Summer 2016

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The RI-TELLER

The Newsletter for Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners and ELL Professionals

5 Strategies to Help Beginning ELLs Listen and Speak Better

by Paul Boyd-Batstone, Ph.D.

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Recognizing the language behaviors of ELLs at each level will help you determine which instructional strategies will meet their needs. Beginning-level ELLs are in a silent period that is characterized by their quiet, active listening and their immediate need to acquire basic oral language for essential communication. Their silence can be perplexing to classroom teachers who want to immediately engage students with multiple questions, expecting to hear responses, but who just receive timid stares in return. But this is the beginning of the ELL's journey from silence to utterances to literacy to proficiency. It takes time to become proficient in another language. Like any long journey, it begins with those first tentative steps. Students at this stage predictably exhibit behaviors such as silence, offering yes/no responses or one- to two-word responses, the ability to name a few objects, and the ability to follow directions. The following strategies will help these students improve their speaking and listening skills.

Five Strategies for Beginning ELLs

The five strategies that follow are appropriate for beginning ELLs across grade levels; however, they may look different within specific grade ranges. As we will see below, they may be combined to address specific Common Core standards related to Listening and Speaking.

Employ simple "caretaker" speech.

It takes a degree of self-discipline to govern one's speech in order to enhance communication with beginning ELLs. There are several components to speech that come into play: pacing and emphasis, volume, and word choice. Pacing and emphasis refer to teachers needing to slow down conversational language and to place emphasis on key words in order to increase the ELL's comprehension. *continued page 2*

Promoting Classroom-Based Discussions With ELLs: Five Strategy-Packed Teacher Resources for You!

by Dr. Nancy Cloud

1. **Academic Conversations with ELLs: Series Overview**

This video shows how to promote academic language, with commentary from Jeff Zwiers and other language experts. Ties academic discussions to Common Core demands. Other videos in the series include: Engaging ELLs in Academic Conversations and Why Are Academic Discussions so Important for our ELLs?
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/improve-conversation-skills-ells-ousd

2. **Key Strategies for Developing Oral Language—Part 3 of ELLs and Academic Conversations**

This video resource mentions three strategies: Adapting Activities to Include Authentic Talk; Using Activities that Develop Strong Language and Using Strong Discussion Prompts. Each strategy is further amplified with sample activities (Interacting with Complex Texts/Jigsaw; 1-3-6 protocol; debrief circles, etc.) that are modeled in video clips.
https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2014/10/29/strategies-for-developing-oral-language-ousd/

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At times in the hectic pace of the classroom, teachers succumb to the temptation to talk fast in order to "cover the material." Rapid speech without emphasis on key vocabulary will be heard as meaningless noise and will therefore be lost, misunderstood chatter. In addition, volume control is essential to tune into a student's comfort level. Many teachers, without realizing it, use extremely loud "teacher voices" to project to an entire classroom of students. Volume is culturally determined and to a beginning ELL, it can be quite distressing to feel like the teacher is yelling for some unknown reason. In many cases, a calming, low-volume voice will have a positive effect and increase the ability of the ELL to pay attention. Finally, using simple sentences and emphasizing and repeating key vocabulary will increase comprehension. When planning a lesson, identify the key vocabulary to teach and use in speech with students. As you speak with students, use simple sentences such as "Look at this ball. The ball is round. The ball is round like something. What is round like a ball?" (note key words: ball and round).

Use realia and visuals

The value of using realia (real objects) and visuals (such as pictures, diagrams, and models) cannot be over emphasized with all ELLs, but particularly with beginning ELLs. Show something first, then follow by labeling it with words. Words, by themselves, are abstract representations of objects and images. As literate adults, we see words as very meaningful. However, to a beginning ELL, a word card displayed without an object or picture to give meaning and context can be as incomprehensible to them as Chinese characters are to an English-only speaker. Whenever possible, use concrete objects to express meaning. Display items related to instruction and discussion topics. Providing realia has the added benefit of tapping into multiple senses such as touch, sight, smell, sound, and even taste. When the senses are tapped, comprehension and memory are increased. At times, showing a picture, a diagram, or a model is more appropriate or logistically easier. For example, when teaching about anatomy (such as the features of the nervous system), it is logistically much more feasible to display visuals, diagrams, and models. Allow students the opportunity to illustrate their thinking with their own sketches and drawings. They do not need to be pristine or highly artistic drawings; they just need to communicate their ideas. Give the student the opportunity to recognize the realia or visual first in his or her own language; then label the item or picture in English. It is a more efficient use of instructional time when meaningful items and pictures give context to the learning. Just remember to show first; label second.

