**Eight Effective Practices for Teaching English Language Learners**

**Deena Thompson August 2015**

1. **Link new content to prior knowledge.** Our students bring a wealth of experience and culture to our classrooms. Ask them about their experiences and find out what they know. Use that information as a foundation upon which to introduce new content. Give students opportunities to share about themselves. Try to find ways to make connections between new material and past experiences.
2. **Create a community of learners.** Remember that if your students need to use the restroom, are hungry, thirsty, or otherwise uncomfortable, they will not be in a position to learn. Ensure that their basic needs have been met before anything else. Give them time and opportunities to get to know each other. Discuss self-respect and respect for others and show them what that looks like. Encourage students to use English, but also to maintain their home languages by validating the importance and richness of them. Remind students that it’s OK to make mistakes, ask questions, and that your classroom is a **safe** place, free of judgment. Provide routine and structure by keeping a daily agenda where students can see it and a system in place for completing tasks.
3. **Modify assignments and activities.** Model **everything** by giving students examples of what you expect. Scaffold assignments, activities and assessments with tools such as word banks, word walls, pictures, diagrams, graphic organizers, and simple and clear instructions. Be aware of your rate of speech and slow it to ensure clarity. Allow appropriate wait time (count to seven) after posing a question to give students a chance to formulate a response.
4. **Provide visual and other sensory aids.** Remember that many students are visual and kinesthetic learners. Incorporate as many senses as possible into your lessons to reach everyone’s learning styles. Provide images and realia to support text and verbal instructions. Write instructions and homework assignments on the board in addition to explaining them aloud. When appropriate, incorporate music, smells, and tastes to keep lessons interesting and further scaffold instruction. Get students moving with [Total Physical Response](http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-approaches/teaching-approaches-total-physical-response/146503.article) activities.
5. **Pre-teach vocabulary.** Teach vocabulary in context using images, realia, and prior knowledge to help with comprehension. Allow students to illustrate vocabulary words in ways they feel comfortable, such as with pictures or gestures. Keep a word wall available for students to reference. Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice pronunciation and use of vocabulary words in authentic contexts. Save the dictionary for **last**.
6. **Chunk difficult texts.** Break up longer texts into smaller, more easily digestible chunks, stopping after each chunk to discuss the text and check for understanding. Ask questions, revisit key vocabulary words, and have students paraphrase each chunk in their own words. Model think-aloud strategies that students can use to self-monitor for comprehension.
7. **Allow time for interaction.** An essential part of learning a language is having regular opportunities to practice using it in authentic settings. Give students a chance to interact with you and with each other. Group students strategically to encourage participation from everyone (for example, in pairs or by level). Give each student a job or role in the group, with clear directions on what to do. Encourage students to ask questions, and have a parking lot for questions to be answered at a later time if needed.
8. **Tier tasks for different levels.** Also known as differentiation, *tiering* targets for different language ability levels within the same content. This **does not mean** creating an entirely separate assignment or activity for each level; rather, make simple modifications to the same assignment and gear tasks toward a level slightly above a student’s current level of proficiency. This will present a challenge for the student without being too frustrating. Use Bloom’s Taxonomy as a basis for tiering an assignment – beginning level students might be at the knowledge/comprehension levels, while advanced students may be at the synthesis/evaluation levels. [See an example of a tiered lesson.](http://www.davidsongifted.org/db/Articles_id_10513.aspx)

**Online Resources**

[¡Colorín Colorado! – ELL Topics from A to Z](http://www.colorincolorado.org/atoz/)

[Vocabulary Strategies - Tier 1, 2, 3](http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/selecting-vocabulary-words-teach-english-language-learners)

[8 Simple Steps to Encourage (ESL) Student Participation During Group Discussions](http://busyteacher.org/10061-8-simple-tips-encourage-student-participation.html)

[Do’s and Don’ts for Teaching English Language Learners](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/esl-ell-tips-ferlazzo-sypnieski)

[Seven Teaching Strategies for Classroom Teachers of ELLs](http://www.everythingesl.net/inservices/seven_teaching_strategies_clas_06140.php)

[Reading Comprehension Strategies for English Language Learners](http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/14342/)

[6 Scaffolding Strategies to Use with your Students](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/scaffolding-lessons-six-strategies-rebecca-alber)

[5 Key Strategies for ELL Instruction](https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2013/10/25/strategies-for-ell-instruction/)