



## *Tips on Communicating, and other important language issues*

Communication can be difficult for both the ESL student and the teacher, but there are ways to help alleviate this difficulty. When classroom teachers communicate with new students, that communication must be comprehensible. Please allow your new learners of English "translation" time when listening and speaking. Remember that they are translating the language they hear back to their native language, formulating a response and then translating that response into English.

It takes 2 years for an ESL student to be able to speak fluently in English, and an additional 5 to 7 years for the ESL student to be working on the same level as their peers in regards to academic content knowledge.

Please do not assume that non-native speakers who have attained a high degree of fluency and accuracy in every day English will have an equal degree of academic language proficiency. This may help to avoid labeling children as having special educational needs, when all they really need is more time.

Even non-native speakers who have exited the ESL program are still in the process of catching up and must be monitored for two years.

The following tips are helpful in communicating with students learning the English language, but remember that there will be times when you will not be able to get an idea across to your ESL students; they are not only learning a new language, but adapting to a new culture as well.

## *Communication Tips*

- **Provide clues to meaning**

1. Use drawings, simple gestures, actions, emotions, voice, mime, smart board/chalk board sketches, pictures, or other visual materials to provide clues to the concept you are trying to convey.
2. If necessary, repeat your actions using the same simple gestures.
3. Simplify your message as much as possible by breaking them into smaller, more manageable parts to give the students a chance to comprehend them.
4. Make sure the student's attention is focused, but don't insist on direct eye contact. Some cultures consider this disrespectful. (More so in Asian countries.)

- **Modify your speech**

1. Speak at a slow-to-normal pace in short sentences, using a pleasant tone.
2. Use simple sentence structure and high frequency words.
3. Use names of people rather than pronouns.
4. Pause after short phrases or short sentences, (pausing after words may distort the rhythm of the language.)
5. Speak one-on-one if there is something important to say.
6. Don't make a big deal when students begin to respond (this occurs more in the lower grades) because the anxiety of being in the "spotlight" may cause the student to shut down.
6. Ask simple yes/no questions and accept one word answers or gestures.

- **Be an active listener**

1. Give full attention to your ESL student and make every effort to understand his/her attempts to communicate.
2. Smile and talk in a calm, quiet manner.
3. Demonstrate your patience through your facial expressions and body language.

4. Give ESL students extra time to respond.
5. Don't jump in immediately and provide words for the student.  
Encourage them to act out or draw pictures to get their meaning across.
6. If the student speaks with a heavy accent, correct by repeating the words correctly. It can be embarrassing for the student to ask the student to repeat the correction.
7. **Resist the urge to overcorrect!** This will inhibit ESL students to the point where they will be less willing to speak. Allow them to use the iPad for translating. The iTranslate app is better for translation because it is more fluent for the student. New students may have an iPad issued to them that will have the iTranslate app already on it. The iPad is to be used in school only. It will be issued to them in the morning, and must be turned back in at the end of the school day. (This is more for the older students.)