Show meaning with gestures and Total Physical Response

Because beginning ELLs are silent and do not produce much in the way of oral speech in English, instruction, in large part, will be direct and explicit. James Asher (1969) developed a highly effective strategy in the form of following explicit directions called Total Physical Response (TPR). To understand TPR, think of the game "Simon Says..." without the element of trickery involved. The teacher models actions of meaningful words or phrases and says them in command form. In response, students act out the directions. They can repeat the commands orally if they are able. For example, picture a teacher stepping forward with students at his side and on the count of three he says, "lunge forward," and he, with the students, strike a pose of lunging forward. The participants show their comprehension by acting out the forward lunge; again, they may or may not have said the command aloud with the teacher. Using realia for props can enhance this strategy. Picture using a scarf with the following commands: "Hold the scarf up high. Drop the scarf and watch it float downward. Toss the scarf in the air. Tie the scarf into a knot." Four complete sentences were just made comprehensible to a beginning ELL when a command was spoken and an object was used. The strategy is enhanced even further when the commands are numbered on a sheet of poster paper and displayed for all to read. As ELLs become more fluent in the written commands, they can pair up with a partner to practice the language, trading off who will say the commands and who will follow the directions.

Avoid forced speech

Novice teachers sometimes feel uncomfortable in a linguistically diverse classroom when ELLs talk to each other in their native languages. They may demand that all students "Speak English!" thinking erroneously that if they can't understand what an ELL is saying in his or her native language, it must be suspicious. Consider the flaws in this kind of thinking. First of all, for a teacher to demand that the ELL "Speak English!" is as silly as demanding that an English-only speaker "Speak Japanese!" If only they could speak the target language on demand, this command would make sense. But they can't at this stage of language development. This is particularly disconcerting for the beginning ELL who is in a silent period in English. Furthermore, and just as importantly, allowing an ELL to speak in his or her native language fosters better learning and thinking. Consider planning *continued page 3*

a space in your lesson when students explain the instruction to each other in their own language. If they have that opportunity, they can discuss the learning at a deeper level than they are able to at this time in English. Over time, this becomes less and less of an issue; but particularly at the beginning stages of language development the native language is a resource for acquiring English.

Select attractive books and read with students

Reading books and well-illustrated materials with beginning ELLs is helpful on multiple levels. On a visual level, the students see what is being read through quality illustrations. On an auditory level, the students hear the teacher model how to read and pronounce the key words in the text. The more comprehensible the selected text, the higher the degree of student understanding and learning will take place. Conversely, providing beginning ELLs with texts that are dense with words and have few illustrations will cause difficulties. With such texts, students' participation is reduced and the learning diminishes. This refers back to the above strategy of using realia and visuals. Address meaning first when selecting texts to use for instruction.

Addressing specific Listening and Speaking CCSS

The five strategies above meet the Common Core's listening and speaking standards. Listening and speaking standards are an appropriate starting place for beginning ELLs because their initial language development is predominantly oral. The goal is to develop oral comprehension and a working vocabulary to participate in classroom discussions and projects. Let's take a closer look at how to implement the strategies to meet specific grade-level standards. Note that the following standards exhibit a progression in complexity that is solely based on grade level. Unfortunately, language level is not tied to grade level. A beginning ELL can be a kindergartener or a twelfth grader. As stated in the Key Design Considerations of the CCSS, "it is possible to meet the standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening without displaying native-like control of conventions and vocabulary" (CCSS, 2010, p. 6). Therefore, specific adaptations need to be provided using specific or combined strategies listed above.

Grades K–2 Listening and Speaking Standard #2b

- Kindergarten: Understand and follow one- and two-step oral directions.
- Grade 1: Give, restate, and follow simple two-step oral directions.
- Grade 2: Give and follow three- and four-step oral directions.

Applicable strategies: Use "caretaker" speech to provide clear and comprehensible directions. Also use Total Physical Response to model and participate in putting commands into action. As students become more fluent, they are able to give and restate directions and TPR commands to partners and groups of peers.

Grades 3–5 Listening and Speaking Standard #1c

- Grade 3: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Grades 4–5: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

Applicable strategy: Discuss selected illustrated texts so that beginning ELLs can point to pictures that give image to their ideas. Allow students to sketch their thoughts so that they can share their ideas and others can give words to their thinking.

Grades 6–8 Listening and Speaking Standard #2b

- Grade 6: Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
- Grade 7: Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
- Grade 8: Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

Applicable strategies: Establish roles in small groups for discussion such as recorder to take notes, governor to ensure discussions are collegial, and illustrator to draw a picture of what the group discussed. Using visuals in this way actively involves the beginning ELL in giving an illustrative voice to the discussion.

Grades 9–12 Listening and Speaking Standard #2b

- Grades 9–10: Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
- Grades 11–12: Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed

Applicable strategies: Don't force speech in English.

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5 Strategies to Help Beginning ELLs Listen and Speak Better
continued

Allow students the opportunity to discuss complex topics in their own language first; then set goals and deadlines to provide a representation of the conclusions in an illustrated format. In addition, have small groups come up with civil and collegial ways to foster clearer communication among all language levels including beginning ELLs. For example, suggest rules such as every new idea presented to the group must be accompanied by an illustration that successfully communicates the idea. In this way, English-only speakers will be compelled to make their ideas comprehensible to all students in the group, not just to the fluent English speakers.

Conclusion

These five strategies help beginning ELLs meet the Common Core. They were selected because they can be applied across grade levels with minor accommodations. They foster a start in the progression from silence to developing proficiency in English.

