

**Inclusivity for English Language Learners**

Aileen Matias-Castro

Department of Educational Technology, New Jersey City University

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Dr. Connelly

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According to the National Education Association (NEA), one in four students will be identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) by 2025. Therefore, frameworks that establish the most effective learning environment for bilingual students and ELLs/ESLs are in need across the US. This study will take a closer look at the cultural fabric within the ABC School District in New Jersey. Techniques, frameworks, and methodologies will be examined to determine if current practices within the district align with successful program models that support the unique needs of bilingual students and those identified as English Language Learners.

According to the 2018-2019 NJ School Performance Summary Report, the ABC School District reported 3% of its student population as English Learners, from a student body of 1,932 scholars. In total, 52% of students come from economically disadvantaged households. For English Language Arts, only 36% of students' scores met or exceeded statewide standards; in Math, 30% of students met or exceeded expectations on statewide assessments. Data was not reported for the 2019-2020 school year due to the statewide test exemption executive order signed by Governor Phil Murphy due to Covid. To date, scores for the 2020-2021 school year have not been reported, as testing has not taken place.

The school buildings within ABC District are compartmentalized. All of the district's kindergarten students attend A School, none of which were reported as ELLs. 7% of the district's ELL students attend ABC School, which house first through third grade students. 4% of the district's ELL students attend B School, which house grades fourth through sixth. 2% of the district's ELLs attend C School, which house grades seven and eight. 1% of the district's ELLs attend ABC High School. Presently, only four teachers within the district are ESL certified.

ABC School presently has one staff member who teaches the kindergarten and first grade bilingual students, simultaneously in a sheltered learning environment. Though all other kindergarten students within the district attend A School, this school year, the seven kindergarten ELLs come to ABC School for daily instruction and are the only seven kindergarteners in the bilingual classroom with first grade students. The other three ESL teachers work throughout the district to provide virtual pull-out ESL services to students.

The primary goal of the ABC School District's English Language Learner (ELL) Program is for students to become proficient in English, as stated by one of the district's ELL teachers. The ELL Mission Statement states that the school district seeks to establish a partnership with its families and community to ensure that all ELLs achieve State standards at all grade levels. Through sheltered instruction, the district wants their ELLs to become lifelong learners who are competent, responsible, and well-rounded individuals. To support parent involvement, the district established Bilingual Parent Action Committee (BPAC). BPAC meets once a school year to explain ACCESS testing procedures. The ACCESS test is an adaptive exam that allows administrators to gauge students' level of understanding in the English language in various domains. At the BPAC meeting, parents are made aware of the exam's layout, as well as the district's mission and expectations. Parents are encouraged to attend the annual BPAC meeting to voice their concerns and/or ask any questions related to the ACCESS Test.

If students qualify for ESL/ELL services in grades K-1 at time of enrollment, and parents identify their primary home-language to be Spanish, then students are automatically placed into the bilingual classroom. Parents can opt to place their child in a general education classroom; however, the bilingual classroom setting is not offered, nor promoted to parents of non-Spanish

speaking households. Staff members highly encourage the bilingual classroom to ELL students at time of registration. The district claims that students' individual proficiency level/s on placement testing is the determining factor for appointment into the bilingual classroom. It is reported by the ESL/ELL teacher of ABC School that the instructional setting for students vary by month. During September and October, the head teacher delivers instruction in both English and Spanish, simultaneously to kindergarten and first grade students. It is noted that as months progress, more English is integrated into instruction, and gradually spoken as the primary and sole language of instruction, unless a particular work or concept needs to be translated. It was shared that the gradual release model to achieve English-language assimilation from dual language instruction is made at the teacher's discretion, all while following State and WIDA Standards. The bilingual/dual language setting is currently being offered to Spanish-speaking students in kindergarten and first grade only. Once these students move onto second grade, they will no longer be in a bilingual setting. While in second grade, ELLs will continue to receive ESL services if deemed necessary by State ACCESS scores. The review process for ELLs to exit from the ESL program are determined by an overall composite of 4.5 or higher on the ACCESS test, which has 4 components: speaking, listening, reading and comprehension.

