

Welcoming a Student Who Does Not Speak English:

Pre-Kindergarten Through Third Grade

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

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### Abstract

This document is a collection of general strategies and implications for the general education teacher with a student in her classroom who speaks English as a second language (ESL). With the number of ESL students continually on the rise, many teachers are finding themselves ill-prepared to teach these young children effectively. This thesis was designed to be a resource guide. Included are many practical strategies as well as contact information for various organizations that advocate for English language learners in the United States. The resource guide is an excellent starting point for teachers who wish to undertake more extensive research. The guide includes a definition of common terms, information about relevant legislation, reference to the ESL standards, general and continuing strategies for instruction, suggestions regarding assessment, and considerations for building partnerships between schools and ESL families.

## Acknowledgments

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## Welcoming a Student Who Does Not Speak English:

### Pre-Kindergarten Through Third Grade

If you are like most mainstream primary teachers, you have received little or no training that focuses on the growing number of students who speak English as a second language. If you haven't already encountered students from this population in your classroom, it is likely that you will very soon. How do you effectively teach and communicate with a child who barely speaks English? General education primary teachers from all over the country are asking this question, many in a state of anxiety and panic. Students arrive in the classroom with no warning, and teachers are looking for fast solutions to the challenges that ensue. Although there are no fast solutions, there are specific strategies and resources that can help teachers get off to a good start with their new students.

The purpose of this document is to equip every primary teacher with basic information regarding the instruction of children who speak English as a second language. There is a great breadth of information available on the topic of ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction. However, the vast responsibilities of an elementary teacher allow for little time to research new information. This publication was created in order to help mainstream teachers sort through the plethora of information to find what is truly necessary and useful. This will serve as an excellent starting point that will direct you to credible sources. I commend you for your dedication--enjoy the challenge, and celebrate the individuality of your students!

## Definition of Terms

A brief summary of some commonly used terms will be helpful to you as you read articles, scan websites, and peruse books for the information you need. You will find that many abbreviated terms and phrases exist within the field of teaching second language learners. Keep this glossary at hand as a quick reference guide while you read. More advanced documents will often use terms without providing explanation or description.

**Affective filter**—This is the barrier that exists when student anxiety is high. The filter lowers as anxiety lowers, allowing for learning to take place.

**Bilingual education program**—This literacy program encourages an introduction to subject matter in the student’s primary language.

**BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills)**—These are the language skills that are required for an individual to communicate at the most basic level. Such skills are the first to be acquired and generally take one to three years to develop.

**BINL (Basic Inventory of Natural Language)** -- Used to determine a student’s level of English mastery, this is a common oral language proficiency test.

**CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency)** – A student at this proficiency level has language skills that allow for academic comprehension and communication. Far more complex than basic interpersonal communication skills, academic language generally takes three to ten years to develop.

**ELL**--English language learner

**ESL**-- English as a second language

**Immersion Program**-- English language learners receive instruction from a bilingual teacher in

English; however, questions may be addressed in the student's primary language. The student also receives language arts instruction in his/her primary language.

**FEP**--Fluent or fully English proficient

**LAS (Language Assessment Scales)** – This oral language proficiency test is used to determine a student's level of English mastery.

**LEP**-- Limited English proficient

**Maintenance Program** — This bilingual program provides English language instruction while continuing development of the student's primary language.

**NEP**-- Non-English proficient

**Transitional Program or Early Exit Program**-- Used to facilitate a more timely transition from the ESL classroom to the English-only classroom, students receive maintenance content area instruction in their primary language as needed while receiving English language instruction.

**Two-Way Program**-- English-speaking students receive instruction in a secondary language while English language learners receive instruction in English. The goal is for the entire student population to become bilingual and biliterate.

