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Preventing Long-Term English Learners: Results from a Project-Based Differentiated ELD Intervention Program

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PREVENTING Long-Term

Results from a Project-Based Differentiated Instruction Program

Yo quiero que mi hija vaya a la universidad, se proponga sus metas y nunca se de por vencida.
[I want my daughter to attend a university, achieve her goals, and never give up.]

Espero que mi hijo estudie lo más alto para que tenga una profesión.
[I expect my son to achieve his full academic potential to attain his profession.]

Me gustaría que salga adelante y termine la escuela.
[I would like (my child) to excel and finish school.]

These are exemplars of hopes and dreams expressed by parents of English Learners (ELs) in Lennox School District, located in a 1.1 square mile unincorporated area of Los Angeles, just east of the Los Angeles International Airport. With an overall population of 22,950, the Lennox School District serves 7,200 K-12th grade students and is comprised of five elementary, one middle, and one charter high school. Demographic data indicate that 95% of the students are Latino, 78% receive free lunch, and 61% are ELs.

Like many school districts across the country, Lennox struggles with how to address the needs of an increasing number of ELs who enroll in the early elementary years, yet after five or more years of continuous enrollment in their district, do not attain fluent-English proficient status and are underachieving. There is growing concern over this group of students, referred to as Long Term English Learners (LTELs). A report released by the Californian's Together Coalition indicates that three out of every four LTELs received limited, or no program services, weak

language development programs, or mainstream placement (Olsen, 2010). This research indicates a clear connection between students' schooling experiences, language use and academic achievement (Menken & Kylene, 2009/2010, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian, 2006).

Taking a proactive approach to address this growing concern, Lennox School District designed and implemented a project-based, differentiated English Language Development (ELD) Intervention program with funding support from the Weingart Foundation. This innovative, afterschool program took place between 2008-2011 and focused on the academic and linguistic needs of LTELs in the upper elementary and early middle school grades, thus **preventing** the long-term trajectory of prolonged EL status for this group of students. This article provides (a) an overview of the Lennox ELD program; (b) a synthesis of the results of the program implementation; and (c) a discussion of implications for the **prevention** of Long Term English Learner status.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Lennox School District's goal was to implement a project-based, student centered afterschool ELD program to increase student engagement and English proficiency through differentiated instruction. The district leadership team identified a target group of 3rd through 7th grade EL students who had been in the district for at least four years and were at Beginning (Level 1), Early Intermediate (Level 2), or Intermediate (Level 3) English proficiency levels as determined by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). To begin the process, the ELD Intervention Specialist¹ conducted (1) student classroom observations; (2) student and parent interviews, (3) an analysis of each student's academic history; and (4) teacher input sessions. These steps were essential in identifying student

¹ External funding from the Weingart Foundation provided resources to hire the ELD Intervention Specialist whose responsibilities included the development of differentiated, data-driven interventions for ELs. One of the co-authors, Rosalinda's ultimate goal was to create a model of intervention services for identified Long Term English Learners that would be used throughout the district during the regular school day.

Form English Learners: Differentiated ELD Intervention Program

By Magaly Lavadenz, Elvira G. Armas, Rosalinda Barajas

Loyola Marymount University, Center for Equity for English Learners and Lennox School District

participants, and initiated a system for monitoring progress through a multi-pronged, data inquiry process to address the needs of ELs not making normative progress in the elementary and middle school grades.

In the second phase of planning the ELD Intervention program, the Lennox School District researched pre-existing Intervention programs. Their queries found that other programs appeared to be extensions of the regular school day curriculum, and reflected the emerging research on LTEL intervention programs indicating that many programs are based on deficit perspectives rather than promoting and assets-based, differentiated LTEL curriculum (Callahan, 2006; Forrest, S., 2006). Traditional intervention programs do not provide sufficient support for meeting the needs of ELs. Effective schools and programs have cohesive infrastructures that promote students' active participation, social integration with strong language models through integrated language learning in affirming environments that include authentic opportunities to connect learning with students' communities and social realities (Olsen, 2010; Faltis & Coulter, 2008; Callahan, 2006). Correspondingly, developing teacher expertise for ELs is critical in the implementation of specialized intervention programs.

