English Language Learners: Strategies to Employ in Order to Better Support Them in K-12

Education

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Essay

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Why I chose this Area?: The specific question I will be addressing is: How can English Language Learners be best supported in k-12 learning?

I chose this because I currently work at a high school where the majority of the population are English Language Learners who are too quickly integrated into fully english classrooms where they struggle to grasp the concepts that other students are more equipped to learn.

Alignment with Common Theme and HCOM: This project is in alignment with the themes of hidden histories as it explores equity and inclusion within the K-12 classroom that is not always paid attention to. It is in the theme of inquiry as this project will allow me to inquire and research aspects of the education system that can be changed in order to benefit and better suit all the diverse and individualistic needs of students.

Purpose: My purpose for this project is to research the best strategies to teach English Language Learners as California schools are filled with students who are learning English as a second language. I hope to accomplish specific strategies that I can implement in my lesson plans and my career as a teacher that will help my future students succeed. I want to learn how to better level the playing field so that ELL students can have equal opportunities.

Introduction

K-12 education is a pivotal part of every person's life. It is the stepping stone to one's adult life and adolescence shapes many aspects of the future. As an aspiring English Teacher, I have spent many hours in the classroom and at school in preparation for my own future. I have witnessed many amazing students, stories, and experiences; in addition to this, I have also witnessed many disparities, inequalities, and gaps in education, particularly for English Language Learners. Transitioning from student to teacher lens has opened my eyes to the validity and urgency of certain issues regarding equity and inclusion in the classroom. For English Language Learners to be properly prepared for an English Classroom, strategies such as reading interventions and phonics instruction must be implemented in an approachable and culturally responsive manner. In my paper, I will first highlight some historical events that relate to the matter of English Language Learners. This will include the case of Lau vs. Nichols and California Education Code 8573. Then, I will propose solutions and strategies to help those students based on thorough research and studies by Ernestina Cantul Gutires, Kathleen Moore, and more. I will also connect that research specifically to high school English classrooms at Seaside High School to best relate it to English Single Subject Matter Preparation and prepare strategies for my future classroom while also accounting for first-hand experiences of current English Language Learners. Lastly, I will conclude with a summary of my findings and a call to action with a quick explanation of my lesson plans that proceed the essay.

Historiography

The disparities regarding English Language Learners have been long discussed and debated. One particular landmark case that kickstarted the attention that was needed was the Lau vs Nichols case. In 1974, the case was opened when a lawsuit was filed on behalf of Chinese

American students in San Francisco who were not receiving adequate language services and assistance within the classroom and were therefore falling behind. Brian P Smentkowski discusses the details of the ruling, "Lau v. Nichols, a case in which the U.S. The Supreme Court on January 21, 1974, ruled (9–0) that, under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a California school district receiving federal funds must provide non-English-speaking students with instruction in the English language to ensure that they receive an equal education" (Smentkowski 1). The court ruled that in fact, the school district was unconstitutional by not providing resources to meet these students' needs. This case was the first to affirm the specific needs of English language learners in California. By acknowledging that language barriers can significantly impact a student's ability to access their education, the ruling established a legal precedent that obligates educational institutions to provide language support and instruction for English Language Learners. It recognized that students who are learning English deserve equal access to education and that students were not receiving that access. This ruling also helped with future legal battles that English Language Learners faced and continue to face. The importance of the Lau v. Nichols ruling lingers today in the education of English Language Learners as the ruling has helped to shape policies and practices that prioritize the needs of English Language Learners, such as the development of bilingual education programs, the provision of language support services, and the hiring and training of qualified teachers who are knowledgeable about the unique needs of English Language Learners.

This ruling, however, was not completely effective as it lacked details and regulation meaning that although this case helped, it did not solve the problem. Law Expert Elianna Spitzer talks about the limitations that Lau vs. Nichols has, "The Court never specified what steps the school district needed to take to decrease English language deficiencies. Under Lau, school

districts must provide some sort of supplemental instruction, but how much and to what end remained up to their discretion. The lack of defined standards resulted in many federal court cases which attempted to further define the school's role in English-as-a-second-language curriculums" (Spitzer 1). The ruling did not provide specific guidelines for schools to follow in providing language support and instruction for English Language Learners. So, schools have had to individually create their own approaches which has led to some having been more successful than others in meeting the needs of English Language Learners. Furthermore, the ruling focused primarily on the issue of language access, instead of the deeper and broader root issues of cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom. This particular focus could have been the contributor to the lack of attention to the cultural and linguistic assets that English Language Learners bring to the classroom and may have created and preserved negative stereotypes and stigmatization of English Language Learners. The Lau v. Nichols ruling also did not address the systemic and structural inequalities that contribute to language barriers for English Language Learners, such as insufficient funding for bilingual education programs, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of access to educational resources and technology. So, while Lau v. Nichols ruling was an important step in the recognition of the rights of English Language Learners to receive equal educational opportunities, it has some limitations that may have contributed to ongoing challenges faced by English Language Learners.