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Paul Boyd-Batstone, The Keynote speaker for the Spring RITELL Conference, is a professor of literacy development and Chair of the Department of Teacher Education at California State University, Long Beach. He has worked for more than 30 years with diverse student populations and teacher development at all levels. He is the author of a number of books on English language development and early literacy for English Language Learners and classroom assessment. His most recent books are *Helping English Language Learners Meet the Common Core: Assessment and Instructional Strategies, K-12* (2013); and *Teaching ELLs to Read: Strategies to Meet the Common Core K-5 Language Literacy and Learning.*

Check out the New and Improved RITELL.org

We're redesigning the RITELL website, with a goal to provide easy access to useful links and resources for you.

Resources include Language and Country Projects to aid teachers in understanding the culture and linguistic backgrounds of their ELLs, Booklist Projects to help you use culturally linguistic books for your classes, along with many other web links and resources. If you know of a particularly good textbook, website or other resource we should include, please contact us!

Promoting Classroom-Based Discussions with ELLs: Five Strategy-Packed Teacher Resources for You!

continued

3. **Engaging ELLs in Academic Discussions: Talk Moves in Academic Discussions**
This video demonstrates how to help ELLs participate in academic discussions. Middle school examples are shown from an 8th grade class in Oakland CA.
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-ells-to-participate-in-discussions-ousd

4. **Teaching Your Students How to Have a Conversation**
The article provides 8 tips designed to encourage speaking and active listening in classrooms.
http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-your-students-conversation-allen-mendler

5. **For Adult Educators: Group Discussion Skills, by the British Council, BBC (article)**
This site covers the following points for adult educators:

--why teach group discussion skills?
--types of discussion
--useful sub-skills for students
--setting up group discussions
--giving and encouraging feedback

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/group-discussion-skills

Dr. Nancy Cloud, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Educational Studies at Rhode Island College, is a specialist in ESL, bilingual and dual language education.

Adult Education Practitioner Award (Adult/Higher Education)

Awarded every Fall Conference, the recipient for this award:

- Demonstrates high levels of commitment and makes significant contributions to the field.

- Demonstrates high levels of professionalism, collegiality and cooperation.

- Goes above and beyond to help ELL students and professionals in the field of Adult Education.

See past AE winners on Ritell.org and nominate someone you know for this year's award!

Nancy A. Carnevale Grant for teachers of ELLs (Pre K-12)

Nancy Carnevale, M.Ed., a National Board Certified Teacher of English as New Language (ENL) invested her 38-year career in supporting urban ELLs and their families. She exemplified the "can-do" philosophy. She serves as a model of best practices in urban education for ELLs.

Every Spring Conference, The Nancy A. Carnevale Grant is awarded to classroom teachers who exemplify Nancy's life and career. The $500 award may only be used to fund a project which meets the grant criteria

The grant winner for 2016 was Erlin Rogel, an ELL teacher at Gilbert Stuart Middle School in Providence. His grant, Project Roots, will have his ELL students engaging in research to explore their native country's influence and history in their local Rhode Island community. This research will include visits to colleges, city archives, interactions with diverse visiting scholars, and the exploration of academic databases. They will produce an informative essay and a presentation that will showcase their findings. In addition, the project will culminate in a public exhibition of their work at the local public library. Erlin is invited to share the exhibition of his work at the Spring 2017 RITELL Conference.

Carnevale Award Winner Erlin Rogel along with Award Presenter Cathy Fox

Strategies to Help Adult Learners Overcome Barriers for Participating in Discussions

By Kiyomi Donnelly & Carolina Bisio

Classroom discussion on readings is an essential activity across the curriculum regardless of learners' age and their literacy level. Discussion on readings will not only help learners strengthen their reading skills and deepen their understanding of the reading materials, but also expose them to ideas of others. By responding to ideas of others – whether to restate, clarify, elaborate on, or defend the initial idea– learners can deepen the level of their thoughts, thus developing critical thinking skills. Classroom discussion on readings is also vital because it provides opportunities to collaborate with others to construct meaning. By sharing varying perspectives and by activating their existing knowledge, learners work in collaboration to construct a fully developed idea that cannot be drawn by one individual learner. Although classroom discussion on reading clearly promotes learners' engagement, for many adult English learners, actively participating in discussion can be challenging for various reasons.

What are the main barriers that might be preventing our learners to actively participate in group discussions? What are some strategies that can be used to overcome those barriers?

One of the challenges learners face is having *limited reading comprehension.* In order for ESL learners to participate in a discussion based on an assigned reading, they need to clearly understand the reading they will be talking about. Some effective strategies that will help learners improve their reading comprehension are: front loading of target vocabulary; providing background information (statistics, visuals, etc.); teaching reading strategies (title/ structure/ identifying main idea etc.); activating student's attitude and/or feelings toward the topic; teaching grammar patterns (structure for emphasis, e.g. "*What* + S + V+ be+…etc.); and using visual quizzes.

