
Most successful ways of teaching English as a second language

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Classrooms across the United States are becoming increasingly diverse with increasing numbers of students whose primary home languages are not English. State-reported data in 2008-09 estimated 10 percent of the US school-aged population (PreK-twelfth grade) as students identified as limited English proficient. Terms more widely accepted and used are English-Language Learners or simply English Learners (ELs).

To adequately assist ELs in learning both content concepts and English simultaneously, all educators need to view themselves as language teachers. Here are 10 tips for supporting ELs in general education classrooms.

Know your students

Although identifying and sorting student learning preferences may seem time-consuming, the dividends your students will reap should more than compensate. Having a student lie on the floor to read his book rather than sit in a chair, letting a student explore the concept of life cycles through her passion for beetles, assigning a drawing rather than a writing project to an artistic student—these small modifications can make big differences in the learning that takes place.

Interests. There is a considerable research base to support a strong correlation between the degree of student interest and levels of student motivation, achievement, productivity, and perseverance (Amabile, 1983; Torrance, 1995). Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues (1993) have found that student interest is as critical to talent development as the match between task complexity and student readiness for the task. According to Glasser (1988), students who are interested in what they are learning are motivated to pursue learning experiences of ever-increasing complexity and difficulty. There is also a significant correlation between students' interest in the learning content and their willingness to persevere in learning tasks that are momentarily not interesting.

Another important correlation to emerge from the research on student interest and choice is that students who are engaged in work that interested them were overwhelmingly more able to see connections between their present work in school and their future academic or career goals. These connections form the foundation of commitment to future learning and foster self-directedness (Cziksentmihalyi et al., 1993).

There are two types of student interests useful in planning for personalized learning. Pre-existing student interests are those subjects, topics, and pursuits about which an individual student has an existing curiosity or passion. They may be interests explored at school (areas of the curriculum, extracurricular activities, or athletics) or outside interests in which the student readily invests time and energy. Relevance to the student is obvious and engagement is immediate. Potential interests are topics, activities, or pursuits that the student may not have yet discovered or been exposed to, but that may prove to be ongoing. Potential interests are as powerful as pre-existing interests, but a teacher needs to mediate their relevance for the student.

Effective teachers pay attention to both pre-existing and potential interests. Whenever you can link the classroom curriculum to student interest, you tap into internalized achievement motivation—where goals are personal, motivation comes from within, and achievement is deeply meaningful. Mediating connections between classroom learning and student interests is one of the most powerful strategies that teachers can employ toward the goal of creating enthusiastic lifelong learners.

During a unit on religious knowledge in our IB Theory of Knowledge class, we asked the students to write about how they personally came to knowledge through faith. Both Jorgen, a militant atheist from Sweden, and Samir, a devout Jordanian Muslim of Palestinian extraction, wrote particularly well-organized, articulate essays. As a follow-up, we asked the class to undertake a self-analysis of their arguments for "confirmation bias"—the tendency all of us have to perceive only that which confirms our pre-existing ideas and prejudices. A rich and respectful discussion ensued, with Jorgen and Samir—both fascinated by God but taking polar-opposite positions—driving the conversation. It was a vivid example of how student interest can support deep, critical thinking.

Intelligence preferences. General consensus in education today is that intelligence is not monolithic but made up of many elements. Educators also view it as malleable, subject to a wide variety of influences (Nisbett, 2009). Howard Gardner's (1993) model of intelligence, identifying eight specific types of intelligence, has been popular with teachers, but many who find it fascinating intellectually also find it cumbersome to apply to classroom instruction. Gardner himself is quick to point out that his theory was never designed for classroom use.

Teachers may find Robert Sternberg's (1985) framework of intelligence preferences easier to use. Sternberg proposes three intelligence types: analytical, practical, and creative.

Analytical intelligence is the intelligence most often recognized and rewarded in schools. Students with strengths in this area learn well with traditional school tasks such as organizing information, perceiving cause and effect, logical analysis, note taking, and predicting implications.

