

# An Introduction to ESL at SCS

## Introduction

The challenges of bringing an American education to a foreign country are a reality at SCS. Although our student body is comprised of over 90 percent Dominicans (whose first language is Spanish) as well as a 5-10 percent blend of Asians, Americans, Canadians, and Europeans, we believe that all our students are capable of reaching our high academic standards with ‘best practice’ instructional strategies and supports.

The Santiago Christian School ESL curriculum has been designed taking into consideration that ...

- There are five stages of second language acquisition (SLA). All ELLs go through them: Silent period, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency.
- Current research has shown that language proficiency is further developed through academic application, so core curriculum subjects (science, math, social studies, etc.) serve as the context for English language development, progress toward language proficiency, and overall academic achievement.
- Individual language learners vary in the acquisition of their second language and in consequence in the acquisition of their productive (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading). English language learners (ELL) may not be at a uniform level of English language proficiency across the four language domains. This may be reflected in their native language proficiency.

The goal of these standards is to establish criteria to support SCS elementary students who in a great majority are learning English language learners (ELL) while accomplishing academic goals and to assist teachers in planning and implementing instruction and assessment for those ELLs.

These levels reflect the social and academic dimensions of acquiring a second language that are expected in grades PK – 8 and are divided into five grade level clusters:

PK3 – PK4	Entering
K – 1	Beginning
2 -3	Developing
4 – 5	Expanding
6 -8	Bridging

However, it is important to keep in mind that the five language proficiency levels outline the progression of language development, delineate expected performance and describe what English language learners can do. So, for instance a new student admitted at SCS in 4<sup>th</sup> grade could be at the **Beginning level** because of his/her language proficiency.

From there we conclude that, direct instruction through the pull out delivery model of instruction would be needed for students at the entering and beginning level. Support would be required when language level and grade level are not so far from each other.

Our ESL educational team consists of our Special Services Department as well as our Pre-K through Grade 12 teaching staff. In order to help all students reach their potential, our team strives for continual classroom improvements by taking personal responsibility for learning and practicing ESL strategies through in-house workshops, continuing education, professional collaboration, and reflection, as well as following SCS's ESL philosophy as summarized below.

## Philosophy

- We believe that all our ESL students are capable of reaching high academic standard with 'best practice' instructional strategies and supports.
- We understand that the process of second language acquisition is similar to that of first language acquisition.
- Studies show (see references below) that language acquisition increases with peer and teacher modeling, thus SCS supports inclusion.
- In order to increase quality peer interactions/modeling we promote classroom cooperative learning activities, specifically those that are engaging, meaningful, purposeful and context-rich. (Cooperative learning activities - when facilitated properly – in addition to increasing student learning, increases communication and social skills, as well as character development.)
- We understand ESL learners benefit from a multi-sensory instructional approach. All learner styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic, should be considered when developing units of study.
- Learning strategies for all levels of learning need to be explicitly taught to students. This will provide for student the learning tools they need in order to become independent and responsible learners.
- Unit or lesson goals, curriculum, and evaluations must be aligned. As well, they must be grade appropriate, yet challenging, reflecting high standards and best practices.
- All SCS educators should understand and implement best practices for vocabulary building avoiding 'talking down' to students but challenging them with robust vocabulary instruction. (See resources below: Bringing Words to Life )

## Practical Application

ESL strategies are often classroom best-practices used for all students with some common-sense adjustments. Here are a few tips that may help a teacher in the ESL classroom.

- Teachers should study the students individual profiles (background, native language, current English skills, special needs)
- When considering seating and cooperative learning groups, reflect on the group composition. Position students with strong English language skills to help model language for struggling students.
- Encourage 'English Only' even during recess or after-school activities.

- Provide additional 'wait time' for students responses to questions.
- Be conscious of the vocabulary you use.
- Teach the language of the subject.
- Daily read-alouds are encouraged
- Rephrase idioms or teach their meaning (especially in the lower grades).
- Frequently check for understanding.
- Write key words on the board or use visual and other non-verbal cues, wherever possible; i.e., objects, charts, maps, pictures, photos, gestures, facial expressions.
- Provide outlines, written notes/summaries/instructions on lengthy activities.
- Respond to students language errors through correct modeling

## **ESL Supports: How it looks in the classroom**

### **Pre-K through 2nd grade classrooms**

SCS's ESL Teacher – who is part of the Special Service Team - collaborates and plans with kindergarten through first grade teachers to include ESL strategies in the classroom. The ESL teacher also regularly works in these classrooms leading students in lessons relating to Language Arts and Science. Struggling students may be pulled out of classrooms for small group or one-on-one learning activities.

