

BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

by

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Artifact Paper

Introduction

As a student teacher in the spring semester of 2020 and a new English as a second language (ESL) teacher in the fall of the same year, I have had firsthand experiences in how schools transitioned from in-person instruction to distance and online learning, and prepared for the 2020-2021 school year by developing plans for in-person, hybrid, and distance learning. English learner (EL) students have specific language needs, and based on feedback through video conferencing and written communication from some of the EL middle school students I taught, online learning was not a positive experience for them. This feedback, along with the low number of students who completed assignments successfully, and the multiple times EL students requested help understanding lessons and assignments from content classes has led me to ask *how can educators improve ELs engagement and success in distance learning settings?*

As of November 2020, distance learning has reoccurred for many school districts across the United States, and will continue for the foreseeable future due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As distance learning becomes commonplace, it may also become a more viable option for students during snow days, students homebound due to illness, and a growing alternative choice in schooling, among other reasons. As EL students currently make up around 10% of public school students (*English Language Learners in Public Schools*, 2020), this population must be considered when educators develop instruction in distance learning.

As the focus of this project is on distance education, mainly through online formats, I felt it was in alignment with this topic to create a website. During the COVID-19 school closures, many teachers worked from home and connected with students via laptops and other electronic devices over the Internet. A website would be not only easily accessible for educators already

connected to the Internet, but is also free to users, easily shared amongst people, and available anytime. As the COVID-19 closures have affected people nationwide, teachers can access a website from any locale.

Project Description

My project is a website designed for educators working with EL students. This website was developed using the free website builder Wix, as this website builder has accessibility and readability features built in. This website serves as a resource for educators by providing clear ESL theory based practices to implement into online instruction, and links to other resources. This website connects information to educators, which can then be used immediately in instructional practices. The resources this website houses for online instruction includes other websites, multimedia, articles, and applications. Additionally, as distance learning due to COVID-19 has been an evolving situation during the year 2020, this website will include a news section to share new information as new challenges arise.

The design plan of the website has a home page offering clear navigation to choose between the pages of *best practices*, *news*, *about the author*, *resources*, or *FAQ*. The website has a navigation bar at the top of the site, visible on each subsection and page. Within the *best practices* page, I overview the basics of who EL students are, the role of an ESL teacher, how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected EL students and their families, and how to best support ELs in online learning. The *best practices* section has a list of research-based references to support the claims. In the *resources* page, I divided the information into sections based on the type of resource, age groups, and audience to best connect teachers with the information needed for their specific classroom. Not only does this direct teachers to the most usable and relevant information, it is less overwhelming and promotes readability. The *news* page contains links to

recent news articles pertaining to the topic of education and COVID-19. The *FAQ* section anticipates questions from teachers on the topic of ELs in distance learning. Finally, the *about the author* details the purpose of the project.

Target Audience

The intended audience of this project is educators, and I mainly address K-12 content and classroom teachers. The reasoning is that content and classroom teachers are directly working with EL students daily, and are less likely to have professional development or education backgrounds focusing on the needs of EL students. However, the information presented in my project may also be useful for school administrators and ESL teachers in planning for instruction and collaborating with classroom teachers.

Summary

Due to distance learning continuing during the 2020-2021 school year in many places across the United States, this capstone project takes the form of a website. With teachers instructing through technology and relying on the Internet to connect with students, staff, and teaching resources, it was logical to develop a website so that this research can reach educators quickly and through a platform they are already familiar with and have access to. The website was developed to be approachable and immediately usable for teachers instructing through the online platform. The website's information is geared towards classroom and content K-12 teachers who work with EL students. Accessibility and readability was considered in the development of this website so that its information is clear, organized, and usable by all. The website was developed during the fall of 2020, and is ready for teachers to use in December, 2020. If online learning is mandated further during the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19,

this website can be used during this school year and beyond to support the instruction of EL students.

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Links and Screenshots

<https://kpieczonka01.wixsite.com/elonline>

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ABOUT

This website was created as part of a master's capstone in the School of Education at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

THE AUTHOR



KYLIE PIECZONKA

Kylie is a student at Hamline University, and will graduate in December 2020 with a master's degree in ESL education. She completed a portion of her student teaching during spring of 2020, and experienced teaching in a distance learning setting during the first round of school closures. She is now an elementary ESL teacher in a Minneapolis suburb, and is teaching students through a hybrid model of learning for the 2020-2021 school year.

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Who are English Learners?

Simply speaking, English learners are any students who speak another language outside of school and need support to develop academic English. English learners come from all backgrounds and countries of the world, but many were born, and have lived their entire lives in the country they attend school. Each student's life story and connection to their home language is unique.

However, teachers need to consider that a significant portion of English learners and their immediate families have had potentially traumatic experiences in their former countries, during immigration, in refugee camps, or within the current country of residence. For some students, these experiences may include disrupted formal schooling. Additionally, some students may have an immigration status that may add challenges to their daily life and overall feeling of safety. Higher rates of poverty and experiences belonging to a cultural, religious, linguistic, or racial minority may contribute to continuing trauma and stress¹.

How has the COVID-19 experience affected English Learners

English learners are more likely to belong to populations disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 virus. 75% of young people who die from COVID-19 complications are non-White². There are many factors contributing to health outcomes of non-White and immigrant populations. Colorin Colorado describes impacts of COVID-19 on immigrant families, and includes factors such as employment conditions and increased exposure through the workplace, loss of income or housing, crowded or multigeneration living situations, and overall levels of stress³. Due to family's work situations, and the limited language skills of adults in the home, older students may also need to support younger siblings during online learning, or provide childcare for young family members. This could affect their own school work due to added responsibilities at home.

How can teachers support English Learners during distance learning?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Where can I learn more about working with English learners?

The website [Colorín Colorado](#) has many research-supported articles, videos, and links to more resources for teachers and families of English learners. The [WIDA Consortium](#) also has information on assessing and teaching English learners. Many states are members of this consortium, and the states use this consortium's developed standardized assessments to track student growth in listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Furthermore, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are the best way to learn about the English learners at your own school. Reach out to your school's ESL teacher, because they are the experts on English learners in your school's community.

What are some books to read to learn more about the immigrant experience and education?

- *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society* by Carola Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, Irina Todorova
- *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools* by Laurie Olsen
- *We Are Americans: Undocumented Students Pursuing the American Dream* by William Perez
- *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* by Django Paris
- *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* by Christine Igoa

Where do I start to make online learning better for my English learners?

Start in the best practices section, recognize what you are doing well, then pick one area you want to grow in. Then, look to the resources section of this

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[Learn best practices](#)

English learners have specific learning needs. Click above to learn how to best support your students and understand more about what makes English learners a unique group.



[Find resources](#)

Discover resources for online and distance learning. Sort by grade, subject area, or type of resource to find exactly what you need.



[Don't know where to start?](#)

[Visit the FAQ section.](#)

None of the resources on this website are things I have created or profit from.

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NEWS



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RESOURCES BY TYPE

Find resources based on type. These include applications, websites, and multimedia.



RESOURCES BY AGE

Find resources from preschool through 12th grade.



RESOURCES BY SUBJECT

Find resources for language arts, math, STEM, social studies, and the arts.

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