

ESOL Strategies for Any Teacher, Any Classroom!

By JODY NOLF

Congratulations! You'll be teaching a newcomer program this year. Here's where to start.

If you're like many teachers, you might find yourself thrust into exciting new territory this school year. Schools around the country are seeing an influx of multilingual learners (MLs) with unique needs that extend beyond language learning, and educators are finding themselves in classrooms filled with students they aren't accustomed to teaching.

Depending upon the home country, MLs arrive with various levels of education, life experience, and background knowledge. Some students have interrupted learning experiences, considered SIFE or SLIFE students (*Students with Interrupted Formal Education/SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*). Others might speak and understand their first language (often referred to as the L1), but cannot read or write in their L1. Many educators are finding themselves overwhelmed and underprepared for their newcomer MLs, but there are simple strategies and scaffolds educators can use to better educate this diverse population of learners and acclimate them to the American classroom.

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Student Voices: Long Term English Language Learners Speak Out

By AIMEE DAVIS

Long Term English Language Learners (LTELLs) bring a question to educators: Why have these ELLs been in an ESOL program for so long and what can be done to help accelerate their academic language learning?

Why have these ELLs been in an ESOL program for so long?

Who are LTELLs? West Ed. defines LTELLs as "a formal educational classification given to students who have been enrolled in American schools for more than six years, are not progressing toward English proficiency and struggle academically due to their limited English skills" (2016, p.2).

Some ELLs excel, exiting their ESOL program and entering into mainstream or advanced courses, while some stagnate, hovering in the developing or intermediate categories and carrying the ESL label for too many years. Placement within different types of ESL programs is crucial to these outcomes, as are other variables, such as teachers, curriculum, and first language use.

I analyzed the progress of six tenth grade LTELLs from a secondary school where 12 languages are spoken by ELLs who comprise 60% of the total student population. The six tenth grade students speak four different native

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Perspectives on Interacting in ESOL Classrooms

By TERRI STILES

I believe that the most important trend in teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) involves using communicative language teaching along with cooperative learning. Having students engage in reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities, with their peers, will help them remember what they have learned and take their learning to a higher level. Teachers, in communicative classrooms, are free from the board or PowerPoint and can instead circulate the room, helping their students and seeing where they need more attention. Teachers that use communicative theories with collaborative learning will have success developing classrooms that encompass language support, student cooperation, and celebration of diversity.

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Reviewed by Valeri Harteg



Review: Rapid Program Development: Building an English for Employment Course in Two Months

Reviewed by VALERI HARTEG

PTE's Fall 2023 Second Saturday Seminar series concluded on December 9th with a deeply reflective and transparent presentation by Eliana Stanislawski, who currently serves as the English for Employment Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator at HIAS Pennsylvania. Eliana led us through a process that is crucial to both professional and program growth *and* one to which we practitioners often don't devote enough time and effort: reflecting on the work we've done.

At the time of this presentation, Eliana and their students in HIAS PA's inaugural English for Employment program were in the final assessment and feedback phase of the course. With most of the first iteration of this course in the rearview mirror, Eliana was poised and ready to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of their experience with a critical eye. Their grant-motivated expectation was to design a new in-house ESL for employment course in the span of two months. The goal of the course would be to prepare newly arrived adult refugees with high beginner to high intermediate language proficiency to navigate both job searching and interacting in the workplace in English. In a perfect world, focusing on this kind of undertaking and only this for two months would be ideal (and likely still not enough time), but like most ESL professionals in community-based work, Eliana was balancing a variety of other job responsibilities. Before walking us through how they got started, Eliana invited us

first to reflect on the situation and to share what initial steps we would take if we were in their shoes.

Beginning with the curriculum design phase, Eliana offered recommendations based on their reflections on what worked well and what didn't. Here are their valuable pieces of advice:

Even if you're a seasoned educator, take time to review credible curriculum design resources to set your path for planning. Structure helps, especially in a situation like this in which it's easy to become quickly overwhelmed with what needs to be done on a short timeline. For this course, Eliana sought guidance from the curriculum design model outlined in *Language Curriculum Design* (Macalister & Nation, 2020).

Be honest with yourself about the situation, and acknowledge that there are almost always factors outside of your control that can limit your capacity to do everything you want to do. For example, it's important to recognize how grant requirements, such as data collection and case noting, can affect the curriculum design process as well as the capacity of the teacher to focus entirely on pedagogy.

