



## 9 Ways to Support ELs in 2021: How Leadership Enacted Teachers' Recommendations

by *Marisa Ferraro*

In my January 2021 piece, "[9 Ways to Support ELs in 2021: Privileging Teachers' Voices](#)," I enumerated nine ways educational leadership could support, promote, and ensure equitable initiatives by centering emergent bilingual students in the design and delivery of instruction. I shared an analysis of nearly 2,000 educators that had been surveyed directly following a series of sheltered instruction workshops (Echevarria & Graves, 2014). Participants recorded what they could do in their own classrooms and what they needed from their school and district administration to support these steps. The recordings were analyzed, synthesized, and categorized, resulting in 54 clear, concise recommendations for administrators.

Support from leadership at both the building and district level *must* be a prerequisite in order for teachers to practice the kinds of pedagogies that research has proven effective for emergent bilinguals. Just as teachers play pivotal roles in conceiving educational reform, administrators are responsible for creating learning environments that are conducive to such change. Implementing newly learned sheltered pedagogies takes time and human resources. Teachers highlighted supports needed to make the workshop to implementation cycle sustainable throughout the district. Organizational support for the pedagogies that equitably educate emergent bilingual students is necessary in order to enact the practices in the classroom.

### Heeding the Call Through Actions

Since the analysis of teachers' recommendations, I had the opportunity to chat, albeit virtually, with district leadership. That is, the administrative leadership from the very same school district, (herein referred to as the District), in which the nine areas of recommendation originated. Cynthia Manifold, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment for Grades Pre-K–6, and Monica Lahiri-Hoherchak, Coordinator of K–12 English Learners (ELs), spoke with me. Having served as a K–5 classroom teacher, reading interventionist, and English as a second language (ESL) specialist, Cynthia currently works with administrators and teachers to deliberately choose instructional strategies to make content comprehensible. Monica oversees a team of approximately 100 EL professionals and EL programs ranging from new arrivals centers, bilingual, ESL, and native language support.

Specifically, I wanted to know *how* the leadership had responded to the teachers' requests. Had they enacted any of the recommendations? The goal of sharing the data was to prompt district change around policies and practices for ELs. Cynthia and Monica took time to share how the District has made efforts to privilege their teachers' voices:

### **1. How to Plan, Revise Curriculum (34%)**

Collaboration is key to curricular planning. Curricular flexibility is conducive for interdisciplinary exploration of ideas. Finding time for teachers to collaborate in lesson design, planning, and revising is critical to the success of every student, and, I'd argue, teacher.

#### *What They Did*

In subsequent professional development (PD) workshops, teachers were afforded the opportunity to meet in small groups or one-on-one with instructional coaches. The notion of a dedicated time for teachers to elicit feedback from instructional coaches specializing in sheltered instruction was born from the educators' recommendations at the end of the initial 10-hour workshops. Time was embedded for lesson planning, alongside coaches, for designated teachers who engaged in 45 hours of PD. Instructional coaches coplanned and codelivered lessons, modeling effective instruction for ELs. This more advanced workshop focused on applying new learnings into the practice of pedagogy. Additionally, ESL teachers are included in grade-level interdisciplinary team meetings so they can partner with grade-level teachers to share information about emergent bilingual students.

#### *What You Can Do*

Earmark one staff meeting a month for teachers to come together to modify and revise curriculum for ELs. In curriculum mapping sessions, encourage alignment of interdisciplinary themes across grades. Ensure curriculum delivered by ESL teachers is consistent with curriculum delivered in grade level, mainstream classrooms. Include ESL teachers in every school curriculum committee, and provide funding for curricular resources, such as modified texts.

### **2. How to Allocate Resources (17%)**

Sharing resources is paramount when it comes to modifying lessons for emergent bilinguals, as the process is labor intensive. Centralizing files for teacher-made modifications is critical. Resources having to do with funding also need to be examined to ensure they are going to the proper places of need.

