Tips for English Language Learners (ELLs)

**Learning Styles**

Most new ELL students learn best kinesthetically. Don’t expect them to sit and listen to lectures. Use lots of gestures, drawings, or other visual aids. Give students hands-on activities to complete.

**Utilize peer helpers**

If possible, have more advanced students who speak the newcomers' languages take your new students on a tour of the important places in your school, such as the bathroom, office, cafeteria, etc. Make sure they also explain to the student what the expectations are for the classroom.

**Utilize the cultures in your classroom**

Tie the cultures of your ELLs to your lesson. These children with diverse backgrounds have stories and experiences that are unique. Teachers should build on the background knowledge and cultures their students bring from their home countries.

**Give clear and simple directions**

Give clear, simple directions to ELL students. Complex directions should be broken down into smaller steps. Ask students to explain in their own words what you are asking them to do before they do it.

**Be positive**

The more comfortable new ELL students feel in your classroom, the faster they will learn. Find the positive things about your students’ work, and praise it. Put away the red pen for a little while. Instead, create frequent opportunities for their success in your class.

**Be aware of culture shock**

The new ELL student in your classroom is probably suffering from culture shock. Imagine how you would feel if you were in their shoes! Make sure you create an environment where the ELL student feels safe. This will lessen the intensity and duration of culture shock.
Compile a list of translators

Compile a list of the people in your building who speak another language so that teachers will have a resource when they need someone to translate information. Make sure that the office has a copy of this list.

Cooperative learning helps ELLs become more productive in the classroom

New ELL students who work in cooperative learning groups learn English more quickly. They are forced to become an important part of the class. They can learn the basic vocabulary of the unit you are teaching in order to become more active participants. Encourage other members of the group to help them.

Encourage participation

Encourage ELLs to participate in class. Most ELL students are hesitant to speak even when they know the correct answer. Give them nonverbal opportunities to respond to the questions.

Avoid singling ELL students out

If you have some important information to convey, speak to the student one-on-one rather than in front of the class. When put on the spot, it is more difficult for them to understand what you expect.

Be familiar with the "silent period"

Don't expect your new ELL students to speak before they are ready. ELLs will acquire language best when they can sit and listen instead of being forced to participate. Don’t get discouraged by their silence, embrace it!

Become an active listener!

When listening to ELLs speak, give lots of non-verbal feedback and praise. Give students all of your attention while attempting to understand their comments. Be sure your body language is patient and inviting.

Where should new ELLs sit?

Decide in advance where you will seat a new ELL student so the decision doesn’t have to be made spur of the moment. Place a new student close to your desk so you can provide assistance, or near a student who would make a good buddy. If your class sits in groups, place new ELL students with students who will be helpful and unimimidating.
English and Native Language Literacy Connection

Building native language literacy is important. Students who are literate in their native language will be more likely to become literate quickly in English. ELLs will use strategies learned in their native language to help them in read in English.

Encourage social interaction

ELLs need to interact with real speakers of English. Give them a variety of activities. Limit the amount of time ELLs spend completing non-verbal tasks. Acceptance is an excellent motivational tool!

Learn that name correctly!

Saying the name right isn't always easy, but it's important. Many Hispanic and Asian names have multiple parts, so getting them correct is important. Also, make sure you practice the correct pronunciation. Avoid Anglicanizing a name; it robs your students of their identity.

BICS and CALP

BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) may take up to 2 years to develop while CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) may take 5-10 years. Avoid the common mistake of assuming that a student who speaks English is able to work academically in English.

Print

New ELL students may know the English alphabet but will probably not be able to read cursive writing. Either print or type all notes and assignments to ensure comprehension for your ELLs.

Help ELLs interact with English speaking peers

Provide ELLs with opportunities for interacting in a meaningful way with peers who speak English. This will help develop social vocabulary and acceptance as well as academic understanding. This type of exchange provides second language learners with feedback and knowledge about how to correctly communicate their ideas in English.

Promote vs. prohibit native language interaction

Provide periods for new ELLs that allow them to spend time each day speaking with others of the same native language. Everyone needs “downtime” once in a while.
Try to learn your ELL students’ language

Attempt to learn a few words in your new ELL students’ native language. When you are able to laugh at yourself for making errors in a new language, your new ELL student will become more comfortable speaking in English.

Check for comprehension

Effective communication with ELLs requires that teachers check periodically for comprehension. A common mistake is to simply ask the student “Do you understand?” in front of the entire class. The flaw in this method is that a student will say “Yes” even if they don’t truly comprehend the lesson. Ask them questions at their level to assess their level of comprehension.

Support native language development

Anything your students learn in their native languages will eventually be transferred to English. Encourage them to continue speaking, reading and writing in that language at home.

Allow time for translation

All ELLs are busy translating the English they hear into their native language, mentally responding, and then translating that answer once again into English. Remember to be patient while they process all this information.