

PODCAST: The Picture Word Inductive Model

Larry Ferlazzo

When I teach Beginning and Early Intermediate English Language Learners, the centerpiece of my instruction is not the textbook, not a video, and not worksheets.

It's a picture. A big picture.

And it's one big picture each week.

The instructional strategy is called the Picture Word Inductive Model, and it's great not just for English Language Learners, but for young native speakers who are just beginning to read.

The process has four steps.

On a Monday, I introduce a very large laminated photo to the class which I hang on the wall.

Ideally, the picture is one that I've taken, and often has pictures of students from the class. It's connected to the thematic theme we will be studying that week – food, school, neighborhood, etc.

I invite students to join me at the picture, and ask them to share words they know that describe the objects they see. As individual students speak, I write the words on the outer edges of the photos with an arrow pointing to the item. After I write each word, I say each letter, and ask students to repeat. After having labeled twenty or so items, including new words I introduce, students go back to their seats and label their own photocopied versions of the same photo.

The next day, after reviewing the words on the photo, students begin using the higher-order thinking process of categorization. They take the words we have identified, and place them into

at least three or four categories of their own choosing. These groupings could be “words that start with the letter b,” or words that describe fruit, ones that describe people, etc. Then, they use their dictionaries to identify additional words that fit into the same categories.

On Wednesday, again after a picture review, I give students a sheet with twenty sentences that include a “blank.” Under each sentence are three words, including some from the photo. They have to choose the word that correctly completes the sentence. Each sentence describes something in the photograph. Next, they categorize those sentences into three or four groups. Lastly, they have to add sentences of their own related to the picture that fits into those categories.

On Thursday, students turn all their sentences into paragraphs. As students become more advanced, writing conventions like introductions, topic sentences, and conclusions can be introduced. In effect, they have written an essay about the photo.

Then, on Friday, students develop different potential titles for their essay, choose one, and complete their essay. We then have a test combining recall, fill-in-the-blanks, and creating original sentences. Of course, during the week and during the test, there is also plenty of opportunity for students to practice listening and speaking about the photo, too.

As the weeks go by, the classroom walls become filled with labeled pictures that can be used as reference and as tools for review games.

I can't think of any better way to incorporate teaching English and helping students developing higher order thinking skills. Again, the process is:

First Day – Introduce the Picture & Identify 20 or so words

Second Day – Students Categorize the words and add their own

Third Day – Twenty fill-in-the blank sentences, students categorize them, and write their own

Fourth Day – Put the sentences into paragraphs

Fifth Day – Choose a title, and take a test

Even more details about using the Picture Word Inductive Model can be found in my book,
English Language Learners: Teaching Strategies That Work.