

# MULTISENSORY TEACHING AND LEARNING: WHY AND HOW

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## I. WHY?

### A. Teaching

1. To consciously teach in another style ( we usually teach in the style we learn—or in the style in which we were taught.)
2. To be more effective—reach more learners more thoroughly
3. To reach those whose learning disability—or very strong learning preference-- prevents learning in the usual ways
4. To make material and language for ESOL learners more accessible
5. To help learning for adults be more realistic and relevant
6. To prevent boredom and insure learning over the long term: All three kinds of learners, ESOL, adult and those with LD, often need multiple exposures and lots of time to absorb even simple things—multisensory instruction provides multiple ways of addressing the same material.
7. To assure an interesting class learners will feel part of and less like auditors in a lecture
8. To break away from traditional molds of education which many learners—ESOL and ABE—have found to be negative

### B. Learning

1. We retain about 90% of things we do, as opposed to about 10% of what we hear only.
2. Some of us can learn ONLY through one or two channels of learning—and they are usually NOT the ones school usually requires ( visual/auditory)
3. Some of us learn only a little through any channel of learning, so we must combine all channels for effective learning.
4. It is easier to stay involved with active learning—especially after a long day of work
5. Active, multisensory learning doesn't feel so traditional or so much like school where many of us failed.
6. It is easier to understand new ideas and words in English if we can interact with material in many ways.
7. Those of us who don't know much English —and maybe don't know how to read or write at all—find it very tiring to sit a long time and listen to English.
8. Being involved with learning in many ways makes us feel less like children in a class.
9. Some of us are not very competent at learning things one way, but are very competent at other kinds of activities. Having a chance to do things in a variety of ways gives us a chance to shine where otherwise we would never look very good as learners.

## II. HOW?

### A. Making the classroom friendly to the multi-channel learner:

1. Jazz up those classrooms—make them a literacy experience: maps, globes, pictures (president, governor, mayor), charts, manipulative calendar, —music??
2. Toolkits—letters & numbers, felt-tip markers, colored overlays, pencil grips, large-grip pens/pencils, alphabet strips in print and cursive, large-print dictionaries, timers, koosh balls, clay or play doh, post-it glue, highlighters, erasers, slate/chalk/eraser, magic slates, ear plugs or headphones, pastel paper, paper with big lines, collection of realia miniatures for phonemic awareness/phonics

### B. Providing for multisensory learning in a single lesson

1. Series of three or four activities of short duration on the same material
2. Example one: You want the students to learn the vocabulary of a certain lesson you will read:  
Activities could include:
  - a. Matching words to pictures (concentration, felt board or magnetic strips, pairing game, picture grid etc.)
  - b. Matching words to definitions (concentration, or paper activity done in pairs)
  - c. Completing cloze sentences using words on strips to place in sentences.
  - d. Acting out a few words if action words or adjectives ( e.g. feelings)
  - e. If objects, using realia props, students give each other commands to get a couple of objects.
  - f. If more abstract words, students receive a set of sentences in which target words have been used incorrectly and in pairs or triads they have to correct the sentences

You choose a few with a variety of channels of learning in mind as well as levels of difficulty in mind (slower students might match pictures, faster ones work on the cloze sentences—if the slower ones want the sentences, they can take them home to work on).

Example two: You want to do a lesson on rhyming words that are not spelled similarly (would, good)

Activities could include:

- a. Listening to a Dr. Seuss book
- b. Taking turns reading the stanzas of the book
- c. As a group listing the rhyming sets—separating those that look alike and rhyme ( fish/dish) from those that don't (meant, went)

- d. Finding matches for other words of this kind (non-visual pairs: paper and pencil (connecting words from two lists), concentration, sorting sets of cards)
- e. Completing sentences with a word that rhymes with an underlined word:  
I found a note in the pocket of my \_\_\_
- f. Completing a crossword using rhymes as clues (there's a crossword building website for teachers somewhere)
- g. Go-fish game of sets of rhymes

### C. Using multisensory instruction over a long period of time

1. Why?—permits you to revisit the same material without boredom
2. Permits targeting all channels of learning to help learners retain a critical piece of knowledge
3. Is an essential part of teaching to mastery or over-teaching
4. Is the logical response to diagnostic teaching that tells you some of your learners have not mastered a particular lesson

