

More than a Dozen Ideas for Working with a Child Learning a Second Language

- Essentially learning English as a second language is similar to learning English as a first language – take the opportunity to speak with the child often, talking about what is in the here and now and what is interesting to the child.
- If the child is learning English as a second language, understand that there may be a period of time when the child is quiet, just observing and taking in information.
- Speak distinctly, providing visual models (i.e. be at eye level with the child so she can see your face) when possible. This will help in learning the English sound system. Recognize that some sounds may be entirely unfamiliar for the child learning English – for example, sounds in Chinese may not be the same as those in English.
- Don't be afraid to play with different sound making, just as with an infant learning a first language. This may help in developing the oral motor capacity and function to produce new sounds in the new language.
- Instead of directly saying that a child has said something incorrectly, model back the corrected statement after an affirmation to the child. (ex. If the child says, *Me short hair* you say, *Yes, you do have short hair!*).
- Understand that beginning attempts at communication may be telegraphic – saying only the key words in a sentence, such as the noun and the verb (ex. *I go*. Instead of *I go to the store*).
- Research what you can about the first culture of the child to help with understanding.
- Accept the first culture and language of the child as a part of the child. Share in holidays, traditions, music, etc. Be respectful.
- Share books, music, foods, dances, etc. from many different cultures.
- Learning a new language is risky business – the more risks one takes in speaking and trying out the new language, the easier and quicker the learning will be – encourage trying! Role-playing may help, such as pretending to order food in a restaurant.
- Provide opportunities for the child to interact with peers – encouraging communication efforts.
- Understand that diversity is a gift we have in this world!
- **Make learning language fun!**

For further reading: Tabors, Patton O. *One Child, Two Languages*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; Baltimore: 1997.

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