causing students who are learning English to be at risk for academic struggles.

## The “Hidden” Rules of Language

Teachers who read aloud to students do them a great service in helping them to listen and understand language in many forms. However, many teachers ask questions about content without using the opportunity to discuss the unique features of the language used in the text. This added

line of questioning and discussion allows student to learn about the “hidden” rules of language in an open and nonthreatening way. These exercises in listening provide students access to new language in context rather than in isolation, allowing students to incorporate words into known vocabulary. The exercise shown in Figure 2.4 is an instructional tool that can be used in a large group, small cooperative groups, or with a buddy (preferably with a common language).

**Figure 2.4** A Strategy for Encouraging Reading\*

**Strategy:** *Passports*

**Literacy Competency:** Functional literacy, content literacy, and critical thinking literacy

**Description:** Use a passport to document the reading students do by genre or topic.

**Advantages:** Encourages reading and celebrates accomplishment of reading many books or other written materials over time. Increases fluency, language acquisition, vocabulary expansion, general knowledge, and specific content knowledge; also deepens understanding.

**How to Use:** Staple multiple half pages together with a cover, similar to the size of passport. Could also buy blank books in the “dollar”-type stores and cut them to size. Students put name and other information on one page; they could add a picture of themselves or draw one. Label each page with a favorite topic or genre. Students then record each title and author as they finish reading books and other materials. Pages can be stamped when full. Celebrations may include getting a book or magazine to take home and keep or earning time to read with a friend. The nature of the celebration should reflect the theme of reading as well.

**Bottom-Line Examples:**

↑ This strategy works well for almost any type of learner.

⇒ This strategy would work for some students in special education if some of the materials were also available on audio. Use audio recordings for early Braille readers, or hard-to-find materials in Braille for students with visual disabilities. English language learners who are at the survival level may also benefit from recordings and materials with plenty of picture clues.

↓ This strategy does not work as well for students with cognitive or severe disabilities unless other media or assistance is offered. Students with cognitive disabilities should, however, be encouraged to read as much as possible, but they may need to start with functional or commercial signage, materials at an appropriate level, and other accommodations.



## **YOU CAN'T LEARN TO READ IN ENGLISH UNTIL YOU CAN SPEAK ENGLISH**

After developing receptive language, students begin to develop social language. In the development of social language, students are able to practice the skills they have learned through informal activities and academic learning exercises by communicating with peers. This initial peer communication is nonthreatening because it takes place primarily with peers who have already accepted the student and because it takes place in the more social venues of school, such as the playground and cafeteria. Many times a teacher will be able to walk around at recess and hear a student speaking who has never spoken in class. The temptation is to be frustrated because the student can “speak English,” but teachers should resist frustration: in reality this informal speaking is the first step toward formal literacy.

### **Metalinguistic Skills for Learners From Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds**

Students need to have opportunities every day and throughout the day to practice “metalinguistic” skills: “These involve the ability not just to use language but to think about it, play with it, talk about it, analyze it componentially, and make judgments about acceptable versus incorrect forms” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 5).

What does this look like in a classroom of students who come from different language backgrounds? Students should feel safe in their ability to risk speech and interpretation. Words and language should be a part of a safe, engaging, learning environment, and this environment is ensured when students are encouraged to interact with language.

Ruby Payne (2001) discusses classrooms where spoken languages that are foreign to the teacher can be met with curiosity and discussed with respect. Students who feel embarrassed by having a different language spoken at home will not be as open to learning as those who are given situations and examples accepting of different languages. The difference between the language the child first learns may be so different from the language of the larger society that it causes difficulties in the interpretations and the acquisition of meaning and situational use of language. The teacher must provide instruction on the rules of language use through examples and stories, while allowing students to explore oral language.

