



First Nations' Learners and Effective Teaching Methods can inform our practice with Newcomer ELLs

Since the early 2000s, the Ontario government has had a major focus on Student Success. There has been much research about Student Success for Indigenous Learners in the last twenty years. We know that First Nations learners are gifted and intelligent and learn in ways that may differ from other students from other ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds. For this reason, we are explaining some of the knowledge about First Nations pedagogical approaches in order to give the teachers a sense of how ELLs who are FNIM can be taught effectively. The approaches outlined below, are effective with all ELLs including adults. The student ELLs at AHS often are from other tribal/Indigenous nations in Africa, Burma, etc. Some of what applies below also applies to their cultural traditions. This said, by utilizing methods we know work for Indigenous North Americans we embrace the idea that removing Eurocentric models of educational practice in favor of more diverse ones including Indigenous pedagogy, will value our publically funded system, in general. Douglas Cardinal, Métis and Blackfoot architect has said that our children need to be raised with a drum in one hand and a computer in the other. This phrase echoes two underlying principles in First Nations' education; the importance of cultural survival and pride; as well as, preparation for life in contemporary times.

The Importance of Oral Language

Oral language is the base of traditional teaching methods and needs to be reinforced as this is a significant traditional way of passing on knowledge. The knowledge we carry and our understanding of the world needs to find a place in the classroom. Students can express what they know verbally and share with each other their knowledge on topics. This is also a fundamental principle of the Communicative approach to teaching ELLs and we know from research that students who speak English, and think in English will be more successful in becoming fluent in reading and writing in English.

Our elders continue to share knowledge in primarily a verbal way. This is the way our ancestors have shared knowledge for thousands of years. Oral language promotes important skills; the ability to tell rich varied stories, the ability to listen well, the ability to think for yourself, the ability to listen for the significant truths, the ability to share with others in a real way and the ability to grasp concepts on a deep level. Our storytelling traditions need to be valued in the school system as it is the prime mode of sharing knowledge in our communities.

Teaching in circles

The circle is a complete and equitable format for teaching, learning and sharing and is central to most First Nations' cultural and social frameworks. Not only are medicine wheels circular, but our worldviews however diverse are all circular. Circles are used in healing, in gatherings, in teaching lodges, in decision making, in conflict situations, in teaching, in communicating, in dancing, and in all aspects of traditional life. Our communities, our architecture, or social structures and our gatherings are for the most part, non-hierarchical and circular. The circle of life starts before we are born and lives on after we pass on to the spirit world. Circles are very important to all First Nations learners and are a valued and respected parts of teaching and learning. All ELLs can learn from talking in a circle as the circle allows each student to speak, or not speak and for all others to listen while one person speaks.

Experiential Learning

There is much evidence that First Nations students learn well through experiential learning, as do most humans. As our education system is predominantly text based, and based on communication through text, many First



Nations students to do not achieve as they would if the system valued experiential learning. First Nations adults need to learn through all of their senses, through actively doing things both in the class and outdoors, by trying things out, by solving problems, by experiencing ideas; rather than reading about them. We need to discuss how we can teach ELLs through experiential methods of learning.

Time for thinking

Aboriginal student success models have demonstrated that First Nations students by and large take time to contemplate ideas before responding. This is a trait of Indigenous students from many nations. Time to reflect is valued and often First Nations adults will not respond until they have thought things through. They may not answer at all, or they may simply want to consider possibilities before responding. Teachers of ELLs may need to teach in a style that accepts silence, accepts time for contemplation, and allows learners to be ready to respond when they are ready. Also think aloud approach from Balance Literacy pedagogy values teachers modelling how to go about thinking about a specific topic before giving students time to reflect as well.

Involvement with Role Models who are from one`s nations or one`s ethnicity

We believe that all learners need to see successful adults doing things that are interesting, diverse and valued. They need to see that our adults and elders have had careers, families and responsibilities. By inviting elders of both genders and diverse backgrounds, as well as; authors who are Indigenous we show that our peoples are role models for newcomer ELLs. This role modeling is important so our younger adults have a sense of hope about their own futures. They need to see that they can grow up, have jobs, have families, have responsibilities, and live in a good way. Not all ELLs have these role models in their families and communities, so it is important that all Indigenous curriculum reinforces how it is to live in a good way as an adult and as an elder. We met with two elders and had three knowledge carriers/ authors come to the school to speak to some classes.

Integrative learning

This traditional approach to education values learning through everyday experience. Children learn by doing and by reflecting on what they are doing. They learn at home, at play, with family and at school. This integrative approach needs to be reinforced in the lessons we plan and teach.. By integrating the subject disciplines, the isolated skills, that may not hold meaning on their own, will be reinforced through the content, and the pedagogy that integrates knowledge into all subject disciplines yet teachings the English language skills of: listening, speaking, reading, writing, thinking, and group work.

Literacy, Numeracy, Media Literacy and Technological Literacy

If our adult ELLs are to be prepared for their futures, for the world we live in and to be resourceful adults they need to be educated to support literacy in both their native language and in English or French. They also need strong numeracy understandings to leave open many career paths, run their own businesses, etc. They need to be media savvy in order to ensure they are skilled and safe on the net. They also need to be able to decode media messages in: advertising, radio, t.v. and the internet. They need to know how to use varied technology in creative ways.