Diversity Practices

The challenges and strengths that ELL students bring to the classrooms is a great opportunity for teachers and schools to grow and better their teaching. All too often teachers do not change the way they teach to accommodate and help those whose first language is not English. Instead they believe that the conversational language students demonstrate is evidence of their abilities to succeed in mainstream classrooms. This is not generally true. ELL students in addition to learning content and concepts must also learn academic language simultaneously. The challenges that ELL students face are daunting. In truth we expect them to learn twice as much as native English speakers. However there are several ways teachers can help their ELL students to be successful in mainstream classrooms. From my studies in ELL, these are the concepts and practices I agree with and plan to implement into my own classroom

**Tiered Evaluation/ Alternative Evaluation**: Many times we expect the same things from every student despite their abilities. Education all too often becomes a place where achievement is the only thing that matters instead of improvement or progress that students make. We judge students’ abilities only on tests. I hope to encourage learning in my classroom and hope to have various ways for students to show that they understand and have learned the content. This may include portfolio assessment, multi-genre papers, pictorials, etc.

**Peer Groups for Social Interaction and Scaffolding:** I agree with Vygotsky’s influential theory. I believe that students each have different strengths and that group work is a great way to have students helps each other. The perfect system of teaching I believe would follow the pattern of first having a teacher demonstrate a concept, second, have the class together demonstrate the concept, third have students work in groups to demonstrate the concept and finally ask students to alone demonstrate the concept. It is the idea of gradual release and I believe is the best way to teach.

**Involving Families in Education:** Guardians, siblings and other family members of students are a huge, often untapped resource. Involving student’s families in the learning process is a way to help ELL students and to establish meaningful connections between home and school. There are several ways I’d like to involve families in the learning process, but I feel that communication between teachers and guardians is probably the most important element. Often the only times families hear from schools is when their student is doing something wrong or at report card time. I feel that families need to be aware of what their student is learning, how they are progressing, and feel that they are welcome to contribute to that learning, and that their contributions are recognized and appreciated.

**Using Culturally Diverse Materials:** One of the best parts of teaching ELL students is the variety of experiences and ideas they bring to the classroom. In accordance with this diversity however teachers should look for ways to diversify the materials they use in teaching. Using culturally relevant materials is not only new and interesting for students whose L1 is English, but it validifies and respects the diverse cultures students have.

**Appropriately Challenging students:**  Reviewing materials to make sure that the material is not overly hard and then reviewing it for ideas, words, concepts and learning that ELL students may not know. It is important to give students challenging work, but we should also make sure that we are challenging them at the appropriate level. If students have to look up more than 10-15 words per page I have found that the book, article etc. is too hard. Many times we can choose different materials that teach the concepts we want student to learn in an easier to understand way. At the same time we need to work so that we don’t oversimplify the material either. It is finding the zone of proximity the i+1 idea.

**The Importance of Personal Investment:** I think the most important thing in education is giving student the opportunity to become personally invested. This generally involves giving students the opportunity to put a bit of themselves in their work. There are several ways this can be done; it could be by letting students choose how they will show what they have learned. It may be letting students choose the topic or material they want to learn. Students always learn better and more when they are interested and invested in what they are learning.