Similarly, another challenge ESL learners might experience is having *limited speaking and listening skills*. In order to help students improve these skills, teachers can implement strategies such as teaching formulaic language (such as sentence starters), providing learners with explicit grading instructions using rubrics, and preparing mini-pronunciation lessons to work, for example on minimal pairs.

Another very important barrier that ESL learners need to overcome in order to become more successful participants in discussions is *cultural differences.* Are ESL students comfortable with the American class expectations? What cultural characteristics of their home countries and educational settings might be interfering with their participation in class discussions?

Let's take a look at what some Latino learners might be experiencing. The following chart summarizes the educational experiences Peruvian and Guatemalan students might bring with them:

Peru	Guatemala
Strict focus on correctness often results in students' fear of risk-taking.	Lecture accompanied by dictation.
Learners might think is better to provide no answer than to be wrong.	Students are not encouraged to actively participate.
Some teachers still hold the view of "teachers as God" and "students as ignorant".	Students don't feel comfortable asking for clarification of concepts not clearly understood.
Students enjoy working in groups. In more affluent schools, students compete with each other for top positions.	Students enjoy working in groups: sense of taking an active part in their education.

There are similar teaching practices in other Latino countries such as Honduras, Nicaragua, and Ecuador where classes tend to be very teacher-centered. Although we should not overgeneralize this characteristic and assume that all Latinos or that all learners from one particular Latino country have had this educational experience, this is important information that helps ESL teachers understand why these learners might not feel comfortable participating actively in class.

Many learners from East Asian countries also need our support to overcome cultural differences. One cultural barrier that prevents them from participating in discussions is the concept of *face*. *Face* in East Asian countries is an image and identity that others grant, therefore, highly susceptible, and collectivist cultures emphasize the importance of saving face. In order to save their *face*, they avoid a situation in which their image can be harmed by a negative *continued page 7*

evaluation of others, meaning that they remain quiet unless they know "correct" answers that they can say with "correct" pronunciation in a grammatically "correct" way. For many of them, making mistakes in front of others is an excruciatingly painful experience. In addition to saving their own *face*, saving the teacher's face is also important to them. They often avoid asking questions or asking for clarification of concepts because this indicates that the teacher was not clear enough.

For many learners from East Asian countries, asking questions can embarrass their teachers and can be a threat to the teacher's face. Some learners, and those from Japan in particular, will choose to remain quiet to save the face of their classmates. Even when learners know what to say and how to say it, if they sense that their classmates don't know the answer to a question asked by a teacher, they remain silent in order not to outperform their classmates and to avoid creating a situation in which their peers would be embarrassed. As seen above, saving *face* is a salient cultural characteristic in East Asian countries which hinders the learners' acculturation process and impedes their second language acquisition.

The following list describes different strategies to promote engagement and participation in our culturally diverse classrooms:

1. ***Teaching class expectations and benefits:***

ESL teachers should let their students know how and why participating in a certain activity will help them improve their language proficiency. Learners should understand that classroom interactions give them the opportunity to receive comprehensible input and feedback from their interaction partners; furthermore, by interacting with partners and the teacher, learners can focus on their own linguistic output. When students work collaboratively in class, they get chances to communicate with others by understanding and being understood. Learners will be more willing to participate in activities when they understand what the rationale is for the different types of tasks that teachers assign (discussion, dialogues, small group talk) and the ways that these activities can help them build their language skills.

2. ***Create a warm climate in the classroom:***

In order to create a warm climate in culturally diverse classrooms, teachers should help their students develop pride in their heritage, establish an atmosphere of acceptance, provide opportunities for learners to teach a few words in their own language, and notice important dates of celebrations in the students' home countries, among others routines and activities.

3. ***Ensure equal participation in class:***

Teachers should implement strategies and activities that will provide everyone with a chance to speak. See the speaking assignments in the *Activity Chart* (see next page.) Teachers can easily modify and adapt these activities to their learners' particular needs. More or less scaffolding can be provided for each activity depending on the levels of English proficiency of the students participating in the activity.

By implementing activities such as the ones described above, we are not only providing all learners with opportunities to practice speaking, but we are also allowing students to discuss and rehearse responses in small groups. This helps students feel more comfortable and confident when they need to contribute during whole group participation.

Kiyomi Donnelly &Carolina Bisio
Co-Chairs, RITELL International Voices Special Interest Group