The needs assessment phase of curriculum design is crucial, and even though it can be tempting to fast-track this exercise when there's limited time, it's important to be as thorough as possible. Eliana's goal was to do it quickly without just skimming the surface; they wanted to gather meaningful information about their learners efficiently but effectively.

A strong needs assessment leads to a very informed course outline with content that's relevant to the learners' needs and conducive to the teaching environment. Eliana noted that ultimately they still maintained a mentality of "building the plane while flying it," but being able to rely on that outline kept the plane flying in the right direction. One key finding from the needs assessment that Eliana returned to time and again was the

importance of repeating and recycling material for this student population. While this is generally a best practice for adult ESL learners, especially beginners, giving students repeated exposure to content and setting up language practice routines seek to mitigate the effects of trauma and culture shock on learning.

When it comes to content, there is no need to put the pressure on yourself to develop everything from scratch. Take time to research what's out there, and recognize the power of working with student-generated content! Specifically, Eliana advised us:

Not to reinvent the wheel—to look at what's out there and adjust it to meet the needs of your learners. Watch this seminar's recording at <https://www.penntesoleast.org/Second-Saturday-Seminars> to get the full list of ESL for employment resources that inspired Eliana's curriculum.

To use the Language Experience Approach. In the context of this course, using student-generated narratives as content and as sources of practice was particularly helpful for practicing the interview skill of talking about past work experiences.

To use AI to help with lesson planning. For Eliana, ChatGPT was a great source of support for generating exercises, example sentences, and dialogues for listening and speaking practice.

To use authentic materials. Eliana often drew from real workplace materials to provide students with support engaging in *real* real-world tasks.

Other activities and tools that Eliana felt worked well and that specifically helped combat the challenges of the program's structure and implementation included:

Brain breaks and games. Even with incredibly relevant content and

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well-designed lessons, Eliana reflected that being in class (virtually) for several hours at a time four days per week seemed to be too much of a commitment for this student population. Eliana's including cognitive breaks and interactive games throughout lessons helped students cope with the class length and stay engaged.

Wakelet (<http://wakelet.com>) as a hub for storing and organizing course materials. This tool was especially helpful in addressing the challenge of inconsistent student attendance; students who missed class or arrived late were able to catch up by viewing the materials Eliana uploaded to Wakelet.

Authentic, task-based assessments at the end of lessons and units to supplement standardized test scores. Though the program grant required

reporting students' scores on a standardized test (BEST Plus 2.0), it was important to evaluate students' learning in more authentic ways that closely aligned with the course material.

Eliana's final reflections with the group highlighted the contrasting sentiments of exhaustion from the mental stress of completing this project under both external and internal pressure and of immense pride in what they were able to create. We at PTE are grateful to Eliana for sharing so openly about an experience to which many of us can relate, and we hope that their rich reflections leave you feeling validated and encouraged.

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Second Saturday Seminars
is a webinar series from PennTESOL East held every second Saturday of the month from 10:00 to 11:00 AM EST via Zoom. All sessions are recorded and posted to the PennTESOL East YouTube Channel! Join at: bit.ly/PTE-Seminars

Upcoming Sessions

Moving into Management: Transitioning from Teacher to Educational Administrator
Gretchen Spencer & Michelle Ferguson
March 9

Pros and Cons of Sheltered ESL in K-12: A Panel Discussion
April 13

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ESOL Strategies for Any Teacher, Any Classroom!

By JODY NOLF

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Where Do I Start?

Start with a smile! A welcoming classroom immediately puts students at ease and reduces what is known as the affective filter, i.e., any barrier to learning such as anxiety or lack of confidence. Students are more apt to learn in an environment where they feel a sense of safety and encouragement (Colorín Colorado, 2023). Once students feel safe, the true language learning can begin, and there is no better place to start than with introductions. Welcome your students and embrace their unique backgrounds.

Begin with Hello

One way to accomplish this is through authentic experiences. Begin with "hello" and model simple yet important greetings. "How are you?" "What is your name?" "My name is..." Students will not only learn how to engage with others in their new language, but they will also learn language that identifies themselves and others and their roles in the community. "Mrs. Carter is my teacher." "Alana is a classmate." "I am a teenager and I like to swim." Vista Higher Learning's ELD series *Get Ready* (2022) opens with these themes and is specifically designed for both elementary and secondary newcomers. The series also offers educators easy-to-follow lessons that demonstrate welcoming rituals and celebrate identity.