*See handout; "When learning something new.." ( Eve Leons, Landmark College)*

### D. On-going learning

1. Active learning is good—but so is passive learning. Having activities available for students to do

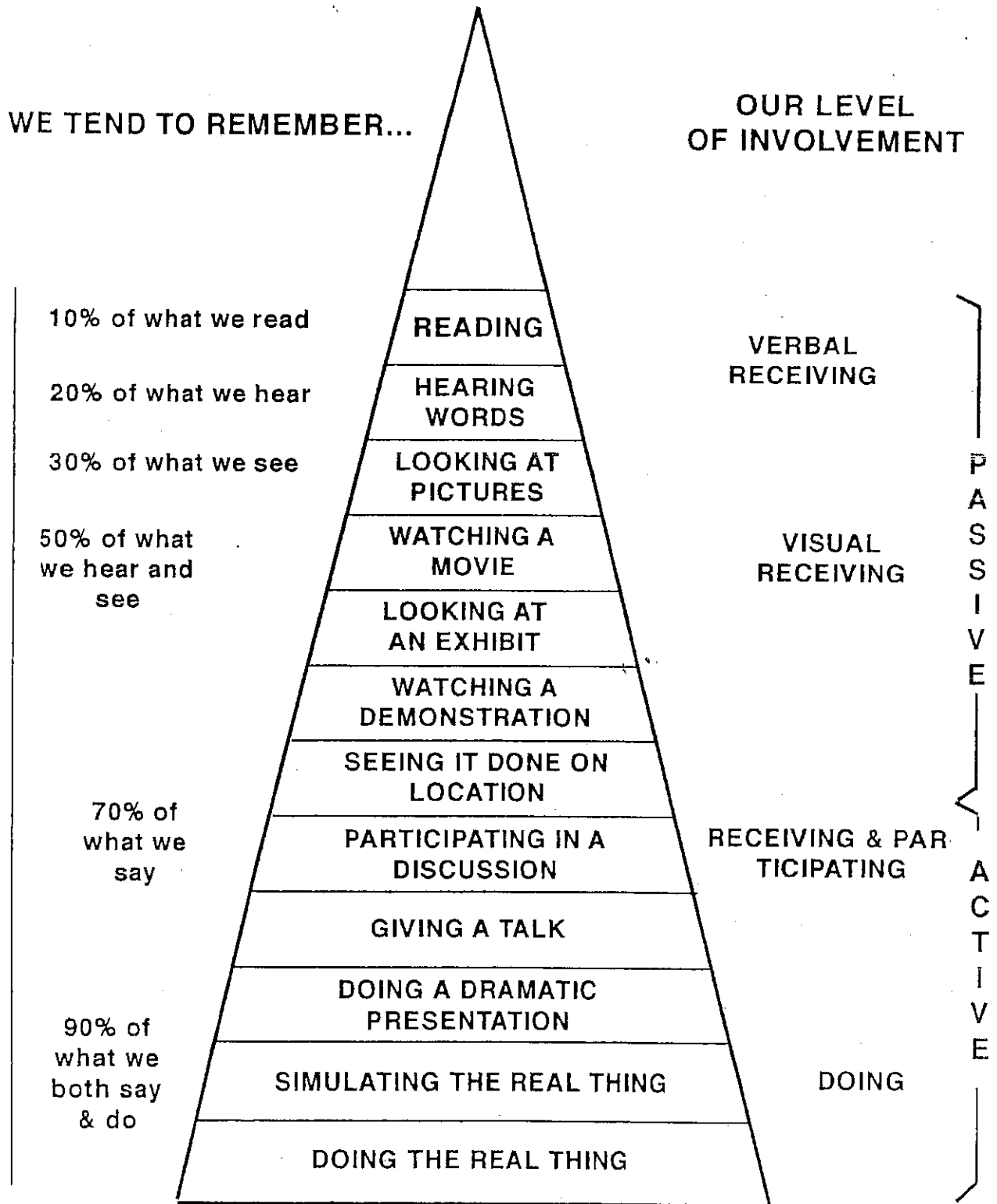
- While waiting for late students to arrive
- During break
- When they have finished something ahead of others or
- As a part of their assigned individual activities

These activities provide extra practice and promote independent learning.