The Supreme Court deemed the responsibility of full integration of students on school boards, this includes English language proficiency for ELLs and bilingual students. According to Nieto (2009), children with limited English who were taught using some of their native language scored significantly better than similar students who were solely given instruction in English. Schultz (2014) argues that many teacher education programs in the US do not adequately address the elements of identity and cultural context. Therefore, if districts are not properly training teachers to weave the diverse needs of their bilingual students into their pedagogical practices

and teaching methodologies, then ELLs run the risk of not acquiring full integration – both academically and socially. Coleman & Goldenberg (2010) highlight when school districts implement proper resources for ELL students and their parents, adequate professional development for teachers and maintain high expectations for students, then ELL students have a higher probability of achieving academic success. Kim & Winsler (2015) underscore the strengths of a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program as it provides support for ELLs as they gradually acclimate a new language, while strengthening their native tongue. Using native language schema to bridge connections for students allows ELLs to connect new content with what they already know. This pedagogical approach provides support for ELLs, instead of a *sink or swim* learning environment, where districts gamble with providing equitable instruction.

Ping, W. (2017) argues that there is a difference between bilingualism and diglossia, and to truly provide an adequate learning environment for bilingual students would take the buy-in of all stakeholders. Revamping a district's framework or pedagogical practices must be well-developed and well-researched. "The effectiveness of various program models for language minority students remains the subject of controversy, and there are several factors to consider when selecting a program model: (1) district or school demographics, (2) student characteristics, and (3) district or school resources" (Rennie, J, 1993). There is no *one size fits all* curriculum for ELLs. The responsibility lies on stakeholders to provide an impartial learning experience for ELLs, one that is designed to their diverse needs. Though the approach may vary from district to district, what is not negotiable is providing ELLs with an inclusive education that is tailored to meet their social, academic, and linguistic needs.

To ensure equitable practices for ELL students' needs, ABC District is in need of professional development in this area. Research provides frameworks and suggestions for

educators to align their assessments to better serve English Language Learners (ELLs). According to Campbell (2014), effective classroom assessments allow two opportunities: for scholars to highlight what they know and provide the teacher with meaningful feedback to guide purposeful instruction. Hurley & Blake (2001) offer guiding principles of assessment for English learners that consider methodology, pedagogical appropriateness, and instructional practices; the whole child is considered to deliver an authentic learning environment fit to meet ELLs' diverse needs, while aligning to state requisites. The researcher will design the questions that will be asked to the ELL Supervisor based on best practice for ELLs. In addition, the researcher will also obtain feedback from the teachers at ABC School District via a questionnaire that has both open and closed responses. A side-by-side comparison will be conducted against the principles outlined by Hurley & Blake (2001) to gauge each assessment's level of appropriateness for considerable accommodations suitable for ELLs.

ABC School houses a K-1 bilingual classroom of 15 students. All students within the classroom identify as Hispanic and/or Latinx. Though Spanish is identified as the primary language spoken at home, the students within this classroom have diverse social and academic levels of language development in both English and Spanish. The head teacher of the classroom uses three assessments throughout the year to monitor the progress and growth of ELLs. This data is collected and shared with administration and parents at the end of each marking period on students' progress reports. This data is also used to determine future recommendations for ELLs to attain academic success in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math throughout the academic year, as well as determine classroom placement and support systems for the upcoming school year. These students our house within the same classroom throughout two consecutive school years without any exposure to the general native English speaking grade level peers. Within the

sheltered instructional environment students receive support from their bilingual instructor in addition to their ESL teacher who provides a combination of push in, push out, and virtual academic support. Students' ESL teacher is bilingual and provides support to all kids who qualify for ESL services. However when the students are mainstreamed after these two consecutive years, none of the teachers they will have the following year speaks Spanish. This pillar of support that was provided for students will no longer be available. For this reason the researcher wants to explore current practices within the bilingual classroom as well as in the following grade to assess the practices of ABC District in respect to their approach to ESL students.

