

**Title:** FAQs for the Multicultural Committee: What are considered “best practices” in teaching English language learners?

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In my quest to learn about a best practices model for education English language learners (ELL), I came across many useful resources, including a review of effective practices by August and Hakuta (2007), multiple materials from the Center on Instruction (2012), and a checklist of suggestions compiled by university-based English as a Second Language (ESL) tutors (Burton et al., n.d.). The goal of the FAQs from the multicultural committee is to offer a summary and list of resources as a starting point for school psychologists who have questions about working with ELLs. As such, I offer a summary of suggestions for best practices for teaching ELLs. Please look through the references section of this article if you would like to learn more.

Suggestions from August and Hakuta’s (2007) review of best practices in ESL include:

- Just as native English speakers have strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, so do ELLs. Instruction and learning environments should be customized to meet the unique needs of each ELL.
  - Some ELLs may have had little schooling in their home country, others may have had more intense instruction than in the typical classroom in the United States, and yet others might have been born in the United States to a household that does not speak English but have spent their school years in public schools. These factors not only affect academic performance—they also affect how well the student knows their first language.
  - ELLs will learn English at different rates.
  - Research has shown that pull-out for English instruction is the least effective way to learn English. Intuitively, this makes sense; ELLs need to see and hear peers and adults modeling appropriate English language usage.
- ESL teachers, general education teachers, principals, and all staff should create a supportive learning environment for ELLs and should collaborate to build effective practices.
- Courses on language, linguistics, academic discourse, language development, and cultural diversity should prepare teachers for working with ELLs.
- The curriculum followed when teaching ELLs should be evidence-based and address multiple issues: “conversational fluency, academic language proficiency, literacy...grammar.... [culture,] listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (p. 2). Instruction should find a balance between teaching basic skills and more advanced skills in order to effectively teach the basics and encourage growth in language skills at the same time.
- School-family-community partnerships are essential to the success of ELLs.
- Native language usage should be encouraged because it improves the English of ELLs.
- ELLs’ native cultures should be incorporated into the curriculum.
- Explicit and direct skills instruction is one of the most effective ways to teaching English.
- Effective programs provide multiple opportunities for ELLs to practice English.

Resources from the Center on Instruction (2012) affirm most of the evidence-based suggestions from August and Hakuta's (2007) review. The Center does offer some more suggestions for best practices in ELL instruction:

- Assist ELLs in developing the academic language necessary for using English in the classroom. Many ELLs sound fluent in English but do not have the appropriate academic vocabulary to perform well in the classroom. This vocabulary should be taught in a variety of academic disciplines.
- Teachers can focus teaching on three areas: preventing skill deficits, boosting skills, and correcting existing deficits.
- ELLs should receive explicit and intensive instruction in phonological awareness and phonics early on when learning to read English in order to develop basic decoding skills.
- Interventions that work well for native English speakers when working on reading skills also work for ELLs, though the pacing may need to be slower. Examples include cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, graphic organizers, and use of students' background knowledge.

Tutors working in a university-based ESL tutoring center offer more personal, social-emotional suggestions for working with ELLs (Burton et al., n.d.):

- Build rapport with students by asking about their writing experience and perceived writing ability, learning about their culture, and respecting cultural differences.
- Inspire confidence through specific and earnest praise.
- Encourage students to ask their teachers questions, as their home cultures may discourage students from questioning teachers.

If you are interested in a more detailed look into these suggestions, please head to the references listed below or the website for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (<http://www.tesol.org>), where you will find resources such as *Implementing the ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* (Snow, 2000).

## References

- August, D., & Hakuta, K. (2007). Beaverton school district: Best practices for English as a second language. Retrieved from [http://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/pdf/ins/ins\\_ELD\\_Best\\_Practices\\_Extended.pdf](http://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/pdf/ins/ins_ELD_Best_Practices_Extended.pdf)
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