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AUTHOR   Allen, Lili
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ABSTRACT
                This issue brief considers how to involve English language
learners in community-connected learning, a set of strategies to engage young
people in learning experiences beyond the classroom. Such strategies include
internships at work sites, and project-based learning in classrooms. In
successful community-connected learning strategies, students come to
understand how they might pursue and expand upon their own interests, and to
observe and work alongside adult experiences in a variety of workplaces and
occupations. Specifically, they advance their language skills by interacting
with English-speaking adults in the workplace, experience being treated as
adults, participate in learning as an active rather than passive process,
earn wages while charting long-range career plans, and gain opportunities for
valuable job experience and learn about academic options at post-secondary
institutions. Other issues considered include the following: effective
strategies for involving English language learners in internships and
project-based learning and the best role of community supervisors and high
schools. A check list of potential barriers to English language learners
involvement in community-connected learning is matched with specific
suggestions for addressing these barriers. Twenty additional resources are
recommended. (KFT)

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Involving English Language Learners in Community-Connected Learning

Why is community-connected learning especially valuable for English language learners?

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Involving English Language Learners in Community-Connected Learning

Why is community-connected learning especially valuable for English language learners?

High school-aged English language learners face a number of simultaneous challenges. They must advance as quickly as possible in their English language skills, make progress in core academic subjects, integrate into the school community, and prepare for careers and college. Often, they must help support their families and negotiate with the English-speaking community on their families' behalf.

Community-connected learning — a set of strategies to engage young people in learning experiences beyond the classroom — holds great promise for English language learners in addressing these challenges. Community-connected learning strategies include internships at work sites and project-based learning in classrooms. In the best community-connected learning activities, students come to understand the nature of expertise in a career area and the connection to academic learning, to understand how they might pursue and expand upon their own interests, and to observe and work alongside adult experts in a variety of workplaces and occupations.

What does a high-quality community-connected learning opportunity invite English language learners to do?

- Advance their language skills by interacting with English-speaking adults in the workplace.

- Become better integrated into the wider community.

- Experience being treated as adults.

- Participate in learning as an active, rather than passive, process.

- Earn wages while charting long-range career plans.

- Gain access to high-skill jobs.

- Gain understanding of the opportunities available in postsecondary institutions.

Cutting edge programs in areas with large numbers of English language learners have developed strategies to address the particular dilemmas involved in integrating English language learners into community-connected learning opportunities.

Jobs for the Future has developed a guidebook for the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory that provides suggestions and directions for increasing and improving English language learners' involvement in school-to-career initiatives. It describes model initiatives that either target or include significant numbers of English language learners, and it analyzes some school restructuring issues raised by the research. This issue brief is drawn from that guidebook. For ordering information, contact the LAB Publications department at 401-274-9548 or visit the LAB Publications Web site at:

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What are effective strategies for involving English language learners in internships?

Internships are work placements outside of school that are structured around learning goals and can include projects that develop students' academic, research, literacy, and technical skills.

Pair English language learners with peers who have more advanced English skills.

For example, the Health Professions Academy in Socorro, Texas, helps students participate in internships by pairing them with students who have more advanced English skills. More fully bilingual students help the English language learners accomplish their job tasks, translating for them when necessary.

Find bilingual supervisors.

Students are likely to feel most comfortable with supervisors who share their native language. It is critical, however, that internship staff seek jobs with native language supervisors in the primary labor market (i.e., banks, hospitals), where students can not only learn English but also gain access to high-skill careers.

Employ a case management approach.

Any good internship program makes at least one person, the "case manager," responsible for a placement's success, both for the student and the supervisor. This position is especially important for English language learners, who are unlikely to address work-site issues directly unless coached on how to do so.

In communities with a high percentage of English language learners, the case manager should be familiar with this population's needs.

Place students with low-level English skills in bilingual settings.

Some internship programs have used fully bilingual settings as first-step placements for English language learners. Internship coordinators warn, however, that while students may find these placements comfortable, they are not suitable for long-term employment.

Enroll student interns in a course (or courses) related to the work site.

All good internship programs give students opportunities to discuss their work experiences, troubleshoot work-related issues, and integrate work-site learning with academics. This may happen in school, during class time, or after school. Problem-solving around work-site issues is especially important for English language learners, who may encounter cross-cultural issues and who may have difficulty discussing their experiences with a supervisor.

Offer tutoring.