## Acquiring Academic Language

Once students become comfortable and begin interacting with peers and teachers in the formal classroom, they are ready to learn and use academic language. Academic language includes the use of content-specific vocabulary and appropriate implementation of grammar. Teachers should not be overly critical at this stage, as students will shut down if they feel threatened or if they are mocked for their attempts. Gentle redirection or nonverbal cuing systems can benefit students in the early stages of using academic language. Strategies such as repeating what the student has said using correct grammar or vocabulary or praising the student for effort can encourage student participation in the classroom.

## YOU CAN'T LEARN TO READ WITHOUT READING

Learning to read in English can be a unique situation if a student is already literate in another language. Acquisition of this skill can actually be a frustrating experience. As often as possible, the student should be allowed to practice new skills in the home language before attempting them in English. This strategy will ensure that students are not falling behind academically while they are learning the new language.

Another challenge is when students are not literate in the home language. This causes the need for teachers to teach reading skills to students who have not mastered literacy skills in their home language. Students are at risk for failure if teachers are not able to meet both literacy and language needs simultaneously. That is why language development and literacy programs should be directly aligned.

There are several important factors in setting up an educational environment that is conducive to literacy acquisition (Constantino, 1998). These include

- providing a wide variety of reading materials;
- providing adequate time for sustained reading with no other obligations, including writing or sharing;
- allowing student self-selection of reading materials by interest level and content;
- providing opportunities to pursue a favorite author, genre, or subject of interest in a content area;
- allowing students to take books and materials home; and
- providing appealing materials, including books, color, multimedia resources, and pictures.

In addition to these factors, the following factors are equally important for teachers to do with English language learners:

- Provide materials in the home language.
- Allow students to bring materials from home, especially in the home language.
- Encourage students to share materials in their home languages, perhaps encouraging them to teach other students how to read them as well.
- Invite parents to participate with the student in literacy activities.

Passports, tickets to reading, question logs (see Figure 2.5), and journals are all ways to record a student's understanding of complex text or research. Helping students develop questioning skills helps them self-evaluate their understanding of key concepts and comprehension of complex text. In addition to self-evaluation, students also can be paired to allow English language learners to ask questions of peers in a nonthreatening environment.

**Figure 2.5** A Strategy for Encouraging Content-Area Reading\*

**Strategy:** *Question Log for Text-Based or Research-Based Assignments*

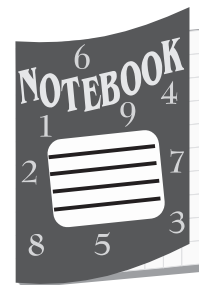
**Literacy Competency:** Functional literacy and content literacy

**Source:** James Burke (2000, 2002)

**Description:** Students generate a prereading question and record it in a spiral notebook or computer file. Teachers may also provide a short list of prereading questions from which students may choose. Students read a short portion of the text or research and jot down notes to answer the question(s). Use a two- or three-column format for logging answers and notes. The third column could be the applicability of the new information or prediction of next events or steps.

**Advantages:** Students are oriented to the text and what to look for; they read assignments in short bursts (similar to adult technical-reading patterns). Questions generated by students or chosen by them tend to be answered with greater attention.

**How to Use:** This method is especially well suited for the beginning of a course or unit when students are acquiring background information and need to read for certain levels of understanding. Give students high-quality question stems or question choices to model the level of thinking needed to truly comprehend the text. Shorter, more-frequent reading assignments will be easier to understand at the beginning of a unit. Once students have acquired the vocabulary related to the concept, comprehension increases and longer reading assignments can be given. Students can do this in class or for homework. Give students time to do a think-pair-share, or establish small groups of three for sharing responses before discussing questions and answers as a whole group.



(Continued)

**Figure 2.5 (Continued)****Bottom-Line Examples:**

- ↑ This strategy works well for most types of learners.
- ⇒ This strategy would work for some students in special educations, if some of the more difficult materials were also available on audio and questions were provided or question stems used. Use audio recordings for early Braille readers or harder-to-find materials in Braille for students with visual disabilities. English language learners who are at the survival level may also benefit from short materials with plenty of picture clues; they may need assistance or alternative assignments.
- ↓ This strategy does not work as well for students with cognitive or severe disabilities unless other media or assistance is offered. Students with cognitive disabilities should, however, be encouraged to read as much as possible; but they may need to start with functional or commercial survival-type materials at an appropriate level, and might need other accommodations.

