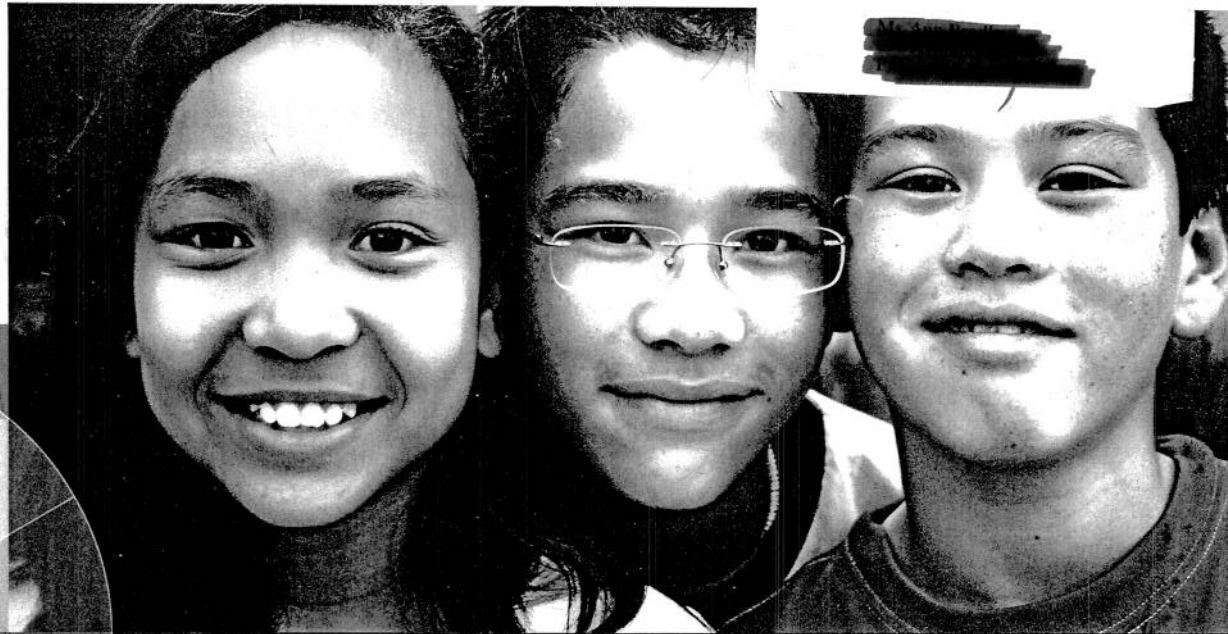


Classroom Instruction That Works with English Language Learners

Jane D. Hill • Kathleen M. Flynn



Classroom Instruction *that works* *with* English Language Learners

Jane D. Hill • Kathleen M. Flynn

1

WHAT IS *CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION THAT WORKS?*

“Research-based” is today’s buzzword for teachers when it comes to choosing modes of instruction, curricula, and forms of assessment. Particularly since the advent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), teachers can no longer rely solely on their knowledge of best practices or their years of experience.

In the late 1990s, researchers at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) were at the forefront of this paradigm shift—a shift, essentially, from viewing teaching as an art toward viewing it as a science. Another shift in educational thinking was under way at the same time: Researchers were realizing that studies from the 1960s and 1970s indicating that school quality accounted for only 10 percent of differences in students’ academic performance (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972) were not entirely accurate. In particular, researchers found that even if a school was not highly effective in raising student performance, individual teachers could still have a powerful effect on students’ academic achievement (Brophe & Good, 1986; Sanders & Horn, 1994; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997).

Buoyed by this new line of research, McREL researchers began looking at studies of various instructional strategies that could be used by individual teachers. An instructional strategy was defined as an

alterable behavior on the part of teachers or students. Using meta-analysis, these researchers analyzed over 100 studies of instructional strategies, spanning 30 years. (A meta-analysis combines the results of many studies to determine the average effect of a technique or strategy. Because of the large sample size, this is considered an especially strong method of identifying what works in educational practice.) Through its meta-analysis, McREL researchers identified nine categories of instructional strategies that proved to be exceptionally effective in increasing student performance:

- Setting objectives and providing feedback
- Nonlinguistic representations
- Cues, questions, and advance organizers
- Cooperative learning
- Summarizing and note taking
- Homework and practice
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- Generating and testing hypotheses
- Identifying similarities and differences

The results of this research are presented in a practitioner-friendly format in *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001) and the accompanying resource manual, *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Norford, Paynter, Pickering, & Gaddy, 2001). *Classroom Instruction That Works* provides an overview of the research on each category, offers generalizations regarding the use of each category, and presents examples of actual classroom implementation of relevant instructional strategies. Before differentiating these strategies for ELLs in detail, we present here a quick overview of each category, including definitions and some generalizations drawn from the research. Discussion of actual instructional practices can be found in subsequent chapters.