### Standards

The use of state and nation-wide standards in the United States educational system has become an essential tool for curriculum design and accountability. The educational standards are meant to be focused on all students in the educational system. However, many of the standards do not reflect the special needs that ELLs may have. To aid administrators and educators in the process of providing quality educations for these students, Teachers of English to Speakers of

Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) published a set of ESL standards for grades K-12 in 1997. The standards are organized under three educational goals: (a) to use English to communicate in social settings, (b) to use English to achieve academically in all content areas, and (c) to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Short, 2000). The ESL standards can be downloaded from the Internet by accessing the following web address:

<http://www.tesol.org/assoc/k12standards>. In addition, TESOL published a collection of articles entitled *Integrating the ESL Standards into Classroom Practice: Grades pre-K – 12* (Smallwood, 2000). This would be a very practical resource for any classroom teacher.

### Legislation

When servicing an English language learner, it is important that we have a basic understanding of some key elements in ESL education. One of these elements is the need to be aware of government legislation regarding students who are learning English as a second language. Maintaining awareness in this area will insure that you are meeting the necessary requirements of instruction, and it will also provide a knowledge-base concerning student's rights. The following is a brief description of the court cases and legislation that are important for you to know.

#### *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*

This legislation prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin. "The Title VI regulatory requirements have been interpreted to prohibit denial of equal access to education because of a language minority student's limited proficiency in English," (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2002).

*Bilingual Education Act (1968)*

Also known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), this legislation initiated federal policy that would assist ESL education through funding to provide services, professional development, and research. The Bilingual Education Act was rewritten in 1994 as part of the Improving America's Schools Act. The revised legislation changed eligibility requirements for services under Title I to increase eligibility for ESL students to receive services (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

*May 25 Memorandum (May 25, 1970)*

The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued a statement of clarification regarding the rights of students. "Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national-origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open the instructional program to the students," (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

*Equal Education Opportunity Act (1974)*

This prohibits states from failing to provide equal educational opportunity to any student with regard to his race, color, sex, or national origin. The act specifically prohibits states from failing to provide appropriate opportunities for students to overcome language barriers that may affect students' rights to equal education in an instructional program (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

*Lau versus Nichols (1974)*

This was a suit brought on by the parents of non-English speaking Chinese students

against the San Francisco Unified School District where the Supreme Court ruled that students receiving identical education were not necessarily receiving equal education as required by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The court ruling stated that the school district must take steps to diminish the educational barriers that were present for non-English speaking Chinese students in the area (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

*Castaneda versus Pickard (1981)*

This case led to the development of a test that would evaluate school programs for ELL students. The test evaluates school programs based on the following criteria: (a) The program is based on sound educational theory and instructional strategy. (b) The program uses the necessary resources and personnel. (c) The school evaluates its program and makes changes according to the findings (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

*Plyer versus Doe (1982)*

Plyer versus Doe was the U.S. Supreme Court decision that stated undocumented children and adults have the right to enroll in public school programs, as do U.S. citizens. Schools cannot refuse enrollment to any child based on immigration status. School personnel may not inquire in a way that could expose a child's status (NABE, 2002).

*English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (2002)*

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, this section reauthorized the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Changes were made regarding the formula for school funding, parental rights, testing to measure student need for services, and accountability (NABE, 2002).

National organizations concerned with bilingual education are the best resources for updated information regarding current legislation. Because of the updates and changes that occur steadily in legislation, the internet may be the best resource available. Most organizations update their sites very regularly. The following groups should be especially helpful to you.

