

Five Essential Practices for Teaching ELLs

Essential Practice 1: Develop Oral Language through Meaningful Conversation and Context

Oral language is the foundation of literacy and the main tool for learning and interacting in both academic and social settings. Natural exposure to, as well as planned experiences with oral language facilitates increased expression and understanding of the second language. Oral language also supports vocabulary development in context, paving the way for better comprehension and production. Exposure to language in a meaningful setting is vital for developing proficiency, as well as developing language skills.

Essential Practice 2: Teach Targeted Skills through Contextualized and Explicit Instruction

Full literacy is a fluid combination of oral, reading, and writing skills. These skills must be taught through explicit and contextualized instruction that scaffolds learning. Contextualized instruction provides students with extra linguistic clues that support understanding. Explicit skills give the students the tools they need to comprehend increasingly complex situations.

Essential Practice 3: Build Vocabulary through Authentic and Meaningful Experiences with Words

Developing and deepening a student's understanding of new words is essential for English language learners. Building vocabulary in the context of real life problems and experiences ensures that students will own the new words they encounter. Vocabulary building is a life-long process and students must learn ways to integrate and approach new and challenging terms. Discussing, playing with, and using new words allows students to gain new vocabulary through meaningful, and therefore memorable, experiences.

Essential Practice 4: Build and Activate Background Knowledge

Learning is based on establishing neural connections in the brain, drawing on previous experience, background knowledge, and prior and current environments. It is both the teacher's and the student's job to facilitate these connections in order to construct meaning and understand new ideas and concepts while expanding on their own world knowledge. Actively fostering these connections will enable students to more easily interpret their surroundings, and assign meaning to new concepts while expanding their own.

Essential Practice 5: Teach and Use Meaning-Making Strategies

Intentionally teaching meaning-making strategies provides students with a toolbox to approach future learning challenges. Meaning-making strategies vary from helping students comprehend text to various strategies students can use to understand English-dependent lessons. Modeling appropriate behaviors to students gives them the tools to be autonomous learners, while simultaneously supplying them with options through which they can interpret environmental input, both academically and socially.