

## The Role of the ESOL Teacher

***Outcome: In this segment, you will come to better understand the roles of an ESOL teacher.***

Jose recently arrived to the United States from El Salvador. When his teacher asked him the name of his school in El Salvador he replied, "La escuela". His teacher thought that Jose did not understand the question, so she asked again. Again Jose said, "La escuela". The teacher asked another student to translate for Jose. After a moment of conversation, they explained that Jose came from a small village in El Salvador where there was only one school for all of the students in the village. Everyone called the school "La escuela" which means the school. What are some challenges that Jose might face as he tries to adapt to his new American school?

Rohit has been in the United States for two years. He moved with his family from India in order to pursue a better life. Education is very important in Rohit's family. He was one of the best students in his school in India. He arrived to the United States with a strong academic background and previous exposure to English. However in India, his English teacher did not use English very often in an academic setting. Rohit is communicatively fluent in English and getting ready to exit the ESOL program. What are some difficulties he might continue to have in his academic classes?

Beile arrived from Ethiopia last year. In her country she went to a school where she studied English. Beile quickly developed fluency in oral language and listening skills, however, her writing and reading skills need improvement. She has difficulty organizing her thoughts in paragraph form. What can be done to support Beile as she acquires the English language and develops her writing skills?

David moved from Korea to the United States several years ago. He has received ESOL services, however he continues to have difficulty in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. He has repeated some levels of ESOL and taken summer school in order to help improve his English language proficiency. His teachers are concerned because they have tried various accommodations but he is still having difficulty. His teachers have held several parent conferences but, his academic

performance continues to be a concern. What should his ESOL teachers do next?

In classrooms across the country, teachers face issues like these every day. So how do ESOL teachers support classroom teachers and their students in addressing their many concerns?

In the past, ESOL teachers primary responsibility was to instruct students in English in order to develop their communicative competence in English. However, with recent changes at the federal, state, and local level in regards to the accountability of ESOL student achievement ESOL teachers must now prepare students not only for communicative competence but academic competence as well. At the same time, they support students and their families as they learn to navigate a new country, language, and culture.

For students new to the country, ESOL teachers focus on developing communicative English skills quickly so that students will be able to function in their new settings. They do this by providing students with the scaffolding, experiences, and support needed to begin comprehending and using social language. Once this foundation of basic structures is in place, ESOL teachers move to adding instruction in content and further developing the students' language.

ESOL teachers also assist classroom teachers in modifying assignments based on the language level of the student. ESOL teachers must take into consideration multiple learning styles in order to make concepts comprehensible.

At the more advanced levels of language proficiency, ESOL teachers need to deliver challenging lessons that promote growth in language as well as academic skills in order to ensure students will be successful in content classes. In order to prepare students for more challenging work ESOL teachers provide specific instruction in study skills, academic language, meaningful feedback regarding grammar and vocabulary usage, and specific strategies for high stakes assessments.

If academic success for ESOL students was based solely on language acquisition, the job of an ESOL teacher would be much easier. However, in order to be successful, ESOL students need to acquire culture as well as language. ESOL teachers provide specific instruction to help students develop competency in the American culture. ESOL students need to be oriented to the culture of the United States and have the rules and expectations of their new schools and country explained to them.

Students need to learn about the holidays and traditions of their new country in order to facilitate their adjustment. This needs to be done so that the new culture is not seen as replacing the old and promotes a sense of safety, mutual appreciation, respect, and encouragement.

Since ESOL students spend most of the day in mainstream classrooms, ESOL teachers must collaborate with other staff to best meet their needs. Through cooperative planning and shared expertise, the ESOL students benefit throughout the day.

In summary, ESOL teachers do much more than teach the English language. ESOL teachers are also responsible for the acquisition of culture, the social, and emotional development of ESOL students as they prepare them for academic success in the mainstream classroom.

***Reflection: What roles of the ESOL teacher can you tap into to help your students become as successful as possible?***