

Best Practices for Teaching New Learners of English

Make sure that students comprehend whatever they are expected to learn

- Students do not need to understand every single word they hear, but they must understand the general idea of what is being expressed.
- Meaning is essential, or the lesson becomes pointless.
- Use gestures, facial expressions, demonstrations, and tone of voice to help students understand the message you are trying to convey.
- Bring in real objects (realia) and other visuals.
- Provide real-life, hands-on experiences for the students.
- Model what you want the students to do before asking them to do it.

Language is a process

- New learners of English start out in the silent/receptive stage. The length of time a student will stay in this stage will vary with each individual. Students should not be forced to speak during this time, but they can follow comprehensible directions and listen to comprehensible stories, nursery rhymes, songs, and chants.
- Listening and speaking activities precede reading and writing
- Confusion is good. Confusion shows the students are thinking and trying to find meaning. It also gives the teacher a great opportunity to clarify.

Be a language facilitator

- Make language as meaningful as possible for the students.
- If the objective is to teach English, speak only English, but do whatever necessary to make it comprehensible to students. If translation is always included, students will just wait for the translation and subsequently will tune out the English.
- Second language acquisition is driven by need and motivation. Acknowledge that second language acquisition is difficult but possible. **Remember- second language learners are doing double in the classroom.**
- Model comparisons-“Oh, so you say weiss in German. We say white in English.”
- Model cognates.
- Mediate students' language. Provide words to describe your actions or the actions of children. Talk out loud as you or the students perform actions and activities.
- You may want to provide picture dictionaries to help them find the vocabulary they need to be able to communicate.

Provide a low anxiety atmosphere

- When a student is speaking, the focus should always be on the message. Only content is corrected, not grammar or accent.
- Avoid humor and sarcasm. Humor can confuse and sarcasm can be insulting and embarrassing to many other cultures.
- Cherish the knowledge new learners of English bring with them.

Emphasize peer interaction

- Language is social. New learners of English must have numerous opportunities for meaningful interactions with peers, especially proficient English speakers.
- When using a 'buddy' as a translator know when to remove the support and facilitate English learning.
- Create heterogeneous groups to assure English is used to make meaning.
- Make 'talking expectations' clear and create focused opportunities for students to talk together.

Make sure students are receiving content instruction

- Thematic units created around content provide a way in which to cover concepts and vocabulary in meaningful ways. The 'meat' of content provides a vehicle for language learning.
- New learners of English learn language and learn about language through content.
- Experience from hands-on content activities/experiments creates language
- Key vocabulary must be practiced numerous times, in a variety of meaningful contexts to be learned.
- Assess what the students already know about the topic. Relate the topic to their personal experiences. Provide background experience-information and concept development, if necessary. *(This may be an appropriate time to use the native language.)*

Introduce new learners of English to literacy as soon as possible

- Start to read good picture books to the students immediately.
- Encourage students to read comprehensible stories, poems, songs and chants along with you.
- Utilize shared reading and writing approaches to involve students in literacy activities using common experiences.
- Go from the concrete (oral production) to the symbolic (letters/sounds/text).

Continue to challenge students as they progress

- Continue to make sure content is comprehensible even when students begin to appear fluent. They still may have gaps in their cognitive academic language (CALP).
- Call attention to multiple meanings and idioms as they occur since they can seriously interfere with comprehension.
- Use your ELA support wisely.