

2015

# Using Technology with English Language Learners in the Classroom

Megan Cutter

St. John Fisher College, mmc06099@students.sjfc.edu

## [How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_ETD\\_masters](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters)

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cutter, Megan, "Using Technology with English Language Learners in the Classroom" (2015). *Education Masters*. Paper 313.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at [http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_ETD\\_masters/313](http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/313) and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact [fisherpub@sjfc.edu](mailto:fisherpub@sjfc.edu).

---

# Using Technology with English Language Learners in the Classroom

**Document Type**

Thesis

**Degree Name**

MS in Special Education

**Department**

Education

**Subject Categories**

Education

# Using Technology with English Language

Learners in the Classroom

Megan Cutter

St. John Fisher College

### **Introduction**

In recent years, there has been a rising number of English Language Learners (ELL) being included into general education classrooms within the United States: “recent waves of immigration into the United States have led to the public schools enrollment of more than 14 million students for whom English is not their first language, and demographic data indicate that this trend will continue well into the future” (O’Hara, Pritchard, Huang, & Pella, 2013, p. 275). Imagine what it may look like for these students as they begin to live in an unknown country and be required to immerse themselves in a foreign language while learning grade level content. It is crucial, as teachers, to implement strategies into the classroom which will help ELL students not only become comfortable with the language, but with themselves as individual learners. Teachers need to be aware that English Language Learners “are at [an] increased risk for inappropriate special education referral and placement, inappropriate service delivery when identified, and lack access to content due to language barriers” (Doran, 2014, p. 62). For these reasons, it is essential for teachers to be given the opportunity to engage in several professional development opportunities to learn the best practices in working with ELL students so they feel supported and receive the appropriate education. Although teaching and learning are the essential aspects within a classroom, technology is important to implement into the classroom, in order to support student growth and differentiation: “technology shouldn’t replace the great things already happening in your classroom, but it can enhance, augment, and improve the teaching and learning experience when used for a specific purpose” (Nemeth & Simon, 2013, p. 52). By giving teachers the opportunity to attend professional development workshops they will gain knowledge and understanding of how to implement technology, such as iPods, iPads and

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

computers into the classroom. This strategy of infusing technology in the class will motivate English Language Learners in learning, and promote their success in the English Language. In this paper “Using Technology with English Language Learners in the Classroom,” I will make a case for the importance of professional development opportunities for ELL students, as well as the positive effects of implementing technology into the classroom (such as iTouch devices and computer resources), in order to promote both the learning and motivation of English Language Learners.

### **Professional Development**

Before learning in the classroom can begin, it is important for teachers to receive the proper training and professional development to guarantee that they understand how to help ELL students as well as how to use technology in order to increase their motivation, engagement and differentiated learning. Based on the increase of English Language Learners in the classroom, “the teaching profession has increased its focus on teachers’ cultural awareness, and professional development is seen as a means of accomplishing social justice within school environment through equitable instruction, inclusion and improved teacher awareness” (Doran, 2014 p. 63). It is imperative for teachers to receive instruction on strategies to use with ELL students through workshops and professional development opportunities. This opportunity will help teachers better understand and be able to integrate strategies into their classroom which will support the differentiation for ELL students. In order to better service all students “teachers themselves have frequently articulated a need for more, and better, professional development to help them include and support their learners who are culturally and linguistically diverse” (Doran, 2014, p. 62). In Karen Ross’ study, “Professional development for practicing mathematics teachers; a critical

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

connection to English language learner student in mainstream USA classrooms” (2013) she found that 69% percent of the teachers she asked were offered professional development opportunities, regarding working with ELL students in the classroom, one to five times in the last three years” (p. 94). O’Hara et al. (2013) supports this need for professional development when they state that “despite the urgent need for an enormous challenge of supporting ELLs in the content areas, few teachers receive adequate preparation and ongoing support to do so” “...in classrooms where 26% to 50% of the students were designated as ELLs, more than half of the teachers had had no more than one in-service professional development session devoted to the instruction of ELLs over a period of five years” (p. 277). With the growing number of ELL students entering the classroom, from various countries, cultures and linguistic backgrounds, it is crucial for teachers to be required to attend at least one professional development workshop regarding strategies to use when working with ELL students: “professional development opportunities should steadily increase, along with the increase of ELL students” (Ross, 2013, p. 96).