Professional development that incorporates strategies and methods to integrate English language instruction with content area learning can improve teacher effectiveness in bolstering ELs higher-level language skills (August & Shanahan, 2010; Goldenberg, 2008; Calderón, 2007; Walqui, 2001) The dedicated professional development and planning time for program teachers was designed and delivered by the ELD Intervention Specialist and occurred weekly during the course of the eleven week program cycle. Teachers prepared for the ELD Intervention Program by attending a training session at the beginning of each cycle where they are informed of the assessment and instruction protocols and procedures as well as the lesson objectives for each week. Program goals and vocabulary

are introduced; however, program teachers provided input on lesson delivery. The curriculum incorporates strategies from district professional development trainings (such as a vocabulary lesson planner and think alouds) in order to maintain consistency and familiarity of strategies presented during the regular school day. A sample afterschool session schedule is provided in Table 1.

During the first implementation cycle, the district ELD Intervention Specialist developed a curriculum and piloted it at one elementary school. Using the ELD standards, a rigorous and relevant curriculum was developed for the beginning and early intermediate level students. In subsequent cycles, the specialist worked alongside program teachers to refine and redesign the curriculum. Continuous cycles of observing target students in their regular classroom and studying their academic history revealed a need

Table 1:
Sample After School Lesson Sequence

Activity	Description
Warm Up	Reading a current event, reflection about the article
Vocabulary Lesson	Practice academic language for program and lesson
Language Skills	Questioning, Sentence Structure/Syntax, Taking Notes
Real-World Application	Relevant Curriculum that is applicable outside of classroom (journalism genre with field trips to community locations)
Closure/Culmination	Reflection: Incorporate vocabulary (e.g. headline, caption, include a quote)

The Lennox School District team used this research as a guide for establishing the components of its afterschool program, which included:

1. professional development for program teachers;
2. a project-based, student-centered curriculum with a focus on oral and written language development; and
3. community partnerships

Figure 1.
Project-Based Differentiated ELD Program Components



to develop listening and speaking skills as well as written expression. Consequently, the focus of the intervention program continued to be oral and written English language skills. To this end, a journalism-themed curriculum was used to develop students' basic writing skills with a focus on genre-specific syntax. Oral academic language skills focused on questioning, interviewing, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information leading to the publication of the Lennox *Voices* newspaper

Students attended one after school eleven-week cycle, two days a week for two hours each day. The Idea Proficiency Test (IPT) was used to assess students prior to beginning the program, as well as at the end of each cycle. Each group of students worked with a certificated teacher in a small group setting of four to seven students. This enabled students to receive differentiated and targeted instruction and allowed teachers to monitor student progress. Teachers also assessed students through class work and informal observations in order to address academic gaps and promote English acquisition. IPT progress was reported to students and parents.

Teachers selected a community business/location for student fieldwork and prepared students to conduct computer-based research and prepare interview questions for experts from the selected profession. A focus topic and background information about the experts and locations were given to students prior to beginning the research. Students became the reporters/journalists once they arrived by bus to the selected locations. After conducting their

interviews, students paraphrased, analyzed, and synthesized information through a writing process approach to produce an article for the *Lennox Voices* newspaper. The district newspaper was distributed to participating schools, throughout the community and to the locations visited. The sample article in Figure 2 exemplifies the ELD program's potential to bolster LTEL's oral and written language output.

PARTNERSHIPS

Part of development of the Lennox ELD Intervention Program included forming partnerships among various stakeholder groups, especially parents who had to consent to have their children participate in the afterschool classes. Parents were interviewed/surveyed to gather information about their child's study habits, academic strengths and needs, and long-term goals. Students' classroom teachers were also interviewed to gather information about their academic performance, participation, and subject matter needs.