Source: Gregory & Kuzmich (2005b, p. 29).

Another factor in creating a climate for literacy is the arrangement of space. It is fun for students to have a different place to read other than at their desks. It may be a corner of the room piled with cushions or a comfortable chair. Grouping desks or tables also can make the environment more inviting for reading. Anything that attracts students is helpful. These alternatives may vary with the level of experience of the student.

Color and lighting are also important aspects of an environment that says, “Please read here.” Changing the lighting to include lamps is more attractive than just overhead fluorescent lighting. Even creating a scene that relates to class topics or genre can be inviting.

Remember, students who are acquiring a second language are also learning the “rules” of language and school. Setting routines and expectations to manage behavior in the reading area is important. Reading habits might have to be taught to students who have not had many reading experiences. Students may need to rehearse the appropriate moves and skills—with plenty of reinforcement—to meet the teacher’s expectations.

## YOU CAN'T LEARN TO WRITE WITHOUT WRITING

We now have a classroom that is supportive of new language acquisition, with additional space and opportunities for practicing reading skills. What about writing? The next step in language acquisition and



literacy development is written language. Much like reading, writing skill development is particular to the comfort level of the student. Some writers crave cool tools to write on or with. Special colored pencils or pens; writing implements of various sizes, shapes, or textures; journals; or special paper or paper with raised lines can appeal to students. Be prepared to offer a variety of writing implements and paper choices to encourage students to write.

Also be prepared to appeal to the reluctant writer. Reluctant writers (and others) may prefer the computer as a writing tool, or they may want a smaller space on which to write, such as a sticky note or an advanced organizer. Some writers will work well at a desk, but others will prefer a clipboard or a journal in a cozy corner. Design the classroom to be as flexible for writing as it is for reading.

Students should be encouraged to write and to initiate writing tasks for authentic purposes. Although this will not happen overnight, students can be encouraged to write as a means for communication or celebration, and as an establishment of resources, such as creating personal dictionaries or word lists (Reeves, 2000):

- Sending invitations to classmates, notes to relatives, and postcards home to describe accomplishments
- Creating books and stories to be illustrated by friends
- Creating a class journal that everyone helps complete
- Setting up e-mail pen-pals and e-mailing parents and students

We will cover types of writing and writing for a variety of audiences and purposes in upcoming chapters. However, to achieve buy-in and overcome reluctance, teachers should allow students to experiment with their writing skills in nonthreatening tasks without concern about an overcritical eye. Positive reinforcement and encouragement to use writing as a personal tool for communication can create positive attitudes toward writing in students learning a second language. Writing should be fun, important, and natural.

## **READING, WRITING, SPEAKING, AND LISTENING EVERY DAY**

In this time of diverse classrooms, an oral language experience and group writing experience may be more complicated as we try to help students construct meaning and relationships. Students who are learning English for the first time in the midst of these experiences face special challenges. We may need to modify known strategies or take these strategies to a different level to account for greater diversity.

By creating opportunities for students to play with words and dialogue while they acquire language and increase literacy skills, teachers can enhance instruction for all students. The brain craves rehearsal prior to action. Verbal modeling and practice help students reach higher levels of thinking (Paul & Elder, 2001). Turning to a partner to rehearse what students will write or role-playing a dialogue prior to reading or writing will yield better results.

When teachers incorporate language acquisition skills into a literacy-based classroom, English language learners will be better able to master literacy objectives while acquiring language skills. Mastery of spoken language builds on listening skills and leads to better reading comprehension. The key to a successful classroom is connecting speaking and listening to everyday literacy in a variety of ways to create a classroom climate that truly serves to enhance and accelerate literacy among all students.