Practical intelligence is about relevance. Students with strengths in this area need to solve problems in a meaningful context. Their learning is supported when teachers offer connections with the real world outside the classroom. These students need to see concepts and skills at work.

Creative intelligence involves approaching ideas and problems in fresh and sometimes surprising ways. Students with strong creative intelligence are often divergent thinkers, preferring to experiment with ideas rather than "work" like everyone else.

All people have and use all three intelligences, but we vary in particular preferences and in combination of preferences. These preferences may be shaped by "brain wiring," culture, gender, and personal experiences. It makes sense for teachers to support students as they develop their intelligence strengths while providing opportunities to expand their nonpreferred areas.

Sternberg's model has been well substantiated by research studies of students from primary school through university level. His findings suggest that students can make significant gains when teachers both permit them to explore ideas using their preferred intelligences and teach regularly in all three modes, which deepens student understanding and enhances retention.

Learning styles. In recent years, educators have seen some controversy arise over the issue of learning styles. Willingham (2009) and other critics argue that there doesn't seem to be much evidence that children and young adults learn in fundamentally different ways. In fact, in a September 2009 posting on the Washington Post website, Willingham called learning styles "bunk." This is a remarkable conclusion that flies in the face of what people know intuitively about learning and what educators have learned from observing our students in the classroom. In his book *Why Don't Students Like School?* (2009), Daniel Willingham asserts that there is no neuroscience research that supports the use of learning styles in schools. This may be true. But there is also no neuroscience research that establishes the influences of temperament or personality on learning. However, for hundreds of years, teachers have known from experience how powerful these influences can be. There is no question that certain approaches to learning work better for some children than for others.

No one, to our knowledge, is suggesting that we use a learning style inventory to pigeonhole children,

and no one is suggesting that children's learning style proclivities may not change from situation to situation. The reality, as we see it, is simply that because many children find learning to be a struggle, teachers are obliged to do what they can to make it easier. Being aware of learning style preferences and building them into instructional planning is one way to do this.

Modality preferences refer to a student's preferred mode of taking in information—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactual. Each of us uses all four modalities when we learn, but in different combinations of preference. The largest proportion of the population tends to prefer visual learning; these are students who greatly benefit from a graphic display of the material to be learned. The next-largest groups are those who prefer kinesthetic and tactual learning experiences. (Several of our special education colleagues from schools around the world have observed that a significant number of boys with learning disabilities have a preference for kinesthetic learning; ironically, these are the same students teachers often require to sit still for long periods of time.) The smallest proportion of the population tends to prefer auditory learning. That auditory learners are a minority in our classrooms is significant, given our proclivity as teachers to fill the classroom with teacher talk.

Each modality preference may present challenges to learning, but each also offers opportunities for personalizing and ought to be considered during instructional planning. Figure 1.1 lists some activities that may be problematic or helpful for each type of learner.

Be aware of their social and emotional needs

Students' ability to learn depends not just on the quality of their textbooks and teachers, but also on the comfort and safety they feel at school and the strength of their relationships with adults and peers there.

Most of education policymakers' focus remains on ensuring schools are physically safe and disciplined: Forty-five states have anti-bullying policies, compared with only 24 states that have more comprehensive policies on school climate. Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader.

Mounting evidence from fields like neuroscience and cognitive psychology, as well as studies on such topics as school turnaround implementation, shows that an academically challenging yet supportive environment boosts both children's learning and coping abilities. By contrast, high-stress environments in which students feel chronically unsafe and uncared for make it physically and emotionally harder for them to learn and more likely for them to act out or drop out.

As that research builds, more education officials at every level are taking notice. For example, the federal government has prioritized school climate programs in its \$38.8 million grants for safe and supportive school environments, and two states—Ohio and Wisconsin—have developed guidelines for districts on improving school life, according to the National School Climate Center, located in New York City.