TPR—Total Physical Response

These engaging lessons also allow teachers to employ the TPR method of teaching—Total Physical Response. TPR is a great way for educators to convey meaning while newcomers can use TPR to show their understanding of language. Newcomers wave or high-five their classmates when learning to say "hello" and point to themselves when saying, "My name is..." These students begin to understand general welcoming rituals in a language-rich, authentic setting.

Visual Cues

When working with newcomers, teachers of all grade levels and content areas can present lessons with visual cues as an effective way to convey meaning. In the *Get Ready* series, each page of instruction contains photographs, symbols, or images that accompany both academic and practical language (often referred to as "Survival English"). Students see children on the pages who look like them while also learning how to appropriately interact with others in their world.

Visuals are also useful in acclimating newcomer MLs to their new school. For example, use graphics to create a daily schedule for MLs. While the words "lunch" or "cafeteria" might be unfamiliar to a newcomer student, pictures of food and a room with children eating creates meaning and context for a student learning to navigate throughout their school day. Such familiarity builds confidence while also building language.

Oral Fluency

As newcomer MLs become more accustomed to their new language and environment, the need for verbal expression grows. Simply stated, these students should be encouraged to speak and utilize their new language. However, many newcomers experience what is known as a “silent period”. This silent period should not be dismissed, however, as merely a passive activity devoid of any learning. The silent period is an excellent opportunity for MLs to absorb language that is all around them. Oftentimes educators mistakenly associate lack of speech with lack of understanding. This is not always the case. Many MLs are not yet at a level of comfort where they wish to demonstrate speaking skills, but they are able to show their understanding through other means, such as drawings, pointing, or role play, and these less-confident newcomers should be encouraged to do so. However, teachers can reinforce speaking skills in a very low-stress setting. *Get Ready* allows students to practice their oral fluency through the program’s embedded speaking exercises (Vista Higher Learning, 2022). These activities can be assigned for at-home practice, one-on-one, or with a shoulder-partner if desired. This feature also allows students to try out their speaking skills while avoiding whole-group (choral) reads or echo practices, where the entire class is involved.

Working with MLs doesn’t need to be a frightening experience. In

fact, many teachers find that after the initial fears subside, these students are apt to be engaged and motivated to learn. With the appropriate scaffolds and strategies in place, MLs can learn English at a steady pace and can achieve academic success alongside their native English-speaking peers. The key is implementing the *right* scaffold, or level of support, for the student’s level of English proficiency. And just like structural scaffolds, learning scaffolds are designed to be adjusted as the student learns language. For example, as MLs grow in their new language (called the L2), teachers will discover that they don’t need to employ as many visual or verbal cues as when their students first entered their classroom. Classroom labels such as “pencil” or “notebook” can be removed once MLs have mastered those terms—and master them they will. With the proper supports and a nurturing environment, these students *can* be successful!

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Student Voices: Long Term English Language Learners Speak Out

By AIMEE DAVIS

(Continued from p. 1) different native languages and have carried the ESOL label for over seven years. These six students were placed in honors, sheltered, or mainstream courses. Students in honors courses have been recommended by previous teachers based on ability and motivation for high achievement. ELLs or LTELLs who are above level 3 are rostered to sheltered courses to receive content instruction with tailored modifications. Mainstream classes include regular education students, and ELLs and LTELLs who are level 3 or higher and have demonstrated academic ability. The classes’ practices vary in resources and use of first language. Two of the three students who exited the program at the end of this school year were enrolled in the sheltered class and one was in the honors class. Honors class held the highest-class size. The mainstream and sheltered class were equal in class size. Individual growth in standardized test

scores analyzed throughout this school year. Data also included recorded and transcribed individual conversations with each LTELL about their history in ESOL Programs. I analyzed the data for trends to focus on factors that helped three students to make gains in ACCESS testing and other criteria that allowed them to exit the program.

Practices Being Considered

As part of my research I considered teaching practices that may have an effect on LTELLs’ success. Such practices include the students’ histories with push in or pull out programs, class placement, Culturally Responsive Instruction and resources, as well as first language use in academic group work. Current research tells us LTELLs are shortchanged by ESOL programs when they are either not serviced enough or overly serviced with a prescribed formula that does not meet individual needs.

Current Research

Most LTELLs can communicate socially in English. This observation illustrates the students’ use of basic interpersonal communicative skills over academic language proficiency. An ESOL program’s purpose is to exit students when they acquire *academic* language, not basic communication skills (Cummins, n.d.). The ability to apply academic language is a determining factor for exiting programs. It can seem like: “a paradox between students’ linguistic preference and their strong capacity to communicate orally in English; and their inability to communicate in the academic context” (Artigliere, 2019, p. 8). It is typical for LTELLs to prefer communicating in English, even when they are proficient in their native language (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Having strong communication skills in English does not equal academic

language proficiency, which is the goal for exiting ESOL Programs.

