

# **Techniques and Strategies for Supporting ELLs**

Feb. 2, 2019  
Josh Kurzweil  
[josh.kurzweil@gmail.com](mailto:josh.kurzweil@gmail.com)

# Techniques/Strategies for Supporting ELLs

## Class Discussions

Common Issues/Strategies	Description of Technique/Activity
<p>Students may not know what kinds of discussion questions are good to ask or the types of answers that you are looking for.</p> <p><b>Question &amp; Answer Models</b></p>	<p>T can give examples of effective and ineffective answers and questions from previous discussion on a hand out. Have students read through and rank them (Ex. scale of 1-4). Then have Ss talk with a partner about why those answers or discussion questions are useful, effective, etc. T can then offer your scores for those questions (or answers) and discuss them with the class, so that they can get a better sense of what you are looking for and why.</p>
<p>In whole-class discussions, ELLs may need time to conceptualize and formulate their ideas in English.</p> <p><b>‘Think time’ before discussions</b></p>	<p>Before the discussion begins put some of main questions on the board or a screen so that students can get ideas and clarification before the group discussion starts. Students can make a few key word notes about what they want to say before the actual discussion starts.</p> <p>Another option is to have students talk about discussion questions with a partner before the whole-class discussion. This can help ELLs practice what they want to say in a safe way before speaking in front of the whole group.</p>
<p>In whole-class discussions, ELLs may not be able to hear or understand questions.</p> <p><b>Teacher as Scribe/Notetaker</b></p>	<p>T (or a student) can take key word notes on the board to record the main ideas that come up during the discussion. The key words on the board can help ELLs track and focus on what is being said. This can involve you paraphrasing or clarifying (So... you’re saying that... Is that right?)</p> <p>After the discussion, T can give students a chance to check with a partner to talk about which ideas were interesting or unclear. This can help students get clarification without having to speak in front of the whole class.</p>
<p>In small group discussions (i.e. 3-4 students), some students may dominate the discussion leaving little time for other Ss (especially ELLs) to participate</p> <p><b>Group Discussion Structures</b></p>	<p>Give a structure for the group discussion with some kind of turn-taking. For example, each student can take a turn and either make a comment or ask a question. This can help quieter Ss participate initially. After the first round of discussion Ss can then make it more free flowing.</p>

<p>In discussions about readings, it might be unclear whether Ss are supposed to clarify what the author is saying or offer related opinions/ideas.</p> <p><b>Reading Tasks/Guidelines</b></p>	<p>Provide some structure of how to offer comments. For example, for homework have Ss put 3-4 stars next to parts that they think are interesting (*) and questions marks (?) next parts that are unclear. In the discussion, tell Ss to ask each other. Which parts of the article were interesting for you? Which parts were unclear?</p>
<p>In both whole-class and group discussions, some students may demonstrate understanding while others do not. i.e. Are you sure they got it? Likewise, some Ss may be embarrassed to raise their hand and admit that they didn't understand something.</p> <p><b>Post Discussion Reflection</b></p>	<p>After a group discussion, have Ss do a short solo reflection writing. i.e What were the main points and/or interesting parts from our discussion. (The T can keep a list of key words/ideas from the discussion on the board to scaffold this more). T can move around and monitor Ss or can collect these.</p> <p>Do pair work check after whole-class discussions. i.e What were the main points and/or interesting parts from our discussion. T can move around and monitor Ss.</p>
<p>ELLs may not understand vocabulary from the readings or the discussions that are really critical for the lesson/unit.</p> <p>Ex. privilege, a construct, dominant paradigm, perspective taking, etc.</p> <p><b>'Word banks' with key terms</b></p>	<p>Keep a word list on the wall with key terms from the discussion or readings. Add to it as they come up.</p> <p>Ss can also do pair work checks on key terms by asking about them or testing each other. i.e. Look at the list and say 'This word means _____. What word is it?'</p> <p>The T can also make a Quizlet* set with key terms and definitions. Another possibility is to have students make the Quizlet set as a group by creating a set that all students can edit.</p> <p><i>* Quizlet is a free online flashcard system that teachers and students can use to record and study key terms. Cards are very fast to make and can use pictures</i></p>

## Assignments/Critiques

<p>Students who are presenting might not be clear on how to effectively structure their presentations.</p> <p><b>Presentation Outlines</b></p>	<p>Provide an outline for how students could/should structure the talk. For example, an outline might look like this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the concept or problem that you are trying to work with.</li> <li>2. Talk about how you tried to express that concept or solve the problem.</li> <li>3. Say which parts of your piece you thought worked well with that concept/problem</li> <li>4. Say which parts of your piece you are unsure about or have questions about</li> </ol>
<p>Students might be sure what to comment on or might be off topic in their feedback</p> <p><b>Critique Questions</b></p>	<p>Give the students questions based on the above criteria. For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What struck you most about this piece?</li> <li>2. What do you think about the problem/concept that this piece is working with?</li> <li>3. What aspects of the piece work well in working with that concept/problem?</li> <li>4. What aspects of the piece do you think don't address the concept/problem as well?</li> <li>5. What questions do you have about the piece or the process?</li> </ol>
<p>Students may not be sure how to effectively do the assignment and/or may be unsure of how to evaluate the effectiveness of an assignment.</p> <p><b>Sample Assignments</b></p>	<p>After giving the assignment but before completion, consider giving some examples of strong, reasonable, and weak assignments from prior courses. Have students individually assess these assignments and then discuss them with a partner. Then give your commentary on the assignment so that students can see if their ideas match up with yours. Conclude by opening it up to discussion and questions.</p>
<p>Some students are silent during critiques.</p> <p><b>Scaffolding Critique Participation</b></p>	<p>Give students some 'think time' before they actually start speaking. In other words, after the student presents, give the audience a few minutes to make some notes about what they thought. You can refer them to the criteria/questions above.</p> <p>Structure the feedback so that it starts with each person takes a turn for 30 seconds or so. For example, they can offer some specific that they liked and one question like "I'd like to hear more about..." The teacher can go last, which can also help by giving the teacher more time to think and organize their feedback. After one go around, the teacher can then open it up for more comments.</p>
<p>Students may have trouble understanding the feedback that you or other students offer.</p> <p><b>Teacher as Scribe in Critiques</b></p>	<p>Consider recording main ideas on the board as a kind of summary after they are offered. Ex. So, it sounds like your main point is... Is that right? (Then put that on the board). This can help the ELLs keep track of the key ideas.</p> <p>Another possibility is to have students take notes of feedback offered. This can be done during feedback or after the critique for that person is done. Ex. What were the key points about from this critique? You can also have students check with a partner after making these notes.</p>