**National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)**

Website: [www.nabe.org](http://www.nabe.org)  
Phone: (202) 898-1829  
Address: 1030 15th St., NW  
Suite 470  
Washington, DC 20005

**National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA)**

(formerly the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education; NCBE)  
Website: [www.ncbe.gwu.edu](http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu)  
Phone: (800) 321-6223  
Address: 2121 K. Street NW, Suite 260  
Washington, DC 20037

**U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Programs for English Language**

**Learners**

Website: [www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/ELL](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/ELL)  
Phone: (800) USA-LEARN  
Address: US Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20202

### General Guidelines for the Teacher

The first day a new student walks into your classroom can be cause for anxiety if the student is an English language learner. Unfortunately, the student is often more nervous and uncomfortable than anyone. Keep in mind that the most important and immediate goal should be to make the student and his/her parents feel comfortable and included in the classroom and school environment. This is the essential foundation on which instruction and communication must be built. Implementing some basic strategies will aid you and your student in a smoother transitional period. It is important to note that although the following strategies are specifically implied for ESL students, their use in the classroom will be beneficial to all students. Please keep these strategies in mind during the first few weeks your ESL student is present in the classroom.

**1. Find out important information about the student's cultural, linguistic, and family background that will be helpful in serving the child.** Designing a written survey is a good start. Parents may prefer written communication at first because it allows for time to process information and ask for help translating if needed. Sample surveys can be found in a very helpful publication by ESCORT titled, *Help! They Don't Speak English Starter Kit for Primary Teachers* (1998). This workbook may be obtained free of charge by calling 1-800-451-8058.

**2. Learn essential communication words in your student's first language.** Learn correct pronunciation for words such as bathroom, yes, no, hello, goodbye, please, thank you, help, teacher, student, etc. Translation websites will be helpful in obtaining words and phrases in you student's primary language. *The Translation Place* will lead you to a collection of translation websites and can be accessed at the following web address:

<http://expage.com/4translation>. Allow the student to speak in his/her home language if it makes the student more comfortable.

**3. Use games and activities that will include the student in a non-threatening manner.** Nonverbal activities allow the student to blend in with other classmates. The use of puzzles, pattern games, and other visually oriented activities are particularly useful. Stress to other students that different cultures and languages are to be valued. If the student is comfortable, allow him/her to share his/her home language with the class.

**4. Develop a quiet place in the classroom that the student can go to have time alone.** As you can imagine, a room full of foreign speakers can be overwhelming for a young child. Allow the student a space where he/she can be surrounded by comforting objects or pictures of familiarity (Tabors, 1998). Include children's literature printed in the child's primary language in this area.

**5. Use visual and hands-on resources to clarify verbal communication.** Demonstrate instructions step-by-step. Use pictures, graphs, and videos. Implement behavior plans with a tangible reward system.

**6. Use as much routine as possible.** This will make the student feel more comfortable in the classroom, and it will reduce the need for constant explanation of activities. In addition, routine activities will help the child to integrate into the classroom (Tabors, 1998).

**7. Invite the student's parents to be involved and present in their child's education.** Learning about the student's culture and ethnicity will be particularly helpful in this area (Holman, 1997). Insure that parents know they are a valued component of their child's educational experience. Form a partnership with them.

**8. Use step-by-step instructions, and repeat main ideas often.** Repetition gives the ESL student time to process, and it reinforces his/her understanding.

**9. Allow the child to be silent if he/she chooses to do so.** Non-English-speaking students will either choose to speak in their native language or they will not speak at all. Allow time for the student to adjust to his/her new environment without forcing participation in verbal communication (Tabors, 1997). Although the student may have a significant level of listening comprehension, he/she may not be comfortable speaking. It is essential to lower the student's affective filter.

**10. If possible, use an assessment tool to evaluate English proficiency.** This will give you a clearer understanding of the student's level of English comprehension. Oral language tests are listed under assessment.

### Continuing Strategies

As a teacher who undoubtedly has limitations regarding time and resources available, one of the most valuable ways for you to spend your time is to compile instructional strategies. If you use reputable sources, recommended strategies will be practical and helpful to you regardless of your ESL knowledge base. Keep in mind that any strategy recommended for an English Language Learner will also be beneficial to your English-speaking students. In their book, *Literature-Based Instruction with English Language Learners*, Hadaway, Vardell, and Young suggested that teachers keep in mind four basic principles of language acquisition when implementing instructional strategies: (a) Focus on the ability to communicate. (b) Remember that comprehension precedes production (speaking). (c) Production emerges in stages. (d) Lower the affective filter of students (2002).

