Technology to Promote ELL Student & Family Success

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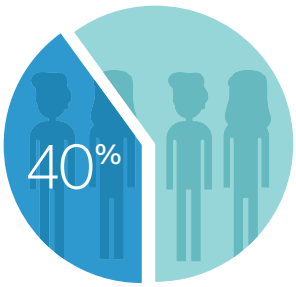
Introduction

English Language Learners (ELLs), also referred to as English Learners (ELs), are a vastly diverse group of approximately 5 million students who speak a primary language other than English and who are not yet proficient in English, which is a second or additional language for them. ELLs constitute 10% of total school enrollment in the U.S. (National Academies, 2017). The Migration Policy Institute reports that 82% of kindergarten through grade 5 ELLs and 65% of grades 6-12 ELLs are U.S. born, making the vast majority of all English Language Learners ages 5-17 native born (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). A large percentage of ELLs, approximately 60% at the secondary level, remain designated as English Language Learners for the majority of their schooling experience (more than six years), making them Long Term English Learners (LTELs), never reaching full proficiency in English (National Academies, 2017; Olsen, 2010).

ELLs are the fastest growing subgroup of students in U.S. schools; it is expected they will constitute approximately forty percent of the PK-12 population by 2030 (Murphy, Guzman, & Torres, 2014; National Academies, 2017). The vast majority, approximately 80% of ELLs in the U.S., speak Spanish as their primary language; however, ELLs across the country speak hundreds of primary languages and dialects (National Academies, 2017). As a demographic group, they are concentrated in high poverty, highly linguistically and racially segregated under-resourced schools and often with too few qualified teachers, resulting in unequal outcomes (Gándara, 2017; Peske & Haycock, 2006). In the aggregate, ELLs' academic achievement is among the lowest of all major subgroups, and there is a wide disparity between ELL and monolingual English students on attainment and achievement measures, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In 2015, math scores at 4th grade averaged 218 for ELLs and 243 for non-ELLs, a difference of 25 points. At 8th grade ELLs averaged 246 and non-ELLs 284, a difference of 38 points. In the same year there was a 36-point difference between 4th grade reading scores for ELLs and non-ELLs and a gap of 44 points at the 8th grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In 2014, English Language Learners had a graduation rate of 63%, making them as a group significantly less likely to graduate from high school compared to students living in poverty (72%), and to students overall (82%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

In order to catch up and keep up with their native English speaking peers, ELLs need more instructional time and specialized instruction, including specially designed materials and state-of-the-art educational tools to accelerate their learning. If learning for ELLs is not accelerated, they risk running out of time and not earning the credits they need to graduate. Teachers cannot wait until students are fluent in the language of instruction to teach content (a successive approach), as students will fall too far behind academically. Therefore, a simultaneous approach is required whereby students must learn academic content while developing language. Technology is one means by which ELLs can receive the additional input and practice they need to accelerate their language learning by providing them with more opportunities for language development, and thus, the ability to participate more fully in grade level academic work. This increases ELLs' opportunity to meet the academic standards to which they and all students are held, which in turn increases postsecondary college and career options.

APPROXIMATELY
5 MILLION
ELL STUDENTS



40 PERCENT
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Leveraging Technology for ELLs

Information and communication technologies (ICT), broadly defined, are used to promote English language learning across the globe in numerous and creative ways. There is a small but growing body of literature on the ways in which primary and secondary English as a Second Language (ESL) students can benefit from ICT generally, and from computer-assisted language learning specifically in terms of accessibility, immediacy of feedback, self pacing and independent activity (Motteram, 2013). Most ELLs would benefit from additional practice exploring and using English across the curriculum and across the language domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing, especially in terms of focused academic English (Bunch, Kibler & Pimentel, 2012). ELLs can benefit greatly from increased opportunities to interact with language in meaningful ways, which can be provided by and facilitated using technology tools that allow students to receive practice and feedback on their performance, such as voice recognition to promote listening and speaking skills and modeled language use.

Using technology for language development has the additional benefit of giving students more familiarity with the use of the technology tools, which is important in the current era of computer-based standardized testing, where a lack of familiarity with the technology often puts ELL students at an additional disadvantage, due to a 'digital divide'. This 'divide' refers specifically to the disparities in access to and familiarity with using technology across various populations. For example, in 2015, 82% of Hispanic teens in the U.S. reported owning a computer, compared to 91% of white teens (Lenhart, 2015). However, the divide can be seen in other aspects of the digital learning ecosystem as well, including in the nature of the learning activities students are offered and subsequent outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Zielezinski, & Goldman, 2014; Vanek, 2014). Further evidence of the digital divide is reflected on the 2014 NAEP assessment of Technology and Information Literacy, which shows a significant disparity between 8th grade ELLs and non-ELLs, with average scale scores of 108 and 152 respectively. This is a larger gap than that found across racial groups, parents' education level, or socioeconomic level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In addition to a focus on gaining access to technology for ELLs, educators should include an explicit focus on information literacy, which ELL and all students must acquire to be successful in our digital, globalized world.

