



# LANGUAGE LEARNING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

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Dr. Sharon C. Snyder, Kean University  
ssnyder@kean.edu

NJTESOL/NJBE Conference Hyatt Regency Hotel – Regency B, New Brunswick, NJ  
May 25, 2011, 1:45-3:15 pm



# Let's Ask Ourselves ...

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- What are some of the best things I've experienced in teaching ESL students?
- What seems to work and what doesn't?
- In what areas am I truly perplexed?
  - Hmmmmm.....



# Principles Underlying Language Learning

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- Eight principles are presented here.
  - Six focus on the environment and motivation for language learning.
  - Two focus on the structure and modes of language.



# Principle 1

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Written and oral language is best learned in context.

Context creates:

Predictability



## Principle 2

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Meaning is central to written and oral language.

(Will the learner understand?)



## Principle 3

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Background knowledge and experiences are key contributors to written and oral language.



## Principle 4

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Learning is social. Language learning is supported by peer and other personal interactions.



## Principle 5

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Language learning is a lifelong process. Both teachers and students are learners.



## Principle 6

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A low risk environment  
encourages learning.



# Principle 7

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All the language systems interact and support each other:

- Phonology/grapho-phonemics
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Pragmatics

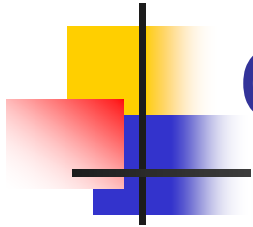


# Principle 8

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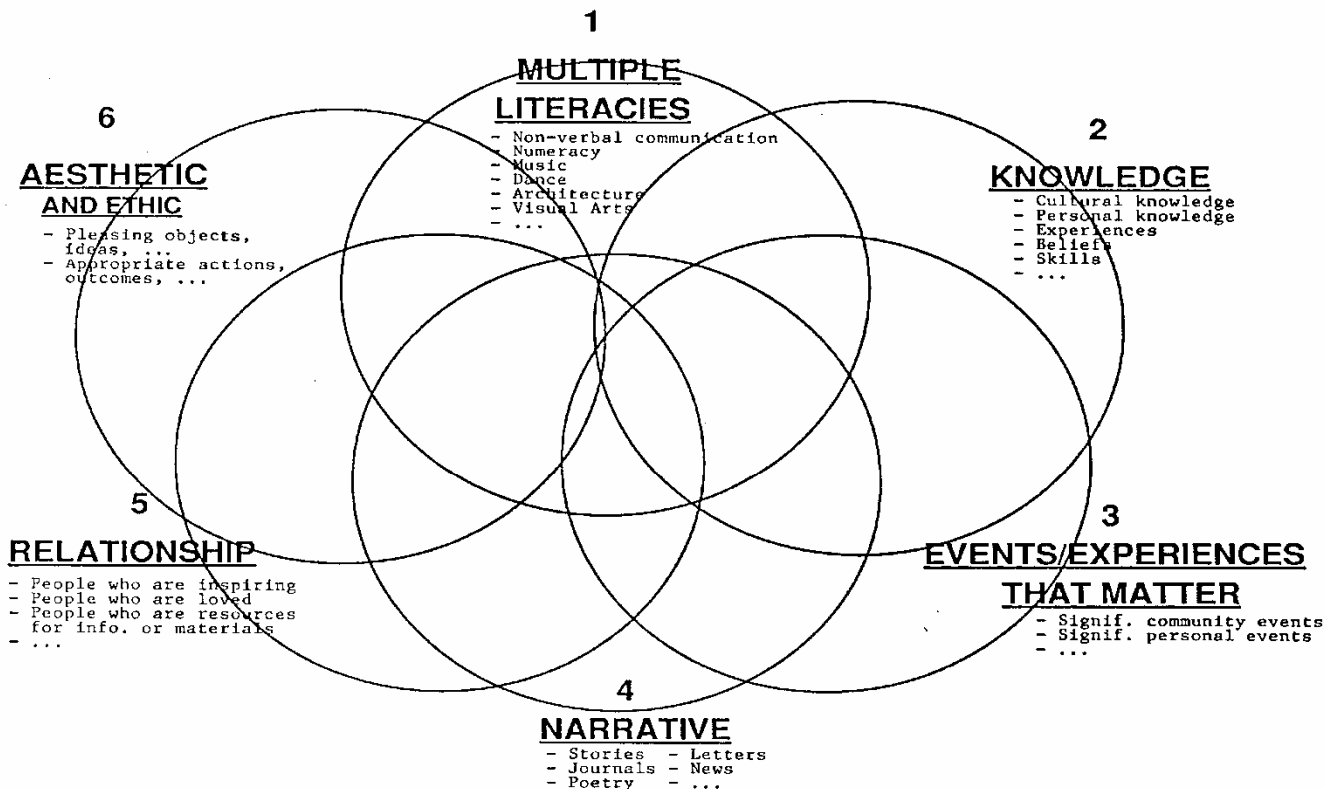
All the language arts interact and support each other:

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking



# Creating Context and Predictability

## CONTEXTUALIZING LITERACY INSTRUCTION: CONCEPTS (VEHICLES) WHICH TAKE US FROM PRINCIPLES TO ACTION





# Multiple Literacies

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- Non-verbal communication
- Numeracy
- Music
- Dance
- Architecture
- Visual Arts



# Knowledge

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- Cultural knowledge
- Personal knowledge
- Experiences
- Beliefs
- Skills



# Events and Experiences That Matter to the Learner

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- Significant personal events
- Significant community events
- Significant world events



# Narrative

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- Stories
- Letters
- Journals
- News
- Poetry



# Relationship

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- People who are inspiring
- People who are loved
- People who are resources for information or materials



# Aesthetic and Ethic

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- Pleasing objects, ideas, ...
- Appropriate actions, outcomes, ...