Professional development workshops should be offered in a variety of ways, such as “study groups, mentoring, observation, peer planning and workshops” (Kose & Lim, 2013, p. 197) as well as “demonstrations, experimentation with and design of technology learning models and collaboration” (O’Hara et al., 2013, p. 278). Not only should the types of professional developments be varied, but depending on the grade level and content area the professional teaches, it is necessary to differentiate different strategies for different content areas so they are learning useful strategies that will support the students within their curriculum. O’Hara et al. (2013) stresses the importance of offering “learning experiences that incorporate the same interactivity and attention to visual, kinesthetic, and auditory paths to learning that [teachers] will

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

be expected to develop with students” through “individual and collaborative experimentation” (277). Considering the extent of information that needs to be learned about working with ELL students, as well as the constant change of the curriculum, diversity of learners and new technology being invented, it is impossible for one professional development workshop every three years to be adequate in keeping up to date with the shifting of the times. Within these workshops teachers should be given the chance to work with the technology they will be using in the classroom and provided with resources, materials and support to implement more effective and innovative strategies in order to meet the needs of diverse learners (O’Hara et al., 2013, p. 280). O’Hara et al. (2013) found it most effective for teacher to be:

engaged in active learning and provided with studio time to rehearse new instructional practices in a low-risk environment and to innovate and retool their instructional practices. The professional development facilitators modeled instructional strategies to provide participants with the opportunity to experience these strategies as learners and then reflect on their learning. (p. 280)

Allowing teachers to work with and discover how to use and navigate through technology puts them in the place of the students, allowing them to understand where frustration may arise and extra direction is needed. Reflection after a workshop such as this is key: it gives teachers the opportunities to think about their failures and success and consider which students would benefit from what technology/programs the most. While professional development is an integral aspect of culturally responsive teaching, differentiation is the core to teaching a classroom of diverse learners; one rising differentiation strategy teachers are implementing into their classroom, is the use of computers, hand held iTouch devices, and other technology.

### **iTouch Devices**

One way to improve inclusion and differentiation in the classroom is to implement technology into lessons. Although technology can be found and is used in almost every classroom around the room “the majority of teachers [use] technology for their own productivity but did not facilitate students’ use of technology to enhance learning” (O’hara et al., 2013, p. 277). Through professional development opportunities, teachers can learn about the various types of technology that are available to assist ELL students. Technology can now help students to “(a) [contextualize] authentic learning opportunities; (b) help students develop language and literacy skills as they make connections among text, images, video, sound and animation; and (c) encourage students to construct meaning and to make connections to their prior knowledge” (O’Hara et al., 2013, p. 277). It is essential for these opportunities to be offered to ELL students in order to help them become confident students who are able to perform to the best of the ability in all content areas; both in their native language as well in the English language. As a result of the increase in use of resourceful technology in the classroom, English Language Learners are being given multiple opportunities to “collaborate with classmates to complete interactive tasks that make good sense to them and result in language learning” (Daniel & Cowan, 2012, p. 99).

A few pieces of technology which have proven to be very effective in helping English Language Learners become engaged and motivated in the classroom are the use of iTouch devices (iPads and iPods). Both “devices [are] simple to operate and students enjoy using them” while also being “highly adaptable and [having] accessories (e.g., microphones, cameras, speakers, touch screen capabilities) that can be used to tailor instruction for students with varying needs” (Rivera, Mason, Moser, Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2014, p. 32). Having several capabilities



## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

available on one accessory makes the device accommodating and accessible to a range of students and learners. During classroom instruction, if a student is able to use an iPad or iPod, they will be able to “access resources such as translation dictionaries that provide audio pronunciation along with images to support the vocabulary acquisition and audio textbooks” (Liu, Navarrete, Wivagg, 2014, p. 118). Regardless of what the student’s first language may be, by using iPads and iPods in schools, it allows audio files and videos to be at the student’s finger tips allowing for specific language differentiation for each student, without disrupting the learning of those around them. Billings and Mathison (2011) support this idea when they explain that using iTouches in class “provide primary language support in content areas to support English development” (p. 496). Having an easily accessible device at the finger tips of any students, especially an ELL student, makes learning engaging and memorable for students. Through incorporating these devices inside of the classroom it is possible to differentiate lessons for each student, while still having all children learning the same information. Liu et al. (2014) describe the iPad and iPod as “private tutors” which “allow more development, more customized learning” (p. 118). Using iTouch devices within the classroom are an efficient tool because they allow teachers to individualize students learning by downloading various applications, giving the students choices to choose from, promoting the engagement and interest in learning that material and working past the language barriers (Billings & Mathison, 2011, p. 497). For example, “teachers assign the activities and games appropriate for students’ specific language level and [are] able to scaffold students more easily with iPod touch from basics in phonetics and sight words to more fluency and comprehension in advanced topic and subjects” (Liu et al., 2014, p. 38).

