Using English Language Learners Feedback to Improve Reading Skills and Instruction by Maryann Hasso, PhD
Thank you for attending my presentation

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My research is being published with Rowman & Littlefield-The Struggles of Minority English Learners: How Learner Feedback Can Improve English Learner Skills
Organization of Presentation

1. Introduction of Themes
2. Background of EL learner gaps and some history
3. Discussion of each theme with strategies that will benefit EL’s
4. Discussion of each theme expanded
5. Barriers
6. Theoretical Implications
7. Practical Implications
8. Recommendations for Future Practice
9. Group Activity
10. Questions?
The six themes and instructional strategies that will benefit ELL students’ engagement with English reading includes: bilingual instruction, translanguaging strategies, quality of reading lessons (such as gamifying reading), culturally responsive instruction, the use of an active learning instructional model (such as language instruction), and instructional time for choosing literature of high interest.
The ELL population in the U.S. public education system is 9.1%, or an estimated 4.4 million students. ELLs are one of the fastest growing groups of students in schools across the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Seventy-nine percent of ELLs are Spanish native speakers, while 80% of the ELL population is made up of second-generation immigrant students.

The latest census data indicate that the student enrollment in the study high school reflects its Southern California community of approximately 16% Caucasians, 21% African Americans, 55% Hispanics, and 3% Asians.

Although ELLs may have reading and writing skills in their native language, they cannot transfer this knowledge to English (Martínez, 2011).

Explicit skill instruction in areas such as phonics can enable ELLs to improve their reading comprehension and skills, thereby enhancing reading engagement among them (Martínez, 2011).

Most teachers lack training to instruct ELL students (Cellante & Donne, 2013; Chung, 2012; García & Tyler, 2010; Samson & Collins, 2012).

At the school where this study took place, many teachers do not focus their lessons on ELL
ELLs are linguistically challenged due to lack of adequate exposure to the English language and lack of English speaking and listening skills.

ELL students require English reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills.

ELLs also struggle with English vocabulary as a result of limited knowledge of the vocabulary used in the language (Samson & Collins, 2012).

Because it uses a higher vocabulary range than most ELL students are accustomed to, the academic language used in school settings frustrates ELL learners (Roy-Campbell, 2012).

The purpose of this presentation is to explore the perceptions of Hispanic ELL students regarding the strategies that support their engagement with English reading and the barriers that inhibit their engagement with it.

Reading engagement is active involvement and interest in reading (Guthrie, Wigfried, & You, 2012). Success within an ELL reading class is defined as students being able to successfully read and understand.
Instructional Needs of ELL Students

- There is a significant gap in the academic performance of ELL students compared to the performance of native English speaking students.

- There is a need to improve the academic performance of ELLs and ensure their performance is at par with that of native learners (García & Tyler, 2010).

- Schools are obligated by both state and federal laws to provide educational programs for ELLs.

- Approximately 43% of all general education teachers—up to 1.2 million teachers in Grades K to 12—have taught ELLs.

- Improving academic performance among ELLs is hindered by lack of teacher preparation (Chung, 2012).

- It is necessary to use cultural proficiency to evaluate data to initiate actions that narrow and close gaps for students while also addressing and removing the systemic barriers that contribute to the gaps of ELLs.
This research was guided by the imaginative education theory developed by Egan (1988), which focuses on changing educators understanding of learning and provides suggestions for classroom practice. Imaginative education theory conceptualizes understanding of learning as:

- Somatic: Ability to internalize body gestures and relate to the environment
- Mythic: Ability to learn and effectively use vocabulary
- Romantic: Ability to internalize written language
- Philosophic: Ability to discern the relationship between concepts
- Ironic: Ability to apply effectively different rules that guide language use (Broom, 2011)
The Challenges Facing ELL’s

ELL students face multiple challenges as they transition into new learning environments where they are taught in a language that they have not yet mastered.
Ten Hispanic ELL students were selected for this study based on previous difficulties with class material assigned in their high school ELL class. The class materials were designed to help them improve both written and oral English skills.

- The interviews sought to discover why these students had problems with the ELL class material and what could be done to facilitate better learning.

- The analysis was conducted through close examination of responses from the one-on-one interviews.

- Inductive qualitative analysis required the conversion of raw text into evidence-based interpretations involving two steps.
The Six Themes that Emerged
Six themes were discovered in the interviews with 10 Hispanic ELL students.

