Why English is Hard to Learn

(Anonymous)

The bandage was wound around the wound.
The farm was used to produce produce.
The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
We must polish the Polish furniture.
He could read if he would get the lead out.
The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to
present the present.
A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
I did not object to the object.
The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
They were too close to the door to close it.
The buck does funny things when the does are present.
A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
After a number of injections my jaw got number.
Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.
I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
The Native American took a bow after tying a bow in the string of his bow.

Which one of these students is the most creative and great at solving problems?
Whites can be self-righteous and burned by political correctness, Affirmative Action, and programs designed to teach cultural awareness.

So can African-Americans, Hmong, First Nations, Muslims, Hispanics, and Asians.

Would you be okay with your son dating one of these girls? Your daughter declaring one of these girls as her best friend?

“All that’s necessary for the forces of evil to win in the world is for enough good men to do nothing.”

-- Edmund Burke
If you speak up for respectful conversation, racial equity, the rights of immigrants or others from a religion or sexual orientation other than your own, you may lose friends, family members, and colleagues for a while… or longer.

Racism is learned. No one is born racist.

Racism is not insurmountable. Our job includes the securing of a non-racist future. Our response to racism in our schools must be clear, compassionate, and immediate. Settling for indifference exacerbates the problem – a matter of unintentional yet real racism.

“Students, teachers parents, and educators must expect, receive, and give affection (nurturing), protection (monitoring), and correction (accountability) while they take risks to become aware of and learn to resolve racial stress and conflict in daily social interactions. Without these ingredients, the risks of racial avoidance will be too great and the improvement of race relations and racial climates within schools too arduous to complete. Whites who begin conversations with others about race may give up during these conversations out of desperation and fear (Huber, 2013). If educators and parents give up due to fear, then students of color may be at risk for bearing the burden of this unresolved stress.”

-- Stevenson, P. 125
As you corruptoriate these words, make sure you flimp the scogglottora in proper schimilturn. You will only understand this presentation if hickitow glisps in baggaduanation. Use your joomering and begin.

_Huh?

Look, everyone else reading these words on this slide has begun his or her work, why haven’t you? Seriously, use your joomering and get started.

_What exactly do you want me to do?

Hnm. Maybe you’re not ready for the level of comprehension this presentation requires of participants.

_No, I really want to know. I can do whatever you ask, but I don’t know what it is. I’m actually a good participant and thinker, but I don’t use your words or have experience with your culture. Do not think of me as unintelligent!

Maybe I could find something from basic teacher texts for you if I only had the time. Just sit here a moment, while I explain this information to the other participants in the room and let them move ahead. I know this means you’ll be further behind than you already are, but it’s all I can offer right now.

_Reality Check

• We can offend ELL students.
• Some ELL students don’t receive appropriate instruction for their intellectual level.
• There’s a lot of anxiety when we don’t know the language or culture of the country in which we are living, so much so that many of us would find it hopeless to keep trying. It takes a tremendous amount of energy and patience every day to remain attentive and engaged when you’re first learning a language.
Remember:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Proficiency</th>
<th>Thinking Proficiency</th>
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Unfortunately, we tend to equate low language proficiency with low mental function as well. As a result, we don’t ask ELL students to make comparisons, analyze data, connect ideas, synthesize concepts, or evaluate performances. By not pushing ELL students this way, these students get further behind. What can we do to move our mindset past this conventional way of thinking?

Students in some cultural groups are reluctant to publicly ask questions, particularly of adults, and also may be hesitant to make conjectures. For students from cultures in which students are expected to wait to be asked before speaking, and where students are not expected to ask questions of elders, it is very important for the teacher to explicitly set the expectation for students to ask questions and express their opinions in the…classroom. Otherwise, classroom discourse becomes an exercise in trying to participate in a game where only others know the unwritten rules.

