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Student Case Study

Instructing students who are English Learners (EL students) takes an extra measure of understanding and meeting students where they are at. Based on the writing sample I received, I suspect this student is an EL student and that their home language is likely interfering with their English writing abilities. This information is important to be able to contextualize the student's errors. I might also ask several questions about the student's background. What is the student's home language? How well do they speak English? What is their reading level? Are they a minority within the classroom, or are there other students who speak the same home language as them? This information would also allow me to formulate a more specialized plan to help the student with their writing development. However, based on the information available in the writing sample, I am able to conceptualize an appropriate teaching plan and response, beginning with a hierarchy of errors.

The most frequent and pressing error in the student's writing is incorrect use of indefinite and definite noun forms. For example, the student uses phrases like "I have to reserve hotel", and "I will buy gift for my family". The first step I would take would be identifying how nouns are treated in their home language and use that connection to explain how indefinite and definite nouns are treated in English. In the student's writing, I would clearly mark every time a noun takes the incorrect form, but I would also especially highlight where it is used correctly, as there are a few instances. Using these examples, I might talk to the student one-on-one and ask them to

walk me through their noun use and how they got to the correct form in each case. I would try and teach the student one-on-one the rules on nouns, but would also take some extra time in the classroom to focus on this subject with the larger group, such that the student would be able to collaborate with other students, especially if the student was in an EL-only classroom.

Specifically, I would have students discuss the rules surrounding nouns, write sample texts of their own, and have them trade texts and give peer feedback citing these grammar rules. This error takes the highest priority since it appears the most and is the most disruptive to the flow of writing. However, with some individualized instruction and peer collaboration, I think this error could be corrected.

The next group of errors is easily corrected, so would be second in the hierarchy. These errors are a collection of small punctuation errors that are very likely due to just not understanding the rule. For example, the student writes “could’nt” rather than “couldn’t”. Explaining to the student that the apostrophe replaces the missing letter (the “o” in “not”) would very likely at least lessen the frequency of this error. Other small errors of this nature present in the writing sample include spacing (explaining the rule that there is a space between every word and after a punctuation mark, but not after an open parenthesis) and capitalization (capitalizing at the beginning of every sentence and for proper nouns). In order to address these errors, I would clearly mark them on every instance in the student’s writing, and explain these rules in a larger class setting (especially if other students were struggling with the same) such that the student does not feel singled out for something rather nit-picky and small. If the student needed extra support, I would give them some grammar practice worksheets where they could correct these kinds of errors in example sentences. Hopefully, with this approach of drilling these rules, the student would be more likely to recall them and apply them to writing.

Another error the student has that is more complex (less frequent than the errors in indefinite and definite noun forms, however) is an issue with using the correct verb tense. Because this topic can be rather arbitrary and difficult in English, I would definitely have the student collaborate with other EL students on this subject. I would not have the student work on this topic in a mainstream classroom, since students who are native English speakers often pick up verb tenses quite intuitively. For EL learners, this is more of a challenge, so I would have them work together as a larger group. The rules for conjugating verbs in English are often not formulaic, so the best approach would be to expose the EL learners to as many verb forms as possible. I would have these students read passages in one verb tense, and then have them try to conjugate these verbs to a different tense, and discuss how this changes the meaning. Worksheets where students must conjugate verbs in context would also be beneficial. Collaboration is important on this subject, since it can be quite complex. However, if the student was not improving in the larger group, I would use some of the same methods one-on-one with the student.

Finally, the last major error the student makes, but one that is less pressing than others, is spelling. There are a few spelling mistakes in this sample text, including the words “famouce” (famous) and “air port” (airport). These errors are not frequent and do not significantly impair comprehension of the writing, so I would prioritize this last. The best way to prevent future spelling errors, since English is not so phonetic, is to expose the student to lots of texts so they can see how the words are spelled. In this exposure, it is crucial that students be reading the texts aloud, so they can hear the words and connect the spellings with the actual words themselves. These infrequent spelling errors would likely be corrected just by exposure to how the words are spelled in a larger group; one-on-one intervention would not be necessary for this error.

For all of these errors, I think that peer collaboration with other EL students is extremely important and effective. The student must be able to feel that their peers are also learning alongside them and that they are not behind the rest of the class. In order to achieve this, other EL students (who are, in theory, making some of the same errors) being present helps to boost morale and make the student feel that they are not alone. Larger instructional groups involving reading aloud, giving peer feedback on writing, and other forms of collaboration will help the student feel that they are supported and in a nurturing environment for learning. It is important not to try and tackle all errors at once and to avoid picking apart student writing, and to instead focus on individual errors and improve those before moving on to the next.