Classroom Instruction That Works With English Language Learners


In Classroom Instruction That Works With English Language Learners, authors Jane Hill and Kathleen Flynn connect instructional strategies described in a popular ASCD publication, Classroom Instruction That Works, to the instruction of ELL students. The nine categories of research-based instructional categories originally identified by authors of the first book are briefly described and set the stage for more detailed discussion. These strategies include approaches such as “setting objectives and providing feedback,” “cooperative learning,” and “identifying similarities and differences.”

Hill and Flynn provide some background before connecting the strategies to instruction of ELL students. Specifically, they talk about the stages of second language acquisition and describe how they use these to provide a framework for the remainder of their book. For example, a content objective might be to help students learn the basics of summarization, using the story of “The Three Little Pigs” as a tool. Students at the preproduction phase of second language acquisition (typically would not verbalize, but instead nod yes, or no, or point) would be asked by the teacher, “Show me the house in the picture.” A student at the speech emergence phase (can answer why and how questions in short sentences) might be asked, “Explain why the third pig built his house out of bricks.”

This approach—using knowledge about the phases of language acquisition to support adaptation of instructional strategies—is used through the rest of the book. One example involves teaching students in the early production phase (typically able to produce one- or two-word responses and participates by using key words and phrases) to take notes that might include only a few key words highlighted by the teacher during a discussion. A student in the speech emergence phase would be taught to add “essential adjectives or phrases,” sometimes with teacher support.

From a principal’s perspective, Classroom Instruction That Works With English Language Learners has several strengths in its potential for use with teacher development or school improvement study groups. It applies a practitioner-friendly approach similar to that used in Classroom Instruction That Works. The brief chapter on the stages of second language acquisition provides a framework teachers can use in assessing their students and in making decisions about the appropriateness of instructional techniques to use with each of them. Each category of instructional strategies is discussed in its own chapter, thus making it easy to focus on one strategy at a time. Finally, schools—and teachers—that have already used Classroom Instruction That Works will be able to build on this knowledge base.