**Strategies for English Language Learners in the Classroom**

**General Tips for ELL Beginners:**

* **Pair student** with a **buddy** who speaks her native language and/or is a stronger student (academically or English-wise).
* **Don’t discourage** a student from speaking or writing in their native language, especially if she is a beginner- just require that she finds a way to also express in English either by repeating/copying you, figuring out a different way to say it, or using a bilingual dictionary.

**General Tips for all ELLs:**

* **Label** as much as you can in the classroom (e.g. doors, windows, plants, etc.).
* ***“A picture is worth a thousand words:*”** Use **visuals** as much as possible to explain a concept with **extensive modeling** (charts, graphs, graphic organizers, photos, drawings, etc.).  Utilize the Smartboard, Internet, Google Images, etc. often!
* Allow students to **draw/illustrate** what they want to express but can’t communicate as well verbally (e.g. illustrating meaning of vocabulary words), then show them how to describe their illustration in spoken and/or written words.  Drawings can also be used as a way of brainstorming and pre-writing.
* Give **verbal and written instructions** simultaneously. This will allow students to reference the written instructions in case they didn’t understand the verbal. It can also be helpful to have **sequenced, step-by-step instructions**.
* **Check for understanding** regularly- both the content and the procedure. Avoid asking, “are there any questions?” Instead, call on students to repeat to the class what needs to be done, and/or develop a **system or sign** that they can use to communicate understanding.
* Explicitly teach the difference between **spoken (informal)** and **written (formal)** English.
* Focus more on **language use** and less on language labels (e.g. *how* to use superlatives as opposed to their definition).
* Allow for greater **repetition** of new words, concepts, and items that are both spoken and written down, etc.  Repetition is key to language learning!
* The more **examples** you provide for an assignment as opposed to just instructions, the better!

**When Speaking to ELLs:**

* Make a point to speak more **slowly** than normal and **enunciate** each word clearly.
* Use exaggerated animated **facial expressions** and **gestures** to support/illustrate a concept or feeling.
* Exaggerate **intonation** of words when speaking.
* Use **consistent vocabulary** (say something in exactly the **same way** until it is comprehended), *especiall*y for daily routines and directions.
* Model standard spoken language and correct spoken errors by **paraphrasing.**
* Whenever possible, **gesture** to the item as you are explaining it.

**When Teaching Vocabulary to ELLs:**

* Assign students a **vocabulary notebook** in which they record words they read or hear that they don’t know, and then write their definitions/synonyms, illustrations, and/or translations.
* Use **T.P.R.** (Total Physical Response) to teach a concept/word.
* Teach **grammar** and **lower-frequency (“Tier 2-3”) vocabulary** **explicitly** using text from all subject/content areas, (this is not to be confused with content-specific vocabulary).
* Use **high-frequency words** in speaking and texts first, then **scaffold** to lower frequency words.

**When Teaching Reading to ELLs:**

* Write down and **point to every word** as you present it/read it aloud. Have students put a pencil or finger on the word as you or a more proficient student reads it aloud.
* Before reading, build tons of **background knowledge** about both content and Tier 2 and 3 vocabulary words.
* Whenever possible, **adjust/simplify text** to students’ level of comprehension (use high frequency, “Tier 1” synonyms when simplifying even if it detracts a bit from precision of meaning).

**When Teaching Writing to ELLs:**

* Use **sentence starters** and **paragraph frames.** For writing and speaking activities, they allow ELLs to think more about the content and less about grammar and sentence structure.
* Encourage frequent **low-risk free writing** in English via journal entries, etc. in which it’s OK to make errors at first.
* Allow students to practice writing down what they hear (**dictation**).
* Allow them to use higher-frequency vocabulary, and make mistakes that may simply be a result of first language interference or lack of language skills.
* Encourage **process writing** and **Writer’s Workshops** in which revisions and one-on-one discussions about writing are frequent.
* Employ **peer-editing** and **self-editing** as often as possible.
* Provide **exemplary models of all writing assignments** that demonstrate your expectations and review with the class why these models are exemplary. Non-models, or weak examples, can also be helpful. Provide clear examples in class and put directly on assignments and worksheets.

**Specific Accommodations for ELLs:**

* Whenever possible, allow the questions themselves on **assessments to be worded as simply as possible** (normally, you are assessing their knowledge of the content, not whether they understand the vocabulary in the questions).
* Allow students more **time to process** information and thoughts before production (speaking, writing), and more time to speak.
* Allow students **more time** to complete assignments (time and a half or more), especially exams and longer written assignments.

**Connection to Home Language and Culture of ELLs:**

* Require that Beginning and Intermediate ELLs have and use a **bilingual dictionary** in their first language (this usually only helps if the student is literate in that language).
* Encourage students to **make connections** to their **native language** and **home country/culture** whenever possible, even if an international school setting.
* If students are literate in Spanish, emphasize that English is inconsistent and not as phonetic compared to Spanish.  **Drill sight words** more often with these students.
* If Spanish is their first language, emphasize and **explicitly teach cognates** and **false cognates** (e.g. “Estoy embarazada” does NOT mean “I’m embarrassed!”)
* **Don’t discourage** a student from speaking or writing in her native language, especially if she is a beginner- just require that she finds a way to also express in English either by repeating/copying you, figuring out a different way to say it, or using a bilingual dictionary.

**Grouping/Classroom Management for ELLs:**

* Allow students to **share ideas orally with partners** (especially friends) **and/or small groups** (e.g. in a lower-risk environment) before or instead of sharing with the whole class.
* **Pair/group** students **heterogeneously** (i.e. more proficient students with those who are less proficient).
* **Seat** less proficient students in the **middle** of the classroom so they can be most aware of what others are doing.

**GENERAL “TRUTHS” TO KEEP IN MIND:**

* **Don’t confuse** spoken/conversational proficiency with academic proficiency.  Basic conversational skills are acquired in around 3 years, while academic proficiency takes 7 years!
* **Younger students** don’t necessarily learn a second language faster than adults. It’s just easier to pick up simpler language that is geared toward younger students to begin with.
* The younger the students are when they acquire a second language, the less likely they are to have an accent.  If they start learning after puberty, there is a strong chance that they will always have a slight accent.
* **Pull-out** and **push-in** language instruction can both be equally effective, given the right strategies and resources!
* The student should be able to understand **80% of the words** in a sentence or text to ensure comprehension (the rest can be understood from context or are insignificant to overall meaning).
* Students **crave** meaning, not rules or labels- if you give and ensure meaning to everything they read, hear, and produce, they are more likely to retain it and seek more knowledge.  Teach words, grammar, text, etc. by distinguishing, comparing, contrasting, analyzing, and connecting them to meaning, especially real-life meaning.
* Use the same strategies you use to facilitate reading/writing skills and comprehension with native speakers, but **more often** and more **explicitly.**
* REMEMBER**:** most of these students are not using or hearing English outside of school at all- for every less hour they use it outside school, they need additional and intensive time in school to **catch up!**
* REMEMBER: Strategies that benefit ELLs **benefit ALL STUDENTS!**