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

Allowing students to work at their own pace and on their own level also builds engagement and motivation within learning because students do not feel as that they have to attain or exceed the standards and intelligence of those around them. One fourth/fifth grade ELL teacher described her experience of using iPods by explaining that “the students were engaged in using such resources as dictionaries and playing educational games at a level appropriate to their learning and therefore reinforcing skills such as reading and multiplication” (Liu et al., 2014, p. 40). The same teacher also described how

there is no downtime in my classroom because any down time we had, even when I’m passing out papers, their iTouches are always on their desks and they know that, so during transitions they all take out their iTouches and work on their multiplication tables, reading skills or divisibility while waiting to change lessons, it’s fun for them. It’s not paper and pencil. (Liu et al., 2014, p. 41)

The 21<sup>st</sup> century student thrives on using the cell phones and iPods; giving them the option to use such devices immediately gains their attention. By eliminating the use of a pen, pencil and paper within the school setting helps create the feeling that students are not completing traditional work, but doing an activity that interests them, while they learn or strengthen skills in the process.

Another engaging way to incorporate iPads into the classroom is by using them to create multimedia shared story photo examples (digital book). Using the iPads to share the stories allows the student to click on links and watch short video clips that increase understanding. Rivera et al. (2014) highlights this idea when they describe how a young boy names Carlos uses digital books with his teacher Tammy. While Carlos was reading and learning vocabulary, Tammy would “show a 10-20 second video of the target vocabulary.” Tammy would choose a

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

topic for the student to learn about. She would then have the student engage in a reading about a specific topic, which would include important vocabulary and concepts. Once the student completed a short reading, he/she would be given the opportunity to watch a visual video, focusing and connecting on the same idea as the reading. After reading and viewing the video, Tammy would have a short discussion with the student reviewing the intended vocabulary and topics, checking for understanding (p. 39). Allowing ELL students to read and watch vocabulary all in one story is only possible when using technology. This also allows the student to make connections to their own life, or previously viewed concepts which will make it easier for the student to recall and remember information. Once the lessons were over, the teachers said that they would “use the iPad again because of how engaged Carlos was during the learning process,” (Rivera et al., 2014, p. 41) while also acquiring one more word in English than in Spanish, indicating the effectiveness” (Rivera et al., 2014, p. 40) of using the iPad in the classroom. One important aspect to the digital stories was the use of the video; both teachers felt that the “embedded videos, led to instances where Carlos used more expressive language” (Rivera et al., 2014, p. 39). Therefore, being able to easily navigate through a story, not only using text but pictures and videos as well, proved to be an effective, motivational and engaging strategy when helping a young ELL student learn and use vocabulary and effective communication skills.

Although differentiation during lessons alters a student’s ability to learn, it is also important for a teacher to differentiate tests and assessments. Andrei (2014) discusses a strategy one teacher uses in her classroom in order to differentiate spelling test levels for ELL students. The teacher would record the spelling test on iTunes, allowing the student to be given a different list of words while also allowing them the opportunity to listen to the words as many times as they needed in order to understand them. Another advantage to allowing the students to listen to

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

the words individually is that it helps the students hear, understand and determine the different phonemes within words. Andrei found in the study that all of the ELL students found this strategy to be helpful and supportive to their learning (46). Not all districts and families can afford to supply an iPad or iPod for every student, so it is essential for teachers to learn about the various applications and websites available to them on computers and websites.

### **Computer Based Web Programs**

Teachers and schools that do not have the ability to use iTouch devices, have the ability to use computers and the numerous web pages and applications available within them. Modern technologies such as computers “can be seen as practical and adequate tools for presenting those learning tasks that especially simulate real and authentic language use, and consequently, end in meaningful learning” (Mellati, Zangoei & Khademi, 2015, p. 240). Martinez-Alba, Cruzado-Guerrero and Pitcher also found in their study about using technology with English learners that in the near future “most states will be requiring students to take assessments in computers, as a result of the Common Core State Standards, which makes the learning and ease of navigating and reading on a computer even more important” (2014, p. 254). With the rising demand of technology and computers it is crucial for students to learn how to navigate through computers and become comfortable working on them. A few applications that are found on computers and can be used to differentiate instruction to promote learning and motivation within ELL students are power point, web pages, digital story books, and glogsters. Each application allows teachers the opportunity to differentiate lessons, while including visuals and audios matching the written word(s), in order to increase understanding for ELL students. Daniel and Cowan demonstrate the importance of this strategy in the article “Exploring Teachers’ Use of Technology in

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

Classrooms of Bilingual Students” (2012) when they state that using multi-modal instructional methods within the classroom allows teachers to “scaffold to understanding with pictures, words, music, and text that adds context to the learning” (p. 99). When a teacher creates a lesson that is memorable for the students, the student is more likely to become engaged in the lesson, be motivated to learn more as well as remember the lesson and information learned for future lessons.