Debra Coggins, Drew Kravin, Grace Coates, Carroll Davila, Maria Dreux, *English Language Learners in the Mathematics Classroom*, Corwin Press, 2007, p. 82

**25 Practical Tips for Assisting ELL Students in the Regular Classroom**

1. Speak slowly and clearly.
2. Repeat important words/information several times.
3. Extend time periods for responding to prompts.
4. Avoid using idioms and colloquialisms until students are more advanced with our culture, or if we use them, take the time to explain them to ELL students.
5. Gesture and point to what we are referring.
6. Ask students to read text more than once.
7. Label objects and concepts in the classroom frequently.
8. Provide a lot of specific models, including a lot of hands-on experiences.
9. Use a lot of visuals: pictures, illustrations, graphs, pictographs as well as real objects during instruction.
10. Frequently demonstrate what we mean, not just describe it. From Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners (ASCD, 2006, p. 41), Hill and Flynn offer, “ELLs will have a greater chance of learning and recalling terms if they use their arms to represent the radius, diameter, and circumference of circles or the right, acute, and obtuse angles of polygons.”

11. Make ELL students feel like they belong and have a role to play in classroom learning.
12. Use a lot of thinking aloud or self-talk to model the sequence of doing the task or the language to use when thinking about the concept.
13. Use cooperative learning groups; let ELL students work with English proficient partners.
14. Sometimes let students draw responses instead of writing them; use more than one format for assessing students if the general approach won’t allow ELL students to accurately portray what they know.
15. Find ways to enable ELL students to demonstrate their intellectual skills and maintain dignity.

16. Give students very quick feedback on their word use.
17. Spend time before lessons building personal background in English language learners so they have an equal chance to attach new learning to what’s already in their minds.
18. Stay focused on how ELL students are doing toward their learning goals, not how they’re doing in relation to other students. We remove ll hope when we ceaselessly cajole ELL students into proficiency by comparing them to language proficient students. It’s a mistake to think they need more motivation or that parading others’ success in front of them motivates them; they desperately want to be proficient.
19. Recognize the difference between conversational language and academic language and that students need help with both; learning one does not mean you’ve learned the other. This means we go out of our way to explain terms like, “similar,” “math exercise,” “vocabulary,” “compare,” “supporting detail,” “analyze,” “instead of,” “not only,” “while,” “unlike,” “common,” “distinct,” “feature,” “trait,” “characteristic,” and, “equal.”
20. Take the time to learn about English language learners home countries.
21. Invite ELL students to learn and explore ideas in their own languages first, then translate them to English.

22. Provide ELL students with response stems, such as, “One thing that I learned was…”

23. Ask students to re-state classmates’ comments as they begin their own comments.

24. Relate concepts in story format before specific instruction.

Additional Ideas from, *English Language Learners in the Mathematics Classroom* (2007)

25. Incorporate all those vocabulary acquisition strategies you learned years ago as well as the ones that see today. You can’t have too many vocabulary building ideas! Seriously, we all should be vocabulary guru’s no matter what subject we teach.

Great Vocabulary Acquisition Ideas

**Shape Spellings**

**Taboo Cards**

**Vocabulary Rummy Cards**

**Competitive Conversation using Vocabulary**

**Word Walls**

**5-Word Continuum**

(Example: From Boiling to Freezing, from Making Words Their Own: Building Foundations for Powerful Vocabulary Allen and Nickelsen, 2008)
Word Morphology:
Teach Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes!

Mal – badly, poor
Meta – beyond, after, change
Mis – incorrect, bad
Mono – one
Multi – many
Neo – new
Non – not
Ob, of, op, oc – toward, against
Oct – eight
Paleo – ancient
Para – beside, almost
Penta – five
Per – throughout, completely
Peri – around
Poly – many
Post – after
Pre – before
Pseudo – false

The Frayer Model
[Frayer, Frederick, Klausmeier, 1969]

Essential Characteristics | Non-Essential Characteristics
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Examples | Non-examples

Concept Ladder
(J.W. Gillet, C. Temple, 1986, as described in Inside Words, Janet Allen)

Concept: __________
Causes of: __________
Effects of: __________
Language associated with: __________
Words that mean the same as: __________
Historical examples: __________
Contemporary examples: __________
Evidence of: __________
Literature connections made: __________
“Word Link”
1. Each student gets a word.
2. In partners, students share the link(s) between their individual words.
3. Partner team joins another partner team, forming a “word cluster.”
4. All four students identify the links among their words and share those links with the class.