The Center for Careers in Technology, a district-wide magnet school in El Paso, Texas, employs two full-time English-as-a-Second-Language tutors who work closely with center staff to help English language learners participate in career-related courses and internships. Students strengthen their literacy skills while developing marketable skills.

Connect internships with the community's economic development needs.

The Student Entrepreneur Center in Ysleta, Texas, has positioned its new school-based enterprise programs as integral to the long-term economic health of the whole community. The superintendent engaged diverse members of the business community in launching the center, and linked it to a newly developed community market in the center of town. The City Links program, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, helps ensure that the public sector is representative of the changing community by exposing immigrant youth to public-sector career opportunities.

Start a fund to provide stipends for students without green cards.

Many communities struggle with the issue of finding paid placements for students without green cards. At a Florida career academy, administrators established a nonprofit foundation to solicit financial donations from employers so that stipends could be provided for undocumented students. (It would be necessary to consult with a lawyer about this practice; undocumented students cannot receive a wage that is tied to hourly work, but they may be allowed to receive a fixed stipend.)

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What role can community supervisors of English language learners play?

In many communities, work-site supervisors have had little opportunity to interact with students from other cultures. Supervisors may need assistance in making the work site a productive learning experience for English language learners. The following are some suggestions from experienced supervisors:

Hold English language learners to the same work standards as other employees.

Some supervisors are tempted to make special rules for students from backgrounds different than their own. Experienced supervisors insist that English language learners should be held to the same standards as other employees, although extra effort may be necessary to communicate workplace expectations.

Speak English at work, even if you know the student's native language.

It may be tempting to speak a common language other than English, but English language learners will benefit from seeing adults from their own language group speaking English in the workplace. You may wish to soften this approach at first with students with very limited English proficiency, and move to speaking primarily English after they've settled in.

Prepare other employees to work with English language learners.

In Boston, a supervisor provided an orientation for employees who would be working with an English language learner. This ensured that the student felt welcome and that staff were patient in explaining tasks and expectations.

Acknowledge employees' cultural differences and celebrate bilingualism.

Supervisors have found that some students come into the job with low self-esteem and a feeling that bilingualism is a hindrance. Successful supervisors let these students know that bilingualism is an asset and take opportunities to celebrate their organization's cultural diversity.

Initially, place English language learners in jobs that require employee contact rather than public contact.

After students gain familiarity with a work setting, they often take gradual responsibility for communicating in English with the public. At first, however, they will be most comfortable in positions that require them to speak only with fellow employees.

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What are effective strategies for involving English language learners in project-based learning?

Project-based learning engages students in extended inquiry about real-world problems, and results in the creation of a product or presentation to an external audience. It affords many opportunities for students to practice and accelerate their English skills. A project often involves students in interviewing experts outside of the classroom, and in making presentations of their findings to an audience of peers and adults. The following are some suggestions for supporting English language learners in project-based learning.

Involve bilingual mentors.

Bilingual mentors can help students by discussing research questions and by helping them practice for interviews and presentations, both in their native language and in English. The native language support may help students grasp complex concepts while conversation in English can help them prepare for presentations to their classmates. College students or community partners may serve as mentors for this purpose.

Engage students in selecting a research topic that interests them.

In the Cambridge (Massachusetts) City Links program, students chose to conduct research on the broad topic of immigrants' rights, about which they had some interest, but their engagement in the project skyrocketed when they began researching a topic that was close to their immediate, personal interest — access to higher education for immigrant students.

Meet regularly with students and teach them relevant skills.

Conducting independent research is difficult for high school students who have had little opportunity to gather information in the variety of ways required by projects (for example, through interviews, primary source material, and the Internet). Students completing projects should be part of a regularly scheduled class or program. It is helpful for them to receive mini-lessons on key activities, such as how to design and deliver a survey, or how to create and deliver a presentation of relevant information using a variety of media.

Encourage students to make presentations in English.

Many students find the most difficult part of a project is making a presentation in English to an audience of students, faculty, and community members. They may be convinced that their peers will laugh at their accents (a fear that often proves unfounded). Practice sessions with one another and in front of peers can help them improve their language skills and gain confidence. As another strategy, the Watsonville (California) Video Academy videotaped students as they practiced delivering a daily news show, motivating them to improve their English skills.

Schedule time for students to complete journals in their native language or English.

If not given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, students are not always aware of the extent to which they are learning new skills until after they complete a project. Keeping a journal in English also strengthens students' English skills.