Every computer has the capability to use Microsoft power point applications. Power points are easy to navigate through, allowing students to work at their own pace while creating “lists, sequence of events, or similarity and differences charts. These [options] allow students to show what they know by employing both text and visuals” (Andrei, 2013, p. 44) in order to demonstrate understanding. This type of projects also permits students the ability to work on content specific to their understanding; students have the option to use different level vocabulary, concepts or ideas when connecting words and pictures together, while strengthening their personal understanding. While using power point teachers can, or have students create digital story books. Digital story books are a series of slides which all share a common theme while incorporating words, pictures and videos. Creating digital story books allows “the kind of experience within the school which will stimulate thought and feeling as well as train the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Story can be that kind of experience” (Yildirim & Torun, 2014, p. 47). One ELL student reported after creating a digital story that “I like English lessons more this year. We did not watch anything on the screen last year; we followed the course book. That is why this year is better...I understand better through stories than books” (Yildirim & Torun, 2014, p. 57). Digital books are also a strong tool to use for presentation, either for a teacher or for students. After a student has had the opportunity to complete a digital

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

book, it is important to have them share their creation with the rest of the class or a small group of peers. Since digital books already have words written and often contain pictures and videos, it takes some of the pressure off of the students to present. ELL students will not have to worry about speaking the language correctly because their knowledge will be displayed on the board, with the written word and visuals to tell the story for them. Although reading is created through words and stories, when students are first learning a new language it is fundamental to use pictures. Pictures are appealing to the eye and catch students' attention, making lessons memorable and motivating for struggling language learners. Yildirim and Torun discuss how students are able to visualize and recall information at a faster and more accurate pace when words are connected to pictures. Digital stories integrate the visual and listening senses, which when added together often result in an increased understanding of the spoken and written word (p. 57).

One modern strategy that is being used in the classroom is the idea of "flipping the classroom." Teachers would not be able to flip their classrooms without the use of a computer and applications such as power point. Kyle Peck discusses the implication of flipping the classroom in his article "The Future of Learning Design: The Future's So Bright I Gotta Wear Shades" (2015). When a teacher flips his/her classroom "lectures and content acquisition are 'sent home' while the teachers use class time to help learners use their new knowledge and develop [their] skills" (p. 25). Teachers use this strategy in hopes to use class time to better meet student needs and be able to clarify confusion and strengthen understanding on topics during class, instead of using the time to lecture notes to students with no interaction or implementation of the information within the lesson. Often, teachers use power point slides as a way to lecture their students at home, by adding information, websites and video clips they would like the

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

students to read and watch in order to retrieve the important information. By using this application, and being able to use a variety of media types (video, audio, and visual) within power point, teachers are able to interact with their students reaching all leveled learners. Lecturing at home, with the words directly in front of the student(s), allows every student to read over and interpret the information in a way which makes sense to them. This also allows students to differentiate the information for themselves, allowing them to determine how deeply they need to read slides, and how many examples they need to listen to/watch in order to have strong understanding of the information. Students are not distracted by others around them and are given the opportunity to read, watch and listen to the information as many times as they need until they are able to take accurate and detailed notes. English Language Learners will also have the chance to translate all information into their first language, without having the worry about missing any information or running out of time (p. 25). There are numerous websites which teachers could add to their power point slides, or use in lessons in order to increase student learning and engagement in ELL students.

Although many students use YouTube as a source of entertainment and a way to listen to music, it is important for teachers to be aware of the positive way YouTube can affect student learning in the classroom. Adding an educational spin to a website that students already frequently use will raise their motivation and engagement in a lesson. Liu, Lan and Jenkins found in their study “Technology-Enhanced Strategy Use for Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition” (2014) that using online tools such as YouTube and voice recorders increased student interest in lessons as well as extending the time students wanted to use technology to learn about a topic (p. 122). Students would use YouTube in order to find video’s which matched vocabulary terms they were learning about, allowing them to make visual and auditory

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

connections to vocabulary terms. Students who struggle with word and language often benefit from the chance to have visual representation because it gives them a familiar picture or memory to unite difficult words with. It is also beneficial for students to have the ability to listen to vocabulary terms, especially when they have the opportunity to listen to the audio multiple times, as well as slow down the video so they can break apart the word in syllables and sounds.

