Five Powerful Strategies for Teaching English Language, Literature and Content with Beginners Mary Lou McCloskey PhD

**Intro**

Many of us address the challenge of new learners of English throughout the school year – often, students have experienced interrupted education through disruptions of war, climate and economics. In this workshop, we will participate in demonstrations of strategies for welcoming and engaging these new learners whenever they enter, and starting them quickly on the path to English proficiency.

**Learning Objectives**

Participants will

* Learn through participation five powerful and effective strategies for working with school-age, beginning-level English learners from upper elementary through secondary school.
* Take home a handout with descriptions of these strategies

**Names**

*A person’s name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language.* (Dale Carnegie).

Our names are very important and reflect who we are. The first activity teaches us to listen to, learn, and use learners’ names, and encourage everyone in the class to do the same.

* **Get the name right.** During intake, ask what the student’s name is and what the student wants to be called in school. Be clear about what is the first name and what is family name. There are many ways to do this!!
* **Listen carefully** to the name and **pronounce it right.** *You can do this!!!* Write it down each name the way you hear it. Keep this list with you. Every day, find a way to ask students how you’re doing with their names and try to improve.
* **Practice.** Use names. Expect students to use one another’s names. Play name games. Find ways to use them often at first. E.g.: The Name Game Song; Rhythm Name Game; Memory Name Game, Name Bingo. Truth or Lie.

**Picture Life History**

*An effective teacher should take into account the intellectual, social, and cultural characteristics of each student being taught*. (Prem S. Dean, 2014). We need to learn quickly about our students and who they are – and they need to learn about one another. Students draw and tell about pictures of people, places, and ideas important to them.

1. Pass out an index card (or sheet of paper) to each participant.
2. Ask participants to write their name where they come from, something they value in the center of the card
3. Ask participants to draw something about their early years in the left upper corner
4. Ask participants to draw something about important people to them/their families in the right upper corner.
5. Ask participants to something they love to do in the left lower corner
6. Ask participants to draw goals for the future in the right lower corner.
7. After they have completed the drawing, participants find a partner (preferably someone they do not know well) and introduce themselves, using the pictures on the cards as cues.
8. Optional:
9. Next, partners exchange cards.
10. Partners introduce one another to another pair and/or the whole group using the cards as prompts. (Partners are allowed to help one another.)

**Total Physical Response (TPR)**

TPR research opened up the concept that for children and adults acquiring another language in school, success can be assured if comprehension is developed before speaking. (James S. Asher, 2007). Strategies for using TPR for teaching intro classroom language as well as technical content language are demonstrated, with accompanying sample TPR scripts.

In TPR, teachers introduce only a few new words each time. Scripts are written in command form, and students first show their understanding through actions. They can eventually move to speaking, reading and writing the scripts.

***Asher’s seven steps include:***

***1. Preparation.*** The teacher prepares a short script, incorporating language appropriate to learners’ level and often using props and actions that help communicate the language. Asher recommends that teachers introduce only a few new concepts at once and wait until these are mastered before adding more.

***2. Demonstration*.** Teacher and/or a few individuals demonstrate the actions for the series of commands. The teacher makes every effort to keep the lessons lighthearted and fun. The series is repeated several times with variations in the order of the commands.

***3. Whole group demonstration****.* Now the whole group participates in repetitions and variations of the sequence in order.

***4. Written copy.***For students who are beginning to read and write in English, the teacher provides written text, which students copy and study.

***5. Oral repetition and questions.***After listening comprehension has been completely internalized (Asher says that at least 10 hours of initial instruction should require no oral response) students are ready to begin to speak. They practice repeating the series, ask and answer questions about it, and respond to the commands out of order.

***6. Student demonstration.*** Depending on language and reading levels, students recite, or, read the script and perform the actions in front of the class. The teacher checks carefully, and guides students toward correct pronunciation, grammatical usage, and comprehension.

***7. Pair practice.*** Students solidify their learning by practicing as pairs, taking turns in roles as readers/speakers and actors.

*(See www.mlmcc.com (handouts) for sample scripts from a variety of content areas.)*

**Lineup**

When we keep students active, we keep their energy levels up and provide their brains with the oxygen-rich blood needed for highest performance. (Eric Jensen, 2005).

Lineups are an engaging way to have learners practice oral language (Levine & McCloskey, 2013). As students mingle and move around, they ask and answer questions and compare their responses about a topic. Eventually, they find their position according to some criterion that can be ordered. The line-up can be used as a quick warm up, a review of a topic, for dividing students into pair or groups by matching those standing next to each other or those standing at the end of the line etc.

***Procedure:***

1. Ask a question that results in answers that can be ordered, for example, What time do you get to school in the morning? How far do you travel to school? What is the month and day of your birthday? What is your favorite number? What is your first name? What is your pretend first name? What letter does your name start with?
2. Model and have learners practice asking and answering the question so that everyone has the language they need for the activity.
3. Ask students to interact with one another, sharing information about the question in order to identify their place in line, for example, the earliest to the latest morning risers or the first to last in the alphabet.
4. Students line up in the correct order.
5. Ask students to share their responses with the whole class (for example, I got up at 6:25 this morning) to check if they have positioned themselves correctly in the line.
6. Conclude the activity, or...
7. Add extra challenges, e.g., Keep your eyes closed and line up in order of height, or…
8. “Fold” the line in half to create partners for the next activity.

**Numbered Heads**

“…cooperation, compared with competitive and individualistic efforts, typically results in (a) higher achievement and greater productivity, (b) more caring, supportive, and committed relationships, and (c) greater psychological, health, social competence, and self-esteem. (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Numbered Heads is a powerful cooperative learning strategy that assures 100% engagement, provides differentiation, and makes learning active and fun.

This powerful and engaging cooperative learning strategy (adapted from Kagan, 2004) can be used at many stages of a lesson: for brainstorming, problem solving, preview, or review. It effectively involves every learner and provides a structure for learners to support one another’s achievement. In the example below, the questions are used in the “beyond” stage of the lesson to help learners intensively re-read a passage to find answers to questions.

**Procedure:**

1. Have students work in groups of about four.
2. Students in each group number off 1 to 4. (If groups have 5, two students take turns as one number; if groups have 3, one student has two numbers).
3. The teacher asks one question at a time about the text or topic and gives a time limit for the group to decide on an answer.
4. Group members “put their heads together” to find and agree on their answers. (This may include looking up page citations in a text, solving a problem, summarizing a passage, drawing a diagram, inventing a product...)
5. The teacher calls a number to designate which student will answer for the group.
6. Students with that number give their groups’ answers (orally, on paper, or on the board)
7. Gives feedback as appropriate; teams might receive points for correct answers, creative answers, correct spelling, etc.

**References & Resources**

Levine, L.N. & McCloskey, M.L. (2013). *Teaching English Language and Content in Mainstream Classrooms: One Class, Many Paths, 2nd ed*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

McCloskey, M.L., Orr, J., Stack, L. & Kleckova, G. (2014). *DeKalb County ESOL Strategies for Teaching English Language, Literature and Content: A Teacher’s Guide.* Atlanta: Educo Press.

***Extended handout:*** [www.mlmcc.com](http://www.mlmcc.com) (Handouts)