



Penny Ur's 100 Teaching Tips

Penny Ur

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Teachers might be tempted to skip consideration of a mere book of tips, but *Penny Ur's 100 Teaching Tips* is a concise outline of years of creative and useful teaching experience that can save teachers from “reinventing the wheel.” Ur not only gives practical advice but also shares well-thought-out ideas from extensive experience gained as a teacher in a variety of EFL and ESL contexts, varying from working with children to adults.

Ur's book, part of the long-running Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers, is available both as a 120-page paperback and an e-book, so portability is one of its key advantages. Ur proposes using *100 Tips* as a reference, looking up topics as they come up in your class. It is divided into 18 themed sections covering a wide range of topics: “beginning and ending the lesson,” “the coursebook,” “discipline,” “error correction,” “games,” “grammar,” “group work,” “heterogeneous (mixed-level) classes,” “homework,” “interest,” “listening,” “pronunciation,” “reading comprehension,” “speaking activities,” “teacher talk,” “testing and assessment,” “vocabulary teaching,” and “writing.” Each of the themed sections listed above includes four to seven tips. A tip in this book acts as a short chapter that serves as a springboard for action in any given class. For example, “Tip 5: Don't give homework at the end,” appears in the “Beginning and ending a lesson” section. The tips in this section help teachers reenvision the flow of their next lesson.

One of the stronger sections in the book is the one on Interest. Tip 53 in this section offers suggestions to facilitate the use of higher-order thinking skills, or “big picture elements,” in lessons. For example, language teachers regularly resort to rote sentence writing with new lexical items. This is not a bad activity per se, but it lacks critical thinking and focuses more attention to “lower-order” thinking skills. Instead of simply repeating these commonplace patterns of classroom

activities, Ur recommends having students differentiate, prioritize, generalize, and classify the vocabulary in innovative ways. Although the “odd one out” activity (elephant, horse, dog, fish, sheep) is a common differentiating vocabulary activity used in various teaching contexts, Ur claims that it is more engaging to supply a list of things that are not different in any obvious way (elephant, horse, dog, sheep, monkey) while asking learners to find new ways in which these things are different or similar. Learners then have the chance to deeply immerse themselves in the meaning of new lexical items.

With 10 years of experience as an English language teacher, I am pleasantly surprised by the little ideas from the book that can make a profound difference in my thinking about the classroom. Though I recognize many of the tips from previous training, Ur’s tips have been especially helpful as I have transitioned from being an ESL teacher working in a college-level Intensive English Program in the US to being an EFL teacher working with college students in Japan who are preparing to study abroad in an English-speaking context. As a teacher in an ESL context, I often aspired to talk as little as possible, seeing my role as a facilitator. Tip 77, which is in the “Teacher talk” section, prompted the opportunity to reconsider the purpose of reducing teacher talk. Sometimes teacher talk is more effective than just facilitation. It is easy to forget that, especially in an EFL context, the teacher could be one of the few (possibly only) sources of comprehensible input. Thus, *Ur’s 100 Teaching Tips* has helped me to reexamine my “comfortable” teaching practices from new perspectives.

Ur is not afraid to expand on issues considered controversial in some circles. The appropriateness and effectiveness of L1 use in an ESL classroom can often be a touchy subject. Tip 81 encourages the occasional use of students’ mother tongue by the teacher (if known). Infrequent but selective use of the L1 can help teachers clarify and save time, with continued focus on learning outcomes. Whether educators agree or disagree with this approach, Ur’s concise reasoning gives educators plenty to consider with each tip.

Parts of the sections and tips are general tips for effective teaching, not just for the language classroom. For example, Ur details with honesty her own challenges with implementing disciplinary actions. This section reminds teachers that other educators have had similar experiences with particular issues. Also appealing to a broad range of educators, “Tip 12: Keep the lesson moving” and “Tip 16: Compliment good behavior” are fundamental classroom-management tips that require tactful attention to detail and purpose ahead of time.

Teachers usually know that they should keep the lesson moving but struggle to figure out how this can be done. Ur explains a few strat-

egies in this section: fully planning lessons, stopping longer activities that are losing momentum, and having a reserve activity.

After reading *Penny Ur's 100 Teaching Tips*, I found myself wanting to read more. While some educators might prefer more depth in the content tips, they must keep in mind that each tip contains a boiled-down discussion intended for quick implementation.

I highly recommend this book to teachers working with EFL or ESL students at all levels and ages. Familiar tips and suggestions are given a fresh look by Ur's unique presentation of ideas and integrated experience. The creativity and joy in language teaching that Ur exudes through the tips in this book stand out and are a worthy addition to any language teacher's library.

