

## How Can Teachers Help Second Language Learners Begin to Communicate?

### Summary C

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One of the most difficult teaching situations is working with a student who has no or very little language in their second language. Teachers need to find ways to interact with students and get them to begin producing language. As you look over the following information, think about how teachers could engage students in learning content as part of learning the language when the students have minimal language. Consider the optimal expectations teachers might have for themselves and their students from using these ideas.

### One to Three Months

#### Student Work:

- Learn to recognize sounds and new words.
- Represent understanding non-verbally (gestures, drawings, pictures, pointing, pantomime).
- Respond to commands. Indicate needs.
- Listen actively and begin to distinguish between sounds, words, and meaning.
- Risk using words. Focus on meaning.
- Use words and test reactions.
- Work on speech, writing, and literacy together.
- Transfer native language understanding and skill whenever possible.
- Have a desire to learn the language.

## Teacher Work:

- Recognize students understand more than they can say. Create a safe environment.
- Allow students a period of silence. Encourage—don't force speech. Use repetition.
- Use non-verbals (gestures, visuals, drawings, pointing, and models) to teach meaning of new vocabulary.
- Plan and create experiences that help students notice features of language.
- Adjust teacher talk.
- Give students time and space to practice useful phrases and formulaic expressions.
- Use the students' first language and background.
- Support the student in continuing literacy development in the first language.
- Provide a rich linguistic environment. Use questions like the following:
  - Point to the\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Do you have the\_\_\_\_\_?
  - Is this a\_\_\_\_\_?
  - Who wants\_\_\_\_\_?
  - Find the\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Put the\_\_\_\_\_ next to the\_\_\_\_\_.
  - Who has\_\_\_\_\_?

## Two to Six Months

### Student Work:

- All tasks listed above AND
- Use formulaic speech patterns and memorized chunks of language (e.g., "I don't know").
- Use one or two-word utterances.
- Add vocabulary and more complex language forms.

### Teacher Work:

- All tasks listed above AND
- Use the following questions:
  - Yes/no (e.g., "Are there 6?")
  - Either/or (e.g., "Is the fungi an animal or a plant?")
  - One word response (e.g., "What part of the frog is it?")
  - General questions that encourage lists (e.g., "What are the names of these plants?")
  - Two-word response (e.g., "Where did he go?")

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Annela Teemant is Professor of Second Language Education (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 1997) at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Her scholarship focuses on developing, implementing, and researching applications of critical sociocultural theory and practices to the preparation of K-12 teachers of English Language Learners. Specifically, she has collaboratively developed and researched the Six Standards Instructional Coaching Model and pedagogy. She has been awarded five U.S. Department of Education grants focused on ESL teacher quality. She has authored more than 30 multimedia teacher education curricula and video ethnographies of practice and published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Urban Education*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Language Teaching Research*. Her work describes how to use pedagogical coaching to radically improve the conditions of learning needed for multilingual learners. She has also taught adult intensive English in the United States, Finland, and Hungary.



### Stefinee E. Pinnegar

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A St. George native, Dr. Pinnegar graduated from Dixie College (now DSU) and Southern Utah State (now SUU). She taught on the Navajo Reservation then completed an M.A. in English at BYU. She taught for 5 years in Crawfordsville, Indiana. She then completed a PhD in Educational Psychology at the University of Arizona (1989). She was faculty at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, before coming to BYU. She helped develop and now directs the TELL program. She is Acting Dean of Invisible College for Research on Teaching, a research organization that meets yearly in conjunction with AERA. She is a specialty editor of Frontiers in Education's Teacher Education strand with Ramona Cutri. She is editor of the series Advancements in Research on Teaching published by Emerald Insight. She has received the Benjamin Cluff Jr. award for research and the Sponsored Research Award from ORCA at BYU. She is a founder of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices research methodology. She has published in the Journal of Teacher Education, Ed Researcher, Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice and has contributed to the handbook of narrative inquiry, two international handbooks of teacher education and two Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices handbooks. She reviews for numerous journals and presents regularly at the American Educational Research Association, ISATT, and the Castle Conference sponsored by S-STTEP.



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