

TOPIC: Addressing the needs of adult literacy learners

DATE: 12/14/2023 **TIME:** 9:30 p.m. - 11p.m.

Lesson Objectives:

- Teacher will facilitate an informal survey of needs and interests to inform future lesson plans.
- Students will learn English vocabulary for classroom discourse.
- Students will become familiar with important words and symbols for daily life.

This is an exploratory lesson that is intended to be given towards the beginning of the term in order shape the topics of future curriculum and teaching strategies. However, assessing needs should be a continual process which serves to check-in on the progress towards the students' goals. This should take up the first 1.5 hours of class before break, but could be extended with other media and activities to comprise the entire session.

Activity	Summary	Arrangement	Materials
Assessment 20 min	<p>Greet students individually when they enter, once everyone is seated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to class that you want to know why they want to learn English, reading and writing. What do they want to gain from this class? • Post or project photos of examples of needs and briefly discuss each, try to elicit feedback from students to add to list • Distribute and give instructions for pictorial survey, inform students they can talk to each other while they take it if they like • Have students take survey home to discuss with family to bring back next time. <p>Notes: At the end of this activity, students should be informed that can get help from family or friends on filling out this survey if they choose. They can include writing in any language in the space provided for additional needs not listed.</p> <p>Students are free to use their L1 to discuss meanings of graphics with other students if possible.</p>	<p>Whole group</p> <p>Small groups</p>	<p>Printed pictorial questionnaire for students' needs in high quality color. Questionnaire has space to add their own need that is not listed</p> <p>Printed or projected photos of needs: Getting a job, becoming a citizen, reading to children, grocery store, taxi, public transportation, DMV, restaurant, school, etc.</p> <p>Tape or magnets to affix signs to chalkboard if using physical copies</p>

<p>Classroom English (cont.) 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduce subject by playing humorous video on styles of hand-raising, stop at 1:00. (cont.) ● Briefly discuss hand raising for asking a question or for help ● Distribute Vocabulary Guide Sheet ● Discuss and provide examples for each example, e.g. “Can you repeat that more slowly?” ● Have class repeat and practice each. ● Tell students to keep Vocabulary Guide with them for reference. <p>Notes: It would be very useful to use your TA to enact these student/teacher dialogues for the students</p>	<p>Whole group</p>	<p>Video: 32 ways to raise your hand in class: (cont.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QOAWO3sV2Y</p> <p>Printed Vocabulary Guide Sheet (20 classroom vocabulary items with photos)</p>
<p>Group Activity 15 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Put the students into small groups and explain that you are going to practice asking questions to the teacher. ● Teacher selects one group member to be the “teacher” from each group and give them a piece of chalk (or dry-erase marker) ● Instruct students to refer to their Vocabulary Guides to ask the teacher for help one at a time (raising hands). ● After 3 minutes, tell the “teacher” of each group to pass the chalk to another student. ● Once each person has held the chalk, end the activity. 	<p>Groups of 3</p>	<p>Several pieces of chalk or dry-erase markers</p> <p>Printed Vocabulary Guide (from previous lesson)</p>
<p>U.S. Signs and Symbols 20 min</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduce topic: “Now we are going to be talking about signs (point to a sign in the room) that you might see every day” ● Post printed signs on board or around room ● Teacher moves to each sign, points at it, and asks students “What does this mean?”, and “What is this?” ● If no student can provide an answer, teacher provides explanation using props, gestures, or the students’ L1s as needed. ● After each sign is explained, put students in pairs. ● Have the pairs take turns pointing at signs and asking “What does this/it mean?” and answering the question 	<p>Whole group Pairs</p>	<p>Printed signs: Exit, Restroom, Prices, Stop, dollar, room number, etc.</p> <p>Tape or magnets to post on board</p> <p>Chalk or dry erase markers</p> <p>Props (like paper money, tickets, etc) would be useful but not required</p>

	Notes: This lesson is two-fold in identifying signs but also teaches “What” questions such as “What is this?” and “What does this mean?” and their answers.		
Closing 15 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher reinforces that students can ask the questions learned today in every class if they don’t understand something • Teacher gives informal assignment: talk to your family about the survey and your English needs. Find things in your daily life that are hard to understand and write it down, remember, or take a picture to bring to the teacher next class. • Teacher asks if students have any last questions from today, answers them if so, and wish students farewell. 	Whole group	N/A

Assignment/take home: Students complete Needs Assessment survey with help of their family/friends and return it to teacher the following class.

