

Educational Technologies for English Language Learners

English as a Second Language



Introduction

According to recent forecasts, in just a few years' time, almost one in three students in American schools will be English language learners. Many schools that once had only a handful of students new to this country and to the English language are now facing an influx of students for whom English is a second language. The No Child Left Behind Act officially made English learners a potentially significant subgroup for measuring Adequate Yearly Progress, a key accountability measure for schools and districts.

Rapid mastery of the English language is key for students to succeed in the K-12 education program. Reading, writing, listening and speaking are all core areas of learning a language. Each of these skills, of course, lies at the heart of basic K-12 educational programs and are assumed competencies at the higher education level. Academic success within an educational program ultimately requires mastery of content that is more often than not delivered in English-based materials.

Computer and communication technologies have a central role to play in facilitating that rapid mastery. With guided, self-paced instruction that allows repetition and personalization, English learners in today's K-20 classroom are strides ahead of their counterparts years ago. Whether teaching students within the classroom or adult learners at home or at work, technology-based materials and media have become the delivery medium of choice. Programs specifically focused on English learners, as well as advances in computer-based translation programs, have opened up virtually all electronic content to the English learner.

The Value Proposition

We are a nation of immigrants, a giant melting pot of diverse cultures and nationalities. The numbers are staggering. In California, 35 percent of school children are English learners. In Texas, 19 percent are English learners. These two states alone account for 1.75 million English learners. The border states are not the only ones with significant English learner populations. Immigration is a national



phenomenon. Illinois has 165,000 English learners who comprise 8 percent of the student population.

How well we educate English learners determines the overall success of our schools. Yet there is a significant performance gap between English learners and the rest of the student population. In California, 52 percent of the overall population scores at or above proficient in English language arts, while only 33.3 percent of English learners are at or above proficient. The gap in mathematics is 54.2 percent versus 42.8 percent. In both cases, the English learner subgroup does not satisfy the state's Adequate Yearly Progress. Results in other states with high concentrations of English learners — Arizona, Florida, Texas and New York — are similar. A persistent performance gap exists.

These data points shine a spotlight on the importance of investing in English learner programs. The overarching goal

must be to help these students transition from English learners to students who are proficient in English, and the sooner the better.

Best Practices for English Learner Technologies

While technology enhances any classroom to a certain extent, there are best practices for English learner technologies that make the difference between just using a technology for show and utilizing a technology to optimize learning. The best programs for English learners meaningfully engage the student at his or her own pace. The programs are interactive, collaborative, content-based, context-rich, authentic, conversational, personalized, and multi-culturally relevant. They create a safe environment for the student to practice, have failures and successes, and learn how to master both oral and written English language.

Students learn at their own pace and respond differently to different presentation styles. Some learners do better with visual presentations, some do better with oral, and some do better with written. The non-English speaking student may be using any one of up to 400 different languages at home, reflecting the cultural diversity of our world. With all of this individual student variation, differentiation is critical. The teacher needs to take the time to assess each student and stand ready to modify and tailor content and presentation to suit that student's particular needs.

The Internet is a key tool for accommodating all of the variations that confront the English language teacher. Engaging students with multi-media websites that stir the imagination enables the teacher to present information in unique ways, shapes and forms, as well as in different languages. One of the advantages of using computers and the Internet is that students can access the material and practice a lesson repeatedly, which allows for learning from mistakes through continual, non-judgmental feedback. In addition, the Internet and school-safe social networking websites enable students of different cultures and languages to connect.

What Can Technology Do to Support Second Language Teaching and Learning?

1. Provide interaction, communicative activities, real audiences and authentic materials
2. Supply comprehensible input and output
3. Support cognitive abilities and critical thinking skills
4. Utilize task-based and problem-solving activities
5. Provide sheltering techniques to support language and academic development
6. Facilitate focused practice for development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills
7. Be student-centered and promote student autonomy
8. Use multiple modalities to support various learning styles and strategies
9. Support collaborative learning
10. Increase motivation and self esteem
11. Foster understanding and appreciation of native cultures
12. Provide appropriate feedback and assessment
13. Connect to the home and community
14. Serve as a resource for content-based ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction
15. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers of second language learners

*Reprinted with Permission.
Mary Ellen Butler-Pascoe, Ed.D, Systemwide Director of TESOL
and Language Education Professor
Shirley M. Hufstедler School of Education
Alliant International University, San Diego, Calif.*

Glossary

Following are terms you need to know in order to talk effectively with parents, policy-makers and potential donors for your organization, school or state.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) – refers to computer applications and approaches for teaching and learning foreign languages

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – refers to learning English in countries where English is not the primary language

English as a Second Language (ESL) – refers to learning English in a country where English is already the main or official language

English Language Learner (ELL) – refers to an active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) – refers to ELLs who have not yet mastered English enough to meet state standards and excel in an English-language classroom



Technology's Role in Creating an Engaging Language Learning Environment

English learners experience heightened stress and self-consciousness in an ordinary academic setting. Communication is such a closely held personal trait that the embarrassment associated with learning a new language in full view of other students can be a barrier to educational success.