#### *What They Did*

Online folders were created throughout the District for Grades K–12 so that teachers could voluntarily upload accommodations and amplifications of concepts, meeting grade-specific standards, and share with colleagues. When it comes to funding, schools throughout the District receive monetary allocation for each EL student from the District. This is in addition to their allotment per pupil on each school's budget to ensure equitable funding per student. Principals earmarked money to directly benefit ELs within the

school, perhaps for instructional materials, textbooks, bilingual children’s books, as recommended from the EL specialists.

#### *What You Can Do*

Encourage educators to create and leverage resources like this online library, [EL Curriculum Library](#), which consists of more than 350 modified, K–12, curriculum units. Examine funding-related resources to ensure they are going where they are most needed.

### **3. How to Cultivate Communities (11%)**

Attention and dedication to cultivating communities can strengthen partnerships. The term “community” was used in several contexts throughout the teachers’ recommendations: community within the *classroom* by enacting culturally responsive pedagogies, community within the *school* by valuing difference and diversity, and community in the *neighborhood* by cultivating relationships with local nonprofits and youth-based organizations. These kaleidoscoping communities can offer layers of support to teachers and students at the epicenter.

#### *What They Did*

The instructional coaches facilitated role-play experiences in a fish bowl activity to model effective practices, to offer helpful ways principals provide feedback, and to problematize the teacher evaluation system. The District included instructional specialists for ELs (TESOL or bilingual education certified) in grade-level meetings and focus walks with administrators to maintain an objective lens. Experts in sheltered instruction helped guide conversations with leadership in highlighting pedagogies that may be beneficial for ELs that perhaps would have been overlooked.

#### *What You Can Do*

To alleviate the stress of finding child care, translators, and/or transportation to and from school for parent/teacher conferences, consider partnering with your local community-based organizations (CBOs) who can provide such services, likely free of charge. Or, given our new ways of coming together online, inquire if the local CBOs can host a virtual meeting with translations provided. Several CBOs in my geographical area have gone above and beyond to put together questions to ask during parent/teacher conferences so parents understand family/school partnerships in our American eduscape.

### **4. How to Support and Trust Teachers (9%)**

Teachers are change agents. They are often underpaid and woefully overworked. School leadership that supports teachers by respecting their time and contributions fosters intrinsic community investment. Providing and protecting teachers’ planning and collaboration time will pay dividends throughout the year.

#### *What They Did*

They organized teachers’ schedules with flexibility to observe teachers in their own school, voluntarily. A module in the PD I delivered addressed peer coaching, building

capacity within districts where teachers learned how to use the 2 + 2 model of peer feedback (Allen & LeBlanc, 2005).

#### *What You Can Do*

Invite teachers to use the 2 + 2 peer performance appraisal model (Allen & LeBlanc, 2005) in your own school. Teachers find it incredibly empowering. Teachers who voluntarily agree visit one classroom per week, observing other teachers for 15–20 minutes. The observing teacher records two compliments and two suggestions. Both teachers may discuss the feedback at a later date, but this is not a requirement of the model. Collegial communities are most effective when given agency and independence to grow, authentically. Be sure to allow teachers common planning time.

### **5. How to Reconsider Assessment (7%)**

Teachers are frequently asked to submit evidence of student learning to demonstrate students' growth over time. This can be challenging for ELs as the default language of assessments is English. So what, then, are some ways we can more accurately assess learning?

#### *What They Did*

An entire module of PD, 2.5 hours, was dedicated to assessment, to include a detailed walk-through of linguistic assessments as well as alternative assessments (e.g., portfolio-based assessments). To differentiate language learning from content learning, teachers offered students two grades: one to reflect understanding of content and concept while the other reflects acquisition and use of academic language. Administrators now include a checklist of sheltered strategies, specific to ELs, on walk-throughs, to ensure teachers are differentiating cognitively *and* linguistically.

#### *What You Can Do*

In addition to standardized assessments, consider portfolio-based assessments, which may effectively document growth over time for your ELs. I invite you to have students include writing in their native language, when possible, as well as the students' reflection of their work. Consider ways in which ELs can accomplish the grade-level standards through multimodal demonstrations (e.g. graphic narratives).

### **6. How to Rethink Instruction (6%)**

Sheltered instruction calls for a shift in how teachers deliver lessons and how background knowledge is cultivated.

