Article Rough Draft

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A Blended Approach to Personalized Learning for Emergent Bilingual Students

Have you ever felt the awkwardness of not being able to welcome new students in their native language? Maybe you are able to welcome them, but not support an academic conversation. Whether we are teachers, staff, or administrators, most of us have experienced this frustration. Bottomline, there are not enough bilingual teachers and resources in the U.S. to meet every student's language needs.

Thus, we have to look at ways to leverage what resources we do have to meet Emergent Bilingual, or English Language Learning, students' educational needs and increase their learning outcomes. In addition, Emergent Bilingual (EB) students have to work even harder in school to learn a new language while learning academic concepts (DeLollis, 2021). This challenge makes it exponentially harder to stay engaged. Thanks to cutting edge technology, educational research, and innovative planning, we can support these students' educational needs through a Blended approach to Personalized Learning (Horn et al, 2014; Ed Elements, 2018).

Over two decades, I have continually realized that students need to hear academic content in a variety of ways to retain it. One successful way is when technology is used as a tool to leverage learning. By experiencing this, I have grown pedagogically to understand the Blended approach to Personalized Learning's power to increase learning outcomes.

Using this approach in science, an area where EBs struggle with the academic language, their specific learning needs can be met. We accomplish this by creating authentic learning environments, where students have choice, ownership and voice in their learning using classroom technology to promote engagement (Harapnuik et al., 2018).

First Steps

One of the initial technology tools is translation software. There are plenty to use from *Google Translate* to *Microsoft Translator* to apps like *Translatium*. Just like when we travel, having these readily available on a student or educator device is very handy. However, translation software is not perfect, and there needs to be more academic support - especially engaging support.

There are also various digital educational resource platforms such as *Discovery Kids, National Geographic for Kids* and *STEMScopes* to utilize. Many of these digital platforms have translation

tools, bilingual vocabulary support, or emergent reader options that are very helpful with instruction. However, these supports alone will not provide the engagement needed for students to be successful.

My Experience to Create Engagement

Targeted peer collaboration was a new concept for me in the Blended approach to Personalized Learning. As a young teacher, I had used reading buddies with my students. I had also worked with students in a book club or creating a STEM project. As an EB Instructional Coach, I recently collaborated with one of our science teachers to work on a plan for peer tutoring on specific concepts.

After assessing specific skills and content knowledge in targeted areas with an online quiz, she was able to create a peer tutoring list of students to be the tutor with students that needed practice with a specific concept. The teacher and I created mini-science kits that included student-led directions and put these into a cart of labeled drawers. Students were given their assignments as either a tutor or a participant. When it was peer tutoring time, they took the kits out to work in their tutoring stations.

Other students created peer tutoring videos that the teacher would screen and post in our LMS (Learning Management System) for students to view and review as needed to support their understanding of the concept.

Afterward, students were reassessed. Our EBs rose on their nine weeks learning outcomes and showed progress on their benchmarks for state testing. This learning approach worked not only for EB learners, but all struggling learners as well.   Additionally, this approach provided engaging enrichment for those students who served as peer tutors because it allowed them to retain and broaden their learning by creatively teaching others.

Students asked questions more comfortably in this environment versus whole class learning. Instructional videos also supported EBs and struggling students so that they could view content information at their own pace and review as needed. We realized that these videos also work for Flipped Learning where students can preview the material before class instruction.

Things to Consider with Implementation

First, students need to have peer tutoring guidelines to follow when working with each other that include demonstrating good character which we based on our campus core values. They need to receive parameters on their created videos i.e., video time length, allowable props to use, appropriate behavior, etc.

Also keep in mind, low-performing students can still be a peer tutor in a specific area of the content as long as they have demonstrated the knowledge of that component. This can be a crucial engagement booster for those students.

At our campus, students have the ability to record videos on their devices to upload through links attached to their *Microsoft Streaming* app in their *Microsoft 365* accounts. *Google Classroom* has similar features. We have used various LMS (Learning Management System) platforms. Presently, we are using *Canvas* which will allow for documents, websites, and video links to be uploaded into the teacher's virtual classroom for students to access as needed on their device. Others that I have utilized are *Blackboard* or *ItsLearning*.

For quizzes, we created these in *Microsoft Office* using a form to allow the export of data into *Excel* for sorting into concepts to create tutoring groups. We also used a platform called *Aware* - a digital testing platform that allows teachers to create test items that reflect our state assessment format with results loaded into *Excel* for data tracking.

Educators are always looking for innovative ways to meet students' educational needs. With our EB populations increasing, we need the powerful, engaging activities that the Blended approach to Personalized Learning can provide. I encourage all educators to examine this innovative approach for impacting their learning environments (Horn et al., 2014; Harapnuik et al.,2018; Ed Elements, 2018).

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