There are innumerable strategies available for you to try in your classroom. Books, articles, and seminars abound with regard to every content area and grade level. As a result, the strategies listed here are very general and should serve simply as a starting point for your research. Please take advantage of the resources suggested in this document. They are sure to provide fruitful results.

### *Learning Strategies and Study Skills*

Use direct instruction to teach English language learners how to learn. Teach how to identify main ideas and how to record important information. Help students recognize important information by using hand signals/gestures, writing on the chalkboard, and so on. Provide outlines and study guides of material at least one day prior to the lesson so students can prepare ahead of time if they choose. This can be done with pictures and minimal wording, even with very young children. More specific strategies are found in Judie Haynes's brief article, *Study Skills for ELLs* (2001).

### *Language Simplicity, Not Content Simplicity (Haynes & O'Loughlin, 2002)*

English language learners are just as capable of learning concepts, and it is important that teachers maintain high expectations for the content to be mastered. Instead of lowering the content level, focus on using lower level language to explain that content. Minimize peripheral information and use sentences that are as simplified as possible. Use simplified questioning strategies as well. Break down complex questions, allow one-word responses, and ask simple yes/no questions. If possible, allow the student to prepare a response in advance, and provide ample wait time.

### *Total Physical Response (TPR)*

Designed in the 1960s by Dr. James Asher, TPR involves teacher modeling in addition to simultaneous vocabulary instruction. For example, while teaching the word, “baseball,” a teacher might pretend to swing a baseball bat. Students imitate the teacher’s speech and actions, establishing associations between language and action that will aid in more rapid vocabulary acquisition. This strategy can be used to teach phrases and commands as well. The language introduced by this strategy is easily comprehensible, and students can begin learning before actually producing their own language (Marsh, 2002). Simply acting out directions, procedures, and other routine behaviors will help English language learners tremendously. Similarly, role-playing and other creative forms of “invented” sign language can be helpful.

### *Dialogue Journals*

When using dialogue journals, students write or draw about a subject of their choosing, and the teacher responds with questions or comments. This strategy is helpful to English language learners because it allows a safe environment for students to test their language skills without fear of failure. Not only does the journal provide essential writing practice, but it also allows the student an outlet to voice needs or concerns privately. While oral interaction can cause anxiety for students, writing provides the time students need to process and comprehend responses. When using dialogue journals, do not grade or correct the student’s writing. Modeling correct usage and grammar in your responses is more appropriate (Brisk & Harrington, 2000).

### *Process Writing*

Any step-by-step approach is helpful, but this is especially important when teaching writing. Teach your English language learners the steps of process writing: prewriting, drafting,

revising, editing, and publishing. Breaking down such a complex task as writing into manageable steps gives students the confidence they need to keep trying, and it also fosters personal relationships with peers as the students read and respond to each other's writing. Step-by-step approaches offer English language learners the structure and routine that they thrive on (Brisk & Harrington, 2000).

### *Cooperative Learning*

There are many forms of cooperative learning available for experimentation in your classroom. One of the main advantages to these strategies is the peer interaction that takes place between the students in your classroom. English language learners get an up-close view at how other students organize information and communicate ideas. In addition, students build personal relationships with one another through this interaction (Schall, 2002). One of the biggest complaints among English language learners is that they feel left out or lonely. The Jigsaw approach is one of the most widely suggested cooperative learning strategies for second language learners.

### *Graphic Organizers*

Story maps, Venn diagrams, semantic mapping, and other organizational techniques help English language learners a great deal. Not only is information consolidated into key points, but it is also arranged in a way that fosters comprehension. Particularly helpful with young children, graphic organizers help access prior knowledge and develop vocabulary (Brisk & Harrington, 2000). In addition, they help to communicate relationships between words and ideas that may be difficult to articulate to young children in a way they understand .