Another recent website that has proven to help ELL engage with and strengthen their understanding of a specific topic is “glogster.” Glogster is a website that allows students to create an interactive poster, which can include words, visuals, audio and easy navigation to other websites. Martinez-Alba et al., (2014) conducted a study on the implantation of glogster in a classroom of ELL students in the article “Glogsters and Other Motivating Technology: A Multiple Case Study of English Language Learners.” Many students in the study commented on their enjoyment of making the poster: one student said “it made writing ‘something out of the box’” and even after his glogster was deleted before he had the chance to save and present it he gladly created the online poster for a second time stating that he did not mind re-doing his project since it was “something fun to do” (p. 257). Having the students present their glogsters is important because “many EL students have instrumental motivation, meaning they want to learn the language to succeed in school” both educationally and socially (Martinez-Alba et al., 2014, p. 254). Glogsters are also a tool that all teachers should be aware of because they allow students to add multiple visuals and videos to their interactive posters. Using both videos and pictures allows students the opportunity to learn in a way, other than words, that may work best for them, while also demonstrating that they know how to correctly use a computer and can find reliable sources that help them gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Glogsters positively promote students engagement while also having them interact with information using various media types



## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

and formats, giving ELL students the option to learn in a way that best suits their learning style and diverse needs.

### **Conclusion**

Integrating technology into the classroom and daily lessons has a direct positive impact on English Language Learners. Not only does technology increase their motivation to learn, it also allows the teacher to differentiate lessons for every student based on their needs and understanding of specific information. However, in order to properly support all English Language Learners, it is imperative for teachers to be receiving sufficient professional development opportunities, in order to ensure that they know about and understand a variety of technology applications, as well as how to properly navigate through them. With this knowledge, teachers will be able to incorporate iPads, iPods and computer applications into daily lessons. All of these devices allow students a unique learning opportunity that does not solely depend on the use of paper and pencil. Students are able to engage in their learning, through participating in vocabulary games and being able to view or listen to pictures and videos that will give the students a deeper understanding of words and concepts. These applications also allow students to work at their own pace; allowing students to not feel pressured or rushed in order to keep up with their surrounding peers and focus on their understanding of the topic. All teachers should be aware of the multiple opportunities and applications available to them, so they have the ability and resources to reach all of their students' needs while also making the lessons engaging for the students, motivating them to want to learn more and strengthening their understanding. As Martniez-Alba et al., states in the article "Glogsters and Other Motivating

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

Technology: A Multiple Case Study of English Learners” (2014) technology has the ability to “create a lively classroom atmosphere and facilitate learning” for all students (p. 254).

### **Using Technology with English Language Learners In The Classroom**

With the rising number of English Language Learners in general education classrooms, it is important for teachers to be aware of the various types of technology available to them that will help students engage in reading as well as strengthen their comprehension skills. Each student comes from a diverse background and it is important for teachers to understand that every student will react different to strategies, so it is imperative for teachers to have numerous strategies to use depending on the needs and interests of each student. In this research study I will explore the numerous types of technology available to teachers and study how they impact the learning and engagement of all level ELL learners. Conducting this research and finding multiple strategies to use with ELL students will help me to support my students and so they can learn both inside and outside of the classroom.

In this research study, three case studies will be shared based on ELL students and the strategies, which all involved multiple types of technology used; documenting how each student, reacted to strategies and how it impacted their understanding of novels as well as their engagement in learning. Each student in this study is in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and was enrolled in Pre-AP English, as well as also being a part of the ELL community at Spartan High (pseudonym). Along with taking Pre-AP ELA, every student also had a support class added into the schedule, where they worked directly with an ELL teacher who supported their needs with reading and writing. I also interviewed three ELL teachers who work with struggling readers and ask them what they do in their own classroom and how it influences student learning.

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

I was the general education teacher in the Pre-AP classroom and I also worked very closely with the ELL teachers in order to help ensure student progress and understanding. I worked with the Public Consulting Group curriculum this past school year, while also making moderate changes to the lessons depending on the class size and students in the classroom. Often, I would integrate technology, mini-lessons and warm-up/exit activities in order to meet the needs of all my learners and differentiate my instruction based on student need.