- **Bilingual instruction**
  - Students did not agree. Answers varied from Spanish instruction being predominant to not at all. Students were drawn to magazines about topics of interest associated with their culture.
  - 70% reported insufficient connection between students and instructor. Bilingual instruction not verified as useful. Reading magazines written in Spanish were deemed helpful.
  - According to Anderson (2018), “translingualism goes beyond ‘code-switching’”, potentially involving a much more finely integrated use of resources from two or more languages, as invoked in Canagarajah’s (op.cit.) “code-meshing” or Garcia’s (op.cit.), “translanguaging”, which she refers to “as the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what
are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential.” (op. cit.: 140).[1]

In other words, students are able to float from one language to another through speech, textbooks, and videos. When students are able to navigate text in their native language and the language they are trying to acquire, they have an easier time learning and using it.
Substantial research exists demonstrating that bilingual instruction is highly effective, and in many cases more effective than monolingual instruction.\cite{1} Studies have found that ELs in English-only instruction were initially more likely to reach English proficiency; however, by high school, ELs in bilingual programs ultimately outperformed peers who had English-only instruction.\cite{2} For this study, bilingual instruction will also be referred to as bilanguaging. Using this approach in the classroom is more effective than teaching in a monolinguistic way because students get to see how both languages are being used in the classroom. Students can also use both languages in their reading and writing so they feel comfortable transitioning from their native tongue to the English language. Reading passages aloud in the classroom allows the EL learner to hear nuances of inflection, intonation, and pronunciation in their new language. Demonstrating similarities and dissimilarities in the two languages help students to better associate grammar systems and syntactic structure, vocabulary, and the nuances of pronunciation and how they apply to the intonation and semantics of language. Here, learners, especially auditory learners, pick up on the subtle linguistic variances that transition the student from learner to fluent speaker.
Quality of Reading Lessons

- In addition to lessons that were fun, students identified teacher involvement as essential to quality lessons. One student said, “Teachers are always there for you.” The challenge for many students is in vocabulary acquisition.

- According to imaginative education theory, vocabulary acquisition is the second or *mythic* stage of understanding (Egan, 1988).

- Vocabulary acquisition also involves the use of imagery, games, drama, humor, and mystery to engage students (Broom, 2011).

- In addition, quality lessons leave students asking for more, such as the student who requested that teachers provide more books to take home.
3:) Cultural Focus

- **Culturally responsive instruction**
  - Students did not notice an overt cultural outreach in their ELL class, but of course, they were aware of the Spanish Class connections. Mexican newspapers were noted by Participant 5 as a way to keep in touch with Mexico.
  - Cultural ties could help connect teacher and students as teachers strive to learn more about their students’ culture and students strive to learn more about English.
  - According to Lindsey and Lindsey (2014), “Culturally proficient leaders intentionally establish diversity, equity and access to resources as priorities for their shared vision, and create action plans to achieve that vision” (p. 24).
Active learning through individualized direction
- Students were supportive of teacher’s efforts and seemed to enjoy learning vocabulary and grammar. The teacher had a strong following and was in a unique position to carry out the active learning instruction model.
- Working with students on an individual basis can lead to identifying individual learning patterns. However, teamwork was also encouraged along with the challenge for everyone to become a better writer.

Language instruction
- Students adapted the learning methods to fit their favorite learning style. Everyone liked to feel as though he or she was receiving personal tutelage.
- Teachers were obviously doing a good job, but the challenge was to meet everyone’s need in a short time period.
6:) Choice in Literature Focus

- **Instructional time for choosing literature**
  - Allowing students to select their own reading material kept them reading and made learning fun. Outside reading was encouraged.
  - In-class discussion and question and answer time of books being read was not productive.
  - Inappropriate student reading choices by the teacher can place the reading material beyond the student’s ability to comprehend. This makes the material difficult to understand, and it could also result in students disengaging from reading (Howard, 2012).\(^1\) Students did state that they have preferences for reading, from mystery novels to the Harry Potter series. One student reported reading the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and mentioned being able to relate to this story because of common
Bilingual Instruction

- Students from Calivalley High did not identify bilingual instruction as a common instructional practice outside the Spanish language classroom.

- Bilingual education can be seen through the lenses of imaginative education theory as related to the somatic level (Egan, 1988).

- Typically, this would be the level of an early English learner, not the study population, most of whom have been immersed in English education their entire academic lives. However, making learning fun is learning at the somatic level (Broom, 2011).

- Students did indicate that games in the classroom helped them engage in learning. In addition, using rhythm and gesture is a somatic engagement technique (Broom, 2011), and one student pointed to effective vocabulary acquisition as when he is asked to “sing it.”
Culturally Responsive Instruction

- Culturally responsive instruction is an important part of the learning process for ELL students.

- 60% of students reported that teachers make connections with their culture through using Spanish.

- However, culturally responsive instruction should go beyond mere language to include cultural referents to which students are connected (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

- Culturally responsive instruction is connected to Egan’s (1988) third stage of imaginative education, the *romantic* stage, which involves emotional connection to learning.

- Higher engagement is achieved when students feel connected to the learning. A lack of truly culturally responsive instruction is a barrier to learning.

- Students expressed this through statements such the suggestion to improve secondary reading lessons by “finding more articles or books to interest teenagers.”
Active Learning Instructional Model

- The active learning instructional model is designed to engage student critical thinking with partners in a group, to express ideas in reading and writing, and explore personal attitudes.

- All these activities are directed toward reflecting on the learning process.

- This relates to Egan’s (1988) fourth stage of imaginative education, the *philosophic* stage. This is when students work on developing understanding of relationships between concepts.

- In terms of language acquisition, it is the understanding of grammar and the rules that govern language use (Broom, 2011).