2.Examples might be:

- a. A board game where one student reads a card with a sentence in the present tense, the other has to change it to the past tense. If the response is correct, the student throws dice ( spins a spinner, picks up a card with a number on it) and moves on the board. ( the correct response is upside down in small writing on the card the reader has.)
- b. Concentration game that can be played alone as a simple matching exercise or with a partner.
- c. Jig saw puzzles—state, US, or other topics

## EXPERIENCE and LEARNING



**DALE'S CONE OF LEARNING**

<p align="center"><b>WHEN LEARNING SOMETHING NEW, A LEARNER WITH LD NEEDS A VARIETY OF MULTI-MODAL ACTIVITIES</b></p>
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For example: Family vocabulary

MODALITIES= V( visual) A (auditory) K (kinesthetic [large muscles] includes speaking) T( tactile) fingers)

Activities to use over 8 or more weeks:

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. Picture cards/word cards                             | V A K T |
| 2. Bingo  | V A K T |
| 3. Video  | V A     |
| 4. Family tree /puzzles                                 | V A K T |
| 5. Song (with movements, pictures,                      | A V K/T |
| 6. Guided conversation<br>( possibly with picture cues) | A K/T V |
| 7. Role plays   | K A V   |
| 8. Writing assignment                                   | T V     |

Using many multimodal activities allows for

- 1) time to process new information
- 2) time to master new information
- 3) building on strengths
- 4) strengthening weaknesses

Adapted from Eve Leons, Landmark College.



## PROGRAMMING FOR SUCCESS

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“Make each student a star everyday!” This was the philosophy of the director of my Peace Corps language program. Success is an extremely powerful motivator. It can happen by a teacher making a conscious effort to see to it that students succeed and are acknowledged for effort and even the tiniest progress.

Have you ever done any of these things?

- Given students passages to read without carefully verifying how much knowledge and vocabulary they have on the topic of the passage?
- Continued with a lesson when one or more students clearly is not getting it?
- Had students do grammar exercises without any evidence that they know the purpose of the exercise and of the grammar being practiced?
- Completed a lesson in which MOST students have given correct answers, but some have not?
- Presented a lesson that seems straightforward but in fact has multiple parts that must be mastered before the “main” lesson is accessible?
- Given a lesson or activities knowing full well that some students will be able to do it well but some will not get it at all?

These are examples of programming for failure. When a teacher knowingly—or maybe unknowingly because she did not reflect—presents a task that one or more students is not really ready and able to do, the teacher is setting up the students for failure, not learning and success.

Programming for success first and foremost means NOT setting up students to fail. Many ESOL students are suspected of having LD because of poor performance in the classroom. In fact, very often the problem of poor performance results from the student being asked to do things he or she is not ready or equipped to do. There are many factors to consider in an ESOL learner’s picture of learning that can affect how a student does in a lesson or task.

Some of the factors include

- Level, quality and type of prior education (students in other countries generally do not learn the same information in the same way as American students do)
- Experience with the type of tasks you are doing
- Language or languages of the student ( May have had education in a tongue other than the mother tongue, so who knows what translation is going on?)
- Actual proficiency in different skills in English (oral proficiency means little in terms of writing and reading proficiency and vice versa, English learned may not be academic English at all.)
- Health issues of all kinds (visual, hearing, physical health, mental)
- Attention deficit disorder

- The student's metacognitive skills—how much he or she knows about learning and about how to think about learning ( e.g Understanding why you are practicing word order of questions. Many assume it is just part of English; they do not think about how their use of questions impacts how people they encounter perceive them.)

Every technique recommended to use with students with LD is intended to help teachers help students succeed:

- Multisensory learning is designed to guarantee that students
  - have the opportunity to learn through all learning channels
  - can learn through whichever channel and in whichever style is best for them
- Breaking tasks down into small, incremental parts permits students to understand and complete manageable pieces of a larger task.
- Providing lots of review and re-teaching guarantees mastery instead of shaky learning on which more learning cannot be built
- Individualizing instruction means that a student will be able to work on exactly the skills and information he or she needs and what motivated him or her to come to class in the first place. It also means not sitting and waiting while other students do things faster or slower.
- Diagnostic teaching means paying attention to the problems and the successes of an individual student as well as of the class to see if teaching is effective or needs readjusting.
- Setting realistic goals based on good information about students, then planning activities that will promote progress to those goals.

