

10 Essential Practices

ESTABLISHING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

Setting Eyes on the Goal

1. A good instructional program for children learning English establishes ultimate goals for language proficiency and literacy in the first and second language, “whether the goal is bilingualism or a shift to English.” These goals must be clearly articulated among staff. (Escamilla & Escamilla, 2003, p.5; Miramontes, Commins & Nadeau, 1997; Cummins, 2005)

Strategic Attention to Language Use

2. A language policy should be decided upon and consistently implemented across age levels, classrooms, office, playground, cafeteria, etc. The use of both languages merits strategic consideration, as opportunities for development occurs constantly inside and outside the classroom, in the home and community as well (e.g., the value of parents’ use of the home language with their children should be emphasized; time dedicated to English should not sacrifice or compromise first language development. (Escamilla & Escamilla, 2003; Miramontes, Commins & Nadeau, 1997; Escamilla, 1994)

Reciprocal Home-School Partnerships

3. Parent – teacher communication should be on going to increase educators’ familiarity of children’s linguistic and cultural backgrounds, to provide parents information and involve them in decision making. Gathering parental support requires affirming the value of parents’ opinions, questions and resources. For example, parents can periodically be offered the opportunity to set agendas and hold meetings in their neighborhood and community centers. Unapologetic utilization of parents’ dominant language and resources is required for true partnership to develop. (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Cummins, 1994; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997)

FRAMEWORK FOR INSTRUCTION

Curriculum Development

4. TESOL Standards K-12 (1997) in broad terms state English needs to be mastered for personal, social and academic purposes. An awareness and understanding of social and cultural norms associated with English use is required in order for linguistic competence to be fully achieved (e.g., distinguishing when a formal manner is required in an interaction or when “I’m waiting” actually means hurry). The preschool curriculum needs to be mindful of both social and academic long-term goals, with children’s present developmental stage, linguistic proficiency, and background experiences in mind.

5. Children bring linguistic and cultural resources that can be utilized to build a relevant and engaging curriculum. Children’s sense of self is evolving from personal expression of their likes, dislikes, their familiar and curiosity of what is unfamiliar. This is a rich base upon which to expand the development of their language, cognition and literacy. Reading, writing, listening and speaking should build upon these funds. Multicultural literature can be used to affirm children’s racial, ethnic and social diversity, reflecting their mores, values, histories, heroes/heroines, etc. The diverse communicative styles held by students, teachers and parents need to be identified to engage in effective cross-cultural communication. (Cummins, 2005; Nieto, 2004; Escamilla & Escamilla, 2003; Valdes, 1999; Harris, 1997; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997).





10 Essential Practices cont.

FRAMEWORK FOR INSTRUCTION

Support of Developmental Stages

6. In preschool, second language learners' language, literacy and cognitive skills are emerging. English, as well as the native language, develops receptively then expressively in meaningful contexts. Children require safe learning environments where risk-taking is encouraged and their approximations accepted. Predictable learning environments with established routines offer children the comfort of knowing classroom expectations and multiple opportunities for the mastery of associated concepts and language. (Escamilla & Escamilla, 2003).

7. In the preschool years, abstract concepts such as time (past, present and future) and language are naturally experimented with (e.g., children will say, "Can we swing for a few hours?" when they perhaps mean a few minutes or say "I goed," instead of went. This overgeneralization of rules without explicit knowledge of grammar is part of the normal developmental process. Hyper-correction and attention to form at early stages of development is stifling and ineffective. The meaning of a child's communication should not be sacrificed for form. (McKeon, 1994; Krashen, 1982; Cummins, 1994, 1981)

8. On the road to mastering the English language, continued development of the native language will allow children's conceptual and critical thinking skills to go uninterrupted, which is essential for long-term academic achievement. (Thomas & Collier, 2002; Cummins, 1994)

SECOND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Daily Structured English as a Second Language (ESL) Lessons

9. Children need daily second language lessons explicitly focused on the development of vocabulary, language structures, social language and pragmatics which help further develop the comprehension and production of English. Prior knowledge plays a significant role in learning, hence daily ESL should build on what children know in their first language. Second language teaching involves teaching key vocabulary, engaging children in hands on activities, and making explicit connections. ESL activities should motivate children and be of high interest. Social language development includes the explicit teaching of social norms of English. (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Gentile, 2004; Tabors & Snow, 2003; Echevarria, Vogt and Short, 2000; August & Hakuta, 1997; Delpit, 1988)



Rich Linguistic Environment

10. ESL instruction requires exposure to both oral and written forms of English in order to arouse children's curiosity and begin to develop an academic and intellectual foundation in English. Methodologies such as Total Physical Response, learning poetry, music, chants, story-telling and role-playing are excellent for developing listening comprehension and expressive language in English. Read alouds, patterned books, choral reading and language experience reading provide meaning based effective means to introduce children to literacy in English. Again, the greater the foundation in the mother tongue for these abilities, the greater ease with which English is acquired. (Freeman & Freeman, 2005; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Richard-Amato, 2003; Krashen & Terell, 1983)