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Technology used effectively to accelerate language learning can significantly impact a given student's educational trajectory, and thus life chances, particularly if and when it promotes language development that results in reclassification from English Learner status to fully English proficient status. Each year a student is designated as an English Learner increases the language proficiency demands that the student must meet to move up a proficiency level and to eventually become reclassified. Ideally a student can become reclassified within several years of becoming an English Learner, although we also know it generally takes 4-7 years to acquire academic English (National Academies, 2017). Reclassification from ELL status and exit from ELL programming can have important effects and outcomes for secondary students in terms of ACT scores, graduation rates, and postsecondary education (Carlson & Knowles, 2016).

Blended Learning to Accelerate Language Development for ELLs

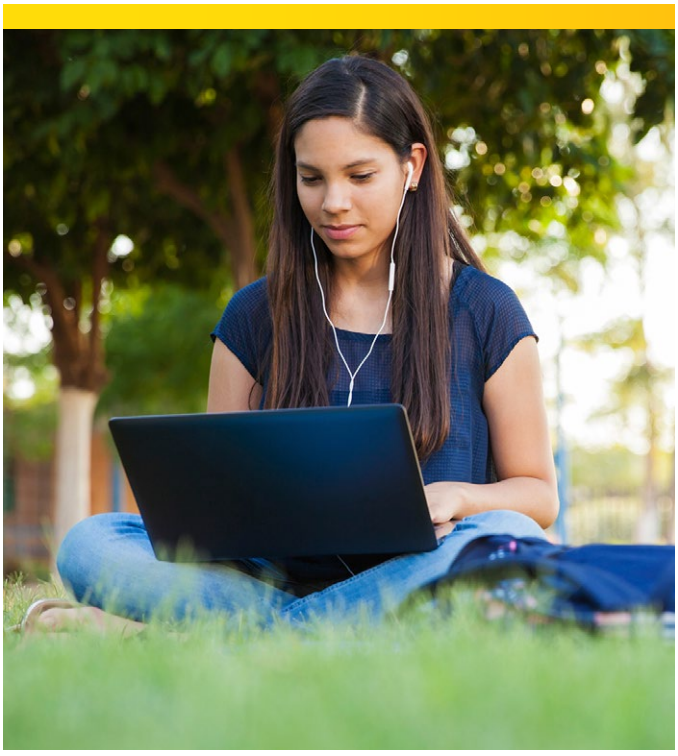
It is well understood that the most effective way to learn language for ELLs is through meaningful content and a compelling need or desire to communicate (Collier, 1995; Valdés, Menken, & Castro, 2015). One way to accelerate learning for English Language Learners is to use technology in ways that allow for

- more time on tasks that promote language development and content area learning
- additional practice developing and using language meaningfully
- feedback on their language production and progress

Blended learning is one potentially powerful approach to improving instruction and outcomes for ELLs, where technology is used to "blend" learning such that students can benefit from an integrated learning experience that combines both face-to-face learning in a classroom with a teacher, as well as technology-mediated learning, in which the student has some control over various elements such as time, pace, and content. The purpose of using a blended learning approach is to maximally differentiate and personalize instruction for students in which they receive timely, meaningful feedback and assessment with individual support. Blended learning can also promote learner autonomy and independent learning. For ELLs especially, a blended approach can help to meet learners' critical needs through greater differentiation, more learning time, more access to language and content (where indeed ELLs can be content producers), and more practice using and developing language. Especially for beginning and early intermediate students, this language development is critical to being able to do rigorous work in the content areas.

One popular use of the blended learning concept is the "flipped classroom" where the lecture and homework aspects of the course are typically reversed or "flipped", such that the student arrives to class having already heard or read the lecture and class time is devoted to discussion, problem solving or other post-lecture learning, practice or applications. In terms of ELL students, such at-home or otherwise beyond the classroom study would offer the dual benefits of being able to a) work through the material at their own pace, and b) involve parents and others in the process (see below).

Blended learning, when done well, builds upon a foundation of excellent in-person teaching, where the teacher mindset includes a belief in the importance of innovation and data-driven teaching and learning, student choice and personalized learning, student discovery, including student generated content, learning by doing, and a growth, asset-based orientation (Powell, Rabbitt & Kennedy, 2014). This mindset provides the basis upon which blended



learning can be well designed and implemented in ways that can significantly improve achievement and schooling outcomes for all students. Such learning is, arguably, even more valuable for English Language Learners, who need the best instruction and access to the most state-of-the-art tools and technologies (which we know currently is not the case for many ELLs). This mindset is also perfectly aligned with what we know in terms of effective stances, dispositions and practices for teaching English Language Learners, where blended learning and effective ELL instruction are synergistic.