Fenner, D.S., (2016) highlights the importance of providing reasonable accommodations to ELLs during assessments to provide them with an opportunity to showcase their knowledge across content areas. The Guiding Assessment Principles outlined by Hurley & Blake (2001), underscore the relevance of having a holistic approach when teaching and assessing ELLs; factors such as parental and cultural attitudes towards schooling, student's background knowledge, experiences and psychological needs should be considered to truly assess student progress. Fang, F. (2017) suggests a necessary shift in paradigm to attain linguistic perspective.

When ELLs are compared and assessed as their native English-speaking peers, the assessment is not practical or reliable. Assessments should be gathered and an interpretation of information about students' knowledge, achievements, or accomplishments as they relate to end-goals. Abedi, J. and Gandara, P., (2007), underscore the relevance of alignment in assessment to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the achievement gap that exists between ELLs and their counterparts. Assessments should align to UDL (Universal Design for Learning) Principles to provide ELLs with opportunities of expression to demonstrate their

knowledge. When assessments are not aligned to best practice or research, English learners are at a disadvantage; their unique development in language acquisition, and their personal cultural connections are not considered. Hurley & Blake (2001) emphasize that effective assessments are purposeful and build upon the learner's strengths; considering a holistic approach that is authentic, ongoing, and relevant, while aligning to state standards is ideal. When accommodations are not considered, a disjointed evaluation of the learner will be produced. The lack of alignment causes ELL's knowledge to be silenced by the assessment's rigid parameters.

### **Review of Literature**

ELLs are the fastest growing subgroup within public school systems across the United States. National Education Association projects that by 2025, one in four students will be an English Language Learner. Hanover Research (2020) indicates that many ELLs “experience worse academic outcomes than their English-speaking peers, including lower reading and math scores, fewer advanced courses, and lower graduation rates.” In addition to this concern, the COVID-Slide has broadened the gap further, leaving many of ELLs in desperate need of targeted instructional practices that meet their linguistically diverse needs. Polyak, I. (2020) underscores the relevance of targeted intervention, as she references a new report by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) projecting a 50% loss due to the epic COVID-Slide. Chris Minnich, CEO of NWEA, shared that these projections are fairly accurate and warns that “students in lower grades typically experience more learning loss because they are more dependent on their teachers for learning.” It is important for educators to be aware of the anticipated COVID-Slide, to begin reevaluating their current practices that are in place and to reflect on the adjustments that need to occur to provide an equitable learning experience for



ELLs. The COVID-Slide will continue to present challenges that will require an educational paradigm shift to take place to meet the unique needs of ELLs.

To curb the spread of coronavirus, schools across the US pivoted their method of teaching, reformatting their delivery to synchronous and asynchronous methods of instruction. There is a time-lapse from which schools, families and children took to adjust to this new method of instruction. The academic regression and lack of adequate progress during this transitional period is identified as COVID-Slide. Sparks, S. (2020) warns educators that the COVID-Slide will be significantly worse than the summer slide. Ramirez, L. (2020) shares that virtual platforms possess challenges to be more engaging in sense-making through language, which is a support English Language Learners (ELLs) benefit from to acquire a new language. Though technology has made it possible to conduct live instruction during school-building closures, this learning environment presents challenges for students who are learning English, as it does not offer the supports readily available in a classroom, ie: turn and talk opportunities, word walls or anchor charts. Despite the herculean efforts teachers and schools are engaged in, students have endured a great deal of stress to cope with; this disruption causes stress on the amygdala, which impacts memory and retention of concepts covered in class (Golinkoff, R., Hadani, H. & Hirsh-Pasek, K., 2020). In response to the anticipated COVID-Slide, researcher will design a virtual professional development series composed of various video shorts which will be tailored to the outcome of the Needs Assessment of ABC School as it relates to their English Language Learners. The instructional tool used to house the professional development video shorts will be a website. The overarching goal of the website will be to provide layers of support for teachers of ELLs in an effort to close the academic gap in ABC District.

