

In the United States alone, there are over five million English Language Learner (ELL) students in elementary and secondary school. ELL students, like all students, need to know that their voices matter regardless of how they express themselves. Some students might prefer opportunities to use their native language, while others may need encouragement to share their ideas and opinions in unique ways. Developing a welcoming and accepting environment for ELL students requires intentional effort by peers and adults to listen, learn and lead with ELL students. Given emerging levels of English fluency, however, standard voice strategies often need to be modified to support and foster their voices.

The following resources offer a variety of strategies for supporting the development of self-worth, engagement, purpose, and voice for ALL students. The goal is to help schools create an environment where students feel accepted for who they are, celebrated for the unique gifts they can contribute to the school community, and certain their voices matter! This can be achieved when schools establish a positive atmosphere where students know they belong, are deeply engaged in learning, and see purpose in their lives. As you support the development of Voice & Aspirations for ALL students, we hope the most important lesson you take away is to never make assumptions. Instead, include students as partners when deciding how to best support their learning needs.

TEACHER REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. What cultural issues need to be considered for your ELL students to develop their voices?
2. What visual aids can be used in your class to help ELL students share their opinions and ideas?
3. How is your class a welcoming environment for ELL students?
4. How do you ensure that native English speakers respect the ideas of ELL students when they have challenges communicating with each other?

ELL VOICE STRATEGIES

Voice is sharing thoughts and ideas in an environment underpinned by trust and respect, offering realistic suggestions for the good of the whole, and accepting responsibility for not only what is said but also what needs to be done.

As a foundation for developing voice, begin by establishing strong relationships, fostering self-advocacy, and creating meaningful routines. When focusing on relationships, start with names. Teachers should know how to [pronounce students' names](#) correctly, and students should know how to pronounce each other's names. Also, students need to be truly and fully seen. Educators must take time to learn about their students' interests, families, and topics they enjoy studying. Teachers should also share meaningful information about themselves—hobbies, family pictures, etc. Classrooms (especially newcomer classrooms) need to feel safe, as students can feel vulnerable each day when they are using a new language.

- Activate students' prior knowledge and build additional background knowledge in preparation for new learning. These suggestions help students with writing, speaking and listening tasks: [K-W-L Charts](#), [Anticipation Guides](#), [Simplified Text](#), and [Multimedia](#).
- Give your students opportunities to tell their [personal stories](#). This will not only provide opportunities to improve their English and see themselves as writers, but also allow them to see that many of their peers have experienced similar difficulties adjusting to a new school, language and culture.
- Buy or borrow a copy of [Voices of Newcomers](#). This book is a practical guide for educators and those who want to learn from the varied and unique experiences of multilingual learners. It includes quotes from students and teachers, resources, reflection questions, and guidance on how to best serve newcomers and multilingual learners.
- Make school a welcoming place by celebrating all immigrants and cultures. Discuss the immigrant experience through read-alouds, lessons imagining what it may have been like, and information local families have shared about their immigrant experiences. The website [Californians Together](#) has a great series of lesson plans available at no charge using the Download Entire Toolkit button.

ELL SELF-WORTH STRATEGIES

Self-Worth flourishes when students and staff know they are valued members of the school community, have people in their lives they can trust and learn from, believe they have the ability to achieve, and know their efforts and hard work are recognized and celebrated in a variety of ways—academically, personally, and socially.

- Allowing students to express themselves in a safe environment and learn from one another is a wonderful [social-emotional learning](#) opportunity that benefits the entire class, especially [students of color](#).
- Using a [daily check-in activity](#) is a great way to start building trusting relationships with your ELL students. Ask them to draw pictures of how they are feeling that day or respond with a thumbs up or down to “yes/no” questions.

- Create a video about your school. Include pictures of school staff, important locations around the school, and classes participating in collaborative work. Ask current and former ELLs for their help creating versions in their native language.
- If you have newcomer English Language Learner students arriving at your school, take intentional steps to welcome them and develop partnerships with families. [This article](#) provides a few ideas to get started, as well as related resources and videos featuring ELL educators, including some who were ELL themselves.
- [Strategies you can implement](#) to help newcomer students feel safe and comfortable learning include building routine, consistency, and predictability into your class culture. This helps newcomer learners expand their mastery of their school environment.
- Celebrate the [Strengths of Immigrant Students](#). It is important to acknowledge the skills and strengths that newcomer students have and not just focus on their initial weakness with the English language.

ELL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Engagement takes root when schools ensure that students and staff are deeply involved in the learning process, showing enthusiasm and a desire to learn new things, as well as a willingness to take positive, healthy steps toward the future.