Teachers can program for success if

- They KNOW their students
- They ACT on that knowledge

Knowing the students means assessing, interviewing, observing constantly. With the knowledge gained

- Teachers do NOT ASSUME knowledge or skills—they have information that supports decisions about materials, methods, content, pace, choice of activities, choice of partners etc.

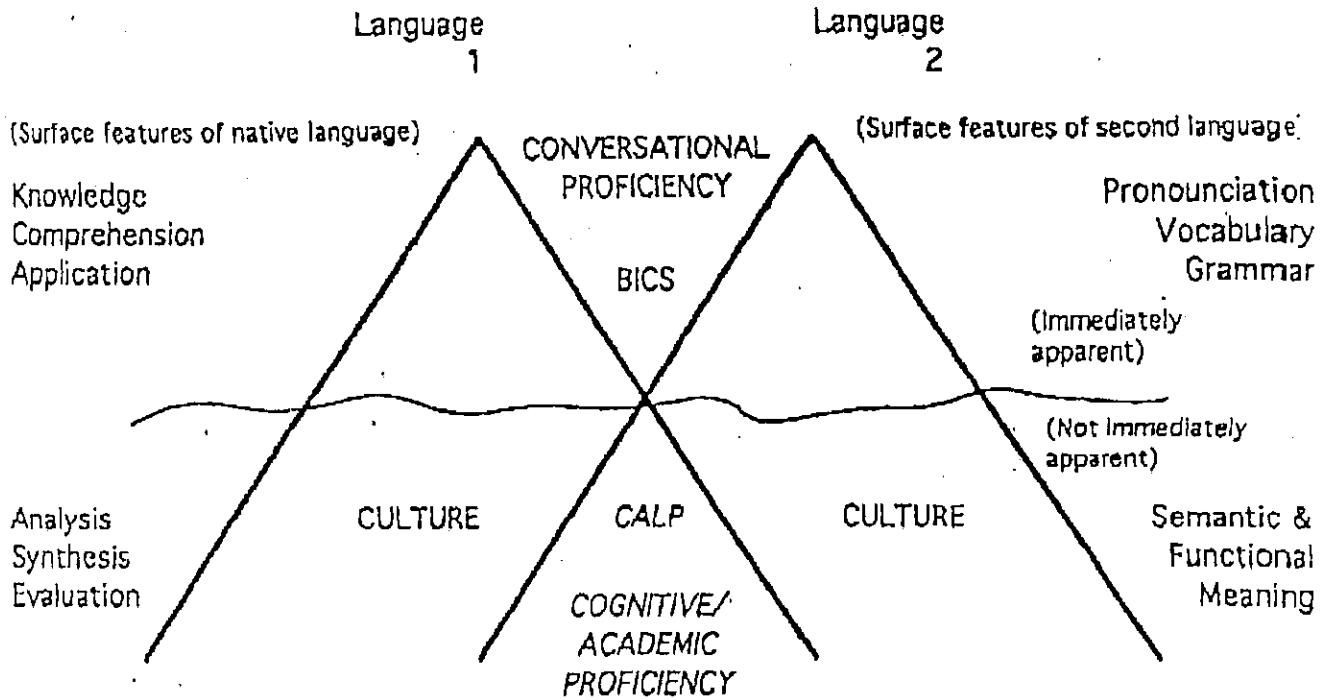
Programming for success also means sincerely acknowledging effort at all times. Students who have had little success in learning, or who have had little experience with learning are often very afraid of making an effort or offering an answer that may be wrong. Students whose effort and risks are acknowledged gradually gain confidence to try again. Some of the most heartbreaking stories of persons with LD concern humiliation at the hands of teachers—sarcasm, ridicule, exclusion from activities, never being called on, punishment for mistakes the teacher should have known the student would make.

Figure 1

DUAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

COGNITIVE DOMAIN

LANGUAGE PROCESS



TWO TYPES OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

1. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)  
-Face to face communication takes up to 2 years
2. Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)  
-takes 5 to 7 years

Source: Jim Cummins, 1989

Prepared by Ellen S. Crasnick, 1994



## **Learning Materials for ESOL Learners**

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### **I. Characteristics of materials produced for ESOL learners:**

**A. ESOL learners are LANGUAGE learners first and foremost. Therefore, materials suitable for ESOL are generally controlled for**

#### **1. Number and type of words**

- a. ESOL learners do not have the foundation vocabulary of native English speakers**
- b. ESOL learners generally learn “survival” vocabulary—or vocabulary associated with the classroom first and only gradually acquire other, less immediate vocabulary**
- c. Stories and “beginning” texts start with somewhere around 300 words**

