

Key Strategies for Instructors Teaching English to OSY Students

Get to Know Your Students

Increase your understanding of who your students are, their backgrounds, and educational experiences.

Determine if OSY have been in U.S. schools for several years and/or were educated in their country of origin and are literate in their native language. Learning these things early will provide you with a better understanding of their educational needs and ways to support them.



Bond with Your Students

Picture yourself as an OSY, sitting with a person from a different place, with a different culture and speaking another language. That's intimidating!

Simply addressing students by name, greeting each student, physically getting down to their level, and making a genuine effort to get to know them will go a long way in building strong relationships. It is important to remember, students will not learn from people that they do not like and respect.

Review the *OSY Student Profile* to glean important information about the student, including their age and last grade attended, current living conditions, and needs in the areas of health, advocacy, and transportation, in addition to their more immediate learning interests. If time allows, consider giving an interest inventory to the student to find out more about their interests and strengths that you might use to build rapport.

Be Aware of Their Social and Emotional Needs

It is key to understand more about their personal situations, interests, and needs. When OSY have support systems such as family close by, they may approach classes differently than a student who is here all alone and lives with friends. Learn about each one of your students to be able to tailor your classes to their interests, schedules, and needs.

Create a Safe Learning Environment

Students need to feel safe and secure in order to fully express themselves. By creating a positive learning environment, not just physically but emotionally, students will be more willing to try new things and, more importantly, practice their English language skills. Correct errors with compassion and empathy. Your students are bound to make mistakes - that's how they learn!



When speaking only in English, OSY will most likely need to translate a question in their head to their native language, formulate an answer, and then translate it back to English. That whole process can take a bit of time, so it is important when asking questions to give students a chance to think it through rather than demanding a quick immediate answer. One important strategy is offering OSY a class both in their native language and English.

Increase Your Understanding of First and Second Language Acquisition

Research and develop an understanding of the theories about language acquisition and the variables that contribute to language learning. This may help you reach your students more effectively.

Student Need to SWRL Every Day in Every Class

The domains of language acquisition - Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening (SWRL) - need to be equally exercised across content areas daily. It is essential to ensure that classes include activities that focus on the development of all domains of language acquisition. Try to address each domain in daily lesson plans.

Increase Your Understanding of English Language Proficiency

Social English language proficiency and academic English language proficiency are very different. A student may be more proficient in one versus the other. A student's level of academic English may be masked, for example, by a higher-level social language proficiency compared to academic language proficiency. For example, a student may be able to orally summarize the main events from their favorite movie, but struggle to recall the main elements that they read in a newspaper article.

Know the Language of Your Content

English has a number of words that have multiple meanings. Once a student learns and understands one meaning of a word, other meanings may not be apparent. Review the vocabulary of your content area often and check in with OSY to assure they know the words and possibly the multiple meanings associated with the words. For example, a "plot" of land in geography class versus the "plot" in a literature class; a "table" we sit at versus a multiplication "table." Remember that vocabulary is best learned and retained when it is taught and used in context.

Modeling

Do model for students what they are expected to do or produce, especially for new skills or activities. Explain and demonstrate the learning actions by sharing your thinking processes aloud. A teacher should show good teacher and student work samples. Modeling promotes



learning and motivation, as well as increasing student self-confidence—they will have a stronger belief that they can accomplish the learning task if they follow steps that were demonstrated. Do not just tell students what to do and expect them to do it.

Rate of Speech and Wait Time

Do speak slowly and clearly and provide students with enough time to formulate their responses, whether in speaking or in writing. Remember, they are thinking and producing in two or more languages. After asking a question, wait for a few seconds before calling on someone to respond. This “wait time” provides all students with an opportunity to think and process and gives especially OSY a needed period to formulate a response.

Do not speak too fast, and if a student tells you that they did not understand what you said, never repeat the same thing in a louder voice. Sometimes it may be helpful to try rephrasing it using different words or vocabulary that might be easier to understand.

Use of Non-Linguistic Cues

Do use visuals, sketches, gestures, and other non-verbal cues to make both language and content more accessible to students. Teaching with visual representations of concepts can be extremely helpful to ELs.

Do not stand in front of the class and lecture or rely on a textbook as your only visual aid.

Use Authentic Visuals and Manipulatives

These can be over- or under-utilized. Implement the use of authentic resources like menus, bus schedules, postcards, photographs, and video clips. Use of realia, especially local realia, can enhance student comprehension of complex concepts. It is an added plus when students actively use these resources in real-life applications.

Giving instructions

Do give both verbal and written instructions—this practice can help all learners, especially ELs. In addition, it is far easier for a teacher to point to the board in response to the inevitable repeated question, “What are we supposed to do?”

Do not act surprised if students are lost when you have not clearly written and explained step-by-step directions.

Check for Understanding

Do regularly check that students are understanding the lesson. After an explanation or lesson, a teacher could say, “Please put thumbs up, thumbs down, or sideways to let me know if this is clear, and it’s perfectly fine, if you don’t understand, or are unsure—I just need to know.” This last phrase is essential if you want students to respond honestly. Teachers can also have



students quickly answer on a post-it note that they place on their desks. The teacher can then quickly circulate to check responses. When teachers regularly check for understanding, OSY become increasingly aware of monitoring their own understanding, which serves as a model of good study skills. It also helps ensure that students are learning, thinking, understanding, comprehending, and processing at high levels.

Do not simply ask, “Are there any questions?” This is not an effective way to gauge what all of your students are thinking. Waiting until the end of class to see what people write in their learning log is not going to provide timely feedback. Also, do not assume that students are understanding because they are smiling and nodding their heads—sometimes they are just being polite.

Strategies that Match Language Proficiency

Knowing the level of English language proficiency at which your students are functioning academically is vital in order to be able to scaffold appropriately. Not all strategies are appropriate for all levels of language learners. Knowing which scaffolds are most appropriate takes time but will support language learning more effectively.

Encourage Development of Home Language

Do encourage students to continue building their literacy skills in their home language, also known as L1. Research has found that learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language as “transfer” occurs. This transfer may include phonological awareness, comprehension skills, and background knowledge.

While the research on transfer of L1 skills to L2 cannot be denied, it does not mean that we should not encourage the use of English in class and outside of class.

Do not “ban” students from using their native language in the classroom. Forbidding students to use their primary languages does not promote a positive learning environment wherein students feel safe to take risks and make mistakes. This practice can be harmful to the relationships between teachers and students, especially if teachers act more like language police than language coaches.

Practice Differentiated Teaching Strategies

Providing students with choices in learning increases student engagement in classes. Using hands-on learning activities that successfully differentiate by allowing students to choose how to display their own learning, creating activities that appeal to multiple learning styles, and leveling outcomes and activities based on ability helps OSY work more independently.



Availability of Resources

In addition to realia, provide students with multiple resources to aid in their learning. Items such as dictionaries, especially visual dictionaries, listening and recording devices, and books that appeal to multiple interests in both students' native language and English all enhance the learning experience. Take advantage of available technology, incorporating computers/tablets with language learning software and appropriate apps for use on smart phones.