Experts say that administrators who focus on using climate merely as a tool to raise test scores or to reduce bullying may set up their reform efforts to fail. Stand-alone programs targeting individual symptoms like bullying or poor attendance may not provide holistic support for students, and emerging research shows such a comprehensive approach is critical to improve school climate.

"There's anti-bullying, which is sort of the top, the visible part of an iceberg, and those are the formal policies where we tell kids, 'OK, don't bully each other,' " said Meagan O'Malley, a research associate at WestEd who specializes in the research group's middle-school-climate initiative in Los Alamitos, Calif. "But then under that, there's everything else that happens in that school, the interactions between people every single day that create an atmosphere that's either supportive of a bullying atmosphere or not. Programmatic interventions have to be one piece of a much larger body of work."

Students who experience chronic instability and stress have more aggressive responses to stress,

along with poorer working memory and self-control, studies show. Building those skills in individual students can raise the tenor of the whole school.

"As much as we need to provide enriched experiences to promote healthy brain development," says Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, the director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, "we also need to protect the brain from bad things happening to it. We all understand that in terms of screening for lead, because lead does bad things to a brain, mercury does bad things to a brain, ... but toxic stress does bad things to a brain, too—it's a different chemical doing it, but it's still a big problem interfering with brain development."

It's easy to focus too much on the visible parts of the school climate iceberg and have school improvement efforts run aground on the massive issues below the surface.

Studies routinely show that students learn better when they feel safe, for example. Yet interventions that focus on visible signs of safety—metal detectors, wand searches, and so on—have not been found to deter crime and actually can make students feel less safe at school. What does reduce bullying and make students feel safer? According to an analysis of the National Crime Victimization Survey, only one intervention: more adults visible and talking to students in the hallways, a mark of a climate with better adult-student relationships.

Likewise, students' ability to delay gratification has been proven to be so linked to academic and social success that the Knowledge Is Power Program charter schools offer T-shirts for students bearing the mantra, "Don't Eat the Marshmallow!" That's a reference to a famous study that used the sweet treat in ..

Increase your understanding of first and second language acquisition

Although courses about second language acquisition are not required as part of teacher education programs, understanding the theories about language acquisition and the variables that contribute to language learning may help you reach your ELs more effectively.

In comparing the L1 and L2 learner, it is apparent that the L1 learner nearly always begins acquiring their L1 from birth (or even in the womb) and is surrounded by other speakers of the L1 throughout their development, whereas the L2 learner can be of any age and in any environment. Given the diversity of L2 learners, this essay will narrow its focus to those learners whom the author teaches; namely adult language learners learning in a classroom. Such learners are typically characterized by their failure to learn a language to a level approaching native speaker proficiency (Han, 2003), although Widdowson (cited in Deriwianka, 2000, p.254) has pointed out that the concept of "native speaker competence" is not well-defined. Bialystok also observes that "for a particular individual, some aspects of language learning are mastered more easily than are others" (cited in Han, 2003, p.7), again highlighting that the capacity to learn a language is more usefully construed as a multiplicity of competences.

Notwithstanding these issues, in analyzing the capacity of an adult in a classroom setting to learn an L2, the common characteristics that differentiate such a learner from a child acquiring his/her L1 can be made to serve as the basis for investigation. The salient distinctions of age, learning environment, and the L2 learner's prior knowledge of a particular language and culture, serve as factors which can be analyzed as to their neurological, cognitive, linguistic, and affective impacts on capacity.

