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## Leadership in the Time of Emergency Remote Instruction

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## Leadership in the Time of Emergency Remote Instruction

by Rachel DeDeyn

*What makes a teacher a leader? Simply stated, it is an ethos of care and the skills one needs to be an inspiration. It is the qualities found in teachers who recognize their innate power to make a difference in their students' lives, to be caring and compassionate, and to be the role model who "walks the talk," who believes all students have exceptional gifts, and who takes the time to help students find and give voice to themselves (Papalewis, 2007, p. xi).*

We all recognize that teachers need leadership skills to be effective in the classroom. Teachers who have strong leadership skills set a positive tone for class, connect with, and empower students. As teachers have navigated the global COVID-19 crisis, strong, positive classroom leadership is even more crucial to keep students engaged with online learning. So, what does teacher leadership in the online English language classroom look like? The research in our field does not provide a clear answer to this question. While recent research has begun to explore teacher classroom leadership, the majority of research in the field of English language teaching focuses on teacher leadership that occurs outside of the classroom through involvement in administrative processes. However, a teacher's classroom leadership is arguably one of the most important factors in determining their effectiveness. To find out what effective teacher leadership looks like according to English language learners studying in an IEP at a US university, I surveyed 59 students on their perceptions of their instructor's leadership style, their course satisfaction, and their grade. Through correlation and regression analyses, two types of teacher leadership were identified that positively related to students' course satisfaction, one of which also positively related to course grade. These findings led me to develop the following list of suggestions for effective teacher leadership in IEP classrooms.

**1. Establish a vision.** Simply put, the vision of a class is what you hope to accomplish. The vision includes course goals and student learning outcomes, and during this time of emergency remote instruction, it also should include skills related to navigating a learning management system or time-management and self-motivation. To be effective, the vision will be relevant to students' personal goals and motivate them to succeed. While it may seem obvious how the learning outcomes in an English language class contribute to the goals of students hoping to attend university in the US, students benefit from considering these connections. Taking the time to discuss the skills that students will learn through studying online and how these skills will be relevant to their university classes can increase students' buy-in to this model of instruction.

**2. Build buy-in.** Hopefully, students will buy in to the vision of the class. However, this does not ensure buy-in to the day-to-day activities and homework. Explaining the purpose of activities and assignments and their connection to the learning outcomes for the class can increase student buy-in. For instance, the classes in the IEP where I work are all integrated skills classes, so students do not have separate classes for the various language skills. Teachers often hear complaints from students that they are not learning grammar, or writing, or another skill. This is not because the instructors are not teaching these skills, but because students do not recognize the activities and homework as addressing these skills. Explicitly helping students make connections between activities and their purpose in supporting course goals builds students' buy-in.

**3. Challenge students.** Challenging students can be a challenge for teachers! The IEP where I work, like many programs dealing with low student numbers, has reduced its number of levels, meaning that teachers now have a wider range of proficiencies within one classroom. To challenge all students in a class, teachers have to provide differentiated instruction. While differentiating instruction has always been challenging, it has become even more difficult in the online setting, where it is easier for students to "hide"

and more difficult for teachers to give on-the-spot error correction. One way that instructors have successfully differentiated instruction is by creating tracks for major class projects. Students who have a lower proficiency level and want to repeat the level can choose track one, which provides substantial scaffolding to help students complete the project. Students who have a higher proficiency level and are ready to pass the level can choose track three, which provides little scaffolding and shows mastery of the learning outcomes for the class. These tracked projects allow all students in the class to feel challenged, receive targeted feedback, and experience success at their level of English proficiency.

**4. Be enthusiastic.** This tip is of particular importance during this time of emergency remote learning. The spring and summer months of 2020 have been full of uncertainties and anxieties for teachers and students alike. Teachers had not planned to teach online, and international students studying at US IEPs had not planned study online, unable to meet their classmates face-to-face or explore the city in which they are living. A teacher's positive and enthusiastic attitude can spread to students who may not be excited about studying English online.

**5. Reward students.** Rewards are a positive motivator for students. However, they must be used strategically to recognize students who have made significant improvement or progress towards goals to be effective. Within the context of emergency remote learning, teachers can use rewards to keep students engaged and to build a sense of community. One of the teachers in the program where I work created weekly challenges in which students post a picture and a short paragraph or audio recording describing something they did during the week. The winners of these challenges receive a reward. Rewards can be as simple as positive feedback or praise, or can be material, like gift cards or extra credit points. Whatever form rewards take, they should be meaningful and valuable to students.

### Reference

Papalewis, R. (2007). Foreword. In E. L. Wilmore, *Teacher leadership: Improving teaching and learning from inside the classroom* (xi-xii). Corwin Press.

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