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SDA - Subtle Difference Analysis

Identify words/concepts that are close in meaning, but not an exact match. Identify how they are similar and what makes them “just off” the match. Example pairs:

Outstanding/Exemplary
Confined/Restricted
Elaborate/Complex
Intelligent/Smart
Child/Offspring
House/Home
Mature/Wise
Late/Tardy
Soil/Dirt

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ELL’s need Authentic Talk -- Is this authentic?

Teacher: What is Ben doing?
Student: Ben is holding a picture of a whale in the ocean.
Teacher: Why is Ben holding a picture of a whale in the ocean?
Student: Ben is holding a picture of a whale in the ocean because he is interested in protecting whales in the ocean.
Teacher: Why is Ben interested in protecting whales in the ocean?
Student: Ben is interested in protecting whales in the ocean because he is afraid they will become extinct.
Teacher: What does the word, “extinct” mean?
Student: “Extinct” means there are no more animals of that kind on our planet.
Is this Conversation Authentic?

J.J.: Where can I buy soccer cleats? Mine are too old. I can’t turn fast in them. I’m the “sweep” this weekend.

Mickey: Wow, I hate playing sweep. I’m a mid-fielder.

J.J.: I can’t play mid-field very well. It’s too tiring. You have to be everywhere.

Mickey: Yeah, but you can get the other team off sides.

J.J.: Sometimes, but I don’t think about that a lot. So, the cleats?

Mickey: Oh yeah. Over at Fair Oaks Mall, there’s a sports store near the soft pretzel shop. Who are you playing? My twin sister plays goalie for a team. They might be playing you.

Avoid Painting All ELL Students with Same, Broad Brush Stroke!

Just like regular education students, all ELL students are not at the same point of development in language.

Some ELL students can respond to: “Show me…,” “Label the…,” “Circle the…,” “Where is…,” “Who has…,” and yes-no questions.

After a year or three, most ELL students can respond to: “Why…,” “How…,” “Explain…,” “What would happen if…,” “Why do you think…,” and “Decide if….”

Successful teachers respond strategically to this variance in ELL students, including those ELL students whose performance is outside these ranges.

At every stage of language acquisition, all of humanity thinks metaphorically. Hispanic, Greek, French, Philippino, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, American, Egyptian, Iraqi, Italian, and Norwegian people think metaphorically. To not include metaphors, analogies, pattern recognition, and critical thinking in ELL students’ learning experiences due to language struggles is like assuming they don’t know how to feed themselves because they don’t eat the same food as we do. It’s pompous, and it denies ELL students their basic instruction. We can’t save advanced thinking only for advance language proficiency students.
Bilinguals tend to outperform monolinguals on some tests of language and nonverbal intelligence, including the ability to think abstractly about language, or meta-linguistic awareness, and one kind of creativity known as divergent thinking. Other studies have shown that bilinguals are better at executive control, or the ability to solve problems that require us to ignore irrelevant information and to focus on what is important. They also have superior working memories, that is, a better ability to keep information in mind while solving a problem.

-- James Crawford and Stephen Krashen, English Learners in American Classrooms: 101 Questions, 101 Answers (Scholastic, 2007, p. 31)

“Time is another fundamental experience that can be conceptualized differently. We are used to thinking of time on a horizontal axis, but Mandarin Chinese also employs vertical scales.” (From Molecule to Metaphor, Feldman, p. 191)

What do we lose by not inviting such comparisons from non-English speaking students?

Sheltered Instruction

We only remember concepts that we can understand. So, teach subject content to ELL students in their native language whenever possible (Crawford and Krashen, 2007). As students become proficient in the specific content, place them in “sheltered instruction” experiences in which we focus predominantly on that content, but we weave in English as much as possible without diluting full content mastery.