# Examples from a Refugee Camp

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- A Day in April (2 levels)
- My Experience During Volcanic Eruption
- Dream Find Freedom



# Applying the Principles

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What questions can you ask yourself, as you plan lessons, to keep these principles in mind?



# Question 1

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Will this strategy or material allow the learner to respond at his or her own level?



## Question 2

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Will this strategy or material allow the learner to discover something new about the language s/he is learning?

Will it allow the learner to stretch as far as s/he can go?



## Question 3

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Will this strategy or material connect with the learner's background and interests?

Is it relevant to his/her life or interests?



## Question 4

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Are supportive communication systems built into the strategy or material?

- Illustrations
- Non-verbal cues

Will the learner understand the meaning without the language?



## Question 5

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Will all the language modes be engaged through the use of this strategy or material?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

Will the learner be able to go from one language mode to another to support learning from the other?



## Question 6

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Will all the language systems be engaged through the use of this strategy or material?

- Phonology/grapho-phonemics
- Syntax
- Semantics
- Pragmatics

Is the language real? Is it in context?



# Let's Get Specific!

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- Story Telling
- News Reporting
- Letter writing, e-mailing, texting
- Journal writing
- Language through pictures
- Language learning in the real world
- Reading Corners
- Teacher as Informant/Peers as Informants



# Story Telling

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- The teacher introduces topics, vocabulary, and grammatical structures through illustrated stories.
- Students use current knowledge of English to tell and write stories of their own.
- As students tell stories, the teacher writes them in conventional form or in the form as spoken by the student.



# News Reporting

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- The teacher and students share any news of interest about their daily lives, or about community or world events.
- The teacher writes what they say in conventional form or the students write down the news individually or in groups.



# Letter Writing, E-mailing, Texting

*This is highly motivating!*

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- Find proficient users of English to be writing partners for your students.
- Partner students with other students.
- Students discuss the correspondence they've received (if not confidential).

Note: Through seeing demonstrations of the conventional writing of a standard English user, students are led toward conventional use of English. Exchanging writing with the teacher or some other proficient English user is highly motivating for the student.



# Journal Writing

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- Students write to the teacher in a journal about a concern or topic of their choice.
- The teacher responds by writing in the journal, returning it to the student.
- Students share their journals orally (on a voluntary basis only).
- Variation: Students write in journals which will remain private.



# Language Through Pictures

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- The teacher provides pictures relevant to topics and to students' interests and aesthetic sense.
- The teacher acts as an informant to help students express what they want to say about the pictures.
- The teacher uses pictures to introduce language related to a topic.
- The teacher builds discussion of topics on students' responses to pictures.



# Language Learning in the Real World

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- The teacher plans experiences for the students in real situations. If possible, the students participate in determining the experiences.
- The teacher and students together assign specific tasks requiring the use of English outside the classroom.
- All who participated report on the experiences afterward.
- The teacher follows up by exploring the language of language that arose during those experiences.



# Reading Corner or Reading Bag

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- The teacher or students provide a variety of reading material of interest to the students. (Note that readability level is not as important as interest level.)
- Time is provided for students to read any materials of their choice.
- Students share what they have read, orally and in writing.

Note: While students read materials of their choice, the teacher reads material of his/her choice as well; while the students write, the teachers writes; when the students share, the teacher shares. This motivates the students and provides a demonstration for them.



# Teacher as Informant and Peers as Informants

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- The teacher sets aside time for students to ask how to say in English things of interest to them. This puts the initiative in the students' hands.

Note: Learning to use proficient English speakers as informants is an important survival and continuing learning strategy.

- The teacher encourages students to use each other as informants.

Note: This needs to be closely monitored so that peer consultation supports rather than limits students confidence in their own ability to use and continue to learn English.



# In Short

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- Language is everywhere, so learning language can be done anywhere.
- People LOVE to communicate and can't stop themselves. Take advantage of that. The more we use language, the more the structure of language is internalized.
- Stories are what we create every waking minute. Our minds constantly predict connections, so build on our affinity for predictability.



## Resources Relevant to Community ESL

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The following may be available from ERIC or from the Center for Applied Linguistics:

- Fifty-four illustrated, predictable books for Vietnamese, Lao, and Hmong adult ESL/literacy learners. Philippine Refugee Processing Center, Morong, Bataan: International Catholic Migration Commission.
- Snyder, S., Stephen, P., Mitchell, W., Aguilar, H. (Eds.) Strategy Notebook: A Compilation of Open-ended Instructional Strategies and Materials for Beginning ESL and Literacy Learners. Manila, Philippines: International Catholic Migration Commission, 1991.

If you would like to create books with your students, you may be interested in the following article:

- Snyder, S. "Books for Beginning Readers and Writers: If You Can't Find Them, Make Them," Cross Currents 18.1 (1991): 77-79.

For a discussion of the role of predictability in language learning, you may want to read the following article:

- Snyder, S. "Supporting Literacy in a Second Language – Focus on Predictability," School Connections, 12.2 (Fall 2000): 21-27.



# Just for Fun

## A Closing Example of One of the 54 Books

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- Uncle Cui and the Banyan Tree