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TE 845

Reflective Essay

### Professional Development on Idioms for ESL Teachers and Students

I chose to focus on idioms for a professional development class. I felt this was an important linguistic goal because it is a difficult skill to master for students speaking English and even more difficult for those from other cultures. The ESL teacher in our school and the teacher with ESL students in her second grade class agree that idioms are a difficult concept for ESL students to understand. This professional development is targeted for teachers who instruct ESL students and teach idioms. This professional development is focused on teaching idioms but can also be applied to other linguistic subjects as well. Teachers who teach ESL students will face many cultural differences when it comes to linguistics. The English language is very different from other languages and translating from one language to another changes the order of the parts of speech within a sentence. This can be very confusing for students, and teachers.

The materials I chose for this professional development are tools I have used in my own classroom to teach idioms. I have found success in these materials in teaching idioms. The ESL teacher in my school also uses these materials in her classroom and has found success with them. The use of images and matching cards with idiom phrases and meanings are a great way to check for understanding as the lesson progresses and corrections can be made accordingly.

I chose to present the professional development through a power point slide. Teachers will be able to view the points being made through the class and refer back to the slides printed out. As a teacher I have always enjoyed following a long during a presentation in order to make

notes for myself later on. After defining what an idiom is, I wanted teachers to understand the difficulty students have with understanding idioms so I chose to have them work in groups to complete a idiom worksheet. Teachers are given a statement in English with a small image. There is a word blank with phrases in Spanish that belong to each idiom. They are given phrases with “vez” which refers to time. These are the only tools teachers are given. The goal is to get teachers out of their comfort zones and understand what it is like for students who do not speak English as their primary language. After completing the worksheet to their best abilities, the answers will be given. The importance of images will be discussed and what strategies, if any, did the teachers use.

According to Li and Edwards there are essential understandings and key strategies and tools for ELL students. I decided to include these in the presentation and give points as to how they are applicable to teaching idioms. I think it is important for teachers to understand how to best support students in their classroom from different language and cultural backgrounds. A teacher’s role is to best serve their students’ needs and it is important for teachers with little experience with ELL students to understand this. I work in a school with a high transient population and many students with varying language backgrounds. Some ELL students have little to no English knowledge, while some ELL students are in the process of being exited out of the ELL program by third grade due to fluent English abilities.

To have a successful professional development it is important to focus on specific strategies, engage teachers in active learning, give teachers opportunities to collaborate, and development must be sustained (Li and Edwards). The professional development focuses on specific strategies as outline by Li and Edwards to be successful with ELL students. Teachers participate in an activity where they must work together to determine the match for an expression

and meaning for idioms in a language they are not fluent. This instills collaboration and gets teachers actively involved. Teachers' knowledge of tools to help ELL students understand idioms and knowledge of strategies to instruct ELL students develops over the lesson. The objective is for teachers to be able to teach and understand ELL students' cultural differences and use those to develop their skills in the classroom.

A key understanding for teachers to take away is the cultural differences students have in their classroom. Understanding personal cultural identity and those of students is important in making connections with students. Cultural identities affect learning (Li and Edwards) and how it affects student learning is necessary to understand. Some cultures do not promote a success in academics to be a priority. Making connections with students who have this cultural identity will have a harder time in school. It is the teacher's role to connect students' outside interests into school to build their interest in school.

Once tools and key strategies are given to teachers and related to idioms I gave a sample lesson to complete with students using idiom cards and a worksheet for independent work. The teacher will introduce the lesson by stating the target and objective of the lesson. If students have never had experience with idioms it is important to discuss idioms in depth before beginning the lesson. If they have had experience, a general overview will simply be needed. Stress how sometimes expressions are said for certain situations instead of saying the exact words we mean. Presenting multiple examples and breaking down the idiom and how it matches the meaning will help students see how to appropriately determine idiom meanings. Images are also on the idiom posters and cards the students use in the lesson. Discussing how the images help determine the idiom meaning is also important. Images help tell more than the words we are given, especially for students who do not speak and read English for their first language.

Once modeling is complete, students need an opportunity to work in a group setting in order to reinforce the concepts being taught with the aid of students around them. Students need to work in a setting where they can feel comfortable sharing their ideas without any negative comments. Attempt to mix the groups so there is a range of student ability within the group working together. This will be beneficial to the students who are lower achieving because they will be “retaught” by the higher achieving students, and the higher achieving students will be reinforcing what they learned, or already know, by re-teaching it to their peers.

Independent practice is necessary for students to demonstrate their understanding after having explicit instruction and group practice. I chose a worksheet that had options for students to choose from to take away the challenge of coming up with their own definition. The only difference from the group work and presentation is there is no image that belongs with it. Students have, however, seen each idiom through the guided practice and modeling. The closing to the lesson is to restate the objective and tell a table partner what an idiom is. This is key in remembering what the lesson focused on.