

Five top tips for English Language Learners in an International Setting

English Language Learners are students whose first language is not English.



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A school needs to have an EAL (English as an Additional Language) framework with criteria which are clear and accessible for the students, teachers, and parents. All students, including English Language Learners, need to feel in control of their learning and the most effective way is by setting simple and clear learning goals based on the chosen EAL framework.



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Although we must differentiate the work for our English Language Learners, we also need to ensure that their needs are met when it comes to content learning. This means that we differentiate by taking out the language, not the content.



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While English Language Learners are focussed on their English language skills, we also need to nurture their mother tongue. Research shows that allowing ELLs to use their native language in class helps them acquire English quicker and it also gives them a sense of achievement. Yes, they are learning English, but that is because they are already mastering at least one other language. If a student knows the answer, but only knows it in their own language, why not let them say it and then translate it together? Brainstorming in their mother tongue before a writing task, allows students to get their ideas on paper. It takes the pressure of having to find the right word in English away. By reading books about Science or History topics in their mother tongue, students are helped to transfer their skills from one language to another.



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Every learner learns at his or her own pace. As the research by Cummins shows, it takes a student between 5 to 7 years before they have reached academic proficiency. When a student arrives in the UK, their first goal is to master social English. They need to be able to make friends and go to the shop. The academic language will follow in time, but when that is, therefore it is important to have open communication between all stakeholders in school.



5-

Parents need to be involved in the school community. The EAL teacher organizing informal meetings, for example, will give parents the opportunity to get to know each other and find out what is happening in school. Parents are often overwhelmed by emails sent out by the school and they feel isolated as English isn't their first language. If parents are involved in school work and activities, they will be able to support their students at home.



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