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Agree to Disagree *(Dave's ESL Café Idea Cookbook)*	**Fluency circles** *(SIOP)*	**Carousel** *(SIOP)*
Divide the room into four corners: agree; somewhat agree; somewhat disagree; and disagree. Then, the teacher makes a statement based on the text being read. For instance, based on this session's main topic, the teacher could say something like "The Agree to Disagree activity found on Dave's ESL Café Idea Cookbook is an activity that will help learners feel more comfortable to participate in discussions in class". The students move to the corner that best depicts how they feel about the statement. The students in each corner have a few minutes to discuss why they feel this way and then, their group presents their idea to the rest of the class. For this activity you can't really predict how many students there will be in each corner, but if you find a large group in any one corner, you can subdivide that group to ensure that all students have a chance to explain why they chose that corner.	The class is divided into two groups. Half the class forms a circle looking out (the inside circle), and the other half stand in front of someone in the inner circle (the outside circle). The teacher places a piece of paper on the floor with one question based on the assigned reading. The students in the inner circle answer first while the outer circle listens. Then, the outer circle responds while the inner circle listens. The teacher can establish a set time for each question and give a signal to rotate. Another option is to let the students give a signal (such as thumbs up) to let the teacher know that they are done with that question. When all students have shared, the teacher gives the signal to rotate. The inner circle rotates right and the outer circle rotates left. This way, all students get to discuss all the questions on the floor with a different partner each time.	Post six posters around the room, each with a question or topic based on the assigned reading. Students number off 1-6. Students move to their poster, discuss the question and write as many answers as they can or everything they know about the topic. At the signal, students move to the next poster. They read the question and the answers on the poster, discuss, and add as many answers as they can. Continue until students have visited all the posters. The teacher has been walking around being a passive observer/listener and providing assistance if needed. Once all students have visited all stations, the teacher can lead a whole class discussion on each poster to check whether each one has been correctly answered by students as they walked around and discussed in groups.

Activity Chart

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The goal of International Voices is to create a collaborative community of ESL/EFL professionals who share the same career needs and interests. Meeting twice a year, the SIG serves the growing diversity of ELL professionals from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Rhode Island. Through collaboration and involvement, International Voices offers a space where members can discuss pressing work issues, share best practices, instructional materials and potential job leads.

Contact Carolina Bisio at carobisio@gmail.com for more

Get Them Talking

by Mary Steele

Whether our students chat with friends, discuss the news of the day, debate ways to solve a problem, or interview for a new job, they need the extended speaking and listening skills demanded of good group communication. Sadly, many ELLs graduate school with little experience of group discussions or arguing their ideas, something that leaves them unprepared for college or careers. Luckily for teachers, there are a number of ways to support the development of oral language by recreating naturally occurring, everyday discussions in the classroom.

Begin by thinking about the sorts of sub-skills you tap when you are part of group chat and list them. Typically, students will need to analyze, persuade, control emotions, and to use functional language. Next, make a list of group situations that occur naturally and require clear communication, such as making decisions, giving an opinion on a topic, creating something, or solving a problem. Some ways to marry your lists and bring them to life in the classroom include:

Analyze

- Give students the topic individually and ask them to brainstorm or mind-map all possible subtopics. Pick a partner for each student.
- Students swap notes and assess the relevance of their partner's subtopics.
- Together, the students make a fresh list or mind-map and discuss how their ideas might be linked with examples or reasons.

Persuade

- Give groups of students the activity of deciding which candidate should get a job. Ask them to create a list of 7 adjectives describing the perfect employee. Regroup the students and ask them to persuade the other members of the new group why their selection is the best while making a second, negotiated list. The group members who retain the most from their original lists are the winners. Note and discuss the useful phrases you hear the students use during negotiations.

Control Emotions

- Practice by giving students a controversial topic and asking whether they agree, disagree, or have no opinion. Make note of their main arguments. Divide students into groups, ensuring there is a mix of opinions in each group. Monitor and give feedback on the ensuing discussions, remembering that the aim for this exercise is to keep voices low and emotions controlled.

Use Functional Language

- On your own or with student input, create a handout identifying functional language under categories such as 'Giving Reasons', 'Giving Your Opinion', 'Agreeing and Disagreeing'. Make sure students have time to review the appropriate section of the list and consider their language before launching any group discussion.

Reviewing prior learning is one of many keys to successful group discussions. Others include using one set of explicit ground rules, giving planning time, choosing topics of interest to your students, ensuring a balance between input and practice, using a variety of types of discussions, varying group size and members, as well as structuring and varying the way feedback is given.

When giving feedback, we lay a better foundation for learning if we value communication of ideas over grammatical correctness. Think of your own learning: doesn't oral language play a powerful role? Was that oral language always perfectly proper? Probably not—but still you learned and remembered content.

Teachers hoping to foster authentic, original and extended conversations should consider giving whole class discussion a rest. Try using activities that force students to develop a stronger and clearer answer, as they talk to different partners successively. In one model, the teacher introduces a question and asks students talk to three different partners or in different groups. Critical to this strategy is that students are not allowed to say the same thing each time; they must borrow language and ideas of previous partners to improve upon, clarify, and evolve their answer each time they share it.

Evaluation is critical to any good conversation and using strong, specific discussion prompts can support ELLs as they practice ranking, prioritizing, and choosing. For instance, if a teacher is looking looking for evidence of a theme, she should prompt students to rank the evidence from strongest to weakest rather than asking them to create a list. This strategy will deliver deeper critical thinking and better conversation.