***Students With Interrupted Formal Education:
Bridging Where They Are and What They Need***

Brenda Custodio and Judith B. O'Loughlin
Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2017.

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Students With Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They Are and What They Need brings much-needed awareness to the growing population of immigrant and refugee students in US schools who have experienced gaps in their formal education because of life circumstances. Authors Brenda Custodio and Judith B. O'Loughlin identify these as SIFE students, or students with interrupted formal education. The topic of this book is particularly relevant in today's political climate in which immigrant and refugee students are "living in a society where hostility towards their presence is growing" (p. 17). The book itself is divided into five user-friendly chapters that first define the SIFE population, provide an overview of potential issues for SIFE students, and offer strategies for school-based support. The format and readability make it a perfect text for teachers, ESL specialists, administrators, program specialists, and educator study groups. Each chapter ends with a section on "Further Study" and student vignettes to provoke in-depth discussion. The appendix also includes a lengthy list of recommended picture books to use with SIFE students of any age.

This text is a useful resource for all educators working with students in K-12 schools, especially those who work with second language learners. Custodio and O'Loughlin bring to light the unique

experiences of these students with robust discussion around trauma experienced during the immigration process, the emotional strain of leaving family and homeland, the difficulties faced when learning a new language, and culture shock experienced upon arrival. Backed by extensive research, the authors advocate for addressing the physical, social, emotional, and academic needs of each SIFE student. They also stress that students can succeed with individualized support, despite their often-harrowing life stories.

Custodio and O'Loughlin lay out key historical and political issues that affect the SIFE status of immigrant students arriving in schools. They point out the dramatic differences in educational expectations among countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, and Haiti. The authors further describe the significant extent to which students are affected by the violence seen in many of their countries, their immigration status (including what happens when one is designated an “unaccompanied alien child”), the family reunification process, struggles between school and work, and the alarmingly high dropout rate.

The authors provide robust discussion on the unique needs of refugee students coming to the US. The most common refugee countries of origin are discussed, including historical backgrounds and strengths and challenges of their cultural adjustment. Custodio and O'Loughlin walk readers through the resettlement process and highlight some of the shocking statistics and facts on “organized” education in refugee camps—most schooling is outdoors, student-teacher ratios are as high as 100:1, many children (particularly girls) do not attend school at all, various dangers exist in traveling to school in some camps, and most refugee-camp teachers are not trained. The authors also address the inevitable culture shock, the high percentage of trauma experienced by refugees, and the necessity of providing mental-health support.

Custodio and O'Loughlin elaborate on how the trauma and lack of formal education experienced by SIFE students create many issues for students when they enter schools in the US. Although some issues are similar for nonimmigrant elementary students and secondary students, specific issues affect adolescents who are newcomers. Academic expectations are more demanding, and assimilating to a new culture is challenging. In addition, many students have parents who expect them to work to support the family.

In advice particularly useful for K-12 educators, Custodio and O'Loughlin outline possible signs teachers should be aware of to help SIFE students cope. When students are first enrolled in schools, the immediate concern is often to help the student catch up academically to his or her peers. Custodio and O'Loughlin explain that students

will not be able to function in an academic setting unless their physical, social, and emotional needs have been met. When students experience culture shock, physical and emotional symptoms may occur, such as being withdrawn, getting sick often, or acting out in an aggressive manner. These “red flag” behaviors are signs that a student is suffering from the effects of a traumatic event or culture shock from acclimating to a new environment, language, and home situation.

The authors stress that it is critical that intake forms are thorough when students first arrive so needs can be met and circumstances can be understood. Parents are not always honest on forms, because they fear their children might not be allowed into schools. Educators need to be sympathetic to this fear while also digging deeper for information that will help them support students.

Although effective strategies and considerations for working with SIFE students are interspersed throughout the book, the last chapter is focused on specific resources that will help build resilience for children. Many agencies offer extensive materials and links to programs that educators can use to support immigrant and refugee families. The authors frequently emphasize the need for teachers to connect with families and students in order to gain trust and foster a “mutually enriching relationship” (p. 27). They also stress the importance of forming a site-based committee to identify and support SIFE students and to advocate for change to better meet students’ most pressing needs.

All in all, this text is an introductory resource on how to help students who have experienced interrupted schooling. The authors provide examples of several different organizations and schools that educate students in this situation, but they offer limited attention to what those schools are doing that promotes academic success. It is clear that each school and group of students is different, as are the resources available to them. As teachers working in K-6 schools for more than 20 years, we found this book to be instrumental in illuminating the lack of support that exists in school districts for SIFE students. *Students With Interrupted Formal Education* is a valuable resource for beginning a conversation on a group of students who are largely underserved in schools in the US.