Program teachers were responsible for communicating with classroom teachers and parents throughout the program regarding student progress. The ELD Intervention Specialist was responsible for overseeing the recruitment, interview and placement process. Community-based partnerships were formed with Los-Angeles based businesses in order for participating students to conduct field research and interviews of the various professionals targeted for their articles. The ELD Intervention specialist and teachers made

A report released by the Californian's Together Coalition indicates that three out of every four LTELs received limited, or no program services, weak language development programs, or mainstream placement (Olsen, 2010).

initial contacts and arrangements to coordinate interview times, a tour of the facilities, and presentation by the professionals.

The Weingart Foundation was a critical partner in the creation of the ELD Intervention program. The Foundation provided the funding to support the development of an Intervention program to support English Learners, including funding a full time ELD Intervention specialist. They also created a forum for multiple school districts to come together and share accomplishments and challenges in order to improve the program. Bi-annual reports were required by the foundation in order to monitor progress.

The requirement of bi-annual reports to the Weingart Foundation resulted in securing external evaluators through the university partnership with Loyola Marymount University's Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL). CEEL's role was to improve and support the development of the program. The evaluators were critical to the development of an evaluation plan, creating data collection tools and procedures, and analysis of student assessments. Their input made the program more effective and efficient leading to increased student academic achievement.

PROGRAM RESULTS

Several sources of data were collected: 1) Pre and post English language development proficiency and language arts achievement data – CELDT, Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), and California Standardized Tests for English Language Arts (CST, ELA); 2) Teacher surveys on implementation of effective teaching practices for LTELs; and 3) Parent program satisfaction surveys.

Findings from the student data analyses indicate that the Lennox ELD Intervention program had the greatest impact on LTELs' improvement of English language proficiency as measured by the CELDT. Effect size values showed moderate effects (Cramer's $V^2 = .27$) and documented higher percentages of attainment of one or more levels of English proficiency for LTELs at the beginning and early intermediate proficiency levels (ELD 1 and 2). Similarly, LTELs at ELD Levels 1 and 2 also had higher percentages of attainment on the CST, ELA achievement measure. The percentage of students who qualified for reclassification to English proficient (RFEP) at the end of the program was 9.1%.

Figure 2.

Sample Article



Does Media Know Everything?

By: Armando Cerda, Jaguar Roar Journalist (Grade 4)

We went to Downtown Los Angeles to learn about the Media Relations, the Public Communications Unit. Their unit has 10-12 full time employees; most of them are police officers. When the phones ring, they all share the responsibility of answering the phone because somebody has to pick it up. It is open 7 days a week. Mr. French, the man who gave us a tour of the Public Relations Communications Unit said, "Remember, it's all about communication. You really have to focus on how well you read, write and speak."

We also saw a studio in the building. They may use the studio for filming, taping, recording a speech by the chief, or for press conferences. They usually have 3-4 press conferences a week. Sometimes they do them or the Mayor asks for them. It had a green backdrop that they use. When you see it on television it shows something different.

They have an Entertainment Trademark Department. The person in charge takes requests for commercials and television shows. He sometimes works with publishers, filming companies and television companies. They check to make sure no one uses their trademark such as police cars, uniforms, badges, and logos that belong to them without asking permission.

Another department was the Reporter Jobs. They watch television monitors to see what happens in the local media. Media Relations has lots of television monitors to tell what's going on in the media. They want to be able to help the reporters do their job right. The Media Relations Unit is an important department for the City of Los Angeles.



Field Trip to the Public Communications Unit, Downtown Los Angeles

Three research questions guided the evaluation of this program:

1. What is the impact of the Lennox ELD Intervention model on students' performance on measures of English Language proficiency and English Language Arts?
2. To what extent do teachers implement research-based practices for linguistically diverse students during the ELD Intervention program after-school sessions?
3. How satisfied are parents with the Lennox ELD Intervention program?