### *Language Experience Approach (LEA)*

The key to this strategy is the fact that students are learning through experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and interesting to them. When using LEA, teachers record a story as dictated by the student. This approach is most effective when the student communicates a personal experience from an event such as a party or field trip. The teacher then reads the story to the student, and the student is encouraged to share the story with others. Many opportunities for instruction stem from these stories, and the student can revise and rewrite as his/her skill level increases. Again, the difference between using personal stories instead of other written material is the personal interest the student has invested in the experience (ESCORT, 1998).

### *Visuals! Visuals! Visuals!*

The importance of using visual and hands-on materials cannot be stressed enough. These resources help retain the interest of all students and are extremely valuable. An English language learner is bound to become confused and disoriented in a mainstream classroom at times. Visuals and manipulatives will serve as tools to redirect students back to a satisfactory level of understanding. A visual aid or demonstration helps fill in the gaps that are left by the student's inability to comprehend all language spoken in the classroom. Examples of visuals include but are not limited to science experiments, math manipulatives, maps, charts, models, pictures, and videos.

### *Adaptation of Materials*

Although it will not be possible to make adaptations to all the materials you use in your classroom, some changes will need to be made. When adapting materials for an English language learner, consider word order, simplicity of vocabulary, length of text, and complexity of verb

tense (ESCORT, 1998). It may be necessary to reduce the amount of material the child is required to read. The best way to adapt material is not to rewrite it, but to simply make helpful additions or deletions. Copy the text being read, and write in synonyms, brief explanations, and simplified sentences. At first, it will be helpful to highlight or underline topic sentences and main ideas.

### Assessment

Already a hot topic in education today, it isn't hard to believe that there is a plethora of new approaches to ESL assessment. Most sources say that the most effective form of assessment is that which is woven into instructional activities. This form of assessment, commonly referred to as authentic assessment, will likely bring more reliable and valid results than any "pencil and paper" test you create. It is essential that assessment strategies allow the student freedom to communicate knowledge without the limitations that limited English proficiency can place on the outcome. Fair assessment takes place only when the student understands the criterion for success. Communicating regularly with your student's ESL instructor will help you gain valuable insight into the child's development and will serve as a resource for information on effective assessment strategies. The following tools discussed in this section are general starting points for designing your assessment techniques. Use the listed resources to find more information about any of these strategies.

#### *Self-assessment*

Particularly with ELL students, children are more aware than anyone of their own level of comprehension and mastery. Teachers must be careful to weigh self-assessment against more

tangible evidence for achievement, but it is a tool that can be invaluable in determining the next step for instruction. Asking a child about his/her strengths and weaknesses is a simple strategy that may save you from hours of preparation for much more complex testing methods. A helpful guide to learning more about ESL self-assessment is O' Malley and Pierce's book, *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners* (1996).

### *Portfolio Assessment*

The teacher determines categories of work that need to be assessed. The student and teacher collectively choose samples of student work to use as evidence of mastery in each category. The contents of the portfolio are usually evaluated according to a checklist or rubric that the teacher has previously shared with the student. Suggestions for portfolio implementation can be found in Eckes and Law's book, *Assessment and ESL* (1995).

### *Projects and Demonstrations*

This allows students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge nonverbally if necessary. Students are given ample time to complete projects, so the child's ability to work quickly under pressure is no longer a factor. A great advantage to this form of assessment is that students are able to choose their own vocabulary. With time to prepare and rehearse, the student's language ability does not affect his or her ability to demonstrate competence in a particular subject area. Asking students to produce models, drawings, or graphs are nonverbal means of communicating student knowledge (Tannenbaum, 1996).