> Bilingual mentors can help students by discussing research questions and by helping them practice for interviews and presentations, both in their native language and in English.

Assist students to select panel members with expertise in the topic area.

Part of the process of building the students' "ownership" of their projects is asking them to choose the appropriate audience for the findings. Often, they locate professionals through the process of conducting their research. Students with limited English proficiency may have particular difficulty asking adults to volunteer as panelists and might need assistance crafting an invitation letter or making a phone call to a potential panelist.

Design projects to involve English language learners and English-speaking peers together.

Projects can provide opportunities for English language learners to work alongside more advanced English-speaking peers. Research on Title VII (federally funded bilingual education) programs indicates that English language learners benefit from working with English-speaking classmates to learn subject matter. Students might work together on projects that require both English and foreign language skills (such as a project requiring interviews with diverse community members), allowing all students to contribute equally.

How might schools be restructured to support the involvement of English language learners in community-connected learning?

Many schools have opted to create small learning communities with career themes in order to increase all students' connections to adults and relevant subject matter both inside and outside the classroom. These schools seek to counter the isolation of the traditional high school and to make connections between what students are learning in the classroom and "real world" activities, through two mechanisms: by creating sequences of courses that expose students to careers while providing a focus for learning, and by integrating community-based learning opportunities into those pathways.

Small learning communities offer both opportunities and challenges for English language learners.

What are the advantages of small learning communities?

- Their homelike environments counter the anonymity of the traditional high school and, if structured carefully, make possible closer relationships between English language learners and their monolingual and bilingual peers.

- They may create options for flexible teacher scheduling, so that teachers have time during the school day to provide guidance to English language learners in the workplace and at school and to connect with employers to develop appropriate internships for English language learners. Bilingual and mainstream teachers may also use common planning time to ensure that their curriculum is aligned and that all students have access to community-connected learning opportunities.

- They allow flexibility in student scheduling to facilitate English proficiency. The Calexico (California) School District is restructuring its high school around upper-level thematic learning units, such as business, science/engineering, and visual/performing arts. English language learners will take English Language Development for two periods per day, focusing on "survival English" along with English specifically for the career area of their unit.

How can schools meet the challenges of integrating English language learners into small learning communities?

English language learners in comprehensive high schools often already benefit from the smaller, more personalized environment of bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language programs. Some restructured schools have essentially kept this structure by designing a separate small learning community specifically for their bilingual population, while others have committed to integrating ELLs into theme-based small learning communities to ensure that they have equal access to relevant coursework both in and out of school.

> Bilingual and mainstream teachers may also use common planning time to ensure that their curriculum is aligned and that all students have access to community-connected learning opportunities.

There are several options available for schools that choose this route:

- They may create small preparatory classes to prepare lower-grade English language learners for involvement in upper grade pathways or small learning communities. These "school-to-career prep" classes can be native language, ESL, or a combination of both, and offer students an overview of the skills and knowledge necessary to select an upper level pathway. In this model, students can polish their English skills in the lower grades, enabling them to participate in optional career-related courses and internships in the upper grades.

- The Calexico (California) School District opted to put all English language learners in the Institute for Environmental and Social Relations, which focuses on human relations and human services, the sciences of living things, and the interaction of man and nature. This institute offers the closest approximation of broad cross-cutting skills (such as communication, problem-solving, and research) and is the most popular pathway throughout the school.

- They may determine that only those students who have achieved a certain level of English proficiency may participate in career-related courses and/or community learning experiences.

- They may allocate their bilingual staff across the school in separate small learning communities. In this case, bilingual teachers would meet and collaborate primarily with other mainstream teachers within their small learning community. Many bilingual educators insist, however, that bilingual teachers must be able to meet periodically as a team to appropriately transition English language learners into mainstream classes.

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What are the first steps to take in order to increase English language learners' involvement in community-connected learning?

School Structure

Create structured opportunities for mainstream and bilingual teachers to work together.

Structure common planning time for mainstream and bilingual teachers.

Use bilingual aides and tutors to support English language learners who are placed in mainstream pathway classes.

Create an ESL class specifically to support English language learners in mainstream career-related classes.

Share common materials and space between mainstream and bilingual students and teachers.

Train and involve ESL teachers and bilingual educators in project-based learning.

Teachers or others familiar with the pedagogy can provide in-service training to ESL and bilingual educators in project-based learning. At the same time, ESL teachers could train mainstream teachers in ESL techniques to promote English language learner involvement in community-connected learning.

