

Quick Tips for Working with ESL Youth

By Jill Martinson

County Extension Agent

4-H Youth Development

Kansas State University, Extension Dickinson County

Hopefully many of you are involved with youth in after-school and camp or day camp programs that are not native speakers of the English language. Working with these youth is a special challenge and opportunity. Please keep the following tips in mind as you are figuring out how to best reach these young people.

- * Never forbid the use of the young person's native language. This is the language in which they are most cognitively advanced – they think and learn best in their first language. Forbidding their use of this language limits their cognition and may serve to create feelings of alienation.
- * Remember that youth learn social language more quickly and use it more readily than “academic” language. Be aware that the young person may have great social language skills, but struggle with vocabulary that is specific to projects or more advanced concepts.
- * Instructors may alleviate youth anxiety by “scaffolding” the new vocabulary – pairing the new concept with things already understood, demonstrating, using visuals, etc.
- * Do not force youth to speak. Many youth learning a new language exhibit a period of silence where they are processing language, but not producing. Encourage their participation, but do not force them to speak.

For additional resources: <http://www.coe.ksu.edu/esl/generalresources.html>.