Bilingual education is often touted as a panacea for problems in ESOL Programs. LTELLs are “emergent bilinguals and should receive bilingual opportunities” (Artigliere, 2019, p. 9). Both the threshold theory and the interdependence hypothesis relate to bilingualism in the classroom. The threshold theory and interdependence hypothesis state that both languages should be developed (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Interdependence Theory explains how advancement in L1 will transfer to L2. Threshold Theory points out how the L2 needs to reach a certain proficiency before it can be used for instructional purposes. These theories emphasize that learning in one language does not occur in isolation. However, there are pitfalls to bilingual programs. Most bilingual programs expect students to have literacy skills in their first language (Menken et al., 2012). Many LTELLs do not have these skills. This could cause a mismatch with the wrong bilingual programs. Research has shown that students who attended bilingual programs inconsistently had negative academic outcomes (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Placing students in a Spanish foreign language program is another example of mismatching students (Menken & Klyn, 2010). These classes may assume the student has no grammar proficiency. Educators should consider curriculum, culture, and native language proficiency when deciding on a program or placement. Schools might run multiple programs and fit the student to the program, as long as there is proper staffing. If programs are not tailored to the students’ needs, then there is a risk of underutilizing students’ assets while not providing academic enrichment necessary to progress (Won & Garcia, 2014).

An additional problematic issue for LTELLs is placing them in remedial courses. Remedial programs are not designed to meet the academic language development needs of English Language Learners (Won & Garcia, 2014). The remedial curriculum is designed for Native English speakers and does not address the cultural and language needs of the

LTELL. This subtractive schooling (Menken & Kleyn, 2010) results in marginalizing students who do not receive curriculum designed with *their* goals in mind.

Results and Implications

Only two of the six students described their elementary pull-out ESOL program as effective. This ESOL teacher provided social capital. She provided world experiences, addressed their educational needs, and built positive relationships. These two students are among the highest achievers in the sheltered class and excel in many classes. One of them exited the ESOL program. This shows that ESOL pull out in elementary schools can work. The determining factor in the success of an ESOL pull out program is the ESOL teacher who is addressing student needs.

The student who was placed in a mainstream English classroom during his tenth grade year showed the least academic growth. He was not among ESOL or LTELL peers in sheltered English, or among high achieving students in the honors class. One might attribute his lack of achievement to the placement that did not honor his LTELL status and considered his basic communication skills reason to be placed in the mainstream. Had he been placed with students with the same native language, or even placed with high achievers, he may have found reason to focus, which he explained as the reason for his lack of growth.

Students mentioned their own confidence and focus as explanations for achieving. Teachers can accentuate these factors by providing consistent encouragement and support. Being in class with students who speak their native language or share their culture can be a form of support. The students’ preferred reading material varied, emphasizing the teachers’ need to give students choice when it comes to resources. Five of the six students preferred to use culturally responsive material.

Spanish speakers, who speak a more common language than the others in this school, preferred English to communicate about assignments. The other students,

who speak less commonly spoken languages, *would* choose to use their first language when talking with peers about assignments. There are a few possible explanations for this response. Spanish speakers have opportunities to use their first language during the school day, while others may not, Spanish is more similar to English than the other languages, the less common languages may have academic vocabulary in their first language to use during assignment completion, while Spanish speakers may only have English for the academic language. *As educators, we need to give students the opportunity to use their language when it's possible and when they prefer it.* We might also supply the academic language in their first language, if possible.

The most surprising piece of data from the analysis were responses from two male Spanish speakers who explained a stuttering problem when learning English in elementary school. Could this have been attributed to their slower pace in gaining academic English? When assessing the speaking proficiency on standardized tests, are speech problems taken into account?

The research implications demonstrate problems with inconsistent programming and deficit-minded approaches such as remedial courses. The outcome of this teacher research establishes that knowing our students’ learning preferences and needs while mentoring them to grow confidence *does work*. As simple as it may be, we need to ask students questions about their learning and language preferences and listen carefully to their responses.

There is no one program to help LTELLs progress. All needs are different. Educators can listen, provide routine, consistency, and materials to peak their interest. Standards and resources are tools to teach skills, but the learning is happening when students feel comfortable, trust teachers, and are provided correct support. With these factors in place, LTELLs can break out of ESOL programs to pursue goals as successful multilinguals.

