

Promising practices: teaching beginning ESL students

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Editor's Note: Gaye is an experienced ESL instructor and mentor. This article first appeared in the January 2006 issue of GBC's "Teacher Quarterly" newsletter produced by Irma Reyes (IREYI@gwmail.gbcnv.edu, 775/753-2126).

When I began teaching the Battle Mountain ABE/ESL class three years ago, it was set up as a multi-level class with one teacher. After being frustrated for months because I felt that beginning level students were not getting enough basic instruction, I asked to change the schedule so beginning students would have their own class from 9-10 a.m., and intermediate and advanced level students would be combined from 10 a.m.-noon. Last year (2004-5), three of my five beginning students advanced to the intermediate low or intermediate high level. The system works!

Three things have helped me most in teaching beginning ESL students: good student books; great teacher's manuals; and inspiring, "hands-on" training workshops. These expert resources, reflecting experience and knowledge of proven techniques, have done the work for us!

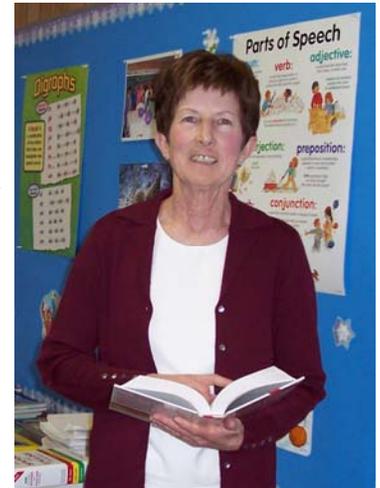
The main books I use are *Laubach Way to Reading (Books 1 and 2)* and *Life Prints (Literacy and Book 1)*. Later in the year, I vary the curriculum by including lessons in other books such as *English, Yes; Picture Stories for Beginning Communication;* and *Pizza Tastes Great*. Because of the enthusiastic response from the intermediate class, I also plan to introduce students to our new *ExpressWays* books this spring. (This teacher's manual is chock full of communicative activities!)

I like to spend the first two months in the *Laubach Way to Reading Book 1* because it's so basic, with strong emphasis on phonics. By presenting the material in small steps and with controlled vocabulary, students are able to achieve mastery and gain confidence. The *ESL/ESOL Teacher's Manual*, with its extensive introductory material designed just for beginning ESL, is very helpful. Each introductory lesson includes a dialog (students really get into this), vocabulary, structural patterns, visual aids, transfer drills, and pronunciation. Since half the class is actually made up of visiting intermediate students, I assume they also desire to master English basics by this clear and systematic method.

The third week of class, I begin spelling tests. On Mondays, students receive six words taken from the previous lesson. They write each one at least three times and use each in a sentence. Sentences are very short at first — e.g., "This is a bird." — but become longer as students progress.

Here are some specific activities I've used successfully in the beginning class. While some are original ideas, most were "borrowed" or adapted from teaching materials and other teachers.

1. **Vocabulary:** In pairs, students look at a picture (*Picture is Worth 1000 Words* book and Norman Rockwell calendars are good sources) and label everything. They also write a sentence about it. They each hold up a picture and read the sentence aloud.
2. **Color Posters:** Students write a color at the top of a large piece of construction paper. They cut and paste pictures from magazines showing their chosen color, then display their posters for the class. Note: Anytime students make posters, they are displayed on our classroom bulletin board.
3. **Rabbit Toss Review:** Each student recalls a word from the chapter while catching the stuffed rabbit.



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Last newsletter before MPAEA!

Mountain Plains Adult Education Assoc. (MPAEA) 2006 Mile High Rendezvous
April 26-29, Denver, CO

Contact: www.mpaea.org Paulette Church, 970-385-4354 or paulette@durangoaec.org

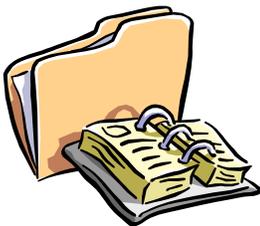
MPAEA serves adult educators in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, and Nevada. The organization provides scholarships, resources, access to like-minded educators, and a terrific annual conference.

Top 10 ways to maximize conference attendance

Adapted from *PD News* (National Center for Family Literacy) January 2006

How can you get the most out of your conference experience? Maximize your professional development with planning and follow-up! Here are ten easy steps to a productive conference.

1. Think about the topics of interest to you and your program. What issues do you face? Talk to colleagues and find out their interests. What can you bring back to benefit all?
2. Create your own learning plan. Peruse the conference schedule. What are the sessions of interest? When are registration, concurrent session times, exhibit hall hours, etc.? Make a personal activity calendar.
3. Divide and conquer. When attending with colleagues, decide who should attend which sessions to optimize learning for your entire program.
4. Look in your conference tote bag. Flyers, postcards, and other goodies are provided to call your attention to items not highlighted in the conference schedule. Don't let those go unnoticed.
5. Keep a log of key concepts. Write down those you'd like to share with your program. Is there a common theme? Add the presenter's name and contact information, in case you need more information.
6. Organize your handouts and notes by session or topic. Bring a pocket portfolio and labels with you and organize as you go. You'll access your notes much more easily when you get home.
7. Network and share with others. Attend any networking sessions available and learn from your peers. Collect business cards or contact information and add to your portfolio.
8. Return to your program with new knowledge and information. Schedule a brown-bag lunch or a full-day staff training. Share key concepts and copies of handouts.
9. Volunteer to lead a learning community group in your program. Review your log of ideas and concepts. Pick a common theme and implement an ongoing, small-group professional development experience. Provide additional readings, research, or discussion on these topics.
10. Contact your contacts. Create an e-mail networking group from new conference contacts with similar interests. Volunteer to manage the group. Provide topics for discussion and encourage others to post questions and share ideas.