Pushing ELLs toward the expression of deeper, more complex responses is also behind a district-wide strategy known as Quality Academic Discussion (Zwiers and Crawford, 2011). Teachers know that ELL instruction focused on 30-60 minutes of English *Continued page 10*

Language Development each day is not enough to help learners meet grade-level content standards. To encourage language-rich instruction embedded in content areas *throughout* the day, educators are looking to academic discussion that demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Purposeful and sustained conversations about content
- Anchored in grade-level texts and tasks
- Students work together to co-construct knowledge and negotiate meaning.
- Students use "talk moves", such as asking for clarification, paraphrasing, and building on or disagreeing with previous ideas.

Proponents of academic discussions say they help students develop reasoning skills and deepen their understanding of content and multiple perspectives. Specifically, they contend academic conversations are critical to language and content development because ELLs need language models in varied contexts; emerging bilinguals need opportunities to apply learned grammar, vocabulary, and techniques such as persuasion to communicate ideas; and students will benefit from multiple opportunities to hear new content explained and interpreted.

Alas, you can bring your student to opportunity but you can't make him talk. We leave you with a few important ways to support your ELLs and encourage their full participation in academic discussions:

- Give more time to paired conversations
- Use discussion strategies that require everyone to talk, such as a Round Robin or Discussion cards
- Expect and require extended responses. Ban the one-word answer! Resist the urge to finish their sentences! Instead, provide wait time before asking, "How so?" or "Why?" or "Can you give me an example?"
- The above information is compiled from three online articles.

You can find the entire articles as well as links to more helpful resources and strategies at:

https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2014/10/24/academic-discussions-and-english- language-learners-ousd/

www.teachingchannel.org/blog/ 2014/10/29/strategies-for-developing-oral-language-ousd/

https://www.teachingenglish. org.uk/article/group-discussion-skills

Mary Steele is a longtime journalist earning her M.Ed. in TESL at Rhode Island College.

Show your support by for RITELL by Purchasing a t-shirt, hooded sweat shirt, pens & pencils, mug, and other merchandise at our next conference!
All proceeds help pay for conference costs.

New RITELL Coordinating Council

Incoming RITELL Coordinating Council!

Election for the new Council was held April 30, 2016. To serve for the next 3 years, starting this August, are returning members:

Holly Bubier
Flavia Molea Baker
Doug Norris
Michael Paul
Jessica Quaranto

Also serving are new members:

Megan Abreu
Rania Aghia
Christine M. Byrne
Laura E. Faria-Tancinco
Sarah Northup
Anke Steinweh

Roles for each Council member will be determined this fall. Thanks for all those members who voted at the conference!

Council members with Guest Presenters from the Conference

Among their activities, Coordinating Council members organize and work at RITELL Conferences, manage the www.ritell.org website, advocate and present position statements for Teachers of ELLs, help form and support Special Interest Groups, and actively recruit new RITELL members.

Council members manning the registration table.

Special thanks to outgoing Council members for your 6+ years of exemplary service:

President: Dina Silvaggio
Vice President: Chris Bourret
Membership Secretary: Jane George
Treasurer: Lauren Bentley
Advocacy Representative: Suzanne DaSilva

The Pragmatics of Teaching Pragmatics

by Laura Vawter

Ishihara & Cohen (2014) in their book *Teaching and Learning Pragmatics: Where Language and Culture Meet,* describe pragmatics as a cognitive process as well as a “social phenomenon” (p. 7). We may be more familiar with pragmatics as how a student asks for their grade to be changed, how they apologize for being late to class, or how they thank their classmate for sharing their crayons. As English Language Teachers we view teaching pragmatics as instructing students to use phrases like “Thank you” and “Can I” when they make a request. Yet, pragmatics is so much more than language actions. It’s also part of our identity as English native speakers. Pragmatics is knowing that, when I ask directions from a stranger, I not only use phrases like "Excuse me" and "Do you know", but I also understand the cultural situations that require these forms over others."

But what does it mean for a student to use or know pragmatics? Ishihara & Cohen (2014) insist that pragmatics be made an integral part of the ESL classroom, but how do you go about introducing such a theoretical concept to English Language Learners? As part of a class project, I decided to incorporate pragmatics into my curriculum to find out.

What I discovered in this process of using pragmatics is that students not only get a picture of American culture, but they get an “insider” look at how language and culture affect our identity.

Most students I teach are from China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia The pragmatic topics I chose to cover in my class were apologies, requests, and compliments, since I believe that the way Americans perform these language tasks are unique or unusual from many of my students’ cultural perspectives. However, I found that many of my students could easily draw parallels between the American pragmatics and their own cultural/linguistic patterns.

An example lesson I did centered on requests. I found that this topic was very beneficial for my students, specifically from South Korea, who perceive the American way of making requests as very indirect. It was also very beneficial for my students from Saudi Arabia and Iran, who see the requests that Americans perceive as difficult or embarrassing, compared to the common or typical way or asking in their countries and cultures."

When teaching these lessons on pragmatics I found it extremely beneficial to first explain to my students that my explanations of requests within American culture, especially on difficult requests American’s make and receive, are simply from my experience and not the experience of all Americans. I believe that this is the correct tone to set for a discussion on pragmatics since, as I soon discovered, my students have contrasting perspectives of pragmatics in their own languages and cultures.