To determine the teachers' needs within the district regarding their current knowledge of specific tech tools, a Needs Assessment will be conducted. An inquiry of teachers' present knowledge of reasonable accommodations in literacy in math will be explored as well as how technology is currently being used to promote parent relationships and community outreach. The professional development workshop series will be tailored to the specific needs of the teachers regarding the application of various tech-tools to enhance the learning experience for ELLs during instruction. This workshop series intends to provide an overview of these technology platforms, with the emphasis of providing ELLs an inclusive learning experience.

Teachers at ABC Elementary School range from kindergarten through grade 3. This is the first school year where all students have their own one-to-one district issued Chromebook. In addition, the school utilizes simulcasting to connect both in-person and virtual students during the same instructional block. It is important for teachers to have an understanding of the tools they can use to facilitate discussion, represent visual aids and extend language comprehension for ELLs. In addition, it is important for the teachers conducting instruction both synchronously and asynchronously to know what these tools are and when to incorporate them into their instructional design as it relates to the unique needs of ELLs during instruction.

This professional development series will take place completely online as the district has not granted permission to have in-person workshops. This workshop will aim to provide a lens of how to manipulate tech-tools to enhance the learning experience for ELL's during class. In alignment with UDL (Universal Design for Learning) Guidelines, by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression for ELLs, all students benefit. Technology should not be the reason for a broader achievement gap for ELLs, but rather the language tool to drive pedagogical practices.

With ABC School District pivoting to a hybrid-model platform to provide both synchronous and asynchronous types of instruction, it is essential for teachers to know how to fully use tech-tool applications. These tools can help promote targeted instruction for ELLs. Now more than ever, in anticipation of the COVID-Slide, ELLs need to grasp concepts within the curriculum to achieve academic success. Since the pandemic, the district has launched a one-to-one initiative for students in K-3 for the first time; teachers are now learning to use the computer as a tool to leverage their instruction. It is imperative for teachers to understand how and when to implement reasonable accommodations thorough the usage of tech-tools throughout their instructional design to ensure that their methodologies are meeting the diverse needs of all their students, including their ELLs.

The professional development will be conducted online, during each grade level PLC (Professional Learning Community). During weekly PLCs, teachers collaborate with their grade level partners; this setting will allow for optimal collaboration that is grade level specific. During the virtual PD, the facilitator will be able to share his/her screen to model and provide a step-by-step tutorial for the content covered.

As a warm-up activity for the professional development, teachers will be asked to take a pre assessment which will be recorded on Qualtrics. The researcher will have access to participants understanding before the professional development series takes place. This data will be used to measure the level of growth an understanding obtained through the professional development series. The researcher will ask participants to take a post assessment after the professional development series to measure growth and effectiveness of the content video shorts. The questions on both the pre and post assessments will be shared with the district's ESL

supervisor and respective stakeholders. The data obtained from the professional development series will be used as insight on further professional development topics related to English language learners as well as insight for the researcher to make reasonable recommendations based on data analysis and research. watch a short video clip that shares the research behind the need for reasonable accommodations for ELLs.

The Council of the Great City Schools (2014) highlight the relevance of considering flexible assessment frameworks that are intentional in design and provide a clear scope and sequence for ELLs to attain academic success within the four language domains. Careful consideration must be placed on scaffolding content and instructional practices, without compromising rigor.