Later in government history, a California education code was created and continues to be implemented today that is supposed to aid English Language Learners in their journey to learning English. The code reads that "Children between the ages of 6 and 16 attend full-time classes taught in English. A student cannot graduate with a grade if they have not achieved English proficiency. Bilingual instruction is permitted as long as it does not interfere with regular

English course instruction" (Developing Ell Programs: Lau V. Nichols). This code, although maybe well-intentioned, is extremely harmful in several ways. It should be noted that English is an important and useful skill and knowing English is undeniably, even if unfortunately, pivotal to succeeding in America. However, forcing students into classes taught only in English may make it difficult for them to understand and fully participate in classroom activities. This results in understandable frustration, a lack of motivation, and a negative impact on their academic performance which can be detrimental to them in the long run. Furthermore, this law prioritizes the need to learn English over a student's individuality in terms of culture and mental well-being. Putting students who do not know proficient English into math, science, and other courses taught only in English (let alone with difficult-to-understand jargon that English Speakers may even have trouble with) is simply unfair. The law's limited allowance for bilingual teaching in public schools creates a hostile educational environment. It is also important to note that the law does not address the root problems that contribute to language barriers for English Language Learners, like a lack of resources and support for bilingual education programs, inadequate or limited training for teachers, and insufficient access to educational materials and tools. This law is not in alignment with the unique cultural and social needs of the very diverse population of students who learn in California.

Laws such as those highlight the fact that English Language Learners are constantly being pushed aside despite their extra challenges in all subjects, but particularly English. This can be seen through laws that directly attack the well-being and pursuit of success for students. Particularly in California, with one of the highest percentages of ELL students at 29%, these disparities are highlighted through state funding and the average amount of money each pupil receives. Instructor Kathleen Moore details the financial injustices in the education system, "The

mean per pupil yield is approximately $8,500 per pupil, ranging from $2,986 per pupil in South Carolina to $17,663 in New Jersey. This shows that there are vast disparities in funding for ELLs across states despite having similar policies for the identification and assessment of ELLs…California and New Jersey use combination weights in which ELLs who qualify for supplemental funding in other categories only receive supplemental funding under one category. This means that an ELL who is eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, a measure of poverty, cannot receive both pupil weights for ELL and for poverty" (Moore 25). Furthermore, it is concluded that 60% of English Language Learners students are living in poverty, (Breiseth 1) which further illuminates the problems regarding funding for English Language Learners students in particular. The lack of access to qualified teachers and resources exacerbates the problem. In California, many schools with large English Language Learners populations are located in low-income areas, which often have fewer resources and less experienced teachers. Even though strides have been made to equalize the playing field, students are still held back by the lack of detail within these laws which allows school districts to continue to not have equitable teaching for English Language Learners. This illuminates the fact that teachers and future teachers need to be aware of these limitations so that they can incorporate means to help English Language Learners into their classrooms.

Strategies to Employ into the Classroom

When it comes to implementing strategies into classrooms in order to optimize the means teachers currently have to help English Language Learners succeed in the classroom despite limiting laws and bills, three strategies will be highlighted through research: incorporating native language in subjects other than English; and specifically for English, prioritizing phoneme education and reading interventions.

Students who are put into classrooms that only use English are confused and as a result, have to work astronomically harder than other students who know English. Rather than focusing on learning math or science, students have to first figure out what their teacher is saying or trying to convey through the lesson. Ernestina Cantul Gutires discusses the need for native language to be intertwined with the student's other classes, "ELLs require valid assessments for evaluating their skills in English and in their native language and for measuring their progress in English Language development and in other subject areas. This requires going beyond the use of English Language Proficiency assessments and also developing materials in students' native languages for subjects such as math, science, and social studies" (Cantul Gutierez 21). So, it is highlighted that native language does in fact need to be integrated when planning for class, but that can be impractical as it is likely the teacher does not know the student's native language. A solution to this problem, that many schools already have implemented, is having some sort of in-class support to translate. It is not a perfect solution, but with the help of an in-class translator, who can sit in the classes with groups of students who need the translation, the student can at least follow along. A more comprehensive and effective solution to this problem would have to come from the district to include classrooms of math and science, as well as other subjects, that are available in other languages. Ernestina Cantul Gutierrez highlights the importance of understanding phonemes for English Language Learners "Certainly decoding quickly will not guarantee that the child will comprehend all that was read but it will free up the child's cognitive energies to use the context of what was read in order to gather comprehension and meaning from the passage" (Cantul Gutierrez 34). Learning phonemes helps ELLs to distinguish between similar sounds and to understand the patterns and rules that govern the pronunciation of English words. It also helps them to acquire new vocabulary and to communicate more effectively with

