



Chapter 4 – Principles of Quality Teaching for English Learners (pages 80–85)

from **Scaffolding the Academic Success of Adolescent English Language Learners: A Pedagogy of Promise**

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CHAPTER



PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY TEACHING FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

In defining quality teaching for English language learners (as well as for all other students), we recognize that no one size fits all. The definition of quality teaching must account for the many and diverse ways of teaching that can address students' needs with excellence. Teacher A may do it differently from Teacher B, but both teachers will have met important criteria while responding to the particular contexts in which each is teaching. All good teaching is situated in the particular — it responds to the specific students and their specific circumstances while keeping the intellectual rigor constant. Accordingly, in this chapter we propose five principles that help us understand and define excellent teaching:

- Sustain *academic rigor* in teaching English learners
- Hold high *expectations* in teaching English learners
- Engage English learners in quality teacher and student *interactions*
- Sustain a *language focus* in teaching English learners
- Develop a quality *curriculum* for teaching English learners

Principles: The Cornerstone of Practice

How can being explicit about our teaching theories lead us to improve our teaching?

Why focus on theory and principles as our starting point? Some might object that this is an abstract place, far removed from the daily concerns and challenges of the classroom. We would argue, however, that carefully elaborated principles are actually the cornerstone of informed practice.

It has been said many times that all teachers have a theory of teaching and learning — beliefs, and actions consistent with those beliefs, that help them plan and teach their lessons. The trouble is, this theory may be implicit or explicit. If it is implicit, our theory influences our teaching, but we are not able to give a clear, precise, or consistent answer to the question “Why are you teaching in this or that way?” Thus, an implicit theory may stand in the way of continuous improvement and reflection. However, if our theory is explicit, we can talk about it, elaborate on it, and evaluate and redirect our own teaching by referring to it. We are more likely to be able to rationally defend the way we do things, continuously seek to improve our practice (and refine our theory), and engage fruitfully with other teachers in discussions about what constitutes “good teaching.” We will then also come to realize that “good teaching” is not some fixed abstract property that applies in the same way across diverse contexts, but that, in fact, it is always situated in the particular.

The principles presented here have been abstracted from hundreds of reflective observations of teaching in middle and high schools in this and other countries. They emerged from our effort to distill from the specific what was constant across classes in which students’ potential and diverse conceptual, linguistic, and cognitive skills development was advanced in

profound and accelerated ways. Although they define the terrain of good teaching in a specific way, these principles are consistent with and overlap those of others whose work we respect, for example, the Institute for Learning's *Principles of Learning* (Resnick, Hall, and Fellows of the Institute for Learning, 2006).

These principles elaborate our theoretical understandings that student development is a consequence of (and not a prerequisite for) carefully planned opportunities for students to participate in meaningful and demanding academic activity with others and that learning is primarily a social and cultural, rather than individual, phenomenon. Figure 8 (pages 84–85) shows how these principles could be enacted in terms of classroom goals and objectives. Following Graves (1996),

[Goals are] general statements of the overall, long-term purposes of the course. Objectives express the specific ways in which the goals will be achieved. The goals of a course represent the destination; the objectives, the various points that chart the course toward the destination. (p. 17)

Principle One: Sustain Academic Rigor

In its specifics, how does the definition below of academic rigor match your experience and your current instruction?

The fact that learners are learning English does not mean they are incapable of tackling complex subject matter concepts in this new language. Indeed, the main purpose of this book is to show ways teachers can support English language learners to access and engage with high-level subject matter content while sustaining academic rigor. To restate Principle One colloquially: Do not dumb down the academic challenge for English language learners, whether in social studies, English, math, science, or any other subject.

Figure 8. Principles of Quality Teaching for English Language Learners, with Goals and Objectives

| Principles | Goals | Objectives |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Sustain Academic Rigor | Promote deep disciplinary knowledge | Develop central ideas in the discipline first, postponing interesting but secondary details Establish interconnections among central ideas of the discipline Deepen understanding of themes over time |
| | Engage students in generative disciplinary concepts and skills | Have students anchor new knowledge to central concepts to build understanding Have students apply familiar central ideas or strategies to their emerging understanding of new concepts Invite students to build increasingly complex explanations of disciplinary concepts and processes |
| | Engage students in generative cognitive skills (higher-order thinking) | Have students combine facts and ideas to synthesize, evaluate, and generalize Have students build arguments, solve problems, and construct new meanings and understandings |
| Hold High Expectations | Engage students in tasks that provide high challenge and high support | Provide students with activities that are robust, but flexible enough to allow multiple entry points: all students, regardless of where they start, will benefit from participation Scaffold students' ability to participate in the activities Ensure that students are asked to engage in increasingly more complex tasks Treat students proleptically – as if they already possess the abilities you are seeking to develop (see chapter 2) |
| | Engage students (and teacher) in the development of their own expertise | Conduct metacognitive activities so that students gain knowledge of how to learn, how to monitor their progress, and how to self-correct Provide practice in the use of academic tools and activities so that students appropriate them over time Encourage students to support each other in their development Encourage students to support each other in building academic stamina |
| | Make criteria for quality work clear for all | Use rubrics to spell out expected quality of work Encourage students to take risks and to work hard to master challenging academic work |

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| Principles | Goals | Objectives |
|--|---|---|
| Engage Students in Quality Interactions | Engage students in sustained interactions with teacher and peers | Invite students to go beyond brief, single responses and to elaborate, illustrate, and connect to their interlocutors' ideas |
| | Focus interactions on the construction of knowledge | State explicitly that constructing new understandings is hard work, that it requires listening intently to interlocutors, making sense of what they are saying, and deciding how to respond, either by agreeing and providing further evidence or by disagreeing and stating why this is the case Ask students to focus on the coherence of what they are saying (Are they staying with the main ideas? Are they making sense?) and to deepen their understanding by making connections to related ideas |
| Sustain a Language Focus | Promote language learning in meaningful contexts | Provide explicit examples, for example, formulaic expressions, of how to mark agreement, disagreement, and other moves in response to an interlocutor or text |
| | Promote disciplinary language use | Focus on the social purpose of genre, audience, structure, and specific language of disciplinary texts; have students practice deconstructing and creating similar texts |
| | Amplify rather than simplify communications | Give rich and varied examples, looking at difficult concepts from several angles |
| | Address specific language issues judiciously | Focus corrective feedback on fluency, complexity, or accuracy, but not at the same time |
| Develop Quality Curriculum | Structure opportunities to scaffold learning, incorporating the goals above | Set long-term goals and benchmarks Use a problem-based approach with increasingly interrelated lessons Use a spiraling progression Make connections between subject matter and students' reality Build on students' lives and experiences |