Tips For Working With LEP Students

Provide clues to meaning:
• Use drawings, dramatic gestures, actions, emotions, voice, mime, chalkboard sketches, photographs and visual materials to provide clues to meaning.
• If necessary, repeat your actions using the same simple structures and actions.
• Simplify your message as much as possible breaking them into smaller, manageable parts to give newcomers a chance at comprehending.
• Make sure the student’s attention is focused.
• Don’t insist, however, that students make eye contact with you when you are speaking to them. This is considered rude in many cultures.

Modify your speech:
• Talk at a slow-to-normal pace, in short sentences.
• Use a pleasant tone.
• Use simple sentence structure (subject-verb-object) and high-frequency words.
• Use names of people rather than pronouns.
• Pause after phrases or short sentences, not after each word. You do not want to distort the rhythm of the language.
• Avoid using the passive voice and complex sentences.
• If you have something important to convey, speak one-on-one to the newcomer rather than in front of the class. The anxiety of being in the spotlight interferes with comprehension.
• Ask simple yes/no questions so that newcomers have an opportunity to respond.
• Accept one-word answers or gestures.

Be an active listener:
• Give full attention to your newcomer and make every effort to understand his/her attempts to communicate.
• Smile.
• Talk in a calm, quiet manner. Raising your voice does not help comprehension.
• Demonstrate your patience through your facial expressions and body language.
• Give your ESL students extra time to respond.
• Encourage new learners of English to act out or draw pictures to get their meaning across.
• Don’t jump in immediately to supply the words for the student.
• If the student response is heavily accented, correct by repeating the words correctly. Do not ask the student to repeat the correction. This can be very embarrassing.
• Resist the urge to over correct. This will inhibit newcomers so that they will be less willing to speak. Allow students to use a bilingual dictionary for words that can not be acted out.

Check comprehension frequently:
• Don’t ask “Do you understand?” unless you have taught it. This is not a reliable check since many students will nod “yes” when they don’t really understand.
• Teach the phrases (or have a bilingual volunteer teach them) “I don’t understand,” “Slowly, please,” and “Please repeat.”
• Write down messages so students have a visual as well as auditory input. Make a list of phrases you want your student to learn and to understand. Ask a bilingual volunteer to work with the student on those phrases.