I spoke with my administrator as well as the parents of the students to receive permission to use the data I found for this research. Once I received permission, I began reviewing old notes as well as taking new ones on the specific students. I also began reading through old writing assignments by my students and annotating for their understanding, where they excelled in each writing piece and writing pieces compared to one another based on the unit being taught at that time. I also met with several ELL teachers to ask them what strategies they used to help my students gain a deeper comprehension of the novel and its meaning. After reviewing old notes, taking new ones, reading over writing assignments and speaking with other teachers I was able to determine the technology that made the biggest impact on student learning as well as helped students to become engaged in learning.

The results of this study elucidate the importance of adding technology into everyday lessons. Students thrive on using electronics in school, so adding them into an everyday lesson will help to engage students in their learning. Also, using technology allows teachers to easily differentiate lessons and make sure that students are working on a lesson that is on their personal level. Teachers should be sure to share new tools with one another so students are always actively engaged, as well as to make sure that there is an activity for students at every level. As a teacher, I make sure to reflect on my lessons at the end of every day to guarantee that I am

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

always working on strengthening my teaching and implementing the strategies which work the best for my students and eliminating the ones that do not strengthen their learning.

### **Researcher Stance**

The purpose of this study is to see how technology affects student learning as well as how it helps to engage ELL students in reading and writing, when ELA is often a struggle for students who are still becoming familiar with the language. Data was collected throughout the whole year, through the use of observations, rubrics and writing samples. I reflected back on my teaching and the technology/strategies I used during multiple units, in order to choose two units to compare to one another to show how students performed better on writing assignments and had a stronger understanding of the novel due to the use of technology. Currently, I am certified grades 1 through 12 with a concentration in English, while, also working on earning my Masters in Special Education grades 1 through 6. As I am completing my Masters, I am also employed by a School District teaching High School English at Spartan High, which is where I completed my research.

### **Methodology**

My role in this study was a teacher, an observer as well as an interviewer. Spartan High is a 6 through 12 Junior/Senior high in a suburb of Rochester, New York. I took field notes and observed student behavior and analyzed the quality of three (9<sup>th</sup> grade) students work during two units. The students were from Bosnia, Cambodia, and Iran. Each student and their family moved to the United States between the last three to five years. The first unit was based on the play *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare and the second unit was based on the play *Oedipus the King*

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

by Sophocles. During the two units I observed student behavior, such as engagement, willingness to participate, leaving the classroom for bathroom/drinking fountain, as well as analyzing student work for comprehension. After analyzing each of these components, I was able to determine which strategies were most beneficial for students and which deterred their learning. Through this data I was then able to decide which strategies, tools and technology I would use in upcoming lessons and which I would not use again.

Once all of my data was compiled I spoke with three ELL teachers in the field and asked them if they have had similar experiences with technology. I also asked them what they felt the best practices in the field were and how they implemented them into their everyday teaching.

### Case Studies

#### Charles

Charles (pseudonym) is a fifteen year old freshman at Spartan High. He moved to Rochester New, York in 2012 from Bosnia and only speaks Bosnian at home. For the past three years Charles has been working with the ELL teachers at Spartan High and due to his hard work and persistence, together the teachers, Charles and his parents decided to enroll him in Pre-AP English to see how his skills would develop when placed in a demanding course. Throughout the four semesters, Charles was able to maintain a C average by staying after with me and working with an ELL teacher on English during his support period. However, I often asked Charles to put his phone away and would have to hold onto it on occasion during class in order for him to stay focused, especially during the *Oedipus the King* unit. Majority of the lessons in this unit had students reading independently, or acting out the scenes in a performance for the class.