native speakers. To effectively teach phonemes to ELLs, teachers can use a variety of strategies and resources, including phonics instruction, visual aids, and explicit pronunciation practice. It is also important to recognize the diversity of phoneme systems across different languages and to support ELLs in developing phonemic awareness through their own linguistic backgrounds.

Another important aspect of aiding ELLs in the classroom, especially when beginning to be integrated into regular English Classrooms, is personalized reading interventions which can be executed in many ways. These may include reading aloud, partner readings, and more, which build and foster the necessary skills needed to dissect difficult texts. Reading Interventions are flexible and can be catered to each classroom in ways that would best benefit the students as a whole, as well as individual students. Cho Young further explains important aspects of reading interventions in her analysis on Reading Interventions, "First, reading interventions for ELLs are expected to be the most efficient when conducted on a medium-sized group of 6–15 students. This indicates that implementing reading interventions for ELLs requires a specially designed group-scale configuration rather than simply a class-wide or one-to-one configuration" (Helion 1). Reading interventions can be a powerful tool for supporting ELLs in the classroom. By providing targeted support and opportunities for practice, teachers can help ELLs build their language skills and develop a love for reading that will serve them well throughout their academic careers. Kathleen Moore, Camille Rutherford, and Keith Crawford talk about strategies and results of reading interventions in the classroom with respect to English Language Learners in their article, "Supporting Postsecondary English Language Learners' Writing Proficiency Using Technological Tools." It states, "The first primary finding from this meta-analysis is that ELLs can improve their reading ability when provided appropriate reading interventions. Our findings indicated that the overall mean effect size of reading interventions of ELLs yielded an

effect size of 0.653, which indicates a medium level of effect. From this result, we can conclude that the appropriate reading interventions generally have impacts on reading outcomes for ELLs in K-12. This is consistent with prior syntheses reporting positive effects of reading interventions for ELLs" (Moore 8). This solidifies the importance of reading interventions in the classroom and shows how students can be greatly impacted with simple strategies that can be implemented by any teacher. Simply taking 5 minutes to do a reading intervention with each student during a period is reasonable as it is proven to aid students greatly.

English Language Learners at Local High School

At Seaside High School, where I have worked for the past two years, I have seen many English Language Learners in situations of triumph, support, and often in situations of defeat or lonesomeness. In order to get more involved in the experiences of English Language Learners, I sat in to observe an English Language Learner-based classroom for 2 weeks. There I was able to gain insight into their views through interviews (with the help of a translator) and through observation.

When talking to the students, I found that every student I interviewed relied heavily on friends during classes to translate for them in their classes. One student even attributed his success in math to the girl who sits next to him and translates for him consistently. Although these findings are telling of the empathy these students certainly receive from their peers, it is also concerning. By having students solely rely on other students for translation services, they are interrupting the flow of learning for the other student. Furthermore, it is also a daunting task to have an adolescent student translate material they are just now learning in real-time. Another student expresses that his hardest class is history because there is no support as there are no students with the capability of translating. This reveals the other flaw with student-to-student

translation, the fact that there may not always be a student available. I also wondered to the students if they needed a professional or adult translator if they thought the school would have one available. Most were not sure or just simply said no as they are more comfortable with their friends translating for them.

Sitting in on the English Language Learner class, I found the teacher relied heavily on the translator, who was a freshman at CSUMB completing a service learning requirement for her classes. She was extremely helpful to the teacher, students, and me. I asked about her experiences translating throughout the year. She described to me an instance where a student was unable to turn in her Chromebook for weeks because the school bookkeeper does not speak Spanish and she was too shy to go without a translator. This shows an added anxiety that English Language Learners feel, along with the regular anxiety that just comes with being a teenager. Schools need to have, at least, a team of regularly available translators, who can even be volunteers. Having available translators will help students with regular tasks to alleviate stress when dealing with situations inside and outside of the classroom at school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, students deserve to have the ability to express themselves in a safe and non-hostile learning environment. Through the historiography on English Language Learning education bills, it is safe to assume that students are not receiving adequate support in the classroom. Despite this, however, there are ways teachers and school districts can support English Language Learners through attention to phoneme education, reading interventions, and incorporation of culture. Proceeding this paper is a set of three lesson plans that I believe are good implementations of these research findings. When creating them I prioritized phonetics, reading intervention, and reading comprehension. These lessons are ideal for 9th-12th graders in

a college prep course. In the future, it is my hope that the government and school districts will prioritize all students' individual and unique needs in order to ensure the possibility of success, however, that may be defined, for every student.

