Promising Practices for ELs with Special Needs

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The majority of ELs are educated in urban schools where they often face substandard learning opportunities, under-qualified teachers, unchallenging curricula, lack of specialized resources, culturally irrelevant assessment and instructional practices, prejudice, and de facto racial segregation [1]. To improve academic and social outcomes for this population of students, educators working with ELs with suspected or identified LDs should focus on the following three areas.

**Identification and assessment**

When EL students fall behind academically, educators must be able to distinguish LD from SLA issues and from issues related to poor educational opportunities. ELs may be misidentified as having disabilities because traditional identification and norm-based evaluation practices are often inappropriate for ELs [2] and can be highly subjective reflecting the judgments of educators. Instead, schools should employ preventative and diagnostic interventions that are evaluated by a school-based multidisciplinary team including teachers, family members, advocates, an interpreter, and an expert in bilingual development [3]. Student evaluations also should assess continuously the quality of EL learning opportunities, support systems, and disciplinary practices.

**Effective instructional strategies**

The following strategies are believed to be effective in teaching ELSNs.

- The use of chunking and questioning aloud in teaching reading comprehension [4]: Teachers divide a reading passage into chunks to allow students to ask questions and make predictions based on individual chunks, and piece together the information provided by the passage following these steps: (1) students read the title of the passage and make predictions, (2) students read the first chunk of text and confirm, refine or reject predictions, (3) students repeat the previous procedure throughout the reading, and (4) teacher provides a follow up activity to bring together the text and solidify comprehension.

- The use of visual aids and real-life examples in teaching math [5]: Teachers can use diagrams, photographs, and drawings to make abstract concepts more tangible, to build and maintain vocabulary, and to process word problems. Real-life examples enhance comprehension and make content relevant to daily life situations.

**Parental involvement** in school plays a significant role in increasing ELs’ academic achievement. Parents should be used as a resource to learn about ELs’ backgrounds and should be included in the decision-making [6].

Creating a nurturing environment, with challenging content, high expectations, effective instructional support, and culturally responsive educational practices may facilitate ELs’ access to general education curriculum and bring forth positive academic and social outcomes.

**References**


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