If you have already read *Classroom Instruction That Works* and are familiar with the nine categories of instructional strategies, feel free to move right ahead to Chapter 2, where we discuss the process of second language acquisition.

Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback

By setting objectives and providing feedback, teachers give students a direction for learning and offer information on how well they are performing relative to a particular learning goal.

Two main generalizations can be drawn from the research on setting objectives. First, by setting instructional goals, teachers can

narrow the focus for students. (Instructional goals should not be too specific, however, or learning will be limited.) Second, students should be encouraged to adapt the teacher's goals to their own personal needs and desires.

The research suggests four generalizations on providing feedback to students:

1. Feedback should be corrective in nature; that is, it should provide students with information on what they are doing correctly and incorrectly.
2. The timeliness of feedback is essential to its effectiveness. Generally, the later feedback is given—after an exam, for example—the lower the improvement in academic achievement.
3. Feedback should be specific to a criterion, meaning it should tell students where they stand relative to a specific academic goal (criterion-referenced feedback) rather than relative to their peers (norm-referenced feedback).
4. Students can effectively provide their own feedback through ongoing self-evaluation of their learning and performance.

Nonlinguistic Representations

The use of nonlinguistic representations enhances students' ability to represent and elaborate on knowledge using mental images. *Classroom Instruction That Works* provides two general statements regarding nonlinguistic representations. First, a variety of activities—including creating graphic representations, making physical models, generating mental pictures, drawing pictures and pictographs, and engaging in kinesthetic activity—produce nonlinguistic representations. Second, when generating nonlinguistic representations, students elaborate on (or add to) their knowledge. This means that students not only understand material better but also recall the knowledge more readily. A teacher can further this process by asking students to explain and justify their nonlinguistic representations.

Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers

By using cues, questions, and advance organizers, teachers enhance students' ability to retrieve, use, and organize what they already know about a topic. In other words, these techniques help activate prior knowledge.

The research offers four generalizations about cues and questions:

1. Cues and questions should focus on the information that is critical to students' understanding of the topic at hand, rather than on what is unusual or interesting about the topic. Focusing on the unusual may heighten student interest for the moment, but it will also distract from the important information that needs to be grasped.
2. Higher-level questions (i.e., those that require analytic thinking) produce deeper learning than lower-level questions (i.e., those that simply require students to recall or recognize information).
3. Waiting briefly before accepting responses from students increases the depth of the answers, leads to more classroom discussion, and facilitates student-to-student interaction.
4. Teachers can use questions effectively both before and after a learning experience. Using questions before a learning experience helps students develop a framework for processing the information.

A somewhat similar set of generalizations applies to the use of advance organizers:

1. Advance organizers should focus on what is important as opposed to what is unusual.
2. Higher-level advance organizers produce deeper learning than lower-level advance organizers.
3. Advance organizers are most useful to students when the information presented is not well organized.
4. Different types of advance organizers produce different results. There are four types of advance organizers:
 - a. *Expository* advance organizers are straightforward descriptions of the new content students will be learning. (The research shows that expository organizers are the most effective of the four types.)
 - b. *Narrative* advance organizers are stories.
 - c. *Skimming* advance organizers involve focusing on and noting what stands out in headings, subheadings, and highlighted information.
 - d. *Graphic* advance organizers visually represent information.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning techniques allow students to interact with each other in groups in ways that enhance their learning. When students work in cooperative groups, they make sense of new knowledge by interacting with others.

Three generalizations can be drawn from the research on cooperative learning:

1. Organizing groups by ability level should be done sparingly. Although homogeneous grouping in general is more effective than no grouping, research has shown that students of lower ability perform worse in homogeneous groups, while students of high ability perform only slightly better. Only students of medium ability show a significant increase in achievement when placed in groups with students of similar ability (Lou et al., 1996).
2. Cooperative groups should be small—three to four members per group is ideal.
3. Cooperative learning techniques are most effective when used consistently and systematically; they work best when used at least once a week. Teachers should ensure, however, that students still have time to practice skills independently.

Summarizing and Note Taking

By teaching summarizing and note-taking techniques, teachers can enhance students' ability to synthesize and organize information in a way that captures the main ideas and supporting details. Both summarizing and note taking help students process information.

Summarizing is primarily about distilling information, finding patterns, filling in the missing parts, and synthesizing the information into a condensed form. There are several generalizations from the research on developing summarizing skills. The research makes clear that students must engage in three activities when effectively summarizing: deleting information, substituting information, and keeping information. Moreover, to successfully engage in these three activities, students must analyze the information at a fairly deep level. Research also indicates that familiarity with the structure of the information being summarized makes the process easier.

