

# Pre-Literate Adult Teaching Ideas

Heather Odell

Suzy King

May 4, 2006

Saint Michael's College

Tutor resources provided by volunteer organizations may not adequately address the needs of every learner. In an attempt to tackle such lack of materials, the “creators” of this project propose various teaching ideas targeting pre-literate adults. Having volunteered/tutored beginning adult English language learners (ELLs) since January, we realized the need for more resources geared towards this demographic.

Our initial reason for tutoring adults was the fact that they often have children in public schools who receive direct ELL services. Consequently, parents are frequently excluded from the learning process and its benefits. Volunteer organizations such as Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program (VRRP) and Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) are one of the few avenues for adults to be included. Although such organizations are very beneficial, they may not have access to the necessary materials for adult beginners. We have, therefore, begun to create basic and essential resources for those who wish to tutor adult ELLs.

Pooling prior experiences (as Heather volunteered for LVA and Suzy for VRRP), together we have developed a few comprehensive lesson plans for adult beginner ELLs. They include approaches to teaching colors, basic food items, and numbers (0-10), while encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Including these four major skills required in second language acquisition (SLA) is imperative to learner success. However, tutors who have not had English as a Second Language (ESL) training may not know how to go about incorporating such skills in their tutoring sessions. As such learners are pre-literate and lack English proficiency; our lesson plans include context-rich and cognitively undemanding activities. They serve to facilitate the tutor’s initial learner interactions.

Having only begun to confront this issue, we aim to make aware the shortage of lesson plans directed towards adult ELLs available to tutors. As tutors and pre-service ESL teachers, we invite others to contribute to the project. We encourage the use of our lesson plan structure as it takes into account learner cognition and SLA skills. Volunteers who collaborate with ELLs are vital to the organizations for which they work as well as to the individual learner. Tutor and learner success, however, largely depends on the materials made available to them.

## Pre-Literate Adult Teaching Ideas

Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Proficiency Level: No English. Due to the lack of English proficiency, context embedded and cognitively undemanding activities are recommended (Cummins, 1981).

### Colors

*\*Please note, if at any time the learner appears discouraged or restless, feel free to take a break.*

*\*Learners will make mistakes. When addressing repetitive mistakes, recasts may be the most appropriate way in which to correct them. Recasts entail restating the correct word (in this case) after the learner has produced the mistake.*

Materials: Colored pencils or crayons; clothing flyer

*\*This lesson idea will not foster reading or writing skills due to the fact that letters have not yet been introduced to learners.*

#### Presentation:

This section will foster listening/speaking skills.

- On a piece of paper, scribble a color.
- Say the name of the color.
- Have learner repeat color.

#### Focused Practice 1:

This section will foster listening/speaking skills.

- Touch various objects in the room while saying their color. Avoid “ambiguous” colors, such as periwinkle, teal, etc.
- Learner should repeat color.
- Encourage learner to replicate tutor’s actions.

#### Communicative Practice:

This section will foster speaking skills.

- Show learner the clothing flyer.
- Point to only one article of clothing and state its color.
- Allow more learner autonomy by letting the learner pronounce colors individually. When addressing ambiguous colors, categorize them under the “basic” colors; red, orange, yellow, green, blue, pink, purple, brown, black, grey, and white.

Follow-up Application:

- For a quick review at a later date, use color flashcards to refresh learner's memory. Leave flashcards with learner.

## Pre-Literate Adult Teaching Ideas

Lesson Time: 45 minutes

Proficiency Level: No English. Due to the lack of English proficiency, context embedded and cognitively undemanding activities are recommended (Cummins, 1981).

### Food

*\*Please note, if at any time the learner appears discouraged or restless, feel free to take a break.*

*\*Learners will make mistakes. When addressing repetitive mistakes, recasts may be the most appropriate way in which to correct them. Recasts entail restating the correct word (in this case) after the learner has produced the mistake.*

Materials: Basic food flashcards; food

*\*This lesson idea will not foster reading or writing skills due to the fact that letters have not yet been introduced to learners.*

#### Presentation:

This section will foster listening/speaking skills.

- Place food items in front of learner.
- Point to individual food items and say its name.
- Encourage learner to repeat food name.
- Repeat until food names become rote knowledge.

#### Focused Practice 1:

This section will foster listening/speaking skills.

- Use food flashcards to increase food vocabulary.
- Show a flashcard and say the food's name.
- Encourage learner to repeat.
- Repeat until food names become rote knowledge.

#### Communicative Practice:

This section will foster listening skills.

- Emphasize learner autonomy by encouraging learner to independently repeat presentation process.

#### Follow-up Application:

- If learner complies, take him or her to a grocery store. Give learner a short verbal list of food items to locate in the store.
- Repeat using different food items.

## Pre-Literate Adult Teaching Ideas

Lesson Time: 1-2 hours (depending on learner)

Proficiency Level: No English. Due to the lack of English proficiency, context embedded and cognitively undemanding activities are recommended (Cummins, 1981).

### Numbers 0-10

*\*Please note, if at any time the learner appears discouraged or restless, feel free to take a break.*

*\*Learners will make mistakes. When addressing repetitive mistakes, recasts may be the most appropriate way in which to correct them. Recasts entail restating the correct word (in this case) after the learner has produced the mistake.*

Materials: 10 pennies; number flash cards; number tracing sheet (see attached); price list (also see attached)

#### Presentation:

This section will foster listening/speaking skills.

- Introduce numbers via hand counting. Say the numbers out loud while counting your fingers.
- Encourage learners to do the same. Repeat until counting 0 to 10 becomes rote knowledge.

#### Focused Practice 1:

This section will foster speaking skills.

- Show how to count pennies.
- Encourage learners to count the pennies.

#### Focused Practice 2:

This section will foster reading/speaking skills.

- Hold up individual flashcard while pronouncing the number.
- Have learner repeat what you say. Repeat.
- Hold up individual flashcard without pronouncing the number. Encourage learner to say the number.
- When finished, leave flashcards with learner.

#### Focused Practice 3:

This section will foster writing/speaking skills.

- Show learner the number tracing sheet.
- Demonstrate the process of tracing and then writing the numbers.
- Encourage the learner to say the number that he or she is writing.

Communicative Practice:

This section will foster speaking/reading skills.

- Show learner the price list.
- Point to one of the items on the list.
- Demonstrate the process of counting the appropriate sum.
- Encourage the learner to repeat the process.

Follow-up Application:

- Repeat Focused Practice 1 and Communicative Practice using nickels and/or dimes in addition to pennies.
- Facilitate the learning of larger numbers/amounts via coins and an updated price list.