

SECTION 6

Critical Issues for Out of School Youth (OSY) Migrant English Language Learners

Out of school youth are a growing population that present unique challenges to the MEP tutors and outreach workers. These students come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken, and for the moment have decided to not participate in formal education (public school). Within the context of providing ESL to Spanish speaking OSY students, the major factors that impact their potential to learn English are their native language literacy level, their motivation to learn English, and their availability to attend classes. Most OSY students are either non-literate learners or semi-literate in their native language:

- **Non-literate learners** come from situations where they have not had sufficient access to literacy, often because of their socio-economic or political status. Although they have not learned to read, they have probably been exposed to written language and have awareness of the value and uses of literacy. They may be reluctant to disclose their limited literacy background. They generally progress slowly and may need frequent re-teaching of skills.
- **Semi-literate learners** usually have had access to literacy in their native culture/country, but because of their socio-economic status or political or educational situation, they have not achieved a high level of literacy in their native language. They may have left school at a young age or may have lived in the United States and developed oral English proficiency but not literacy.

Although OSY are school age, it is adult learning and adult second language acquisition research that is most applicable and should be taken into consideration when developing ESL programs and classes to meet their needs. Adult second language learners demonstrate either (or both) integrative motivation or instrumental

motivation. Understanding what motivates their students helps tutors/outreach workers to create teaching and learner objectives that meet learner needs and interests.

Second language learners with integrative motivation want to learn the language to connect and engage with a language community. Learners who have instrumental motivation want to learn the language to meet their own needs and goals, such as getting a job, workplace literacy, navigating their community, or talking to their children's teachers. Most OSY students demonstrate instrumental motivation. (Dörnyei, 2002)

Learner motivation is not static and can vary from day to day or from week to week based on the learner's work life, personal life, or the learning environment. When tutors/outreach workers connect to why students decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it, they can align their instruction in meaningful and authentic ways.

Many of the OSY ESL students live and work in situations in which they do not have reason or opportunity to use English. It is important for tutors/outreach workers to create opportunities for students to continue their language learning outside of the class, which will support the development of their communicative competence. For example, instructors could provide audio and print resources that can be borrowed, or give students assignments to use spoken English outside of the classroom. Interactions in English provide opportunities to receive language input (hearing) and allow the ESL learners to negotiate understanding through verbal expression.

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Strategies for Tutors/Advocates to Accelerate Oral Language Development

1. Create opportunities for learners to continue their language learning outside of class.
2. Create interactive tasks in class to give students opportunities to use language in authentic situations and meaningful ways.
3. Show students how to use dictionaries effectively.

Literacy Development

OSY have multiple and diverse needs for literacy and therefore individual and varied sources of motivation. They may want to be more successful at work, pursue further education, more effectively interact with their community, or achieve U.S. citizenship. Whatever their goals, ESL instruction should be designed to meet their needs. Workplace instruction materials should be used with students who want to focus on Vocational ESL; GED preparation materials should be used with students are interested in pursuing their GED; materials that reflect their daily lives should be used to assist students in navigating their communities; and civics-focused instruction and materials should be used in citizenship classes.

Critical Issues for Tutors/Outreach Workers

1. Language, cognitive, and social issues are different for OSY English language learners than the other student populations served by MEP.
2. Adult learning theory and research and adult second language learning theory and research are the most relevant fields to consider when designing programs and services for OSY Spanish speaking English language learners.
3. Learner motivation must be identified and addressed when developing classroom instruction and designing lesson plans.
4. Health and safety issues are often the most urgent and may need to be addressed initially in the student's first language. Corresponding ESL lessons can then be created to support the content to be transferred from the native language to English and to build vocabulary knowledge.
5. Since OSY English language learners are almost always employed, tutors/outreach workers need to be flexible when scheduling sessions and classes because of their students' work schedules.