#### *What They Did*

The District received grants to provide teachers a stipend to create modified materials during summer institutes. I provided PD around summer school hours, within the same building. Within such a model, instructional coaches model and codeliver lessons to summer school students, working with small cadres of teachers to lesson plan and provide daily feedback.

### *What You Can Do*

No longer can we rely on oral language to remind students about previous concepts or build background to warm up to new understandings. Consider flipping the instructional sequence:

- *Rather than:* talking → reading → doing activity
- *Try:* doing activity → talking, learning the academic language in context and concert with activity → reading and writing

Language learners benefit from intentional oral language development prior to moving to text, receptively (reading) or productively (writing). Highlight a new sheltered strategy each week by posting samples in highly visible spaces throughout the school or in shared Google classroom folders.

## **7. How to Make Students Visible (5%)**

In order to make students visible, educators should be familiar with the diversities of countries, cultures, and languages represented throughout the world.

### *What They Did*

Several advanced PD modules addressed linguistic differences through contrastive analyses, comparing ELs' native languages to English. Such knowledge illuminated teachers' understanding of anticipated challenges in learning, speaking, writing, and reading academic English. Every teacher received a brief overview of 20 languages most commonly spoken by ELs in the state: [Country Culture Cards](#). These country culture cards are intended to provide teachers with a snapshot of cultural and linguistic differences. Embedded in these discussions were suggestions for further problematizing learning differences and language differences.

### *What You Can Do*

Download the [Country Culture Cards](#) for every educator in your school. Dedicate one faculty meeting per month to sharing information about ELs or newly arrived students. Request PD workshops around culturally responsive instruction. Assign newcomer students to a buddy, who act as school ambassadors.

## **8. How to Streamline Identification and Placement of ELs (5%)**

In order to help make dual language visible in our communities, we must disseminate student information in a timely fashion, to include home country, language and English language proficiency.

### *What They Did*

At the beginning of my PD relationship with the District, the general education teachers in mainstream classrooms were unfamiliar with state-mandated, annual linguistic assessments. In an effort to efficiently share student information of identified ELs to teachers, the District required that a) all educators, including administrators, completed

2.5 hours of PD about the content and structure of linguistic assessments which I designed and delivered and b) all students' scores were accessible to every educator, via a protected, shared platform. Previously, only the ESL teachers had access to this information, which is critical to lesson planning and differentiation of sheltered strategies.

#### *What You Can Do*

Reevaluate identification protocol, ensure appropriate language support program placement, and continue to monitor ELs after they exit program. Disseminate student information directly to teachers, before the academic year begins, when possible. Create markers on your student database to denote EL status as well as English proficiency levels, as indicated by standardized linguistic assessments.

### **9. How to Partner With Families (3%)**

Symbiotic relationships between schools and families are at the core of student success. To effectively support all learners in the schools, the holistic needs of the family must be prioritized.

#### *What They Did*

They invited family and caretakers into the classroom as guest readers and partnered with local businesses to create real-world skill-building opportunities and job networking to prepare high school students for life outside the classroom.

#### *What You Can Do*

Host English courses for adults at the school during the evening hours. Consider a family resource room within your school as a site for families, students, and educators to come together and plan appreciation events, like Diversity Day. Use images and heuristics to clarify meaning and convey student performance in parent teacher conferences.

## **A Model for Districts Moving Forward**

Educators are well aware of the kind of work that goes into moving an entire district forward in their approach to educating ELs. I find it isn't about answering the "What needs to be done?" question as much as it is providing a space to protect and preserve this work. As a community of leaders, it is imperative we reconsider the ways we support our teachers to meet the needs of emergent bilingual students. Sheltered strategies take time to plan, to design, and to deliver. Educating the multiple diversities represented in all our students calls for an open-mindedness, a fluidity, and flexibility to embrace opportunity and rethink the ways we prepare, protect, and provide teachers with support.

Ensuring equitable access to rich, meaningful curriculum demands that we problematize the ways in which we come together, unified in our approach to meet every student's need. Though teachers play pivotal roles in enacting change, leaders are critical components in endorsing policy that supports such change. To recast a word repeated throughout 2020, it's time to pivot into 2021.

## References

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