Fostering Success in a Second Language: Tools and Tips for More Effectively Teaching English Language Learners

Emily Moline • emoline@ucdavis.edu
Department of Linguistics
University of California, Davis

Motivation for the project

- Anecdotal needs from other TAs, coupled with knowledge of the growing number of English language learning (ELL) students on campus (e.g., 12% of undergraduate population as of Fall 2016 were international students—though international ≠ ELL and ELL ≠ international; 60% of UCD undergraduates speak a language besides English)
- My background: Certificate in TESOL from the University of Florida; have taught around 8 ESL courses at UCD; have taught EFL in Spain; have both TAed and served as lead instructor for college content courses at UCD

Needs analysis

- Conducted survey of non-Linguistics/TESOL graduate students to ascertain needs w/r/t the teaching of ELLs

Training components: 6 modules

- Each module leads with theoretical background, but emphasizes applied tools and tips
- Assessment: three quizzes that must be passed with at least a score of 9/10 in each; each quiz can be attempted twice
- Six modules:
  - Module 1: Rationale and introduction to key terms in TESOL
  - Module 2: Fostering/redefining in-class participation: lowering the "affective filter" and creating an inclusive learning environment
  - Module 3: Pronouncing and learning names
  - Module 4: Delivering oral instruction for English language learners
  - Module 5: Grading practices/reconceptualizing errors
  - Module 6: Sociocultural differences and similarities across understandings of pedagogy/academic literacy/plagiarism

Refinement of modules

- Met with Patricia Turner of UC Davis Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE)
- Met with Chris Stillwell of UC Irvine Department of Education
- Next stage: beta testing with users

Module 3: Pronouncing and learning names

Pronouncing and learning names: rationale and background

As discussed in Module 2, having a lowered affective filter can be the key to an ELL’s level of comfort in a class. A major way to lower the filter is to pronounce someone’s name correctly. Mispronouncing students’ names can negatively impact students’ desire and willingness to engage in class, since they do not feel like their teacher understands a basic aspect of their identity (Nichols & Sánchez, 2012). Although it may not seem like learning students’ names is important in postgraduate education, it can have a strong positive effect and may “help to reduce the feelings of anonymity and isolation that many students experience” (Canvons & Nichols, Early Career Center, 2018). In addition, the opposite can be true if a student perceives that the instructor has not bothered to try to learn their name at all; it can even be a microaggression, since it demonstrates that the person in a position of power (the instructor), although unintentional, has not made the effort to try to help create a supportive classroom environment for all students.

Asking directly vs. “let me know”

Sociocultural differences and similarities across understandings of pedagogy/academic literacy/plagiarism: tips and strategies

- You can clear up many miscommunications in advance by making your syllabus as explicit as possible with the class expectations. This could be its own section, e.g. "Course expectations," where your specific pedagogical expectations are laid out and linked (if needed). Your syllabus is a component of the course grade. It is important to communicate expectations clearly and consistently (Academic Success Center). The syllabus is a roadmap to help students succeed in your class. It is a tool that you can use to provide students with the necessary information to succeed in your class.
- In order to ensure that your students are aligned with a syllabus by which they can study, consider a study guide. A study guide, which, if available, students are asked to answer 3-5 questions about the policies and goals most important. A non-graded-in-class assignment might be a syllabus compare-and-contrast: have students bring in at least one syllabus from another class and compare the structure/content with yours.
- To encourage students to meet with you in your pedagogical expectations, consider creating small, low-stakes assignments around pedagogical practices. A common assignment is to encourage students to review peer feedback on previous class notes, which is to require office hours attendance; have students sign up for 10 minutes of office hours in advance, and have them come prepared with one to three questions. This is a great way to establish rapport with students without taking up additional class or office hours time.
- A common and valid concern of instructors is that meta-assignments take away from valuable course content time. Considering giving an assignment to demonstrate plagiarism that also integrate course content, e.g. give students a primary source document as an example of a plagiarism/improperly cited assignment, and have them correct the assignment while correctly adding new content and citations of their own.

Looking forward/next steps

- Creating a certificate program?
- In-person component, a la flipped classroom?
- Quarterly cohort, corresponding with a live class (synchronous vs. asynchronous)?
- Collaborations/suggestions welcome!

Access it via Canvas Commons: https://tinyurl.com/ELL-UCD

Acknowledgments

For their support, insight, and helpful feedback, I am grateful to the following people:
- Teresa Dillinger
- JP Delplanque
- Patricia Turner
- Chris Stillwell
- Fellow PFTFers for sharing the survey and providing me with great feedback!