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

Although, *Romeo and Juliet* is very similar in genre to *Oedipus the King*, I wanted to make sure that I differentiated the unit so the students would not become disengaged since the two units were taught back to back. During the *Romeo and Juliet* I decided to incorporate several movie clips from the Baz Luhrman modern edition of the movie, as well as several “60 second recaps,” an interactive online “Shakespeare Dictionary” and many online projects which constantly had the students working on iPads and laptops. I started off the class everyday having the students add new words into their “Shakespeare Online Dictionary;” many students decided to use the “Quizlet” app on their phones and laptops for this portion of the lesson. If students did not have a phone or a laptop from home to use, I made sure to have a class set of iPads available to any student who needs them. Instead of Charles coming into the classroom and immediately start texting his friends or looking at some type of social media, he was engaged in adding the words into his personal dictionary. Some of the words selected for the day, all of the students were required to copy down; however, there were also optional words for students who have more difficulty understanding the text and language: Charles always made sure to copy these words down as well. During the *Oedipus the King* unit I asked students to hand write the vocabulary words for the day, which often Charles would only copy down part of the definition and would never copy down the extra words. I noticed that in all of his writing samples from the *Oedipus* unit, details were vague and often there was no analysis to back up the evidence, but when writing about *Romeo and Juliet* I noticed that Charles frequently added the vocabulary from his dictionary and was able to create a deeper analysis of evidence showing that by having his vocabulary readily available he was better to comprehend the language and meaning of the story. Another benefit to using the “Quizlet” app, is that the students are able to look at the words at home and easily use them in their writing because they are readily available.

Commented [SMS1]: Not become?

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

When I spoke with the ELL teacher about how Charles was performing in the *Romeo and Juliet*, unit as opposed to other units, she shared with me that Charles was constantly on his phone using the app to find vocabulary for his writing pieces as well as looking back at the vocabulary when he was reading a word that he was not familiar with. She also told me that Charles would frequently ask her if there were any other apps that he could add to his phone which would help him understand the English language and that he could show his parents to help them as well.

### **Vanessa**

Vanessa (pseudonym) is a fourteen year old, ninth grade student at Spartan High and has been living in the United States for the past four years. Four years ago, Vanessa and her family left their life in Cambodia to move to the United States where her Aunt lived. Since Vanessa already had family members living in Rochester who had been living here for five years prior, they were already learning how to speak the English language. Vanessa excels in science and math, but has trouble with English and History. Worked into her schedule is a support period, where Vanessa works on English work with an ELL teacher to focus specifically on reading and writing: Vanessa struggled with writing in English class. Often times, when Vanessa was frustrated and having difficulty understanding a reading she refused to complete her homework and would quickly fall behind.

In order to help Vanessa engage in the reading and writing, every day after class I would email Vanessa the YouTube clip of the scene we had read in class that day or the segment to watch on the DVD. Vanessa would then go home and watch the video and annotate the print of the scene in comparison to the video of the scene. Often, she would circle words she was stuck on in the reading and write down the interpretation or synonym used in the video. She would

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

also write detailed summaries of the scene under the text in her own words, so she was able to comprehend the scene and was able to look back at the sheet for future projects. Once she was able to grasp the general concept of the reading and had a deeper understanding of the characters, she would only ask for the video when a scene was difficult for her to understand. I noticed that in her writing, she was able to create a detailed thesis and back it up with specific evidence and analysis. In previous units, Vanessa would write vague claims so she was able to write about multiple ideas in attempt to gain points on the rubric for evidence and analysis.

When I spoke with the ELL teacher Vanessa works with, I asked her what they work on together in the support room; she told me that Vanessa works on finding recap videos to watch on the iPads. When watching the videos she would take notes on any ideas that she had trouble grasping before which also helped her when writing the brief summaries about the events happening. Once the ELL teachers and I came together to collaborate strategies to use with Vanessa, we decided to have her create an interactive timeline on the Smart Board, where she would write the scene number and connect it to another slide that had the synopsis of the action. I ended up sharing the timeline with all of my students as a review and they thought it was a great tool to use when preparing for a recap quiz or writing assignment.

### **Gabby**

Gabby (pseudonym) is a thirteen year old, 9<sup>th</sup> grade student in Spartan High. Gabby moved to the United States two years ago with her family from Iran. At home, Gabby and her family speak primarily Arabic; however, the family is working hard to learn and understand the English language. They frequently attend the ELL family program at the mall, where many



## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

teachers and students gather on weeknights to work with families on the English language as well as offer academic and homework support.

Gabby reads at a sixth grade reading level and often struggles with comprehension and word recognition. During class Gabby is reserved and often asks to go to the bathroom or drinking fountain when we have partner read or group discussion. After class one day, I asked Gabby if there was something that made her uncomfortable about working with a group and she explained to me that she becomes very nervous when she is put in a situation when she has to read out loud or share her ideas about a reading passage because she has trouble reading and understanding language. At first, I showed Gabby the video clips to see if they would help her to fill the gaps like it did for Vanessa. Unfortunately, the video only helped Gabby to understand the action, but it did not help her to understand and learn the language; it was important for her to hear and follow along with the words closely, which the video did not allow her to do. After speaking with some veteran teachers, I asked the librarian to put the *Romeo and Juliet* text on an audio iPod, which would allow Gabby to listen to the reading as she followed along so she could hear how the words were pronounced as well as the rhythm and tempo of how the text should be read. Once Gabby became used to the iPod and was allowed to use the iPod both in school and take it home, I noticed that she became more comfortable sharing her ideas with a small group of her peers as well as asking clarifying questions. Gabby was also able to choose stronger evidence in her writing that linked back to her thesis because she had a deeper understanding of the novel and events.