The question of language learning capacity in both FLA and SLA is complex. The multifarious nature of language itself necessarily leads to different interpretations of the idea of language learning capacity. This essay has argued for a broad and functional view of language, whereby the child relies not only on innate structures in the brain, but also on input from, and interaction with, people in the child's environment, in order to develop various language skills and competences. This process of FLA is necessarily unique according to the age and developmental state of the child, the amount and quality of linguistic input and interaction provided within the child's environment, and the relatively unformed state of the child's linguistic

and conceptual systems. Therefore it cannot be expected that second language acquisition will proceed in the same way and a narrow or monolithic construction of language learning capacity will be even less helpful than it is in FLA. In examining the capacity of adult learners to learn an L2 in a classroom setting, age, learning environment, and prior linguistic experience were used as the differentiating constants by which the language learning capacity of these L2 learners could be compared to child L1 learners. In reviewing some of the effects of these factors on different aspects of the capacity to learn a second language, it becomes apparent that such effects are complex, interconnected, and variable. Empirical evidence may show that the adult learner is less likely to reach the same level of ultimate attainment in the L2 as the child-turned-adult will in L1, however there is little other evidence to suggest an inevitable extinction of any part of the capacity of an adult learner to learn an L2. For language teachers, the question then becomes how to incorporate into our teaching practices our understanding of the way in which learning processes are impacted by factors relating to age, environment, and prior linguistic and cultural experience in order to better assist L2 learners.

Student need to SWRL every day in every class

Languages are generally taught and assessed in terms of the 'four skills': listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are known as 'receptive' skills while speaking and writing are known as 'productive' skills. All language learners will need to develop their skills in each of these areas, and your language classes should incorporate activities related to all these skills.

Listening and reading

Listening to and reading content in the language you are learning is a great way to develop your vocabulary and comprehension. It is important to make your listening and reading active rather than passively absorbing the content. The following steps will help you get the most out of listening and reading:

1. Choose the content wisely

Try to choose listening or reading material that interests you and will hold your attention. Whenever possible, listen to recorded content (on a CD or DVD) or through a streaming internet service that you can pause and rewind. This will allow you to listen multiple times, or go back to sections you did not understand. For independent reading practice, choose relatively short passages to focus on (e.g. a news article, a blog post, a section of a short story).

2. Prepare before listening or reading

Knowing a bit about what you are going to listen to or read will help you better understand the material. Before you start, try to find out a bit about the context or topic – you may wish to note down some topics or vocabulary you expect to hear or read. Think also about the format of the piece – is it a debate, a news story, a soap opera, part of a novel – as different formats will have different conventions and structures.

3. Have a first pass

Listen to the segment or read the piece once without stopping – don't worry if you don't understand everything!

4. Have another go

The next time you listen or read, note down or underline any unfamiliar vocabulary, and take notes on the content in your own words in the target language. You can then go back and listen or read again, to try to understand things you may have missed the first time.

5. Put away the dictionary

Even after you have listened to a segment or read a piece a number of times, you will probably not

understand every word! Try to make an educated guess based on the context, and not use the dictionary too much. For independent practice, you should not necessarily aim to understand every word, but try to get a sense of the general topic and some key vocabulary.

Speaking

Developing your speaking skills will involve gaining fluency in spoken interactions with others, as well as practicing your pronunciation. Use your new language skills as often as you can to speak to people – other students from your language class, native speakers you might meet around town, or language partners in online exchanges. To practise pronunciation try reading aloud or repeating after a recorded text, trying to reproduce the pronunciation and intonation of the original. Make a recording of yourself and listen back to try to identify your own strengths and weaknesses as a speaker.

Writing

Writing in another language can seem a daunting task, but is a critical skill, especially if you plan to use it in the workplace. As in your first language, your writing will be improved by becoming a critical reader - try to think actively about how texts are structured and what kinds of phrases or vocabulary are used for different purposes (e.g. introducing a topic, describing, comparing and contrasting, writing conclusions). When writing in a foreign language, always try to think and write directly in that language. Do not translate from a first draft. It is best not to use a dictionary too much in the early stages of writing. Using words in your first language is fine if it helps you get a draft written more quickly. You shouldn't expect to write everything correctly the first time, but write and re-write as much as necessary. Finally, try to get constructive feedback from others (your teacher, fellow students, native speakers) on how you can improve..