Analyses of the teacher survey results reveal that the ELD program implementation heightened teachers' awareness of effective practices for LTELs. A majority of program teachers indicated a need to develop more knowledge and practice in the area of interactions, but also reported incorporating strategies and practices from the afterschool intervention program into their regular daily classroom practice. Teachers identified specific strategies used to ensure that students received rigorous and relevant curriculum through meaningful teaching and learning in an engaging environment. These included:

- *Scaffolding for oral and written language input and output*
- *Selecting expository reading materials at students' instructional level to support research and inquiry for field research*
- *Use and modeling of genre-specific academic language (journalism) with the expectation that students use and appropriate the language orally and in writing*
- *Use of ELD reading/writing levels to differentiate instruction through IPT assessments*
- *Highlighting community connections through field experiences*
- *Use of varied grouping strategies and one-on-one support during on-going instruction*

Parent surveys revealed a high level of satisfaction for program implementation ($M = 4.10$) on a 5 point Likert-scale, whereby 1 equals "unacceptable" and 5 equals "very well". Parents requested additional information around four major areas: strategies for supporting students, information on ELD stages and levels, specific information about students' programs, and more information about the ELD Intervention program. Parent satisfaction was

reiterated in their responses to questions on what helped their child the most in this ELD Intervention program. The most common response was that students' English comprehension skills were improved as they engaged in meaningful reading and writing tasks.

Parents commented on how students' active engagement as "journalists" promoted speaking and writing in English and provided ample opportunity for extended practice in language development. One parent's comment captured the spirit of multiple replies. She/he wrote, *La pasión de mi hija [en aprender inglés] viene del periódico* -My daughter's passion to learn English comes from the newspaper. This statement not only highlights the focus on a relevant curriculum, but also substantiates an additional response that was prevalent among parents. That is, the fact that an increase in motivation and interest helped students attain higher levels of English proficiency. Many parents commented on their child's increased confidence and willingness to speak, read, and write in English. *El ahora se comunica más y se expresa más seguro [en inglés]* – He now communicates more and expresses himself with more confidence in English.

Funding from the Weingart Foundation was intended to support the development of an afterschool intervention program that could inform the regular day classroom instruction for teachers of Long Term English Learners. Once funding ended, the impacts here were incorporated especially by the certificated teachers who participated in the after school program. That is, these teachers retained ownership of project-based curriculum design and incorporated instructional strategies presented during the program's professional development sessions. Regular school day practices were influenced and program teachers reported a continued focus on the use of a journalism genre for developing LTEL's oral and written academic language skills.

IMPLICATIONS

Preventing LTEL status for students who fail to progress beyond Intermediate-level English proficiency before entering middle school is critical. Lennox School District's approach provides important lessons for other districts seeking solutions to this issue. An essential first step is defining the academic, linguistic, and developmental strengths and needs of LTELs (Olsen, 2010). In Lennox's case, a natural next step was identifying both fiscal and human resources to determine how to effectively intervene in the upper elementary and early middle school years. In addition, the ELD Intervention specialist developed structures and systems based on research-based practices: (a) project-based, differentiated instruction; (b) student-centered curriculum based on a journalism genre; and (c) teacher professional development. Simultaneously, an evaluation plan was developed to inform implementation progress and program refinement.

The program evaluation results are important in advancing the work for prevention of LTELs given that there is a scarcity of research on the implementation of intervention programs for ELs that are not progressing normatively in the elementary years. District and school systems must include planning and classroom-based interventions that incorporate project-based learning that emphasizes students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing development in real-world, content-based applications. Developing teacher expertise through *targeted* professional development is requisite in this cycle, particularly given the emphasis on speaking and writing domains in the Common Core State Standards. Lennox School District's efforts invite further research and a call to action for proactive approaches to prevent Long Term English Learner status for this group of linguistically diverse students.

Preventing LTEL status for students who fail to progress beyond Intermediate-level English proficiency before entering middle school is critical.

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