Making Connections 4: Skills and Strategies for Academic Reading

Jessica Williams and Pamela Vittorio

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For students to thrive in an English-medium academic environment, classrooms must not only teach reading strategies but also cultivate strategic readers. *Making Connections 4: Skills and Strategies for Academic Reading* by Jessica Williams and Pamela Vittorio fulfills this purpose quite well, fostering an interactive relationship between reader and text for advanced ESL students interested in technology, business, and science.

Making Connections 4 is part of a four-book series with levels ranging from upper-beginner to advanced. This particular text is best suited as a primary text for advanced ESL and EFL learners, offering 50 to 70 hours of instruction as well as built-in speed-reading practice. The textbook consists of four STEM units: technology, biomedical science, business, and engineering and each unit contains three reading selections. The passages include contributions from STEM field experts and touch on high-interest topics, with reading titles such as “How Information Got Smart,” “Funding Global Health Project,” and “Disruptive Innovation and the Challenges of Social Media.” The teacher’s resource guide includes answer keys, additional thematic readings, and reproducible unit tests, which assess unit reading skills and vocabulary.

Making Connections 4 has three main highlights: learning training, comprehension questions, and vocabulary knowledge. First, learner training is the centerpiece. The first three units introduce nine strategies, one for each new reading passage. The authors emphasize the importance of both bottom-up and top-down skills in these strategies: understanding text organization, summarizing, annotating a reading, employing graphic organizers, identifying language chunks, making inferences, identifying claims and giving evidence, and managing unfamiliar words. The fourth unit dedicates considerable time to systematically integrating multiple skills through topics such as adjusting reading strategies to reading purpose, retaining vocabulary, and preparing for exams.

The overall organization and demonstration of strategies is thorough and efficient, reflecting a present-practice-produce (PPP) sequence, which may overly favor students who prefer deductive instruction. However, the book promotes reader agency by having stu-

dents deliberately choose which strategies to employ. For example, for dealing with unknown words, the book recommends six strategies, among them skipping words, deconstructing by word parts, looking at examples, and finding a comparison or contrast. Students are encouraged to consider which skill or combination of skills is appropriate for the context.

Second, the authors embed comprehension questions in the pre-, during-, and postreading tasks. Prereading activities include partner conversations to connect to the topic and preview. Students scan the first sentence of every paragraph and match ideas to comprehension questions. For during-reading activities, students read the text and stop at every bolded term to do a miniactivity listed in the margins. These activities require students to reread closely and interact with the text by actively employing strategies, such as identifying textual definitions or the writer's opinion. Postreading activities involve checking for both global and detailed understanding, vocabulary development, and production activities.

Third, Williams and Vittorio recognize the rich nature and multiplying power of vocabulary knowledge and its encoded grammatical information. For example, vocabulary is often introduced by its pragmatic use (e.g., introducing evidence) in both the noun and verb forms. In vocabulary-development sections, students work with synonyms, learn multiword phrases, and practice matching definitions with listed linguistic category to words-in-context. Furthermore, the stated purpose of the book is to improve strategic reading skills and build academic vocabulary. This goal demonstrates the perspective that purposeful lexical learning is integral to being a successful academic reader. Accordingly, the Academic Word List is featured purposefully throughout the readings, vocabulary-development sections, and the succinct yet informative dictionary. However, the text could provide more reinforcement of new vocabulary by making explicit connections between the production activities and the target vocabulary.

In addition, the book itself is attractive, with photos and graphs to engage the reader. The pages are information dense, yet for the most part they are balanced by generous margins and clean formatting: numbered paragraphs, subheadings, and textual enhancements. The one exception may be the sections where the reading strategies are first introduced. Though these sections are richly informative and provide ample practice, the text density might cause difficulty for students trying to grasp a new technique. Teachers might need to prepare a graphic organizer or some careful scaffolding to help students.

Finally, the greatest strength of the book, as well as its greatest

limitation, is its thorough approach to review. In the during-reading activities, *Making Connections 4* cycles through the current and all previous reading strategies. With the varied nature and the spaced repetition of strategies, students can successfully incorporate these practices. To get the full effect, however, students must progress linearly through the book, which constrains the freedom of the teacher to selectively use the material. Overall, *Making Connections 4* is an excellent choice for advanced ESL and EFL students interested in STEM topics, as its framework fosters the skills and reader agency necessary to succeed in an academic English environment.