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Perspectives on Collaborative Learning in ESOL Classrooms

By TERRI STILES

(Continued from p. 1) The WIDA Consortium suggests developing classroom norms, providing language support, creating heterogeneous groups, and collaborating with fellow teachers are the key strategies to student success in the ESOL classroom. All teachers must establish rules and procedures for the classroom, referred to as norms that show the students how they are supposed to behave. Teachers can provide language support by providing graphic organizers, worksheets, and opportunities for both pair and group practice. Creating heterogeneous skill groups is helpful to all students if the teacher establishes group roles. For example, a strong writer will be assigned the one to write on behalf of the group, a strong speaker will be the one to present the group findings to the class, and so forth. After students become more confident, roles can be switched. Creating meaningful assignments is best accomplished by following a theme-based curriculum and keeping all the assignments on topic. Collaborating with fellow teachers can generate new ideas and tactics for teaching. Following these suggestions can be helpful to any ESOL teacher (WIDA, 2014).

Colorín Colorado is a nonprofit organization that assists ELLs and English language teachers. They provide information and recommendations on how to implement cooperative learning strategies in the ESOL classroom. They suggest that cooperative learning classrooms encourage students to contribute, stay on task, share ideas, and learn to give and receive peer feedback. Colorín Colorado states that the game “round table” is an effective way to build student contribution. During the game, students add what they know to a topic sheet that is passed around, and at the end the teacher reads the sheet showcasing everyone’s knowledge. Teachers can help students stay on task by walking around the classroom and monitoring student progress. Students can help and encourage each other when a teacher splits up the reading in a process called jigsaw. It is divided by group and the group members assist each other in reading the passage and answering comprehension questions and finally present the content to the class. Students can share ideas by using a tea party activity. In this activity, students make up questions, answer them, and discuss the topic. For lower level

students, the teacher can provide the questions. For problem solving, students can do online research. For younger classes, teachers can set up a web quest. Finally, students can learn to give and receive feedback through peer review (Colorín Colorado, 2023).

WNET, formerly known as The Educational Broadcasting Corporation, recommends that teachers celebrate diversity, acknowledge differences, develop interpersonal relationships with their students, use active learning techniques, reflect on their own teaching practice, and have the students practice self-reflection. Teachers can celebrate diversity by having each student present to the class a cultural connection if they choose to. The students can share with the class where their country is and the food, music, and cultural events their country is known for. The students can each pick a class when they would like to present their information. Teachers can use active learning techniques by having question and answer periods, having students work in partners, and having students work in groups. Teachers need to reflect on their practice but it is equally important for students to reflect on their learning and develop an awareness of how they learn the best (WNET Education, n.d.).

Francisca Sánchez discusses interactive structures and strategies for success. She encourages tapping into student’s prior knowledge, developing personal interaction with text and topic, exploration, synthesis and analysis, and reflection. Accessing a student’s prior knowledge can be done using KWL charts, Venn diagrams, and class discussions. Developing personal connections to the text involves connecting the text to stories the students know or real-life examples of the concepts in the story. Exploration can mean a web quest, or online research or field trips. Synthesis and analysis means critically examining a written text to find the main idea, supporting ideas, inference, persuasion, and the writer’s point of view. Having the students reflect on their final product after they have presented it also builds critical thinking skills. Sanchez offers many games and strategies to accomplish these goals (Sanchez, 2010).

In conclusion, agreement exists across the current literature for teaching ELLS that active communication among students in the classroom improves their learning. Combining cooperative learning with graphic organizers or worksheets and genuine testing will give the teachers a wealth of information about their students which they can then use to plan for the best way to help their students succeed. Students will remember their classroom experiences as active experiences where they learned English, while at the same time making life-long friends.

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PTE Voices is the newsletter of PennTESOL East, a nonprofit professional association dedicated to the improvement and advancement of English language teaching, and the Eastern Pennsylvania affiliate of TESOL International.

PTE Voices exists to provide a forum for writing that is practical, accessible, and relevant to our members and English language professionals in our region. Our audience are practicing English language teachers and other ELT professionals in a range of teaching contexts, including K-12, higher education, adult education, and teacher training.

We are seeking contributions for the upcoming issues of PTE Voices! We welcome submissions from members of all levels of experience, areas of expertise, and subfields of English language teaching. To submit a contribution, see the linked page:



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