

Chapter XXI

Speaking of Technology: Teaching English Language Learners in CTE Programs

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ABSTRACT

Meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) in career and technical education (CTE) represents a growing challenge for all teachers in the field. The challenge is especially overwhelming given the widespread agreement that teachers are not well prepared to meet the needs of ELLs. The implications for schools and CTE teachers are discussed in connection to appropriate instruction for ELLs addressing language development considerations. The underlying premises of effective instruction aligned with contextual teaching and learning, relation to teaching practice in CTE programs, and the implications for using technology to facilitate ELLs' learning are also examined.

INTRODUCTION

There is no question about it. English language learners (ELLs) represent the fastest growing group of students in public schools, and there is widespread agreement that teachers are not are not prepared to meet their particular needs (Flynn & Hill, 2005; Menken & Antunez, 2001; Yoon, 2008). Further, it has been reported that

typical textbooks used in teacher education do not address the growth of the ELL population, and do not provide much practical information on teaching and learning strategies for ELLs (Watson, Miller, Driver, Rutledge, & McAllister, 2005). Career and technical education (CTE) teachers may not be the exception to this trend. They may not be very well prepared either and may lack appropriate supports to address the needs of ELL

students enrolled in career and technical education programs (Cramer, 2004). In this context, the challenge for new and current CTE teachers is overwhelming considering the high-stakes demands for increased accountability requiring ELLs to be part of annual progress reports (Flynn & Hill, 2005; Malone, 2002).

In addressing this challenging situation and fill the void in teacher preparation, instructional technology may afford CTE teachers an opportunity to facilitate instruction for English language learners. To use technology effectively, however, it is important to understand the different needs of ELLs, what we know about linguistic development, and the implications for teaching and learning in CTE programs building upon principles for good instruction.

The objectives of this chapter are to address the problematic implications of the rising school enrollments of ELL students on teaching and learning in CTE, review recent findings on language development, the connections to contextual teaching and learning, and the promising use of technology in support of ELLs' learning. This chapter begins with an overview of the problematic context impacting CTE teachers including the dramatic growth of English language learners in the United States, teacher preparation issues, and contributing student factors. This overview sets the stage for a review of current teaching and learning issues, implications for the use of technology, and emerging trends.

BACKGROUND

When ELL students join a classroom they are confronted with the daunting challenge of learning new knowledge while trying to learn a new language and get acculturated at the same time. In addition to learning English to understand, navigate, and communicate in social situations, ELLs also face the overwhelming task of learning "academic English" in school. That is, the abstract

and complex language required for classroom instruction both orally and in writing. For the majority of ELLs, this struggle has an impact on grades, motivation, and future educational and occupational prospects (Eisenhauer, Zhang, Hernandez, & Angee, 2007; Goldenberg, 2008; Office of English Language Acquisition, 2008).

ELL's Growth: A Rising Demographic Trend

Finding ways to help ELLs students succeed in schools has become an important issue given their dramatic growth in recent years. In 2003, about 18 percent of the population in United States did not speak English at home, representing an increase of 50 percent over the previous two decades. Unlike early demographic trends concentrating in selected states such as California, Texas, and Florida; recent trends depict a widespread growth in the ELL population across 45 states. In fact, the number of non-English speakers actually doubled from 1990 to 2000 in six of those states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). This trend in the general population is quickly translating into increased student enrollment in schools from 2 to 5 million since 1990. Specifically, the number of children ages 5–17 who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled between 1979 and 2005. In turn, the number of children in elementary and secondary schools who spoke English with difficulty increased by 152 percent between 1990 and 2005. In some states that had no historical ties to non-English speakers (e.g., North Carolina, Tennessee), the growth has been even more dramatic showing at least 300 percent increase from 1994 to 2005 (Goldenberg, 2008). In contrast, the overall number of children ages 5–17 in the general population increased by only 19 percent during a comparable period (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006).

The ELL student population represents a wide diversity of language backgrounds, although the

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