

Different methods of teaching esl



This paper will explore different methods of teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) writing. My goal is to show that beginning ESL students can write and produce grade-level papers that will have an introduction, and detailed body and a conclusion. Even though most ESL writing instruction is usually focus on grammar and sentence structure (the mechanics of writing), I will attempt to show that students entering a 4th grade class can write using very basic skills. Teaching certain methods will help most ESL students explore different topics and make them feel successful at writing. I will begin by incorporating Krashen's (1988) theory of language development and how the affective filter relates to an ESL student when it comes to writing, and conclude with a lesson plan that include different strategies that can be used in the classroom to teach writing.

Reading and writing can often be very difficult tasks even for native speaking people. Both reading and writing involve reading at different levels and reading different genres, while also trying to understand and interpret what one has read. Writing is just as difficult as reading because it means one must express their thoughts on paper and attempt to communicate a message to whomever is reading the paper. Learning how to write doesn't just happen, it is something that must be taught and modeled through different processes over the course of one's lifetime. As you think of reading and writing and the difficulties involved, think what it must be like for a child who speaks another language and is now expected to read and write and be proficient at it as they enter a school in the United States.

BICS and CALP

Most teachers that teach second language students know there is a difference between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979). What this is basically saying is that there is a difference in the way we speak during everyday activities and the way we speak in an academic setting, one being formal and the other informal. This also includes the way we write as well, whether we are in a formal or informal situation. When it comes to teaching, many teachers have a tendency of teaching CALP in the content areas because they teach to the standards, but many teachers fail to realize they must continue to teach in the L1 language to achieve the L2 stage. If teachers go in with the thought that they cannot vary their teaching styles because the curriculum will not allow it, they will realize they are doing a disservice to their ELL students. Teachers need to realize that by using L1 can actually make understanding L2 material easier to understand, and therefore making it easier for new students to acquire a new language. (Krashen, 1981). By not using the L1 resources, this can, and often, cause lots of frustration to many second language learners that need those BICS skills embedded into the lessons. In order to acquire the necessary skills to become a successful writer, most ELL students need to feel successful from the beginning and if teachers teach L2 material without using what students already know, many ELL students will begin to shut down or worst yet, they begin to feel the pressure which can make or break any second language learner.

Krashen

When an ELL student enters schools there is already lots of pressure placed upon them and when that pressure begins to build, the ELL student begins to build anxiety, frustration, and fear. These feelings are part of what Krashen refers to as the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1981) Even though Krashen is credited most recently with this theory, the actual idea was introduced a few years earlier under the title of " socio-affective filter, " by Dulay and Burt (1977). This theory basically says that there are emotional variables that can hinder comprehension input from reaching the part of the brain responsible for acquiring language. Krashen goes on to say that if an ELL person is anxious, stressed, not motivated, or does not have a sense of belonging, they may understand what is being taught but puts up a shield that keeps the learning out and the actual language acquisition from happening. Krashen breaks down the affective filter individually.

With anxiety, Krashen states that if a student has low anxiety it will determine the success in how a student will acquire a new language. No matter how hard teachers try to make content comprehensible for students, if they have that affective filter up, you may as well be teaching to a wall! It's hard enough for new students to get use to a new environment, different people and cultures, so imagine if you can, putting all those factors together and then having that student add school into the mix. At school, they are expected to work at the level of the other students in all areas. They have to get use to a new language, a new classroom, and different kinds of students with different cultures. These new surroundings can add stress for the ELL student and they become nervous and thus the anxiety levels will rise,

making them shut down before they even start. Sure, a student needs to get use to new people and places but they also need to get use to how to perform academically in the classroom. One such area that creates high anxiety for an ELL student is in the area of writing. When it comes to writing, that in itself is a different set of problems for ELL students. Many ELL students develop a fear of the writing that often outweighs the projected gain from their ability to actually write (Thompson, 1980, p. 121). Therefore, teachers must realize that writing anxiety can often negatively affect writing performance (Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Smith, 1984). As researchers and practitioners learn more about this writing anxiety, the more and more L2 comes into play. With regard to the educational content on writing, there have been studies focusing on writing anxiety (Atay & Kurt, 2006; Cheng, 2002; Gungle & Taylor, 1989; Masny & Foxall, 1992). Research after research shows that writing anxiety can stem from an individual's writing ability, how much work it takes to prepare a writing piece, the knowledge of knowing they are being assessed on the writing tasks, and how the teachers responds to these writings (Daly & Miller, 1975a, 1975b; Fox, 1980; Leki, 1999; Pajares & Johnson, 1994; Raisman, 1982; Smith, 1984). Many researchers think that writing anxiety also develops because many ELL writers are not skillful at writing and therefore their levels of anxiety seem to rise because of their lack of ability to write. Many students may avoid writing and writing instruction altogether, and therefore they can never improve on their writing. This is especially true since ELL students know that they are evaluated on not only their thoughts, but spelling, morphology, syntax, and mechanics as well. If a student is limited in L2 writing then it becomes even more of a challenge. Their limited knowledge and capacity in L2, hinder the

sophistication and complexity of their thoughts and pushes them into further anxiety then needed. So, one might ask, “ What should a teacher do to help students overcome this writing anxiety? There are many solutions but one in particular is to make sure they write often, though it does not have to be a lot of writing every time. Another wonderful way to overcome anxiety is to incorporate individual portfolios for every student. Portfolios are wonderful in that students can see how their writing improves over a period of time.