In the 2nd grade classrooms, the ESL teacher pulls out struggling students to work in small groups or one on one as needed, as well as advises teachers on classroom strategies.

### **3rd through 6th grade classrooms**

The Special Service teacher works with elementary students at this level with a focus on inclusion. They collaborate and plan with teachers to assist struggling students, offering useful tips and ideas. The Special Service teacher tests students to find areas of difficulty and develops a plan to best help those students.

### **7th through 12th grade classrooms**

The Special Service Coordinator works with teachers and students at this level. She/he may give tests to analyze/evaluate individual student needs, as well as assist in the classroom to facilitate individual student learning.

## **Resources**

### **Pre-K - grade 12**

Vocabulary Strategies: [Bringing Words to Life](#) (Beck, McKeown & Kucan) is an excellent resource for teachers (Pre-K through Grade 12). Chapter four focuses on strategies for elementary teachers, while chapter five is geared toward the upper grades.

Students learn new vocabulary in all grades through content. However research shows that directed and purpose driven vocabulary instruction is more effective. Although there are numerous resources and strategies, a few from Bringing Words to Life are listed that could be useful to all teachers.

1. Teachers could present a new unit, topic or theme by asking students to predict, for example, the 10 most important words which relate to the new study. This will help students to think about what they already know. The lists can be continually reviewed and revised, and at the end of the unit the class reflects on the actual list.
2. Teachers should reflect on the grade and topic they are teaching, continually introducing and practicing appropriate vocabulary. A 7th grade science teacher, for example, could reflect on the students written observations of a tree, introduce and model improved and expanded vocabulary. Perhaps the tree's bark is serrated, ridged, malleable, porous, or lustrous.
3. When introducing a new term look for Latin Greek prefixes or suffix and ask student to consider related words in order to derive the meaning. For example, if a student asks, "What is a unicycle?" the teacher can respond by asking the student to look at the word and to break it down as he/she guides them towards the meaning.
4. Dictionary definitions are not an effective vehicle for learning word meaning (Miller & Gildea, 1985) and (McKeown, 1991, 1993). Although dictionary use should still be taught and encouraged, teachers should create student-friendly explanations by (1) characterizing the word and how it is typically used, and (2) explain the meaning in everyday language. (See chapter 3 for more information).

### Additional teacher resources

**Pre-K through Grade 6:** Scaffolding Success for ELL: A Toolkit for Teachers by Dr. Virginia P. Rojas. This workshop was presented in 2008 at SCS. The information/guides relating to this workshop are available in some classrooms as well as in SCS Special Services Department. In this book are various literacy/reading/vocabulary strategies for pre-K through elementary grades.

**Grades 7-12 as well as Grades 2-6:** for additional support see research below. Also following the RAFT strategy may be advisable when assigning written work, as this is an excellent tool which supports all students especially English Language Learners.

See <http://olc.sped.sk.ca/DE/PD/instr/strats/raft> for the following information description of RAFT:

### What is RAFT?

The RAFTs Technique (Santa, 1988) is a system to help students understand their role as a writer, the audience they will address, the varied formats for writing, and the expected content. It is an acronym that stands for:

- Role of the Writer - Who are you as the writer? Are you Sir John A. Macdonald? A warrior? A homeless person? An auto mechanic? The endangered snail darter?
- Audience - To whom are you writing? Is your audience the Canadian people? A friend? Your teacher? Readers of a newspaper? A local bank?

- Format - What form will the writing take? Is it a letter? A classified ad? A speech? A poem?
- Topic + strong Verb - What's the subject or the point of this piece? Is it to persuade a goddess to spare your life? To plead for a re-test? To call for stricter regulations on logging?

Almost all RAFTs writing assignments are written from a viewpoint different from the students, to another audience rather than the teacher, and in a form different from the ordinary theme. Therefore, students are encouraged to use creative thinking and response as they connect their imagination to newly learned information.

### What Is Its Purpose?

The purpose of RAFTs is to give students a fresh way to think about approaching their writing. It occupies a nice middle ground between standard, dry essays and free-for-all creative writing. RAFT combines the best of both. It also can be the way to bring together students' understanding of main ideas, organization, elaboration, and coherence...in other words, the criteria by which compositions are most commonly judged."

### SCS ESL Program Sources

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