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COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: Working with English Language Learners in Mississippi

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EL TOOLBOX

Translation Apps including Google Translate

Closed Captioning

Changing the Device's Native Language

EL Teacher Support (pull out, push in)

Working with English Language Learners During Emergency Online Teaching

With the transition to emergency online teaching, Mississippi's teachers had to meet the needs of students with additional varying needs. According to a recent statewide study (Javorsky et al, 2022), 151 teachers indicated they were teaching at least one English Language (EL) Learner, 91% of these being general education teachers and 9% being special education teachers. The EL students served online were from all grade levels: 38% primary grades, 45% middle grades, and 34% high school grades. These percentages total more than 100% because many of these teachers indicated they taught across multiple grade levels.

Only 14% of Mississippi teachers said they had participated in professional development, and while some indicated it was done through district personnel, many others added they had sought their training out on their own through sources such as Google trainings or webinars through professional organizations. When these teachers were asked an open-ended question regarding what additional materials, resources, or professional development they had received, 9% of Mississippi teachers stated materials, software, and/or technology were provided, while 7% reported making use of school-provided translation support, and 6% found support through collaborating with the EL teacher at their school. Reading intervention plans for their EL students were cited as a support by 3% of the teachers. However, the majority (59%) of teachers indicated they did not receive any additional materials, resources, or professional development to support EL students.

Best Practices Supporting EL Learners

According to survey results, the accommodation that Mississippi teachers found most helpful for providing strong online instruction for their EL students was translation software or tools, followed by the use of videos and/or additional visuals. Teachers most commonly mentioned the need to translate materials and/or instructions into a student's native language. However, teachers also used such resources as YouTube in a student's native language. One teacher also mentioned being able to convert the native language of the Chromebook being used by the student to help support the student's understanding, but ran into challenges with the district resetting the device(s) on a regular basis. The teachers also focused on using pictures and additional visual aids or even music to support student learning.

Other best practices mentioned by Mississippi teachers included using multiple forms of input, providing students with notes or additional materials, vocabulary support, and closed captioning. All of these practices are consistent with the state education department guidance for online learning during the pandemic (Mississippi Department of Education, 2020).Teachers indicated the importance of providing multiple forms of input, specifically mentioning oral and written instructions, with added email communication with directions or clarification. Teachers mentioned the need to provide students with lecture materials, notes, or other materials that may not have been made available in the same way to their general education population. Several teachers also mentioned the need for explicit vocabulary support through direct instruction, noting terms that may be difficult for students. Closed captioning was also a tool used by teachers to support students. They would use closed captioning on videos, but also record Google Meets or other meetings and use closed captioning.

Communication and Support

Teachers who worked with EL students identified a greater need for better and more significant communication with EL students and their families. These supports for students included a significant focus of one-on-one support via video conferencing, using break-out rooms for small group remediation or support. One teacher mentioned using their planning time to meet individually with a student in need.

Teachers serving EL students online also mentioned coordinating with the EL teacher and contacting families to learn more about their student(s) as being very helpful. In particular, one-on-one communication either via phone or synchronous meeting software (e.g., Zoom) was found to be useful to develop rapport and provide support for families and student learning.

Resources

In the K-12 Teacher Survey, several teachers talked about how they felt overwhelmed, and they did not feel like what they did was "enough" for successful learning to create a school-wide learning environment that supported all students. In addition, teachers wanted more resources to help create a successful learning environment. In support, we provide a partial list below of well-regarded EL resources from the state department of education as well as national organizations for Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, and English Language Arts.

Mississippi Department of Education
Mississippi Department of Education has a resource page for English Learners (EL) (https://www.mdek12.org/EL) . On this page, teachers can find the MS English Language Proficiency Standards, resources on promoting high-quality instruction for English Learners in onsite, hybrid, and remote learning environments, parent guides, progress checklists for EL's, a newcomer kit, communication cards, welcome sheets for families, sentence stem cards, and visual schedules. The site also has EL Webinars and Literacy Tips on topics such as fluency, phonological awareness and phonics, comprehension, oral language and vocabulary acquisition, and classroom set up. There are also Family Guides for Student Success for Pre-K-8th grade, which can be provided online or printed for families, which are available in English and Spanish. There is also a training resource page available, which contains additional resources to help EL parents with grade-level at home strategies and activities to help support the mastery of the ELA and Math standards.