Research shows that keeping a portfolio has several benefits (Brown & Irby, 2000; Ersin, 2005; Johnson, Mims-Cox, & Doyle-Nichols, 2006; Yang, 2003). Portfolios can also help promote student involvement in assessments, and allows for student-teacher interaction, sharing with their parents, they take ownership of their own work, and hopefully they develop an excitement about writing (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Two other aspects of the affective filter are motivation and self- confidence. With motivation, one can assume that if a student is motivated, they are more apt to learn, more than a student that is not motivated. Gardner, (1989) states that when a teacher makes writing fun using different levels of intelligences, (which incorporates both L1 and L2 language,) students can produce, and are more involved in their learning. One of the easiest way to motivate students is to make the work easier and goals attainable. For example, tasks that are easy and narrow down allows students to write step by step towards their goal, almost always means success for an ELL student. Educators, need to let students see what they can do in little pieces as opposed to what they can't do by producing a long piece of writing.

Therefore each writing task should scaffold so that the previous one is just a

bit easier than the next one. This will allow the student's confidence to build and hopefully they will become more motivated and want to write. If teachers continue to push students towards unattainable goals, then they will lose all confidences and motivation, not to mention the anxiety that will begin to set in again.

The Writer's Workshop to teach writing

When teaching writing, one of the best strategies to use with ELL students is to establish a writing workshop in the classroom. Writing workshops are very helpful to ELL students because students are required to discuss their ideas (think-pair- share, strategy), and they can work with a partner to revise and edit their work, and most importantly, it is a chance for L1 students to speak to others in a comfortable setting. It is very important that ELL students get to interact verbally (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002). If a classroom can establish such an environment where students work together, it tends to lower the affective filters as mentioned above.

Once the classroom environment has been set up, the actual writing can begin. First of all, one needs to remember if a writing workshop is to work, students have to be able to write every day. When beginning the writing process, it also helps if students get a chance to choose their own topic (this is one way to motivate students to want to write) and something they are familiar with. Not just with ELL students but with all students, teachers need to implement graphic organizers into their writing lessons. Graphic organizers allow students to organize their writing with a beginning, middle, and end. This also allows for students to a main idea with supporting details. When beginning to use organizers, teachers can have non proficient writers

simply draw pictures of their story and write sentences (or words) explaining what is happening. It is probably helpful for teachers to use one organizer a few times so that students do not get confused. In order for students to even know how to use graphic organizers, teachers must also remember to provide lots, and modeling and instruction on a daily basis. Once students are comfortable using organizers, they can take their thoughts and start making sentences and eventually creating paragraphs. From these paragraphs, lots of mini lessons can develop from grammar, to incorporating the writing traits, to small group instruction, or whatever the teacher sees that her students need to work on.

Activities to motivate writing

Overall, teachers need to remember that everyone can write, if you know how to reach each child regardless of a language barrier. But the secret (and challenge) is to make a child what to write. You also need to lower students' affective filters as well. This can be done by using different activities and different methods of instruction. Some ways in which teachers can lower anxiety and raise motivation and self-confidence is by:

- Planning writing prompts that are exciting and something that student can relate to (it also helps to build background knowledge).
- Read stories prior to beginning writing prompts to give students ideas on the topic.
- Give directions both verbally and in writing, have students repeat directions to their partners for clarification.
- Let the students see you having fun with the topics, let them see you joke or laugh.

- Give positive feedback and encourage students. Do not correct them in front of the class. Except everything that is turned into you and find something positive to say about it.
- Have fun writing activities for mini-lessons before writing.
- Model everything

Krashen sums it up best when he states “ A common problem amongst ELL students is they simply do not understand what is being asked of them and what the final product should look like, or even how is it to be presented.”

Yet, one of the easiest ways a teacher can reduce anxiety with writing, is to show students what a good writing piece should look like. By not being shown a model, this can cause great anxiety and thus raises the affective filters.

In conclusion

Research has shown that the affective filter can make or break writing proficiency in ELL students. Research also goes on to say that many writing techniques are not effective when teaching ELL students. Writing should be taught daily, with the aid of a writing workshop so that students can interact with one another. Writing should not be considered just grammar rules and vocabulary lists. Writing needs to be fun, and in order to get students involved in writing, teachers need to find and use different strategies and methods to remove the affective filter as soon as possible. Teachers need to also remember that the world was not built in a day and they cannot expect their ELL students to be able to produce great writing pieces in a short period of time. Writing does not simply involve giving a prompt and expecting masterpieces, writing is a process that involves the usage of different

activities and strategies that must be used in the classroom by both teacher and students.