- Active learning involves collaboration between teachers and students.

- Students cited the positive aspects of active learning when they discussed teachers actively helping them to understand.
Language Instruction

- ELL students also need instruction that can meet their personal needs and help them keep up with the ELL teaching goals set at the beginning of each semester.

- Success seems certain when a student receives adequate individual attention, as identified in this study by the student who gave credit for his improvement to teachers who were more “focused on me.”
Choosing Literature Focus

- Inappropriate choices for student reading, by the teacher, can place the reading material beyond the student’s ability to comprehend. This could result in students disengaging from reading (Howard, 2012).

- Students did state that they had preferences for reading, from mystery novels to Harry Potter. One student reported reading the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. However, there was no indication of an extensive provision of choice reading material for class study.

- This lack of choice could be a barrier to reading engagement. Howard (2012) called it “demotivating” (p. 114).
Engagement Barriers

- Lessons not scaffolded appropriately. Students need to be taught in their zone of proximal development.
- Students placed into the wrong classes for their comprehension levels
- Outdated or ineffective reading strategies
- Language barriers
- Historical, social, and economic barriers
- A lack of connection to culture
- Noise during lessons
- Increase in number of reading assignments
- Lack of personalized attention by teachers
- Lack of motivation
- Teaching activities such as use of vocabulary without examples, insufficient ELL assignments, and forcing students to define difficult words were also identified.
Because inspiration prompts engagement, inspiration is the place teachers need to start. Reading and writing require the learner to make an effort and engage. People will engage in genuinely meaningful tasks. Thus, student engagement is the first objective of instruction.

A lack of engagement can be seen to function on the romantic level of Egan’s (1988) imaginative education theory. Students must enjoy the activities.

Lack of engagement could be addressed by incorporating games, support from teachers, help in reading difficult words, encouragement to read outside of classes, grouping of students, and making connections to students’ cultures.

Being culturally proficient requires actively seeking viewpoints on behavior to inform responses to all student groups for a safe and nurturing school environment.

Students indicated a number of social and teaching barriers to their engagement with English reading.
Theoretical Implications

- Useful information on what students require to enhance their engagement in reading English is necessary for teachers to acquire.

- Instruction and teaching models can be designed in a student-oriented manner.

- Training teachers to design effective strategies can be guided by the information from this study.

- Information from this research will add to the knowledge of instructional practices and reading engagement strategies for ELL students in both mainstream and ELL classrooms.
Practical Implications

- Teachers should be engaging with students on a personal level.
- Bilingual education and culturally responsive education could be used more effectively to enhance reading engagement of ELLs.
- Quality reading lessons, from the ELLs’ point of view, are those in which the teacher engages directly with the students.
- Teachers should value student feedback as a key to overall classroom success.
Recommendations for Future Practice

Build student engagement

• Engagement is the first step to improving student results. Methods of engagement can include games, distractions, work, or reading—all of which should lead to opportunities for students to practice their English. Practice gives the chance to build skills and increase confidence.

Increase ELL students’ English language proficiency and peer communication through practice

• ELL students should practice their English speaking skills in classroom work no less than three times each week. Two key aspects ELLs require to enhance their English are time and practice. Teachers can do nothing to rush the acquisition of English; however, there are numerous ways to practice English in the classroom.
Always teach the basic English skills, which include vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure

• Direct language instruction should be continued for as long as students are in school. Teachers need to distinguish, educate, and post key academic vocabulary and structures every day.

• Wong, Fillmore and Snow (2000) noted that teachers assume a basic role in supporting language-learning advancement. Beyond instructing students to read and write in school, teachers need to help ELLs learn and use parts of the vocabulary connected with their various school subjects.
Utilize as many resources as possible including conferencing with demonstrations, videos, guest lecturers, and think-aloud guides.

• All these activities and the classroom culture aid in enhancing understanding and making ELLs more interested in learning.

**Build and expand on ELLs’ background knowledge to increase comprehension.**

• A particular and measurable strategy is to evoke foundational information from ELLs in one subject area through an assortment of exercises. Learning something new is similar to stacking building squares. The more you have, the higher you can go.

• It is not generally evident what building squares ELLs can accomplish because of language barriers, and infrequently, ELL students do not associate past involvement with the lesson that is presently being taught.
Adopt culturally responsive instruction to build on the ethnic foundation of ELL learners.

- This is all in a bid to create interest and enhance the ELL’s understanding. This instruction is modeled in a manner that the student can understand. When students feel good about how a teacher examines academic material, they feel capable of making the effort to learn.

Build ELL parent involvement.

- One strategy would be a teacher reaching one ELL parent every week to talk about his or her child, or to educate the parent about a school occasion. Regardless of what language the teacher or students’ parents use, parental backing is a major key to scholastic achievement (Lavadenz, 2011).

Increase writing opportunities.


Group Activity

1. Describe some ways you can implement some of these strategies in your schools, classrooms, or to support teachers.
2. Do you have a huge ELL population at your school? How can these themes and recommendations benefit different groups of ELL’s?
3. 
4. Share out