Campbell (2014) suggests providing ELLs with clear criteria to target, in a language they understand, accompanied by examples of completed work at various score levels so they have a barometer in which to hone in on. This pedagogical practice would be beneficial to model and share within all classrooms since there are ESL students within each classroom upon exiting the dual language classroom.. Research indicates that performance gaps exist between ELLs and their native English counterparts primarily due to the type of assessment used as a barometer to gauge academic language acquisition. Espinosa & López (2007) highlight that in order for ELLs to become proficient in any language, one must consider the complex and demanding process it takes children of all ages.

Mikyung, K. (2008) underscores the responsibility that lies on the shoulders of individual States to effectively utilize assessments to measure ELL students' academic achievement in language proficiency attainment; whether developed or implemented, the assessments must be

reasonable, provide valid accommodations. Until policy changes are made on a state and federal level, this weight is presently on local districts to initiative educational reform. Equitable practices are in need to enhance the learning experience for bilingual students. Therefore, stakeholders must bring the validity of effective assessments to the forefront of academia reform when regarding their English Language Learners.

### **Methodology**

The researcher will utilize a survey to conduct a mixed method research to examine how technology is being used to promote community partnerships. The survey tool that will be used for this investigation will have a combination of qualitative and quantitative inquiries. Having a combination of both types of questions will provide the examiner the opportunity to gain a better perspective on how schools are targeting their ELL students. The study will also examine how technology is being integrated into school's instructional design to promote communal partnerships and parental involvement on a virtual platform. The researcher will share findings of the relationships between the connection of variables and the impact it is having on student achievement and engagement. The intention of this study is to begin the dialogue on equitable practices for English Language Learners. How will ABC district provide support for their English language learners when they step out of a sheltered bilingual instructional setting into mainstream English only classrooms? This study will explore the intersectionality of pedagogy, equity and bilingual students all while exploring how the language of technology can be used to enhance instructional design as well as using technology as the main instrument to conduct this study and provide professional development. Therefore, a mixed method approach will be used for this study.

A mixed methods approach combines both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The researcher is not restricted on their approach but rather warranted the flexibility to obtain data through an array of modalities which include surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Mixed methods approach allows the researcher to use numbers and words as data which can appeal to different stakeholders (Creswell, 2018).

The researcher would like to ask a combination of convergent and sequential design questions to access information relevant to the study. Gaining a perspective of how ABC School is implementing activities that promote reasonable accommodations for ELLs, and analyzing the adjustments made to align to best practice is important research to investigate. The researcher will ask which accommodations were conducted and seek clarity on why other activities were not. This study will provide insight on the impact the decisions revolving around the language of technology integration and accommodations have on teachers of ELLs. The researcher would like to share innovative practices that have displayed the greatest impact on student achievement and/or engagement, based on teacher feedback and responses.

The qualitative portion of the research provides flexibility in the study design to explore phenomena with its open-ended and interactive exploratory format; this approach allows for meaningful revelation. The investigator will conduct research in an unanticipated manner, removing his/her own biases and assumptions. The researcher is at liberty to gently probe *why* and *how* from participant teachers to explore current practices via interviews after the questionnaire portion and open-ended questions have been administered. Sampling in qualitative research entails a subset population, implementing purposeful testing techniques. Recruitment for qualitative research includes a collaborative plan that can be modified as the study unfolds to

explore what areas of need should be highlighted in the PD Series for ABC School to improve equitable practices towards ELL students.

Complying with ethical practices in both research and professionalism facilitates fidelity to be maintained throughout the study which will provide context for research. Research ethics is essential because rigidity in approach can compromise the study (Creswell, J. & Clark, V., 2018). Therefore, the examiner must maintain a balanced methodology, upholding the participants' well-being as top priority and the research questions remain secondary. Once the data has been collected for the research the researcher must prepare the data for analysis. Recoding and computing are completed using Qualtrics and Google Forms. The researcher will create verbatim transcript files that can be coded accordingly by Atlas.Ti and/or manually since this study will have a small sample size. Exploring the data will allow the researcher to interpret and validate the data and results using triangulation methods. Researchers will maintain respect for participants and their communities, possess beneficence, and seek justice for the contributors in the study. Providing this lens of authenticity and merging findings with quantitative data results can result in a rich research study and professional development series.