“The goal in the minds of both students and the teacher is mastering the subject matter, not particular rules of grammar or vocabulary. In this way, students absorb academic English naturally and incidentally, while they are learning useful knowledge. If students are tested, they are tested on subject matter, not language.” (p. 24)
For Translations if your District Doesn’t have Translation Staff:

-- Translation Web sites. Look also for associations of language translators.
-- Use the student’s family members.
-- Contact the Embassy or Consulate in Washington, D.C. or local to you
-- Contact a bank or investment firm in your area that does a lot of international financing
-- Use local associations of individuals from the specific culture in question. They often have liaisons with the larger community and can contact their membership to find someone who can help with translations.
-- Use translation scanners -- often pocket-sized, that can translate almost any language into English and back again.

The Intellectual Life of Teachers

In some schools, there is a pervading, anti-intellectual bias.

It is more effective to build teacher professionalism and intellect than it is to enslave teachers to thoughtless automations.
If we find ways for educators to experience curiosity, awe, induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, resilience, empathy, extrapolation, juxtaposition, and other mental dexterities in their own development, they are better thinkers with our children. They can solve their own problems, connect with students, innovate their way to meaningful lessons, and persevere in the midst of challenge.

- Rick Wormeli

Pictured: Professor and author, Tan Oon Seng, Dean of Singapore’s National Institute of Education’s Office of Teacher Education. This is a photo from the February 2012 article, “Becoming a Thinking Teacher,” found at http://singteach.nie.edu.sg/issue34-teachered/From the article,

Build It, and They Will Think – A Starter Kit for the Intellectual Life of Teachers:

- Start or participate in an Edcamp experience. It’s the organic, unconference for those of us tired of meaningless in-service training where one listens passively to someone at the front of the room for hours.
- To find a dynamic Edcamp experience near you, visit http://edcamp.wikispaces.com/.
- (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7DwCI7fBGg).

Build It, and They Will Think – A Starter Kit for the Intellectual Life of Teachers:

• Create an actual committee dedicated to the intellectual life of teachers in the school or district. Identify courses at local museums/universities, invite guest speakers on diverse, innovative topics, and provide programs to cultivate teachers’ robust intellectual engagement as a companion to the many courses already offered in the district’s staff development catalog. Encourage teachers to take courses unrelated to the subjects they taught and to try something with which they have no previous experience.

• Play Minecraft and other world-building, interactive, on-line or single-player games.

• Study video production (you can get editing suites fairly cheaply today, even for Smart phones); then write and produce short education videos you and others can use in the classroom. Invite former students join you. If ambitious, begin your own channel of instructional videos on Youtube.com or use the videos to provide some on-line tutorials and flipped classroom experiences.
• Study motivation of today's students in greater depth. It takes intellectual heft to help students find meaning and motivation in assigned learning. Effective teachers don't yield to simplistic rewards/punishments or grading policies to motivate students' cognitive efforts. Specifically, seek information on self-efficacy, executive function, attribution theory, and self-determination theory.

• Require divergent thinking and inspired efforts in students' work. If we inspire students to challenge themselves and create products that are truly amazing for them, it inspires our own intellect.

• Reconsider unit sequences: A later one should be taught earlier, or perhaps instead of doing a bunch of disconnected units on different topics, we can move through all the topics historically. What did we know about cells, plants, animals, and the microscope in the 1920's, then in the 1940's, the 1960's, spirally through to the modern world?

• Mentor a new teacher as he or she prepares for their first or second year of teaching. It helps you reflect on your own practices.

• Unpack the learner outcomes you have to teach in terms of the evidence you'll accept for mastery of each one. This takes real intellectual fortitude and expertise. It often takes two to three years to do one year's worth of curriculum.

• Finally watch all those TED talks related to education you've been meaning to watch. There might be something you can use.