Technology-based English learner programs can provide a less threatening environment for learning language, particularly at early stages when small failures may get in the way of progress. For example, when an English learner can practice pronunciation on their own with the aid of audio samples, the stress and anxiety associated with recitation

in front of the class is entirely avoided. The early learner can gain confidence in private before being required to participate in open classroom settings.

Practicing language skills in a moderated, age-appropriate chat room is another safe environment where English learners can hone their written language skills without fear of personal embarrassment or failure.

Moving beyond chat rooms, it is now possible for students to enter entire virtual worlds for learning language. The Internet's virtual world provides the perfect opportunity for students to interact through avatars. Collaborating with others in this dynamic environment provides as close to an ideal communication scenario for practicing conversation as one can get.



Learning language as a knight in a castle is far more fun than translating or reading a passage about a castle. While the younger student might choose to play the knight, the older teen may choose a shopping mall or café. Whatever the virtual setting, the chance to practice using language is the key. These are high-touch, high-engagement environments. And for students who live in homes where English is not the spoken language, the virtual home may be the only home where English can be practiced and learned.

Keeping up in class depends upon being able to understand the words and concepts the teacher is using, and for the English learner, that can be a big problem. However, a student with a laptop or direct access to the Internet can immediately obtain prepared materials on the classroom topic — materials that are as accessible to the English learner as they are to those students proficient in English. And these same materials can then be reviewed later at home with friends or family to help.

Education on the Go

We're a mobile society. Fortunately, technology solutions permit us to deliver educational content even when we are on the move.

English learner materials can be delivered in a variety of settings and with different levels of connectedness. The technology-infused classroom, computer lab or learning center is the most traditional setting. English learner programs can be delivered entirely on-site using software-based, stand-alone products, or they can be delivered entirely through online, distance education solutions. Blended learning, part on-site and part distance-based, is becoming more common as teachers and schools try to leverage Internet connectivity while still maintaining the personal engagement of in-person, on-site teaching.

But the truth is that with today's technologies, the English learner can continue his or her studies equally well at home, at the gym, while driving (hands-free in the car, please!), or virtually anywhere you can carry a small computer or other

Digital Audio Tools

An award-winning program is showing promise in the Escondido Union School District in San Diego, Calif., where a group of teachers is dedicated to the idea that digital audio can be a powerful learning tool for all students. This learning community of teachers is using a wide range of digital audio tools to improve reading processes. For more information, visit <https://sites.google.com/a/eusd.org/eusd-iread/>.



mobile device and/or be connected to the Internet. We are no longer limited to the classroom. Educational opportunities are now truly available 24/7, irrespective of location.

As communication and computer technologies become smaller and more mobile, handheld mobile digital media devices are becoming the teaching tool of the moment. The ability to capture, download and listen to lesson segments, audio clips, and videos while being engaged in daily activities provides an additional opportunity outside the classroom to work on English skills. Podcasts are becoming a particularly useful teaching resource since students can re-

Connecting the English Language Learner

“Traditionally, one of the biggest areas of need with our EL (English learner) population is to overcome the language barrier and the lack of academic vocabulary as it relates to the classroom. We have been fortunate enough to have interactive whiteboard technology the past two years and have seen a big jump in our EL population, not only in CST (California Standard Test) scores, but in student and family participation as it relates to academics. For example, in our sixth-grade classes, our adopted curriculum in social studies has a tremendous amount of Web-based curriculum that includes a multitude of interactive lessons and activities. If the teacher is speaking about the concept of ‘induction,’ for example, instead of trying to explain the concept of heat moving, a student can go to the interactive whiteboard and/or computer and interact with a lesson, use a manipulative to interact with the concept or watch a video.”

A. TED MILLER, PRINCIPAL, VILLAGE K-8 SCHOOL, TWIN RIVERS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



play segments as they hone their language skills.

With these tools, education is spreading far beyond classroom walls. The opportunity to project educational materials through the Internet and mobile communications devices has dramatically expanded our vision of education without boundaries.