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<u>Instructional Unit Plans</u>

The following are five lesson plans. The first three focus on phonemes and morphemes; lesson one is for phonemes with support from <u>Frankenstein</u> by Mary Shelley, the following lesson focuses on morphemes with passages from <u>The Great Gatsby</u> and the third focuses on blending morphemes and phonemes and applying it to their own writing. The fourth lesson focuses on analyzing quotes in <u>The House on Mango Street</u> in order to improve reading comprehension. The last lesson is a jigsaw reading translation for "Hamlet" by Shakespeare that also aims to improve reading comprehension.

<u>Lesson 1:</u> Phonemes in <u>Frankenstein</u> by Mary Shelley

Objective: Students will be able to identify phonemes in <u>Frankenstein</u> by Mary Shelley, and successfully identify them in their own writing.

Introduction:

- The teacher will introduce the lesson topic by explaining what phonemes are and provide examples

    - Phonemes are the smallest units of sound in a language. They are the building blocks that make up words and speech.

        - For example, the word "cat" has three phonemes: //m /a/ /t/. Each sound represents a different phoneme.

        - Another example is the word "ship" which also has three phonemes: /sh/ /e/ /ll/. Again, each sound represents a different phoneme.

Instruction:

- The teacher will distribute the handout on phonemes and review each type of phoneme

    - Vowel Phonemes

        - Vowel phonemes are sounds that are produced without any obstruction in the vocal tract.

    - Consonant Phonemes

        - Consonant phonemes are sounds that are produced with some degree of obstruction in the vocal tract.

- The teacher will ask a student to popcorn read the following passage (and remember their words)

    - "I feel exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self."

- "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me"
- Students will then write down their word that they read and identify all phonemes in the word.
- The teacher will then ask students to share out their words in small groups

Activity:

- Activity on constructing words from phonemes
  - In a hat, the teacher will have a bunch of different phonemes cut up and crumpled for students to pick at random. Each student will pick 3 phonemes
    - For example: a student will reach into the hat and randomly select "sh" "f" and "l"
    - Or "c" "t" "s"
  - Then, the student will attempt to create a word using all of the phonemes while try to use the least amount of extra letters possible.
    - For example: That same student uses the phonemes to create "shelf"
    - Or "cat"
- The groups will share their words with the class.

Conclusion:

- The students will then write a short reflection of what they have learned today in their notebooks and add "phoneme" to their ongoing list of literary devices and elements. This lesson is in alignment with my research as it focuses on phonetic elements. Understanding phonemes is essential to understanding the English Language.

Lesson 2: Morphemes in The Great Gatsby by F Scott Fitzgerald

Objective: Students will be able to identify morphemes in "The Great Gatsby" by F Scott Fitzgerald, and successfully identify them in their own writing.

Introduction:

- The teacher will introduce the lesson topic by explaining what morphemes are and provide examples
  - Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in a language. They are the building blocks of words and can be combined to create new words.

Instruction:

- The teacher will distribute the handout on phonemes and review each type of morpheme
  - Free Morphemes: Free morphemes are morphemes that can stand alone as words. They are not attached to any other morphemes and have meaning on their own.
    - Book, dog, happy, tree, cup
  - Bound Morphemes: Bound morphemes are morphemes that cannot stand alone as words. They must be attached to a free morpheme to create a word. Bound morphemes can be prefixes or suffixes.

- Un-, -s, -ed, -er
- The teacher will ask a student to read with a partner the following passage
  - "All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever." "No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart." "It takes two to make an accident." "He looked at her the way all women want to be looked at by a man."
  - "He smiled understandingly-much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey."
- Students will then highlight all bound morphemes within the passage.
- The teacher will then ask students to share their words with other partners in order to try and highlight them all.

Activity:

- Activity on blending multiple phonemes and morphemes
  - Students will work in small groups to attempt to make the word with the most amount of bound and free morphemes.
    - For example: a student may come up with the word "unhappily" which has 3 morphemes

- The groups will share their words with the class.

Conclusion:

- The students will then write a short reflection of what they have learned today in their notebooks and add "morpheme" to their ongoing list of literary devices and elements. Morphemes are essential to the evolution of learning for English Language Learners. In my paper, I talked about phonetic awareness and I believe morphemes go hand in hand to that idea. Knowing about phonemes and morphemes helps students identify unknown words.

