

Platform Framework - Section I

Language Development and Learning Dynamics

My philosophical approach is *constructivism*. My classroom is basically conducted with hands on experiences and is student centered. Even though I have state and district standards that are required to be met for my grade level, the approach to this knowledge is left up to my discretion. It has been my experience that students learn the most when they become involved. By making the learning a meaningful experience, the teacher must incorporate all of the different learning styles in the daily lessons. Teachers need to focus on the final product and not so much on the process. By building upon a child's prior knowledge the teacher can form a firm foundation so that not only the ELL students will succeed but also all of the students will show progress.

Contrary to popular belief among teachers, first and second language acquisitions are very similar. Before taking this class my approach to helping ELL students was not based on the proficiency in their native language but rather what I felt they needed to know to be competent English reader. Most of my colleagues follow this same procedure. However, according to Samway and McKeon's book *Myths and Realities*, it is a myth that a second language is learned differently than they learned their first language. This is known as the Common Underlying Proficiency or CUP. The CUP concept advocates that students need to be proficient in their native language in order to have good carry-over in understanding and developing a second language. Without a good foundation in their native language, ELL students have a very difficult time in learning and understanding the English language. According to Cummins, "Once children become competent in their first language their literacy skills can transfer readily to the second language."

As a result of this new knowledge, my classroom has a different personality than it used to show. Many common objects such as the chalkboard, clock, desks, door and windows are all labeled in the student's native language. There are books in the child's native language that they can take home and have read to them by an adult that speaks their own native language. I do try to obtain books that the student can read, but they are more difficult to find. (I have a Korean student) Since my background is in special education, I know how very important manipulatives, visual aids and building on a good foundation of information are the best ways to help all children develop their language skills. By putting an ELL child in a risk free environment, Krashen advocates that student's will be more willing to explore and develop their L2. As the teacher uses pictures, manipulative

and gestures and adapts the assessing of the ELL student, the ELL student does not feel so intimidated and seems to take hold of the new language with great confidence. ELL students need to feel, touch, observe and be totally involved in the experience in order to be able to communicate their learning experiences into the English language. With this spiral development of their L2, the ELL student will become proficient in communicating and understanding English with their peers and their teachers. Another important aspect of teaching ELL students is to be aware of the different learning styles. The learning dynamics in a classroom mold the student into their own identity and allow each student to develop as a special person. All students have different learning styles that allow them to learn easier or faster. It is the teacher's responsibility to adapt her lessons so that all of these learning styles are covered every day. This will build the students confidence and promote a positive self-esteem in ELL student as well as the English speaking students.

I also feel that it is important to communicate a lot with the ELL student's parents and other family members that help in the development of this child's life. Many times grandparents are the ones that care for ELL students while the parents are at work and they are the ones that the teacher needs to communicate with, too. Encouraging the parents to provide information about their country and participate in classroom activities would be a great asset to the education of all the students in our class. By providing regular communications between the teacher and the ELL student's family, the student will be the one to benefit the most. The ELL student will learn how much their parents value a good education and that their teacher respects the culture and family of the ELL student. With all of this positive influence in the ELL student's life, they will become successful!