Blended learning can be implemented and utilized in any number of ways (e.g. as an aspect of learning centers/rotations or during homework clubs) to promote success among English Learners. One potentially powerful model involves the ESL/ELD (English Language Development) and grade level or content area teachers collaborating such that the ESL/ELD course or block of time during the school day is devoted to preparing and supporting students in the content they are responsible for learning in subject areas and content courses (Truong, 2017). For example, if particular language structures are used in assigned readings and/or students are expected to use these in their own writing, the blended aspect of the ESL/ELD course can leverage technology tools to focus on and practice these structures, for example the use of the passive voice, which is often found in science texts. This and other coordinated approaches using technology can compound learning benefits for students, including those placed at risk within our education systems, which as a demographic group, includes ELLs. Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford professor emeritus and one of the foremost scholars of education policy, along with her colleagues (2014) found that at risk "learners who worked with teachers alongside their online experience were much more likely to say that they developed an interest in the subject and increased their academic standing" (p.12), where the blended environment allowed for support and encouragement from a teacher. In terms of policy recommendations for using blended learning with at risk students, "the most productive contexts are those that combine structured learning of information, with collaborative discussions and problem-based activities that solve meaningful problems, create products, or both" (Darling-Hammond et al, 2014, p. 15). The online or virtual blended classroom, rather than diminishing the physical classroom, allows it to become more creative and open-ended, both for teachers and students, through application of blended learning content and skills to authentic problems, games, simulations, or 3-D product creation, as examples (Khan, 2017). For beginning ELLs, including newcomer students, application of language and learning to and through real world and local contexts is particularly important.

"Learners who worked with teachers alongside their online experience were much more likely to say that they developed an interest in the subject and increased their academic standing."

Darling-Hammond, Zielezinski & Goldman

ELL Parental Engagement and Community Support

There is a large body of research demonstrating that students are more successful when their parents are involved in their education (Allen, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 2012; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015; Zacarian & Silverstone, 2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act requires that districts set aside funds to involve parents in the school community through "parent and family engagement" efforts, with the aim of benefiting both parents and students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Many parents of ELLs would benefit from learning English and state a clear desire to do so, especially where learning English is made accessible, comprehensible and enjoyable. This may be through language classes offered in the community or through the school, or through access to language learning tools using technology, where learning could potentially happen at any time or place.

Numerous districts all across the country offer English classes for bilingual parents, as well as primary language literacy classes. Some districts allow all second language learners and their families unlimited access to technology-based language learning programs. This kind of widespread access can open exciting possibilities for language and learning, and engaging parents as users of technology helps to close the digital divide. Families can become involved in joint production of projects and the sharing of expertise, where parents and other family members can act as cultural brokers sharing their funds of knowledge, as language specialists, as well as learners of English. Engagement with families should take culturally compatible forms. This extends to technology use as well, where programs and tools should be introduced as part of a broader relationship building effort with students' families, who are both learners and knowledge producers (Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006).

Conclusion

Technology can be used to improve schooling outcomes for English Language Learners, and to promote school engagement for families of ELLs. Technology tools can help to accelerate language development, while minimizing the digital divide and the 'opportunity to learn' gap for English Language Learners and their families. Blended learning, when done well, is a complementary approach to what we know works with English Learners and helps to meet the critical needs of more time for learning, more language and content access, more differentiated instruction and more formative assessment. Well utilized state-of-the-art technology tools can transform not only learning, but schooling itself, for English Language Learners and their families.

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Bernadette Musetti is currently an Associate Professor and Director of Liberal Studies–the undergraduate multiple subjects teacher preparation program at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. She teaches a wide range of courses, including Education & the Public Good, Education and Global issues, Second Language Acquisition, Sociocultural Foundations of Education, Anthropological Analysis of Education, Paradigms of Education, and Methods for English Language Development, among many others. She earned a BA degree in History at Mills College, an MA in TESOL–Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and a PhD in Curriculum & Instruction: Language, Literacy & Culture at the University of California Davis.

Dr. Musetti has taught English as a second language and sheltered literature at the middle and high school levels in Mexico and the United States and documented the transition to 'English Only' in California at a bilingual elementary school in her published dissertation *Don't Question My Authority: The Power and Pedagogy of English Only*. Her research and publications include, but are not limited to, science and English Learners, English Learners and Common Core State Standards, multicultural literature, trauma-informed schooling, and promoting high levels of multiple literacies.

Formerly, Dr. Musetti was an Educational Program Specialist at the California Department of Education, where much of her work revolved around creating community-school partnerships and career academies. She also served for six years as the Co-Director of the Center for Latino Achievement at the University of Georgia where she led district teams of educators across the state to create and implement action plans to raise student achievement. Dr. Musetti has extensive grant writing and administrative experience and was the Lead Co-Director of an $8.9 million Teacher Quality Partnership Grant to build a true K-20+ partnership between a large urban school district and a College of Education.

Dr. Musetti has devoted her career to working with in-service and pre-service teachers to better meet the needs of students in diverse classrooms, which has included an extensive focus on differentiating instruction, designing curriculum, Understanding by Design, and project-based learning. Other areas of expertise include reading in diverse classrooms, sheltered instruction, and creating higher education pipeline programs for students placed at-risk.

In addition to her experience working with K-12 English Learners and newcomer immigrant students, Dr. Musetti also has extensive experience working with international students and teachers at the university level and served as Curriculum Coordinator of the Contract Language Programs and later as Interim Director of the International Training and Education Center at the University of California Davis, where she managed over thirty international student groups, each with a specialized program of study.

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