



TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

Steps for Equitable Outcomes for English Learners: PACE

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Teachers in inclusive classrooms are responsible for supporting a broad range of student learning needs. For English learners (ELs), these learning needs often dictate that teachers need to address issues related to language development, academic skill growth, and sometimes disability support. When faced with this challenge, generalist teachers may opt to rely on interventionists such as bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) teachers and special educators to address these needs. Though these interventionists play an important role, achieving equitable outcomes for ELs requires the continued commitment and support of all teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Research on high-leverage practices in inclusive classrooms (McLeskey et al., 2019) has demonstrated that teachers can focus on a set of core strategies to address a broad range of student needs. Drawing from this work, we suggest that teachers in inclusive classrooms can establish a consistent “pace” to guide their work. We present this framework with an easy-to-remember acronym: PACE.

- **P**atience as students develop new skills
- **A**ffirm and build on students’ strengths
- **C**ollaborate with families and other educators
- Adopting an **E**quity perspective for all students

Patience

Be patient and flexible as learning takes time and practice.

- Provide students wait time in the classroom.
- Allow students to demonstrate their learning in different ways and to respond in multiple modalities.

Affirm

Build on students' strengths and background knowledge.

- Get to know your students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, hobbies, and interests.
- Use relatable examples and references in class.

Collaborate

Work with parents and administrators.

- Collaborate with families and administrators using the FAST framework.
- Practice your intercultural communication skills by familiarizing yourself with different languages and cultures.

Equity

Seek equity in learning outcomes.

- Provide adaptations according to your students' proficiency levels.
- Provide feedback on students' performance, adopting a growth mindset.

Figure. The PACE framework.

The following sections provide recommendations for how you can PACE your approach for establishing inclusive learning environments.

Patience (as Students Develop New Skills)

Patience is a skill that can be developed in inclusive classrooms to help students know they belong and can learn. An initial step toward practicing patience is to establish meaningful learning goals that are both challenging and attainable for students (Alber-Morgan et al., 2019). It is important to communicate that there is a clear set of goals that will help guide your shared journey toward language and academic proficiency, and it takes time and practice to get there. As students work toward these goals, you can use a variety of strategies that establish a supportive learning environment.

Wait Time

Providing wait time helps students to possibly translate from one language to another before they are able to produce an answer. According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2018), wait time “refers to the length of time a teacher pauses between asking a question and soliciting a response” (p. 165). For example, you can ask a question to the entire class and provide a 3- to 5-second wait time before asking someone to share the answer with a partner or aloud to the whole class.

Alternative Responses

Patience also requires teachers to consider flexibility in how students are able to demonstrate understanding. If a student is at the beginning stages of learning English or has a disability that prevents them from writing or orally sharing their learning, you can provide [different ways](#) for them to demonstrate their knowledge. For example, students may be able to draw or act out what a story was about rather than writing a summary. You can also provide sentence stems, word banks, or partner work to better scaffold students who need extra support.

Multiple Modalities

Addressing different learning styles and strategies in inclusive classrooms takes time and effort. Using visuals, tactile, auditory, and kinesthetic activities helps learners engage with content meaningfully. By using multiple modalities, students are exposed to a topic in various ways that help them make connections to their real-life applications. For example, while teaching the water cycle, you could use visual aids to demonstrate the cycle, sing a song doing the motions of the water cycle, and have students create the water cycle using manipulatives.

Affirm (and Build on Students' Strengths)

Along with practicing patience, teachers in inclusive classrooms need to affirm and build on students' strengths. Finding ways to reinforce the knowledge and skills that students already possess is an important step toward building a culture of belonging and acceptance. Armstrong (2012) conceptualized this approach as *positive niche construction*. He recommended that teachers capitalize on the interests and skills of students when designing their curricula. As you help ELs acquire new language and academic skills, there are strategies you can use to acknowledge and build on their interests and strengths.

Getting to Know Students

Before any lesson is taught, you should get to know your students' interests to better engage them. One strategy is to provide an interest survey that asks about their hobbies and favorite things. This survey can be done with pencil and paper, verbally, or with visuals at the beginning of the school year. We also recommend conducting another interest survey in the middle of the year in case students have changed their interests. If a child has difficulty expressing their interests, you can ask family members what their child likes to do.