National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council for Teachers of English has an entire webpage (https://ncte.org/resources/english-language-learners/) devoted to teaching ELL's that can help teachers in adapting their curriculum and instruction to meet their needs. It contains resolutions passed by the NCTE membership, policy briefs, blog posts, links to books published by NCTE, journal resources, and webinars.

Resolution:
National Council of Teachers of English (2018, Feb. 20). *Resolution on support for undocumented students in the English classroom*. Retrieved from: https://ncte.org/statement/resolution-support-undocumented-students-english-classroom/

Research Policy Brief:
National Council of Teachers of English (2008). *English language learners a research policy brief*. Retrieved from https://ncte.org/resources/english-language-learners/

A sampling of free journal articles:
Cole, M.W., David, S.S., & Jiménez, R.T. (2016). Collaborative translation: Negotiating student investment in culturally responsive pedagogy. *Language Arts*, *93*(6), 430-443. Retrieved from: https://library.ncte.org/journals/LA/issues/v93-6/28636
Hickey, P.J. (2015). Lingua Anglia: Bridging language and learners. English Journal, 104(6), 81-83. https://library.ncte.org/journals/EJ/issues/v104-6/27413
Zapata, A., & Laman, T.T. (2016). "I write to show how beautiful my languages are": Translingual writing instruction in English-dominant classrooms. *Language Arts*, *93*(5), 366-378. Retrieved from: https://library.ncte.org/journals/la/issues/v93-5/28590

International Literacy Association (ILA)

Blog Posts:
Barber, A.T. (2014, Feb. 12). *Enhancing vocabulary and comprehension for English language learners*. Literacy Now Blog. Retrieved from: https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2014/02/12/enhancing-vocabulary-and-comprehension-for-english-language-learners
Lesaux, N., & Kelley, J.G. (2014, June 4). *Underreacting to struggling English language learners: The problem with delaying intervention in the early years*. Literacy Now Blog. Retrieved from: https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2014/06/04/underreacting-to-struggling-english-language-learners-the-problem-with-delaying-intervention-in-the-early-years

Free journal article:
Jiménez, R.T., Smith, P.H., & Teague, B.L. (2009). Transnational and community literacies for teachers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacies*, *53*(1), 16-26. Retrieved from: https://www.literacyworldwide.org/search-results?indexCatalogue=fullsitesearch&searchQuery=ELL%27s&wordsMode=0

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)

Research Brief:
Reed, J. (2009). Using two languages when learning mathematics: How can research help us understand mathematics learners who use two languages?. Retrieved from: https://www.nctm.org/Research-and-Advocacy/Research-Brief-and-Clips/Math-Education-Aspects-of-Students-Who-Use-Two-Languages/

NCTM Member/Journal Access:
A simple search of the NCTM website unveiled journal articles that focus on EL students and mathematics instruction. Topics include: creating a responsive learning community for EL's, group work and EL's, scaffolding mathematics discourse with EL's, bridging the language barrier in mathematics, and using Bloom's Taxonomy with EL's. All of these articles are available to NCTM members.

Free Professional Development Webinar and Webcast:
Bresser, B.G., & Melanese, K. (2010, April 22). *Supporting English language learners (ELLs) in math class*. Presentation at the 2010 NCTM Annual Meeting. San Diego, CA. Retrieved from: https://www.nctm.org/Conferences-and-Professional-Development/Webinars-and-Webcasts/Supporting-English-Language-Learners-(ELLs)-in-Math-Class/
Kersaint, G., & Thompson, D.R. (2011, April 11). *Teaching mathematics to English language learners*. Presentation at the 2011 NCTM Annual Meeting. Indianapolis, IN. Retrieved from: https://www.nctm.org/Conferences-and-Professional-Development/Webinars-and-Webcasts/Teaching-Mathematics-to-English-Language-Learners/

National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has published resources on supporting EL students' development of social studies knowledge.