#### **2. Grammar**

- a. Language learners start with the here and now—so good ESOL textbooks begin in, and teach, the present tense and all related concepts before going to a new tense.**
- b. Short sentences—grammar dictates no compound or complex sentences initially and few prepositional phrases—these are introduced gradually.**

#### **3. Type of content**

- a. Books use concrete, comprehensible topics**
- b. Books and other materials start with real life situations or with a cast of characters and their lives.**
- c. Some books have topics of so-called “general interest” or thing learners are assumed to know about Volcanoes, whales, sports, sight-seeing, etc.**
- d. Books for advanced learners try to have topics generally known to educated learners of whatever age group the book is for. This may include movie stars, sports figures, musicians, etc.**

**B. Materials are much less often controlled for**

#### **1. Level of literacy of learners using them**

- a. Normal ESOL materials are intended for learners who are already literate**
  - i. The visual appearance of a page is not a problem**
  - ii. Literate learners generally know how a page in a text is likely to be organized**
  - iii. These texts tend to use “normal” amounts of written directions in addition to pictures or symbols**

- b. Publishers are fairly late in beginning to meet the need of the very low literate. These materials must have
- i. Extremely basic visual appearance—completely uncluttered pages, lessons that do only one thing at a time, large font
  - ii. Pictures that are photographs, not drawings (low or non-literate learners do not necessarily interpret one-dimensional information the way literate learners do.)
  - iii. Extremely limited vocabulary
  - iv. Topics that are extremely familiar
  - v. Extremely limited and carefully written directions.
  - vi. The intended use as ADDITIONAL materials, not primary for very low literate learners.
  - vii. Almost no reference to grammar per se/ no writing conventions except by example. (Unwritten languages do not have words for these; learners from those languages must learn the entire concept of print/symbols and writing conventions; learners from written languages do not know them yet, but can learn the words for them in their first language.

2. Amount of practice they provide and varied ways to practice
- a. Literate learners are assumed to be able to learn at the same overall rate as they learn in first language, so vocabulary and grammar information is presented relatively rapidly

- b. Low literate learners are not strong in “school-based” skills, so they must be provided with the opportunity to practice until they achieve real mastery. For them materials should have
  - i. Lessons limited in content
  - ii. Content reviewed throughout the book/materials
  - iii. Not much reliance on copying or writing answers, unless that is the purpose of the book.

C. These materials should be, but often are NOT, controlled for

1. Cultural bias—or information that one could only know if one was from culture similar to this one.
  - a. This can be content: shopping in a grocery store, using a modern kitchen; objects in the environment (mailboxes, lamp posts, driveways)

b. Values: Family make-up, family activities, education or work values and behaviors, possessions and contents of houses, placement of objects in houses, and on and on.....

**2. General world knowledge**

a. Again, most ESOL materials assume a certain level of education and exposure to the world. This is fine for those who are educated in their countries, EXCEPT

i. Other countries do not cover the same material in the same way as we do in the US

ii. Emphasis on certain information will be different (like why certain countries went to war with others, other historical events and countries' roles in them)

iii. Differences in education systems will mean some learners are not familiar with the American value of asking questions and analyzing, so learners may be baffled by or do poorly on activities that ask for that type of behavior

b. For the less educated or uneducated, this poses real problems. They will not have heard of or seen pictures of many of the items, topics, people or places in their books if the books are not limited to completely familiar topics.

**II. Problems with materials for native English speakers**

**A. Not controlled for**

1. Grammar
2. Length of sentence
3. Vocabulary

**B. Not linguistically presented—according to the way language is learned.**

**C. If American, will have content and cultural slant that learners will not relate to easily.**

### **III. Principles to follow for selecting materials for ESOL Learners:**

#### **A. Level of text, exercises, etc.**

- 1. Suitable for literacy level ( as noted earlier)**
  - a. Too complex—learner cannot learn**
  - b. Too simple for literate—will not be interested**
- 2. Other features**
  - a. Number of vocabulary words**
  - b. Type of words—concrete, frequently used, likely to be used by learners as they are exposed to the words**
  - c. Grammar suitable to literacy level**
  - d. Rate at which information is presented**
  - e. Amount of practice realistically provided**
  - f. Cultural content/expectations**
  - g. World knowledge needed to grasp book contents**