• Write for education publications. Analyzing what you do and explaining it and larger issues in a compelling way to others clarifies and transforms our thinking. If you're interested, I have a PowerPoint presentation with suggestions on how to write education articles/books that I can send you.

• Apply for National Board Certification. It's one of the most transforming and professional experiences you'll ever have. Each of us who has gone through the process claims that we are dramatically better teachers for having gone through the experience, regardless of whether or not we are Nationally Board Certified in the first attempt. To get details, visit www.nbpts.org. Most districts have support classes for National Board Certification – Join them.

• Get exercise. Getting the heart rate up, endorphins pumping, muscles loose, and oxygen to the brain does wonders for the mind. Walk, hike, jog, kayak, climb, bike, blade, dance, swim, lift weights, jump rope, play basketball, do workout DVDs, or do yoga, but get moving for 45 minutes or more at least three times a week. It might be time to get a personal trainer, if you can.

• Hydrate. Seriously water your brain and it will grow.

• Change your physical location. When we're in different countries or different regions of our own country or town, it stimulates the mind. On a smaller scale, rotate classrooms and meeting spaces for department/faculty meetings.
Try bike tourism. There are many agencies that facilitate bike tours, even for the occasional biker. Explore new geographic regions, cities, historical sites, and more.

• Change to a heart-healthy diet. It turns out what’s good for the heart is often good for the mind.
• Learn to use at least five technologies new for you: Twitter, virtual tours, VideoScribe, QR codes, apps, on-line tutorials, Google Docs, MOOCS, crowdsourcing, MIT Open Courseware, screencasts, VoiceThread, Fivver, Moodle, Prezi, iMovie, Edmodo, Promethean/Smartboards. Take an on-line course.
• Learn to play a new musical instrument, incorporate a new art technique, or speak a foreign language.

Learn to play chess or Bridge. Contact the American Contract Bridge League for instructors in your area.
• Take behind-the-scenes tours of museums, factories, wineries, theaters, government bodies.
• Design and market a new game or app for a chosen technology or facilitate students creating them.
• Coach Odyssey of the Mind (www.odysseyofthemind.com) or debate teams (www.debate.org, www.americanforensics.org/forensics) for competition.
• Learn to cook a specific cuisine or a variety of breads.
• Do logic puzzles (Start with www.logicpuzzles.org)
• Write your first short story or novel for publication.
• Journal or Blog on topics of interest twice a week.

• Get involved in a community theater productions, summer youth sports programs, or play in a local musical performance.
• Turn off the t.v. Listen to audio books or radio theater productions. Cultivate the theater of the mind.

• Try your hand at stand-up comedy at a local club.
• Participate in a group ropes course with colleagues and friends.
• Participate in Twitter chats and at least one online community.

• Join a church, synagogue, or mosque retreat.
• Start a book or philosophy discussion group.

Vulnerability is not weakness, and that myth is profoundly dangerous. Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change. - Brené Brown

If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice. - Rene Descartes
Write a letter to one of your favorite former teachers, reconnecting, but also reflect on your teaching practice with him or her.

Without mental catalysts, creativity atrophies and teaching suffers. When we pay attention to our intellectual lives, we make connections, spark insights, and remain mindful of the student’s journey and our role in it. We’re excited to greet the day, and problems are solvable. Igniting teacher intellect is a prime energy source for the learning dynamo in every classroom. It’s an overt act of school improvement.

Fifteen years into the 21st century, it is no longer acceptable to consider ELL students as someone else’s problem or beyond our training. They are just as much a part of the modern teacher’s daily commitment as taking attendance and making sure students have their supplies. We have effective tools for the regular education teacher to help ELL students find every success in our schools. It’s time to free them from what lack of language proficiency would impose.
References, Research, and More Ideas

2. Coggins, Debra; Kravin, Drew; Coates, Grace Davila; Carroll, Maria Dreux. English Language Learners in the Mathematics Classroom, Corwin Press, 2007
5. Flynn, Kathleen M., Hill, Jane D. Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners, ASCD, 2006