#### Research Questions

- How is technology used to provide reasonable accommodations for ELLs when compared to their native English-speaking peers?
- How is technology being used to communicate with parents of ELLs to enhance engagement?
- How is technology being used to establish community partnerships to promote cultural experiences tied to curriculum content?

## Sampling Overview

To launch this study, the researcher will send an explanatory letter to school superintendents via email. For this study, the participants will be school leaders who play an active role in integrating instructional aspects within their school's instructional design. Participants will consist of adults that are classroom teachers, administrators within ABC School District. To achieve this, the researcher will contact the ESL supervisor, building administrator and classroom teachers regarding the purpose of this study and to obtain permission to conduct research. The Curriculum Director of ABC District will obtain a letter via email, describing the goal of the study. The researcher's intentionality provides a layer of precaution to obtain credible feedback from reliable sources within the district. Qualtrics will be used to collect survey responses and store data for further analysis and will be used as a main variable to filter data collection. District name and teacher's names will be kept anonymous, and the researcher will also give survey participants the option to share their contact information if they would like to speak with the researcher to share further insight pertinent to the study.

Having a combination of questions will provide the examiner the opportunity to gain a better perspective on current practices and needs of ELL students. The study will examine how virtual tools are being used and incorporated into schools' instructional design to target engagement and academic gain of ELL students. The researcher can share findings of the relationships between virtual activities and events that promote community partnerships, and the connection these decisions have to student achievement and engagement. The researcher can also share innovative ways technology is being used to promote partnerships within the community at the end of this study. To extrapolate perception, the appropriate questions within the design must be employed by the researcher (Creswell, J. & Clark, V., 2018). The *Principle of Saturation*



highlights that “one respondent’s opinion is enough to generate a code, part of the analysis framework” (Shetty, S., 2018). The researcher will maintain documentation of all responses and combine similar responses under the same code. This will allow the researcher to create a marginalized list that the researcher will share with the ESL supervisor. The findings of the research will be compared to best practice to determine the topics that will be covered on the professional development series for teachers to ensure a holistic approach is conducted to better service the diverse needs of English Language Learners.

The researchers will use various instruments throughout this study. One instrument that will be used for this study will be a questionnaire that will be launched to the teachers who service ELL students. The teachers who service English language learners will be the focus group for this study. Depending on the results of the questionnaire, the researcher may decide to continue to explore or seek clarification through interviews during great level PLCs, or perhaps a one-to-one interview. Once the researcher feels enough information is obtained from the needs assessment questionnaire, the researcher will also conduct an interview with the districts ESL supervisor to share the results of the needs assessment.

The researcher will use a modality of tools to collect data for this research. Instrumentation for this study includes Qualtrics for the initial questionnaire used to survey teachers of English language learners, a website will be used to house all professional development video shorts, and Google forms will be used for the pre and post assessments of the professional development series. The validity of scores that result from said instrument, sample items, contents of instrument, pilot testing, and survey administration (Creswell, 2018). The data analysis portion of a quantitative research allows a researcher to find relationships throughout descriptive analysis. The researcher is responsible for interpreting the results and sharing

findings with stakeholders. The methodology will directly be connected to the best practice and research; a side-by-side comparison will be conducted based on the initial Needs Assessment survey and the posttest assessment scores. Comparing this data will provide feedback to the researcher regarding a better understanding of teachers who work with English language learners. This information can also serve as a tool for the ESL supervisor to hold teachers responsible for providing a more equitable experience for students who are bilingual.

After the researcher has compiled all of this data, the researcher will meet with the ESL supervisor to provide further recommendations for curriculum and instructional practices to improve equity in academia in ABC District.

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