## Demonstrations/Mini-lectures

Issue	Techniques/Tips
<p>Students may be unclear about the logistics of the process</p> <p><b>Written Assignment Descriptions</b></p>	<p>Provide a written handout that includes an assignment description with important dates, examples, and other information. Alternatively, you can give a handout that has questions and room for notes that students write as you give the information.</p>
<p>Students might not be sure about their choice for their project.</p> <p><b>Project Brainstorming</b></p>	<p>After going over the logistics of the assignment, give students a few minutes to individually brainstorm possible ideas for the assignment. Then have them talk about their ideas with a partner. Often talking with a partner can help them sort out their ideas and build up their confidence. At this time, students may call you over to check if their ideas are okay or not. You can also monitor student discussions to see if their project choices sound reasonable.</p>
<p>Students may not know what they need to focus on during the demo.</p> <p>Students who think they already know everything about the tools may not pay attention to key points.</p> <p><b>Pre-During-Post Tasks for Lectures</b></p>	<p>Before the demo, give a pre-listening task. This might involve asking students what they already know about what is coming in the demo. For example, if you are doing a demo about how to use tools, you might give students a handout with the pictures of the tools. Students could then work with a partner identifying the tools they know and saying how and why they are used. While they are talking, you can monitor to see how much they know. This can help you adjust your lecture. You might also hear mistakes or misconceptions, which you can address in your demo (Ex. “Some people think you should... but actually...”).</p> <p>During the actual demo, give a listening task. This might be some kind of note-taking activity on an outline or a set of pictures. For example, next to the pictures of the tools, students could write what it is used for and tips for using it.</p> <p>Provide time for students to check with a partner after the demo about what they heard or noticed. (Ex. “Tell your partner what you learned about ____.”) Talking to a partner can help students clarify information that they missed without feeling embarrassed by talking in front of the whole group. They may call you over at that time ask you for clarification. It also can help them remember and internalize the new information by explaining it.</p>

## Principles of Adult Learning

1. Learning is an **active process** that each student must go through. For students to be able to learn, they must engage in activities such as: *thinking, experimenting, remembering, asking questions, and making connections*.
2. Learning involves **integrating** new knowledge and skills to what students already know.
3. Learning can be helped or hindered by students' **prior knowledge** and **prior experiences**.
4. Student can benefit from **seeing/hearing demonstrations or models** of effective performance, so that they know what they have clear goals and criteria.
5. Students need meaningful **practice** in which they can work on parts of the whole and then integrate them.
6. Students need **feedback**, and also benefit from **assessing** their own work and the work of other, so that they can develop mental models of what is effective.
7. Students require a **safe learning environment** so that they can focus and feel comfortable engaging in activities.
8. Learning requires an **appropriate level of challenge** as students are learning, which means that the task requires effort but in an interesting or enjoyable way.
9. Learning often involves and is motivated by **social interaction** with peers and/or with an instructor.
10. Motivation involves seeing **progress** and how the knowledge or skills are **relevant** to their lives.
11. Students need some **autonomy** (i.e. freedom in how they study) and benefit from opportunities for **self-directed learning** (i.e. making decisions about their learning).
12. Students need opportunities to **reflect** on and **make sense of** how classroom activities and new skills and knowledge relate to their prior beliefs, attitudes, strategies, and preferences.
13. Students need to retain a positive **self-image**. They may avoid participating or engaging in a lesson so that others do not form negative opinions about them.
14. Students benefit from using study **strategies** to help them learn and remember new skills and information.

## References

- Ambrose, Susan A. *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010. Print.
- Carey, Benedict. *How We Learn: The Surprising Truth about When, Where and Why It Happens*. New York: Random House, 2015. Print.
- Deans for Impact (2015). *The Science of Learning*. Austin, TX: Deans for Impact.  
<http://deansforimpact.org/resources/the-science-of-learning/>
- Dirksen, Julie. *Design for How People Learn*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2016. Print.
- Ericsson, K. A., & Pool, R. (2017). *Peak: secrets from the new science of expertise*. Boston: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Schwartz, Daniel L., Jessica M. Tsang, and Kristen P. Blair. *The ABCs of How We Learn: 26 Scientifically Proven Approaches, How They Work, and When to Use Them*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton &, 2016. Print.
- Willingham, Daniel T. *Why Don't Students Like School? A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2010. Print.