- Use images to help students meaningfully engage. [Illustrated vocabulary words](#), organized by theme, can be a helpful resource for students. This is a simplified version of an illustrated dictionary that younger ELLs can look through by theme to see vocabulary related to the colors, days of the week, classroom items, family members, and so on. [Wordless picture books](#) are another effective way to engage students that can ultimately aid students' oral and written skills.
- You can't go wrong with games! In the classroom, [many different games](#) can be played with mini-whiteboards, and they can be modified for online use by using a tool such as [Whiteboard.fi](#). [Quizizz](#) is also great for online use, and it has countless games already premade for just about any topic you want to teach!
- Classmates are a valuable resource in helping ELL and newcomers succeed, whether by showing students around the school on their first day or serving as a buddy in the classroom. Peers can help build students' confidence, act as language models, help answer questions, work on activities, and provide support.
- Students can demonstrate their knowledge through drawing before knowing how to write in English by creating pictures to match vocabulary words related to the curriculum. These pictures allow newcomers to demonstrate their growing understanding of English without producing anything orally or in written text. Students can also demonstrate their understanding of more challenging lessons through the [sketch-to-stretch](#) technique where students represent the events in a novel or historical event by drawing pictures.
- Communication with parents and caregivers is a critical part of establishing a connection between newcomers' families and their new school. Shortly after the child arrives at school, teachers should make an effort to communicate with parents by phone. If a phone call is not productive because of linguistic barriers, it is possible that a family member understands English well enough to make an initial connection, provide some information, and/or take a message. Teachers can try to communicate in the home language, if possible, with the help of an interpreter.

Purpose in school is fostered when students and staff take responsibility for who and what they want to become, both in terms of professional careers and by being confident, responsible members of their community.

- Model and encourage conversations that development higher order thinking skills in your students. This can be particularly powerful when there is no wrong answer. For example, [The New York Times](#) presents photos and asks three thought-provoking questions:
What is going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?
What more can you find?
- Utilize listening exercises. Choose an audio track that speaks about a popular American holiday such as [Thanksgiving](#). Have students listen and answer some comprehension questions. Then ask your students: Is this holiday celebrated in your country of origin? If not, is there a festivity that is similar in your country?
- Introduce your students to [K.I.M.](#), a direct vocabulary instruction strategy. The strategy is based upon a three-column graphic organizer. Students write the key word (K) in the left column, important information (I) about that term in the middle column, and provide a memory clue (M) in the form of a drawing in the last column. You can also add “S” for a sentence as a follow up activity.
- Help your ELL students develop a sense of purpose and bring meaning to their lives by encouraging them to share their interests and what inspires them. Wherever possible, connect them with topics that feel meaningful to them—connections that make them want to get involved and make a difference. One option is project-based learning with a service-learning focus, where students can make an impact in their school or local community.
- Plan a [workshop](#) (pgs 32-38) for newcomers designed to introduce students to people on campus who can provide them help with school-related issues, as well as how to ask for that help. The workshop can also help the school’s newcomer team identify areas in which students need support.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

VIDEOS

[New Moves: An Orientation Video for Newcomer Students](#) features 14 youths talking about their adjustment to school in Canada and what helped them be successful. It is available in 17 languages.

[Addressing the Social-Emotional, Academic, and Linguistic Needs of Newcomers](#) is a webinar that explores research-based practices and teaching strategies for engaging students and creating a classroom climate that promotes connectedness, a strong sense of belonging, and mutual respect.

[You are Welcome Here: Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Newcomer Immigrant Students](#) is a video project that showcases the ways in which Michigan's Dearborn Public School District is helping its immigrant students succeed.

[ESL/ELL Education: Interactive Websites for Learning](#): Instructional videos that can be useful for lesson planning or learning new skills.

WEBSITES

[Welcoming and Orienting Newcomer Students to U.S. Schools](#): Most refugee and immigrant families are deeply appreciative of the educational opportunities available in the United States. For some newcomer students, this appreciation is born out of direct experience with the absence or interruption of schooling. Such experience often creates highly motivated learners who, if given the right tools and a welcoming environment, can progress academically and exceed expectations.

[U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit](#): Includes links to numerous activities that classroom teachers can use to help students understand newcomers' experiences.

[Creating New Futures for Newcomers](#): Educating newcomers entails more than classroom learning. Making sure they have access to a range of health and well-being supports is correlated to better attendance, achievement, motivation, and a stronger sense of belonging.

[17 ESL Activities for Engaging Classes](#): These ESL activities aim at boosting awareness and increasing English as a Second Language in an effortless, fun sort of way.

[Helpful Websites for English Language Learners \(PreK to adult\)](#): Includes book recommendations, language lessons, quizzes, educational games, reading strategies, games, and more.

[Techniques for creating a positive learning environment help students adapt to a new culture and acquire a new language](#): Contains simple strategies designed to construct a safe and inclusive environment so that newcomer learners know that they are cared for and valued.

[The Maine Department of Education](#): This site includes resources and strategies to support ELLs, newcomers, and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE), including graduation and post-secondary education guidance and opportunities.