Global Partners in Developing English Language Curriculum

With the number of English learners on the rise, states are implementing innovative solutions for curriculum development. Although most curriculum to English learners originates in the United States, one program is reaching across the border for help. Language Learners, at the University of Texas at Austin’s Center for Hispanic Achievement (LUCHA), developed a program where curriculum from Mexico is aligned to Texas standards and then converted to online courses. Working closely with the Department of Education in Mexico, teachers on both sides of the border partner to provide English learners in the United States better access to language-enriched digital content that is on target for their needs. What started with one pilot district on the

border four years ago now serves 29 districts and over 20,000 students. The program is hailed as a success.

Providing accurate transcript analysis for students coming from Mexico is one part of the program. As Dr. Amy Pro, coordinator of the program, explains, “with over 350 separate school systems in Mexico, we spent a lot of time understanding content first and not course titles for transcripts.” Without the ability to quickly send transcripts back and forth between countries, many English learners would be placed at the lower end of the educational spectrum. “The immediate benefit of online learning for the students is that they can be placed in the classroom immediately and start learning content that will move them toward graduation and earning credits instead of placing them in ESL, PE, Art, and Autotech until they learn enough English so they can then get into math and science and social science,” Dr. Pro says.

Pro credits the immediacy of the technology with allowing students to retain the information they had previously learned in Mexico. “They are no longer just a dropout waiting to happen,” she says. In addition, “one of the valuable offerings of

the technology is they do not need to have a teacher in a classroom that might speak Spanish and know math content, or speak Spanish and know science content. We have the course online in Spanish with the appropriate content so the student can go to work immediately, but they also have a classroom support system within the school and are not just home doing this alone.” It is within this context that “the students feel valued. They feel like the school districts are opening their arms and welcoming them. They feel a part of something and not a lost child in a classroom who doesn’t know English,” Dr. Pro says.

Conclusion

In just the last five years, technology developments have provided remarkable opportunities for teachers with English learner students. The new communications and language technologies provide unprecedented possibilities for helping English language learners. But the pace at which new technologies are coming can also present challenges to teachers.

Dr. Butler-Pascoe, the systemwide director of TESOL and Language Education for Alliant International University, has noted, “While the theoretical framework of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) continues to evolve as more research is conducted, new technologies develop at staggering speed and offer opportunities not imagined just a few years ago. The challenge for today’s second language teachers is to understand the theories and principles of CALL, keep current with and critically assess the latest and ever-changing



technologies, and harness technology to provide the most effective learning environments.”

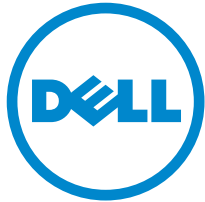
The Internet is a self-referential technology and, after only a few hours with a good search engine, teachers can find hundreds of sources and scores of ideas for improving their own classrooms.

Technology not only provides this access to information and increased collaboration opportunities, but also enables the specialized learning described in this paper to assist English language learners in excelling in a 21st-century education environment.



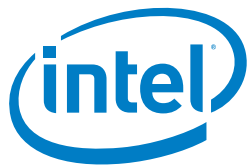
Acknowledgements:

Dr. Kari Kelso is a senior fellow for the Center for Digital Education. Kelso earned her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in Organizational Communication and has over nine years of experience as the lead manager for two of California’s larger school districts in Research, Evaluation and Assessments and one rural district. Having taught at the university level at three universities — combined with her K-12 school district leadership — she knows K-20 education from the inside out.



Dell is committed to enabling teachers to more effectively engage students with all types of learning styles and to prepare students to succeed in this digital age. As the top provider of technology to U.S. K12 classrooms, the company uses feedback from educators across the country to design and develop technology offerings like the Dell Connected Classroom, which includes student and faculty computers powered by Intel's® new 2010 Core™ processor family, digital content and resources, interactive whiteboards, audio systems and student response systems. These classroom technologies help teachers engage students, gauge their level of understanding and customize the learning environment to student needs.

Learn more about Dell and education at www.dell.com/connectedlearning.



Intel is helping to transform the lives of millions through education. For over a decade, we've been working with countries, communities, and schools worldwide to bring the resources and solutions needed for advancing education. Intel collaborates with governments, policy-makers, and local vendors to turn their vision into reality. Technology that brings quality education to more people, while sustaining local communities and economies — that's our unwavering commitment.

Learn more about Intel and education at www.intel.com/education.



The Center for Digital Education is a national research and advisory institute specializing in K-12 and higher education technology trends, policy and funding. Along with its research services, CDE issues white papers and conducts the annual Digital School Districts and Digital Community Colleges surveys and award programs as well as hosting events across the K-12 and higher education arena. CDE also supports the Converge media platform comprised of the quarterly themed Converge Special Reports, Converge Online, and custom publishing services.

www.centerdigtaled.com