More quality upcoming conferences

Additional events at www.literacynet.org/nevada (click on calendar)

What: CATESOL 2006 Statewide Conference, April 6-9. San Francisco, CA
Contact: www.catesol.org Vicki Pabley, vickipabley@yahoo.com

What: Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) 2006 Conference, April 26-29, Houston, TX
Contact: www.coabe06.org/ Tina Washco, tina.washco@nhmccd.edu

What: 2006 CASAS National Summer Institute, June 13-15, San Diego, CA
Contact: www.casas.org 800-255-1036

What: TESOL Academy 2006, June 23-24, Chicago, IL
Contact: 703-836-0774 or edprograms@tesol.org

What: National Reading Conference, November 29 – December 2, 2006, Los Angeles, CA
Contact: <http://www.nrconline.org/>

Free workshops in Nevada in April

Contact the appropriate host to reserve your place in these upcoming workshops geared especially to adult educators.

<u>Title, date, place, and contact</u>	<u>Workshop presenter, description, and objectives</u>
Writing and Error Correction for High Intermediate and Advanced ESL Students 4/8/06; Reno Brad Deeds TMCC 775/829-9052 BDeeds@tmcc.edu	Judy Marks. This workshop will give all levels of teachers and tutors practical tools to use when working with intermediate-advanced ESL students in writing courses. Additionally, the workshop's participants will look at what students need to know for college-level courses so they can provide their learners with skills needed to succeed. Objectives: Prepare to teach advanced writing to ESL students. Focus on specific writing problems ESL students have. Develop the skills to train ESL students for more advanced/college-level writing.
Meaningful Activities for the ESL Classroom Designed To Get Students Up, Moving Around, and Interacting 4/22/06; Las Vegas Fay Savedra Gamboa/Sandy Marks CCSN 702/651-4722 or 702/651-4895 fay_savedra@ccsn.edu or sandy_marks@ccsn.edu	Maxine Frauman-Prickel. This experiential workshop is geared toward beginning to intermediate ESL teachers and tutors. It will cover a variety of strategies to help students develop a communicative competence in their interactions to practice in the classroom and apply in the workplace and the community. The workshop is designed to help teachers create a learning community in their classrooms to support language acquisition. Objectives: Experience interactive classroom strategies that will prepare students for effective communication inside and outside the classroom. Develop a bank of teaching strategies that require little or no time in teacher preparation. Address cultural perceptual blocks or biases that may impact communication inside and outside the classroom.



Research related to upcoming writing workshop

Improving ESL Learners' Writing Skills. (Bello, June 1997).

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/Writing.html

This short digest reviews three approaches to writing (free writing, process writing, and LEA [language experience approach]) and provides specific activities to make writing easier and more enjoyable for both learners and teachers.

Responding to student writing. *English Teaching Forum*, October, 24-27. Mahili, I. (1994).

<http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol32/no4/p24.pdf>

An older piece, but useful for providing some practical suggestions on how to respond to student writing. The author assumes a process writing approach to teaching writing and therefore provides distinct suggestions for giving feedback on first drafts and second drafts. The author also raises the question of who should be doing the responding and notes that in a "workshop" format, students can come together in small groups and, with guidance, provide valuable feedback on each other's written works.

Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class. *ELT Journal*, 59(1), 23-38. Rollinson, P. (2005).

<http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/vol59/issue1/index.dtl>

For those who might have questions or doubts about Mahili's suggestion to consider the use of peer feedback on writing, here is a new piece with a summary of what current research says about that issue.

Rollinson first notes the positive aspects found in the literature, then goes on to point out negative aspects of peer feedback: mainly that it is time consuming (when you consider the amount of pre-training it requires) and that students may not see the value in it. Rollinson argues however, that these main problems can be overcome with adequate training and setting up the group and procedures properly. The article also provides guidelines on how to do this.



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Promising Practices *(Continued from page 1)*

4. **Comparison Shopping:** The teacher brings current ads from two grocery stores. She makes a table for students to record data. Students fill in the form, comparing prices of about six items selected by the teacher, discuss results, and draw conclusions.
5. **Preposition Posters:** Working in pairs, students cut and paste a picture in the center of a piece of colored construction paper. Under the picture they write a sentence about the picture, using a preposition. (Note: Use pre-cut, lined strips of white paper.) Students write the preposition at the top of the poster.
6. **BINGO Review:** After completing three chapters in *Life Prints*, students are divided into three groups. Each group is assigned a chapter and then finds seven words from that chapter to contribute to the BINGO game. The teacher writes all the words on the board. Students choose any 16 words from the list to fill in their BINGO cards. Play BINGO.
7. **Number and Check Writing Review:** The teacher draws a huge blank check on the board. A student draws an object from a paper bag (filled with outrageous items) and reads the price tag. Then the student goes to the board and fills in the check with the amount owed for the item. Continue until each has had a turn.
8. **Alphabet Manipulative:** Make a set of alphabet letters on heavy poster board for each student (they can help). Use for activities such as: take out all the vowels, form the word *hat*, change one letter and make the word *cat*, etc.

New Brief on adolescent adult students

CAELA (Center for Adult English Language Acquisition) staff member Sarah Young has written a brief that explains some of the reasons why adolescents may attend adult ESL classes and describes the characteristics of adolescent learners. The brief also provides guidelines for adult ESL program administrators, instructors, and communities to improve adolescent English language learners' chances of success in and beyond adult ESL programs.

Download the *Brief* from http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/adolescent.html

Share your promising practices with Nevada's adult educators! Send them to Sharyn Yanoshak, saylv@cox.net, phone/fax 702/253-6280