Drawing From Students' Cultural Backgrounds

Acknowledging students' backgrounds as a strength is crucial for them to feel accepted and take risks within the classroom. For example, if a lesson is about landforms, you could share examples of different landforms from different countries students may be from. Students may also share landforms they have seen from visiting different places.

Collaborate (With Families and Other Educators)

Engaging in collaborative partnerships with families and other educators is an essential step in establishing the PACE needed to provide high-quality inclusive education for ELs. Recent research on collaboration between teachers and parents of ELs with disabilities has highlighted the need for a commitment to authentic, reciprocal partnerships that are respectful of cultural diversity, build on student and family strengths, and establish a high level of trust (Hagiwara & Shogren, 2019).

FAST Framework

Uzum and Contreras-Vanegas (2020) developed the FAST framework, which helps establish a relationship among family, administrators, students, and teachers.

- *Families* should be directly involved with their child's education by meeting for conferences and helping to set academic goals.
- *Administrators* should remember to be flexible when working with families and provide a welcoming environment for everyone.
- *Students* should be held accountable for their own learning; they should ask questions in class if they are confused, review and practice new learning, and share their academic goals with others.
- *Teachers* need to be aware of the cultural backgrounds and learning abilities of their students. The cultural background may determine how the family engages in school events and the learning style of the child. You can create a welcoming environment for children by displaying decorations in different languages and receiving professional development that offers best practices for teaching ELs and children with disabilities.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Families and educators can also practice intercultural communicative competence. Jackson (2014) defines intercultural communicative competence as “the abilities needed to communicate effectively and appropriately with people who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 373). To this end, you can familiarize yourself with different languages, cultures and traditions, and World Englishes. You can do this by learning another language, practicing communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, and training your listening and communication skills for different Englishes.

Adopt an Equity Perspective (for all Students)

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of teaching in inclusive classrooms is maintaining a focus on student equity. It is sometimes easy to get caught up in providing the same amount of time/support/practice for each student in the classroom. In doing so, teachers may lose focus on the ultimate goal of achieving equitable outcomes for ELs and all students. Not all students require the same amount of time/support/practice to develop various skills. A key component of establishing the PACE for an inclusive classroom is seeking *equity in the learning outcomes*.

This means designing learning environments that are flexible enough to provide the time, resources, and strategies needed for each student to achieve their learning goals.

Adaptations

When designing curricula, you can incorporate accessibility features to ensure your students can access information and demonstrate knowledge however is most appropriate for their current skills and needs. Differentiating instruction and materials according to the English proficiency and/or academic level is necessary for the success of all students. With any EL, the first step is for you to learn their English proficiency level (beginner, intermediate, advanced and advanced high) in the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Once you know the students' proficiency level, you can make adaptations to your instructional strategies and assignments accordingly.

For example, with a second grade EL at the intermediate level across four language domains, you might use visuals when explaining new material, speak at a pace the student is able to keep up with, provide texts that may be simplified at the independent reading level, and provide sentence stems (e.g., sentence starters such as “the main idea in the story is...”) for writing assignments. A similar approach can be taken for ELs with disabilities, considering their individualized education programs when making adaptations.

Feedback on Performance

If students are shamed or ridiculed for their mistakes in their formative years, they may develop social and psychological problems associated with mistakes and may feel discouraged to participate in school. A key point is to direct any praise *to the work done* instead of *to the person*. (E.g., “you worked hard on this project; you did a great work” versus “you are so smart.”) A good strategy to create an environment where mistakes are welcome is to model it. You can openly acknowledge your mistakes. This provides a strong model for students that demonstrates a growth mindset (Dweck, 2007) when a mistake is made.

Conclusion

The PACE framework is an easy-to-remember acronym that summarizes some of the critical components in teaching ELs and students with disabilities. Teachers can PACE their teaching and keep an eye on student learning in an effort to accomplish equitable outcomes for all students in their classrooms. Teachers can PACE their approach for establishing inclusive learning environments that address a wide range of language, academic skills, and disability support needs.

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