



Kathleen Flynn, Jane Hill, and Cynthia Bjork explain how mainstream teachers can incorporate language objectives into content area lessons to help ELLs advance in both language acquisition and content knowledge

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Providing a Direction for Learning:

Setting Language Objectives for English Language Learners

There's a word we like to emphasize when we are helping mainstream teachers learn to effectively instruct their English language learners (ELLs), and that word is PIE. And no, we're not talking apple or cherry or even strawberry rhubarb. PIE, rather, is an acronym to remind teachers that when working with their ELLs, their instruction has to be purposeful, intentional, and explicit.

Imagine that you're a high school social studies teacher developing a lesson plan for a unit on women's rights in the U.S. in the 1920s. You have a number of ELLs in your classroom, and these students are at different stages of English language acquisition. How are you going to ensure that all of your students, English language learners and native English speakers, will be engaged in learning the content you present during this unit? And how are you

going to ensure that your ELLs are acquiring language skills at the same time?

These things are only going to happen if you make your instruction purposeful, intentional, and explicit. And one of the best ways you can start doing so is to set learning objectives for your ELLs for each lesson — language objectives as well as content objectives. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that English language learners show annual progress in both learning English and gaining content knowledge. ELLs, therefore, must develop a firm foundation in academic English skills in order to meet content standards and pass state assessments. In this article, we will explain how incorporating language objectives into your content area lessons helps your ELLs advance in both language acquisition and content knowledge, and we will show you how to develop such objectives yourself.

Why Should I Set Objectives for English Language Learners?

Research has shown that setting learning goals is useful for all students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001). Why then is setting objectives so critically important for ELLs? To start with, the mainstream classroom is an overwhelming place for English language learners. Just imagine the confusion an ELL student could feel when bombarded with the stimuli of a typical classroom — the teacher and other students talking; the writing on the boards and walls; the print in textbooks, handouts, and assignments — all in a language he or she is only beginning to understand. Setting learning objectives is therefore particularly important for ELLs in order to focus their learning, help them screen out irrelevant stimuli, and provide them with a sense of accomplishment. The classroom