Understand language assessments

Language proficiency assessments in your district may vary. Find out when and how a student's English language proficiency is assessed and the results of those assessments. Using the results of formal and informal assessments can provide a wealth of information to aid in planning lessons that support language acquisition and content knowledge simultaneously.

Many assessments have been developed and normed on native English speakers and, therefore, great caution must be taken when interpreting results when used with English language learners. It is recommended, where possible, to use assessment developed for and normed on populations that include English language learners.

Assessment of Language Proficiency

The purpose of the initial assessment of English language proficiency is to obtain information regarding the student's proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. This information can be used to:

- determine instructional starting points
- identify initial language proficiency levels on the Alberta K–12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks
- determine programming and instructional support. Conducting an Initial Language Proficiency

Assessment It is important to remember that a new student's initial assessment

may be influenced by feelings of stress and dislocation. In some cases students may underperform due to anxiety, a lack of confidence, and/or unfamiliarity with the local dialect and rate of speech. In these cases the student will often show a significant improvement in English language proficiency in four to six weeks as the student has become more comfortable, confident and familiar with the environment. The initial language assessment should be conducted in a quiet and comfortable space in which the teacher

can interact with the student one-on-one.

Establishing English Language Proficiency Levels

After initial English language assessment information has been gathered, the English language proficiency of an English language learner can be identified using the Alberta K–12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks. The purpose of the ESL Benchmarks is to establish a baseline proficiency level, guide appropriate programming for English language learners, and monitor language proficiency growth and development. For more information, . If the initial assessment reveals concerns regarding student learning or behavior , additional assessment of the English language learner may be required. Ongoing language proficiency assessment should be conducted throughout the year to assess the language proficiency progress of each English language learner.

Use authentic visuals and manipulatives

These can be over- or under-utilized. Implement the use of authentic resources for example; menus, bus schedules, post-cards, photographs and video clips can enhance student comprehension of complex content concepts.

If we want to make the most of the use of visuals we should not forget different learning styles of our learners. By using visuals the teacher caters mostly for learners with a visual learning style.

Let's summarize activities preferred by visual learners: Visual learners proceed information by seeing it, they require a great deal of visual stimulation e.g. by pictures, authentic objects, drawings, colours, different layout, size of letters etc.

Activities visual learners prefer, include: working with pictures/real objects, using colours, a different type of writing, card games and all activities that require visualization and imagination.

Also learners with other learning preferences may find using visuals useful and stimulating in case visuals accompany learning tasks preferred by a respective learning style e.g. listening activities, matching or sequencing pictures, drama activities, role play based on pictures etc. Visuals can be successfully used at all levels – although in different ways and we have to consider our objectives. The way we work with visuals depends on the form of a visual and the objective of the lesson. It is advisable to combine several techniques to reach the objective. It is possible to suggest more demanding techniques that can be successfully adapted for the use with visual materials:

1. Description – a learner describes everything s/he can see in the picture. A sense for details is being developed

2. Identification – a learner identifies with a person (animal or thing) and leads a dialogue with a selected item from the picture. Creativity and fantasy is being developed

A view out of the window - a learner is in the role of an observer and observes the picture from inside the room.

3. Film shot – a static picture is being animated and a learner creates a story around it.

4. Mirror picture – it is a specific type of identification when the learner is a person from the picture and compares his/her real “self” and the “other self” from the picture.

The techniques mentioned above are intended primarily for a higher language level and more mature learners and the teacher can successfully use pictures from calendars. Well chosen visuals can serve as a springboard for learner's oral or written output.

Collaborate to celebrate

Seek support from other teachers who may teach ELs. Other educators, novice and veteran, may

have suggestions and resources that support English language development and content concepts. Creating and sustaining professional learning communities that support ELs are vital for student success.

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