

TE Final Part 2&3

The students that I tutored in Otto Middle School were all ESL students and their struggles with reading and writing came mostly from their struggle with the English language however, I got to watch these students grow in my time there and many of them overcame the language barrier to develop other struggles. When teaching ESL children the background of the student is vital, proper school supplies and ample teacher time is also necessary, SLA stage understanding and use of the SIOP model and other teaching techniques are useful to help students succeed.

The background of an English Language Learner is important in many ways. The student might be a refugee, and therefore be struggling with many other pressing mental ghosts that would occupy the child's mind and make learning English a very low priority or effect the content that is appropriate to teach. If they are not a refugee it is important to know why they moved to the country, or at least how they feel about the move, because their feelings about America will effect their motivation to learn English. Similarly it is important to know about their home life, are their parents trying to learn English? Relying heavily on them to learn English? This kind of burden can weigh heavily on a young child in the classroom.

Another great challenge that comes with learning the background of ESL students is their home language. First off, do they speak it? Do they read it? If yes than they already have a head start on learning English, if no than the road will be twice as challenging and long. Second, what language do they speak? With each language comes a different set of grammar rules and a way at looking at

communication. So languages don't write in letters, some read vertical, some have similar sounds to English and others do not. Before reprimanding a student for pronunciation consider if they have ever made that sound in their home language.

A good tool for teaching to ESL students is knowing the common mistakes that language learners make. I myself do not speak every language and when a student is put in front of me that speaks a foreign language I don't recognize I can trace their mistakes by taking notes while they read and developing a better understanding of what to expect next in the learning curve. Stages such as pre-production and the silent period, where it is important to focus on reproduction words let students repeat and copy because they will be overwhelmed and exhausted. Then Early Production where the students vocabulary builds to 1000 words roughly and they develop the ability to ask questions and use small sentences that they have memorized that may or may not be correct. It is important in this stage to utilize pictures and accept one-word answers (without pushing for more), yes or no questions are also helpful and whole class activities are acceptable at this point. Speech Emergence, there vocabulary is now at roughly 3,000 words and students are now making simple phrases and can now read more advanced books and do work sheets with word banks and use flash cards. Choral reading, riddles and journals are great to help the student advance at this stage. The next to stages are intermediate fluency and advanced fluency, in the first you will see complex sentences and opinions and the ability to increase content, in the latter it will take up to 4-10 years and it is near-native like proficiency. Neither of these last two will occur in Middle School. The stages help teachers know how to teach to their

students instead of wondering why a child isn't talking or answering in one word when they write with many.

This only works when a teacher has the proper tools, the Lady I tutor with had four ESL children in one room, all from different countries all with no English background. She had no basic worksheets, books, games or computer software. She admitted to me that these were the first ESL students she had ever had in her class. Seeing that they didn't catch on to lecture teaching she went out and got kindergarten to 3rd grade reading books and worksheets for them and asked for a second tutor. Being able to split the girls up and read at their level made a world of difference but there is only so much a teacher can do when they don't have help like tutors. One of the girls in her class was in the silent stage when we first met and needed lots of personal attention, now she has moved to the early production stage and can interact with her classmates better but group work is still over her head. There are no other students that speak her language and the other little girl that was her close friend has rocketed above her and is in speech emergence already, so she feels slow. It is heartbreaking because there are only so many resources.

There are programs that help break down the lesson, like the SIOP model, allowing for more explanation than every child will need in the room. The SIOP model is a lot like the pre-reading reading techniques we learned in class as well as the vocabulary building techniques that are part of pre-reading and pre-teaching. An important part of SIOP is similar to the concept of teaching about how something is written and how to read it, is it fact or fiction and does the content effect how it is read. Is it easy to read, are the questions based in the text or does your student have

to infer the answers? These are valid context information to understand when teaching and that will help make teaching go more smoothly.

The ESL students will still need more however; this is where community resources come in. The RDC (Refugee Development Center) is a great after school program that helps tutor children and adults and is completely free and right next to Eastern High School. This program helps give children the extra time when a teacher can't or maybe the extra push to keep learning that sound or word they keep tripping on after the school day is over. It helps students complete their homework instead of giving up or filling it out incorrectly and it allows students to meet other English language learners in their own community. This is the RDC's most precious gift, for language learning is easiest when the person teaching understands your language and the RDC is such a mix of cultures and languages that there is always somebody there to help.

In conclusion I think it is important that teachers be aware of all their students, of their history, their special needs, how best to teach to those needs and the outside resources that are available to help them because sometimes we can't do it all ourselves. We should always give our classrooms 110% of ourselves, all of our time and everything we are capable of but often it is not enough. There are students that do not get the one on one time that they need and so outside resources need to be used, like the RDC and parents, to help children really take an interest in reading and writing because interest is the key to development.