Make sure the person responsible for work-site placements for English language learners (and/or the person who serves as the liaison between the employer and the school) supports their inclusion.

One school staff person may be designated for employer outreach, or an intermediary organization, such as a Regional Employment Board or Private Industry Council, may develop work-site placements. Whoever is responsible for this task should be aware of the employment needs of English language learners.

Be willing to grow the program incrementally.

You can start by including a handful of bilingual students at first, then adding more as mainstream teachers and employers grow comfortable in working with these students. Many internship programs also begin by first including students who are more advanced in English. Then, these "pioneers" are able to serve as peer mentors to the new English language learners.

Community Involvement

Invite bilingual business people, and community-based organizations that serve immigrant and/or non-English speaking communities to be active partners in school partnerships.

Bilingual employers and immigrant-serving community organizations can participate on partnership boards to ensure that the needs of English language learners and of many different linguistic communities are taken into account in planning new initiatives.

Immigrant-serving organizations can

- □ Provide training to teachers, program staff, and employers in how to work with English language learners

- □ Conduct outreach to parents

- □ Help translate and adapt materials

- □ Serve as employers or as partners for community service projects

- □ Provide tutors, mentors, or support services that may be critical to enabling students to stay in special initiatives

Bilingual employers can

- ▣ Provide work-based learning experiences

- □ Serve as mentors

Develop ties to bilingual/bicultural associations on the campuses of local colleges and postsecondary institutions.

Bilingual/bicultural college students can serve as research assistants in high schools for English language learners who are working on projects outside the classroom. They can provide tutoring, discuss their own course of study during in-class presentations, and provide tours of their college campus.

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A Checklist To Improve English Language Learners' Involvement In Community-Connected Learning

| Potential Barrier	Suggested Strategy
Internship program staff may be inadequately prepared to work with English language learners.	*Invite community organizations that support English language learners to provide training or services.*
Bilingual departments are often isolated from other academic departments and are last to learn of community-connected learning opportunities.	*Organize dual-language programs.* *Team-teach between bilingual and mainstream staff.* *Use bilingual aides in mainstream classrooms.*
There may be a lack of native language or ESL curriculum materials. School staff and others may not be aware of the best channels or methods by which to disseminate these materials.	*Provide stipends for bilingual teachers to translate and prepare culturally appropriate materials.* *Identify appropriate outlets to ensure widespread access and dissemination to other educators and community partners.*
Parents or teachers may have concerns about placing English language learners in the workplace.	*Provide extensive preparation for interns who are English language learners and include orientation for supervisors who will closely manage interns' work.*
Parents of English language learners may not speak English.	*Translate parent outreach materials.* *Engage community organizations and native language media in outreach and in interactions with parents.*
Lack of documentation in some cases means that students cannot be paid wages.	*Involve undocumented students in community service learning.* *Establish a fund with donations to support stipends for undocumented students.*
The challenge of meeting graduation requirements sometimes limit English language learners' access to elective course offerings.	*Provide professional development to teachers on how to use community-connected pedagogies to help students meet graduation requirements.*

Conclusion

Across the country, high-quality community-connected learning initiatives present enormous opportunities for English language learners. These initiatives can promote the integration of English language learners into the community, foster language development in real-world contexts, provide much-needed employment opportunities, and offer traditionally disenfranchised young people the opportunity to have a positive impact on the neighborhoods in which they live. We hope that this issue brief will help teachers, administrators, and community partners to improve the access of all students to community-connected learning, helping them to build their academic, communication, problem-solving, and technical skills in real-world settings.

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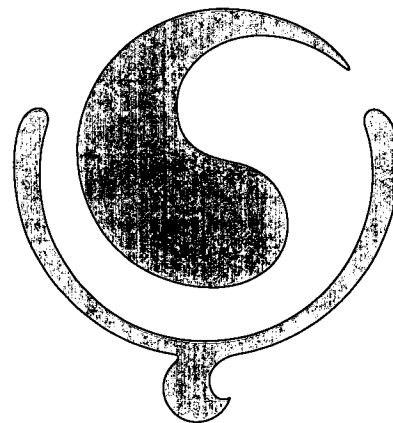
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LAB Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory At Brown University

222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 401.274.9548
Fax: 401.421.7650
Email: info@lab.brown.edu
Web: http://www.lab.brown.edu

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