Lesson 3: Analyzing quotes in The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Objective: Students will be able to analyze different quotes based on their reading comprehension and knowledge of literary elements and devices.

Introduction:

- The teacher will introduce the lesson topic by explaining analysis and the importance of conveying your interpretations of texts.
  - Students will do a quick write on this prompt
    - "Why is it important to analyze, wonder or ponder on reading? Is it important to analyze anything else?"

Instruction:

- The teacher will then give students 10 minutes to find a quote from the book

- Teacher will then have students highlight "golden words" within their quote

  - "We do this because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning."

  - "the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing"

  - "Butterflies are too few and so are flowers and most things that are beautiful. Still, we take what we can get and make the best of it."

- Teacher will then have students refer to their list of literary devices and elements in order to identify any in their quote

- Students will then switch their quote with a partner to get their point of view on any literary devices or elements

Activity:

- Activity on analyzing quotes

  - Students will work independently to create a say mean matter do chart

Say	Mean	Matter	Do
Here is where the quote would go.	Here the student will summarize what the quote is saying in their own words.	Here the student will explain why this quote matters to the context of the text as whole.	Here is where the student will dive the deepest. They will explain what the quote does and explain any literary elements or devices that could be identified within the quote.

- Then, students will trade quotes with someone else and fill in the chart again.

Conclusion:

- Students will have better reading comprehension skills as they can analyze complex quotes to better understand the meaning. This is an example of reading comprehension and "say mean matter do" is a tool students can use for any piece of writing or literature. It helps them stop and think critically about what they are reading. It is useful whether or not the student is grasping what they are reading because it will either lead them to understanding or encourage them to dig deeper in their learning.

Lesson 4: Blending Morphemes and Phonemes

Introduction:

- The teacher will introduce the lesson by reviewing the definitions of Morphemes and Phonemes with their respective examples

Instruction:

- The teacher will then ask students to share with their partner the difference between morphemes and phonemes, as well as the difference between bound and free morphemes
  - They will also write in their notebook their name and then point out any morphemes or phonemes in it.

- The teacher will go more into depth about the difference between morphemes and phonemes
    - Morphemes used to convey meaning
    - Phonemes used to convey the sounds of the words
- Students will then group a list of morphemes and phonemes (put on white board) into a chart

Phonemes	Morphemes
"C" "t" "b" "Sh" "th" "ch" "d" "k"	**Free:** "Cat" "Bat" "bird" "desk" "happy" **Bound:** "Un-" "-less" "ed" "-es"

Activity:

- Activity on blending multiple phonemes and morphemes
    - Students will be given a free morpheme
        - For example: "cat" "hat" "red"
    - Students will then group up with each other to attempt to change their root words as many times as they can by applying phonemes and morphemes.
        - This will be a friendly competition
- The groups will share how many words they got.

Conclusion:

- The students will then write a short reflection on their process behind choosing their phonemes and morphemes to expand their words. This will allow students to better understand the meaning behind English words and be more equipped to construct and dissect them.

Lesson 5: Jigsaw Reading "Hamlet" by Shakespeare

Objective: Students will be able to work together as a class to dissect Hamlet by attempting to translate it to a modernized version.

Introduction:

- Teacher will begin with a warm up where the students will quickwrite about the following prompt
  - What is intimidating or scary about reading Shakespeare? Why do you think we study Shakespeare even though his work is so old? Are there any writers that should have the attention that Shakespeare is given.

Instruction:

- Teacher will give a mini lesson on old english words and student will create a table such as this one

Shakespeare English	Modern English
Thou	You
Hath	Has
Methinks	I think

- Teacher will give an overview on Hamlet and provide context for the rest of the lesson.
- Teacher will show the movie version of the Monologue

Activity:

- Students will then be divided into groups and each will be assigned a section from Hamlet's infamous monologue about life and death.
  - "To be, or not to be, that is the question:/ Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/ Or to take arms against a sea of troubles/ And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep,/ No more; and by a sleep to say we end…"
- Students will work together with their group to translate their section into modernized language in order to better understand the difficult diction and syntax.
- Then students will come together as a class to read their translations out loud as one whole monologue.

Conclusion:

- The students will then write a short reflection of what they have learned today in their notebooks and add any concerns they have regarding Shakespearean language. Students will be able to recognize complicated words in Shakespeare plays and hopefully be able to better detect what that word would translate to in the modern world.

In conclusion, I believe these lessons are suitable for high school English Language Learners who need extra support with phonetic awareness, reading comprehension and more. My research corroborates these lesson plans as they include strategies that are sensitive to English Language Learners but may still be used in a college preparatory class.