To begin the discussion on requests, I stated by defining pragmatics as a combination of language and culture- “it’s not just what you say but how you say it in American culture”. Next, I asked the students to give me examples of common requests they hear or heard recently. For some students this was difficult, so I gave an example. After writing “Can I have/borrow a pen?” on the board, the students were able to give countless examples of requests to me- everything from “Can I see your notes?” to “Can we facetime more?” To give my students an even greater idea of the concept of making requests, I gave them a list of people and had them brainstorm, in groups, requests they heard for each person.

- ★ Sales clerks
- ★ Waitress’/Waiters
- ★ Students
- ★ Teachers
- ★ Parents
- ★ Friends
- ★ Girlfriend/boyfriend

As the students reported their ideas to the class, I saw it as beneficial to distinguish for the students the difference between a command and a request. Some of my students offered examples of “Finish the assignment by Friday” as a request from a professor. So, at this point, I pointed out that the use of modals like “Can you” or “Would you be able to” are often indicators of requests.

After the students had a chance to share their findings, I asked them to use the examples they came up with and make a list of phrases or language they could use to make a request in certain situations. Here, the students were able to identify the use of the models of “may” and “could” in requests. After this, I gave them a list of common language items, including modals, often heard with requests and we went over the pronunciation of each. *continued page 13*

Language of Request (Acts)	
Could you...	Would you mind if....
Are you...	I wanted to...
Would you...	May/Might I...
Will you...	I was wondering if...
I would appreciate If...	Sorry to bother you, but...
Is it ok if...	Would it be ok if...

From this discussion and practice, I felt that the students had a clear understanding of requests. So, I proceeded to use Ishihara & Cohen's (2014) model of using an attention getter, action, and support when making a request. I used these sentences as models of this three step process:

A. Terry, *can you remind me later to bring the book for you on Monday?* **Otherwise I will forget**.
B. Excuse me, **I hope I'm not interrupting**, but *could you tell me where the train station is*?
C. Can I ask you a favor? *Could I borrow your notes?* **I'm really stuck on this problem**.
D. Hi! Wow that's a really nice car! **If it's no trouble**, *do you mind moving it* **so I can pull out of my driveway**?

After I explained these steps, students did an info-gap activity, filling in sentences with the missing "attention getter", action (request) and support. Providing these examples to students also brought to the discussion how requests change with the audience. I explained this change in requests by describing the different types of supports we use. Some of the supports we discussed were giving an explanation or reason (A & C) giving a "fake apology" (B) or giving a compliment (D). Then, I explain that usually we use compliments and apologies for strangers or difficult requests. Finally, I gave examples of requests Americans don't like being asked or asking:

Richards, Hull & Proctor, Interchange Full Contact Level 3

This was a great opportunity to explore what common requests students make in their culture and what requests are difficult for them to ask or be asked, to compare cultural similarities and differences with situational requests in the US. This chart also spurred lots of questions from students about how Americans respond to each of these requests.

I made a point to give my personal experience about each, and make sure the students had a solid amount of time to express their perspectives on each one. Interestingly enough, many of my Chinese students agreed that asking for money is seen as a difficult request and that, as far as making a request to stay at someone's house, it is impolite to give a specific length of stay. This discussion provided my students with an opportunity to contrast making a request in their culture and showed that language is negotiable. It also demonstrated to my students that requests can differ between individuals and there are many "right ways" to make a request.

I found an examination of dialogues helpful after this to give students an example of how Americans respond. I taught this lesson around Valentine's Day, so I used thematic examples from www.succeedsocially.com as well as from www.as.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish:

Martin: Hey! Do you have plans this weekend? I was thinkin' I might go see the new Star Wars film this weekend, if you're free ...
Claire: Oh, erm... yeah OK. I'm not sure about Star Wars but...
Martin: Well, we don't have to see Star Wars but...
Claire: No, that would be nice. Do ya wanna meet there or...
Martin: Well, why don't I give you my number and you can text me with a film that you'd like to see – and what time you wanna go...

For assessment of student learning, I gave time for the students to demonstrate what they learned. I divided the students into groups and gave each group situations for them to make a dialogue about using what we had learned about requests. After practicing in groups, I had each group share out to the class one dialogue for groups to compare.

You are waiting for your car to get repaired and the auto mechanic says it's ready. You walk out to your car and find that there is oil and dirt on the seats, it smells like smoke, and there is trash on the floor. Talk to the Mechanic about it.	*You are at a restaurant and the waiter seats you in the back. The table is dirty and the light above the table is broken. Talk to the waiter about it.*
You order a cheese pizza and when the delivery person comes, they bring you the wrong pizza. Talk to the pizza delivery person about it.	*You and your date have been at a party for a long time. You are tired and your date is bored. Talk to your date about it.*
You and a friend are watching a movie in a theater and the couple sitting next to you is talking. Talk to the couple about it.	*You are at a friend's house for dinner and the windows are open. You are very cold. Talk to your friend about it.*
Your teacher returns your test after grading it and they marked an answer wrong that you think is correct. Talk to your teacher about it.	*You are in the library trying to study. Several students next to you are talking loudly. Talk to them about it.*

Pragmatics not only builds an understanding of culture in the classroom, it builds community. Through these discussions, students share their experiences and cultures. It also spurs learners to wrestle and experiment with language. Having authentic examples of languages empowered my students to use English outside of the classroom. I highly recommend trying it out with your learners.

TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo

TESOL 2017, TESOL's 51th Conference, will be held in Seattle, Washington, March 21-24.
See more at:
http://www.tesol.org/

Save the Date!
Fall 2017 RITELL Conference

October 29, 8:30-12:30
Student Union Ballroom,
Rhode Island College

Conference Speaker:
Paula Markus, Toronto District School Board

Link to videos she has made for Colorin Colorado:
http://www.colorincolorado.org/videos/meet-expert/paula-markus

Link to info about her role in her district:
http://www.tdsb.on.ca/HighSchool/YourSchoolDay/Curriculum/ESL.aspx

RITELL: Over 300 members strong! Help us to keep building. Ask a colleague to join! Increasing our membership means being able to afford top notch presenters at conferences, create professional development opportunities/trainings for teachers, advocate for teachers more effectively, and create awards for deserving members of our community. Thanks for your continued support.

Golden Apple Award Winner

by Doug Norris

On the second-to-last day of the school year, West Broadway Middle School teacher Hilary Lundgren prepared for staff from the Rhode Island Department of Education to observe her class. While teaching in one of the pioneer schools of blended learning in Providence, Lundgren had become accustomed to opening her classroom to stakeholders interested in seeing first-hand how blended learning works, but on this day, she would learn that the visitors' interest was a ruse.

Lundgren, it turned out, was being honored with a Golden Apple Award. Sponsored jointly by NBC 10, Hasbro and the R.I. Department of Education, the award recognizes outstanding teachers in Rhode Island, honoring those who believe in the true spirit of teaching by making classrooms creative and safe places to learn.

"I was completely shocked," Lundgren said. "I had no idea. All of a sudden everyone walked in…my friend who nominated me, my boyfriend, my colleagues. I was just stunned."

Lundgren has only been teaching for three years, but she credits Rhode Island College with giving her the experience, knowledge and preparation to succeed in the field. She subbed in Providence for two years while completing a Master of Arts in Teaching in May 2014. She then earned her ESL certification in May 2015.

"Being at RIC was an unbelievable experience," she said. "The field experience was the best training I could ever have. It really isn't meaningful until you see theory in action, but I learned so much at RIC and through my placements. I think RIC does a really great job of that – of showing instead of just telling you."

Through her field experience, Lundgren became passionate about working in ESL classrooms. "I had struggles in my own life," she said. "My mother passed away at an early age. I was on my own for a number of years. I always knew I wanted to work specifically with kids like me, who had struggles in life and endured really difficult times. As I studied to become a teacher, I knew I wanted to work to help this population of children, to give them opportunities they deserve."

Lundgren said that while teaching with an emphasis on best practices is a primary focus of the job, teachers working with ESL populations learn quickly that their role as advocates is perhaps even more important in helping students achieve their goals.

"I think that's one of the greatest challenges in urban education," she said, "but it's also one of the greatest rewards. We are so geared up about advocacy for our students that we literally will do whatever they need in order to make them successful. We want to see every student growing up in Providence achieve their dream. Every one of these kids needs to have someone encourage them every day."

The Golden Apple Award includes a $250 contribution from Hasbro, provided by the Kids in Need Foundation, to help teachers with their classroom needs. (It also includes a gift bag from Thames & Kosmos.) For Lundgren, the award represents validation that she has chosen the right career and the right place for her to affect the lives of others in deeply meaningful and positive ways.

"I want to be in Providence forever," she said. "I think we have the vision to really make a difference in the Providence community. Just knowing that I'm possibly sparking an interest in a child to work hard to be successful, and to have a purpose in life, and to have something to prove in the future, is tremendously gratifying. We can't teach them everything, but if we can help them develop a lifelong love of learning, then we have done something worthwhile."

Golden Apple Award winner Hilary Lundgren

Photo courtesy of WJAR-10

Candid Camera at RITELL: Spring 2016 Conference

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Thanks to those who attended our Spring Conference and making it such a success! See you October 29 for the Fall Conference!

Contact information:

See us at:

www.ritell.org

Mailing Address:
RITELL
c/o Nancy Cloud
PO Box 9292
Providence, RI 02940

Phone (401) 456-8789
Fax (401) 456-8284

nancycloud2@gmail.com

Call for Submissions

We are always on the lookout for RI-TELLER submissions from our members. If you have a great lesson plan, resource or activity, please share! Other article ideas include student profiles, research you've done relevant to the field and questions. Submitting an article is a great way to get published in the field and an important step to building up our professional connections with one another in RITELL. Contact Editor Doug Norris at dougnorris1489@gmail.com if you would like to submit.

Also, if you have a colleague you would like to nominate for the Nancy Carnevale Grant or Adult Education Practitioner awards, please see the Awards page at http://www.ritell.org/page-1554404