A sampling of free journal articles:
Cruz, B.C., & Thornton, S.J. (2008). Social studies for all: ESOL strategies for the elementary classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *21*(2), 11-16. https://www.socialstudies.org/social-studies-and-young-learner/21/2/social-studies-all-esol-strategies-elementary-classroom
Cruz, B. C., & Thornton, S.J. (2009). Social studies for English language learners: Teaching social studies that matters. *Social Education* ,*73*(6), 271-274. https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/73/6/social-studies-english-language-learnersteaching-social-studies-matters

Dunne, K.A., & Martell, C.C. (2013). Teaching America's past to our newest Americans: Immigrant students and United States history. *Social Education*, *77*(40, 192-195. https://www.socialstudies.org/social-education/77/4/teaching-americas-past-our-newest-americans-immigrant-students-and-united

Keefer, N., Lopez, J., Young, J., & Haj-Broussard, M.(2020). Gathering funds of knowledge: An elementary social studies unit plan for bilingual settings. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, *33*(2), 14-19. https://www.socialstudies.org/social-studies-and-young-learner/33/2/gathering-funds-knowledge-elementary-social-studies-unit-plan

Free Webinar:

Skarin, R., & Kayser, A.A. (2022, Feb. 6). *Powerful civics for all: Realizing the educating for American democracy roadmap's potential for ELL's*. Retrieved from: https://www.socialstudies.org/educating-american-democracy/powerful-civics-all-realizing-ead-roadmaps-potential-ells

National Science Teaching Association (NSTA)

The National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) has a *Topics* website dedicated to EL's on their site where if teachers are members of NSTA, they can access articles related to EL instruction. The site is here: https://www.nsta.org/topics/english-language-learners

TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORTS

As evidenced in the word cloud, multiple teachers noted that Google Translate (https://translate.google.com/) was a helpful application to use to work with EL students. Specifically, one middle school teacher noted, "Google translator for EL parents was CRUCIAL during online instruction." Another high school teacher explained, "I provide them with a set of notes translated into their first language to go along with the lessons. This is probably the most helpful thing I do."

What does the research say?

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)'s 2008 Research Policy Brief provides recommendations related to current practices Mississippi teachers were using with EL students. NCTE (2008) recommends that teachers:
- Use technology effectively
- Position native languages and home environments as resources

These practices can help EL's see that their teachers value their native languages and home environments as assets to education rather than deficits.

PEER and TEACHER SUPPORTS

Teachers discussed the importance of their EL students receiving support from their EL teachers or peers. An elementary school teacher said, "[Something that was helpful for me was] support from the ELL teacher." Another elementary school teacher found, "Students are able to ask other students or their ELL tutors for help," during online instruction.

What does the research say?

Cruz and Thornton (2009) emphasized the importance of promoting interactive learning between EL's and English-speaking students. They posited peer to peer interaction can "be an important way to include ELL's as full participants—rather than passive observers—in classroom activities" (Cruz & Thornton, 2009, 271).

Barber (2014), in a blog post about Vaughn, Martinez, Linan-Thompson, Reutebuch, Carlson, and Francis (2009) work, wrote that the use of structured paired reading with a native English speaker can help support EL's comprehension and oral language development.

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FULL REPORT

▸ Javorsky, K., Alley, K.M., Miller, N.C., Fondren, K.B., Lemley, S.M., & Hopper, P.F. (2022, June). Mississippi's K-12 public education response to the COVID-19 pandemic: From remote learning to recovery and beyond. Emergency online teaching - What works for Mississippi. https://guides.library.msstate.edu/c.php?g=1156773&p=8479156