Like summarizing, note taking asks students to identify key information and restate that information in their own words. There are three main generalizations we can draw from the research on note taking:

1. The least effective way to take notes is verbatim. Trying to record everything that is heard or read does not give students a chance to synthesize the information presented. This does not mean that students should take limited notes; in fact, the more notes they take, the better. It is important, however, that notes be specific to the learning goals outlined by the teacher.
2. Students should consider notes to be works in progress; they should be regularly reviewed, revised, and added to as a student's grasp of the content grows.
3. Students should use their notes as study guides. A set of clear, well-organized notes can be a powerful tool for test preparation.

Homework and Practice

Assigning students homework and practice extends the learning opportunities for reviewing and applying knowledge and enhances the ability to reach the expected level of proficiency for a skill or process.

Classroom Instruction That Works describes four generalizations on assigning homework:

1. Students in lower grades should be assigned less homework than those at higher grade levels.
2. Parent involvement in homework should be kept to a minimum. Although parents can facilitate homework (by providing a good study space for their child, for example), they should not solve homework problems for the student.
3. Teachers should be clear about the purpose of homework. Is the assignment designed for practice of a new skill, to prepare students for the introduction of new content, or to help students elaborate on already introduced content?
4. Homework is more effective when feedback—be it a grade or written comment—is provided.

There are two generalizations from the research regarding practice. First, a student will not master a skill without a significant amount of practice. In fact, students generally do not reach 80 percent competency until they have practiced a skill at least 24 times (Anderson, 1995; Newell & Rosenbloom, 1981). This is important to remember because the goal of practice is to develop a skill or process so that it can be applied fluently with minimal conscious thought. Second, when practicing, students should adapt and shape what they

have learned. The conceptual understanding of a skill should develop during practice. Again, students need multiple opportunities to make continued adaptations as they develop their understanding of the skill they are learning.

Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition

By reinforcing effort, teachers enhance students' understanding of the relationship between effort and achievement by addressing attitudes and beliefs about learning. People generally attribute success to one or more of these four factors: ability, effort, other people, and luck. Of these four factors, only effort actually contributes to achievement. Although a belief in ability may appear helpful at first, a task will eventually come along for which you do not believe you have the requisite ability. Sometimes you must accomplish a task alone, in which case belief in other people as a source of success can be limiting. As for belief in luck, what if your luck runs out?

There are two related generalizations from the research on reinforcing effort. First, not all students realize the importance of believing in effort as a means for academic success. Second, students can learn to believe that effort pays off, even if they do not initially hold this belief.

"Providing recognition" refers to providing students with rewards or praise for their accomplishments related to the attainment of a goal. The research offers three generalizations in this category:

1. Rewards do not necessarily have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation.
2. Rewards are most effective when students must reach some standard of performance in order to receive them. For example, offering a reward for merely participating in an activity can diminish intrinsic motivation, whereas a reward that is contingent on successful completion of a task increases intrinsic motivation.
3. Abstract symbolic recognition, such as verbal praise, is more effective than tangible rewards, such as candy or money.

Generating and Testing Hypotheses

There are two generalizations from the research in this category. First, hypothesis generation and testing can be approached in an inductive

(specific to general) or deductive (general to specific) manner. The research shows that deductive techniques are generally more effective than inductive techniques. Second, teachers should ask students to clearly explain their hypotheses and conclusions. By explaining their thinking, students deepen their understanding of the principle they are applying. This process can also help clear up misconceptions.

Identifying Similarities and Differences

When students identify similarities and differences in the content they are learning, they make new connections, experience new insights, and correct misconceptions. Engaging in these complex reasoning processes helps students understand content at a deeper level.

Two main generalizations can be drawn from the research on identifying similarities and differences. First, both teacher-directed and student-directed comparison tasks enhance student knowledge. However, if a teacher wants students to focus on specific similarities and differences, direct instruction is best. Second, using graphic or symbolic models (such as Venn diagrams or matrices) to represent similarities and differences enhances students' ability to generate similarities and differences, thus enhancing their understanding of, and ability to use, knowledge.

There are a variety of ways to identify similarities and differences. Four highly effective forms of doing so are comparing, classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies. Identifying similarities and differences is implicit in the process of comparing, and it is also critical to classifying. To create a metaphor, a student must make the abstract similarities and differences between two elements concrete. In creating analogies, students identify how two pairs of elements are similar.

Summary

The authors of *Classroom Instruction That Works* acknowledge that many questions remain about the categories discussed in this chapter, despite all the research to date. For the purposes of this book, the key unanswered question is whether the categories of strategies set forth in *Classroom Instruction That Works* are effective with diverse student populations, and with English language learners in particular. Are there ways in which a mainstream teacher with ELL students in her classroom can use these categories to help students acquire English

and learn content knowledge? When and how would a mainstream teacher use these strategies? Do the strategies need to be adapted for use with ELLs, and if so, why and how? The following chapters help answer these questions.