It will also be helpful for you to conduct an oral language proficiency test in order to evaluate the student's level of English language comprehension. Contact information for popular

oral language proficiency tests is listed below:

**BINL (Basic Inventory of Natural Languages)**

Checkpoint Systems  
1558 N. Waterman, Suite C  
San Bernardino, CA 92404

**IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test**

Ballard and Tighe  
580 Atlas St.  
Brea, CA 92621  
1-800-538-9547

**LAS (Language Assessment Scales)**

CTB/McGraw Hill  
Del Monte Research Park  
2500 Garden Road  
Monterey, CA 93940  
1-800-538-9547

**Family Partnerships**

We all know that there is a correlation between academic achievement and parent involvement in a child's education. With this in mind, it is essential that you make every effort to communicate with the family members of your ELL student. Parents may seem hesitant to become involved, especially if they have recently arrived in the United States or if they have very limited English skills. Parents may have feelings of insecurity or a fear of judgment that is understandable and even expected. No matter what approach you take to building that important partnership between the school and the family, you must remain sensitive to the unique circumstances of these families. Read and think about the following considerations when beginning a relationship with you student's family.

**1. Maintain a welcoming, non-judgmental attitude.** Parents will not involve

themselves in their students' education if they feel unwelcome or judged by school administrators and staff. Don't assume that parents are apathetic if they don't attend scheduled conferences and orientation meetings. Many parents are required to work long hours for low wages in order to support their families. The financial strain on individuals new to the United States can be great, leaving little opportunity for activity outside the workplace. "Economic survival is the primary concern for immigrant families," (Holman, 1997). Encourage communication and welcome involvement at any level.

**2. Determine the preferred form of communication.** While the majority of English-speaking parents may prefer face-to-face communication, written notes and information may be the favored alternative for parents with limited English proficiency. While verbal communication may cause anxiety, written notes allow the family members time to decode material and prepare responses. They may seek out help with translation privately. Whenever possible, communication should take place in the parents' home language. Enlist the help of a translator for face-to-face meetings. When using written language, there are sites available online that will translate English text into the text of the student's home language.

**3. Clarify rules and expectations.** The standards of American education are vastly different than that of many other cultures. Don't expect parents who are new to the country to know and understand our society's values and expectations placed on education. Rules and procedures regarding attendance, parent responsibilities, and other requirements should be communicated clearly to families. Provide orientation to the programs and services that are offered by your school system (ESCORT, 1998).

**4. Make your invitations personal.** Flyers, generic newsletters, or general invitations

encouraging parental involvement are unlikely to solicit a response from limited English proficient parents. Personal invitations are much more likely to be considered (Inger, 1992).

**5. Make participation as easy as possible.** Even parents who speak no English can volunteer to make copies, do bulletin boards, or assist in other nonverbal activities. Provide as many resources as you can that will encourage involvement. Examples would include providing translators, transportation, flexible schedules, and limiting financial requirements (Inger, 1992). Make as many accommodations as you can. It will be worth it!

**6. Demonstrate appreciation and respect for the family's culture.** Invite parents of students to come to the classroom to share about the family's culture. Ask questions about holidays, customs, and values that are observed by the family. Being aware of the student's home culture will communicate your concern for the individual and your sensitivity to the preservation of family traditions and values. "Schools should recognize that newly arrived Hispanic families come to us from a rich social context. Rather than try to 'acculturate' these families, schools should encourage them to share their culture and background with others," (Holman, 1997).

**7. Provide resources for homework assistance.** Many parents who have limited English skills feel unqualified to assist their children with homework assignments (TESOL, 2000). If possible, provide possible resources for additional assistance with schoolwork. It would also be helpful to provide parents with some general information regarding study skills and work habits that are customary in our culture. Taking these steps will remind parents that you're on their side!

### Conclusion

As educators, our ultimate responsibility toward an English language learner in our classroom is the same fundamental responsibility we must fulfill for every student we teach. Above all, we must communicate care and concern for the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual well-being of the child. We must first meet the fundamental need for love and acceptance before learning can take place. As you endeavor to educate the English language learner in your classroom, remember that his/her challenge to learn is just as great as yours is to teach. Celebrate the challenge, and meet it together!

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