#### **B. Appearance/format—again—level of learner critical;**

##### **1. Low/non-literate:**

- a. Visually simple –not cluttered**
- b. Large, clear type preferably not black on white—consistent style**
- c. Repetitive, predictable format**
- d. Pictures—preferably photos in color—NOT drawings (MAYBE life-like pictures as in Oxford Picture Dictionary)**
- e. Many examples or models or practice items are provided.**

##### **2. Higher level—mostly literate**

- a. Visually more interesting**
- b. Can use any type of visuals**
- c. Typefaces can vary**
- d. Format can be more varied**
- e. Directions are clear, not too wordy**
- f. Exercises are well edited—about practice and examples**

#### **C. Adaptability of book/materials to other activities, increased practice**

- 1. Book may have wide variety of activities (E.g. Grammar in Action)**
- 2. Pictures, activities may lend themselves to adaptation**
- 3. Activities include multisensory approaches**

#### **D. Book/materials lend themselves to mastery**

- 1. Sufficient practice**
- 2. Consistent, sufficient, useful review activities regularly included**
- 3. Overall mastery part of goal of book/materials.**

#### **E. Content is meaningful to learners (by THEIR acknowledgement)**

#### **F. Content/vocabulary can be related to, connected to other study/learning**

#### IV. Suggestions for adapting text to different needs of learners:

##### A. Appearance of pages too cluttered

1. Cover part of pages with paper with cutouts
2. Copy only relevant parts.
3. Make copies and use highlighter on relevant parts
4. Box or otherwise indicate parts learner must pay attention to
5. Acknowledge spaces that are too small or lines that do not match the response needed—show learners how to write or answer in them.

##### B. Not enough pictures or illustrations

1. Provide class or learner with supplemental visual help for understanding
2. Have learner who understands better make pictures of what is happening or of object or place being discussed

##### C. Clarifying directions:

1. Simplify directions; then simplify them some more.
  - Use command verbs,
  - Use only one command per phrase/sentence.
  - Bullet commands where possible –like this
  - Number steps learner should follow
2. Give more models on an additional paper.
3. Use overhead of page with activity to demonstrate how to proceed—use colored pens
4. Avoid overwhelming learners with auditory input while they are trying to figure out the visual information or read directions. If reading directions aloud, indicate that learners should follow while someone reads.
5. If a listening activity, be sure learner knows clearly what to listen for and how to respond to it. **EXAMPLES!! MODELS!!**
6. Provide structured answer sheets for listening tasks, or put a colored box around the answer area on the book.
7. If you are making your own activity, use consistent direction format. Keep it clear and short.

##### D. Teaching metacognitive skills to learners to use materials more effectively.

1. **TEACH** how to **USE** the book!! (most teachers do **NOT** do this!!)
2. Show how sections are defined.
3. Show where page numbers are, exercise activities, directions, etc.
4. Show why and when visuals are used.
5. Show self-help features: study questions, terms in boldface, information in margins, glossary at back. Check that your learners know how to use an index and the table of contents.
6. Bring attention to other features of books –signals for listening, writing, etc.

**F. Making the books work for you and your learners:**

1. Add manipulative activities
2. Add explanations or models where necessary
3. Acknowledge mistakes in the book
4. Acknowledge cultural bias/American values—not bad, just not theirs—helps them understand their own feeling of difference.
5. Go where learners lead you—if discussion veers off to their concerns related vaguely to a topic or activity—that is a **TEACHABLE MOMENT**
6. Enrich with
  - phonological information,
  - practice
  - vocabulary
  - cultural or world information
  - you own take on things—they are interested in you as a person
  - grammar notes/enlightenment—but don't get in too deep!
  - Extra activities for lower or higher students

**BEWARE!!**

1. Too much grammarese; phonetic symbols used without teaching
2. Poorly edited text/activities do not match practice, exercises
3. Culturally biased content or pictures
4. Assumed prior knowledge of learners—diagnostic teaching!!
5. Too little explanation of grammar, activity, goal of exercise
6. Insufficient practice/lack of opportunity to master lessons/content
7. CALPS CALPS CALPS!!!

**Don't forget that publishers/editors want to SELL books—they compromise the needs of learners with teachers' impressions of prettiness, fun, interesting appearance, etc. You have to fight back.**