Discussion:

This lesson outlined above will serve as both a preliminary needs assessment and also as an introduction to important practical classroom and real-world language. At 1.5 hours in length, it should be executed during the first half of one of the first two class sessions, and should serve as a starting point for both teacher and students for how to assess and communicate needs in an ongoing fashion throughout the term. This lesson was created with the goal of addressing an important issue facing the NSC. This issue is the lack of alignment between classroom practices and students’ immediate learning needs and goals. As stated previously, current pedagogical methods bypass these practical needs in favor of simplistic and often childlike literacy strategies. We know from studies of language and identity that motivation alone may not be enough to foster effective language learning; rather, the learner must be invested in gaining knowledge of the new language (Norton, 2010). If the subject matter is not relevant to the lived experiences of the students, there is little chance of investment.

An essential component of needs-based English instruction is to empower the students with linguistic resources for classroom discourse in addition to the comprehension of everyday language. The above lesson begins to address these key issues of adult literacy-level learners and should be followed with many more lessons which cover the specific needs made visible by the assessment activity. In the following sections I will explain the purpose for each section of the lesson plan and support it using sociolinguistic theories.

The first activity presented is a take-home needs assessment. In order to address students' frustration due to trivial and impractical classroom topics, we must immediately make an honest attempt to discover what practices the students envision and hope to be doing with English in the future. In this sense, we seek to uncover a piece of the students' language identity, or what Bonny Norton would term their "imagined communities" (2010). On page 355 of "Language and Identity", Norton asks, "The question that arises then is what community practices do these learners seek to learn? What, indeed, constitutes 'the community' for them?" (2010). An assessment, although not without barriers for pre-literate students, is a way to begin to answer this question.

In the next subsection of the proposed lesson, students are taught and encouraged to practice vocabulary for classroom discourse. Most importantly, they learn how to speak up if they need help, do not understand, or need a statement repeated. The lesson starts off with a video about hand-raising, an important classroom convention in the U.S. The acquisition of such cultural norms governs membership into speech communities (Hymes, 1972) or communities of practice (Wenger, 2010). To be sure, classrooms are most effective when they operate as a community of practice wherein its members feel a sense of belonging via mastery of shared norms, communicative practices, and affinities (Rymes, 2014).

Next, the students use the vocabulary learned in the previous subsection to form small groups and practice their pronunciation and memory. The students are given agency during group work to ask questions of one another, help each other, and receive feedback from their peers. Here, we begin to use interactions among members to cement the new language practice as a common experience. The group work also aids the students in practicing their emerging knowledge of contextualization cues like turn-taking, politeness and hand-raising (Gumperz, 1997; Rymes, 2014).

Last, I plan to conduct a practical lesson on U.S. signs and symbols using visual props. This lesson also includes how to ask questions involving the word “what”. If the answer to “what is this?” is not known, then the teacher is instructed to convey the meaning of the sign via gestures, props, or the students’ home language. In keeping with the practical sense of the lesson, what is important is that the sign and symbol is understood for its real-world use, not perfect execution in English. In this way, the meaning of the sign can be *negotiated* using whatever forms of speaking are available or shared between teacher and students. Lu and Horner call this type of meaning-making *translingual* (2010) and propose that the use of many types of semiotic resources is a boon, not a hindrance to language learning.

The lesson concludes with a reinforcement of the concepts covered and how they can be applied in and out of class moving forward. The assessment of students’ needs along with the real-life scenarios introduced in the lesson were designed to better align the pedagogy and class content with the lives of adult immigrant English learners. Bearing in mind that this class may be a student’s first experience with learning English, I have intentionally kept the focus on speaking and listening as opposed to writing and reading in order to maximize the benefit that group study

affords. It is my hope that beginning a term by taking seriously the needs of adult learners will foster an environment of respect, value, and understanding that was previously lacking.

References

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