I spoke with the ELL teacher Gabby worked with and he agreed that once Gabby was given the opportunity to follow along with the reading by listening to it on an iPod, he noticed that her confidence level had risen. He also told me that when they were filling out the graphic

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

organizer to assist her in her writing she was able to complete the evidence section on her own; normally asks for assistance on or has trouble choosing examples that relate back to her thesis. I ended up using this strategy for her with multiple other novels throughout the year and noticed her reading score rise as well as her writing abilities.

Name:	Thesis Rubric Grade:	Evidence Rubric Grade:	Analysis Rubric Grade:	Final Rubric Grade:
Charles	2 - 4	3 - 5	2 - 3	70 - 81
Vanessa	3 - 5	3 - 6	3 - 5	75 - 90
Gabby	1 - 3	2 - 5	1 - 3	65 - 74

\*\*The above chart shows how each student grew in their writing ability from the *Oedipus the King* unit, where little to no technology was used, to the *Romeo and Juliet* unit where I used several different types of technology. The first score in each category is the rubric score from *Oedipus* and the second score is the rubric score from *Romeo and Juliet*. Each individual rubric score is out of 6.

### Best Practices

After analyzing my own data, I interviewed three ELL teachers at Spartan High – Ms. Dime (pseudonym), Ms. Beach (pseudonym), and Mr. Jeffrey (pseudonym) - and asked them all what strategies they have used in the field, involving technology, which they have found the most success with. All three teachers expressed how they frequently use iPads with their students because they are easily for students to navigate and they are versatile for all students from all countries and all levels. Most often, they are used for quick translations for students

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

who have trouble understanding one or two words or when a teacher is not sure what word the student is saying and needs to look it up quickly.

Ms. Dime told me about a literacy program called “Imagine Learning” that she often uses with her new ELL students. This is a program that can be used on iPads, Windows or Android devices. The program focuses on helping students to develop critical reasoning skills, testing skills, break words apart into syllables as well as identify, read and form contractions. One of the most beneficial factors of the program is that it tracks student progress so teachers can easily identify which areas the student is still struggling in and share this data with other teachers as well. Ms. Dime described to me that students often ask to use this program and they tend to use it as a “reward.”

“Raz – Kids” and “myON” are two online reading programs that Ms. Beach and Mr. Jeffrey shared with me. Both of these programs have helped students move up multiple reading levels throughout the school year. One of the benefits that Mr. Jeffrey enjoys the most about these two programs is that they allow him to differentiate his instruction for all levels. Each website allows students to read at their own level without the assistance of a teacher, as well as read something that they find interesting. All of these programs are easily accessible from any web-connected device, allowing students to work both inside and outside of school as well as during summer and over long school breaks. Ms. Beach shared with me that “ELL students are often self conscious and nervous inside the classroom of the peers, but when they are engaged and working on a computer, iPad, etc. they feel a sense of accomplishment and are excited to be learning and catching up to their peers.”

### **Conclusion**

It is crucial for teachers to begin learning more about technology and the programs available to them on these devices. Students become more engaged when working on technology and often less distracted by the distractions around them. Due to their progress and achievement, the students often show their families at home the technology or applications we use in class and the parents explore the strategies as well. This allows students to strengthen their skills inside and outside of school while also creating a close relationship between teachers, student and family members. One of the most valuable aspects of using technology in the classroom is the ability to differentiate instruction to each students' level, but still making sure that they are achieving their goals and progressing. Every student I worked with showed remarkable growth throughout the school year due to the new strategies and types of technology used with them. Conducting this research has helped me learn about new strategies to use with ELL learners while also understanding how important it is to collaborate with other teachers in order to learn more about strategies you previously did not know about as well as support students and their learning.

### References

- Andrei, E. (2014). Digital technology in three middle school ESL language arts classrooms. *TESL Report, 47*, 35-50.
- Billings, E.S., & Mathison, C. (2011). I get to use an iPod in school? Using technology-based advance organizers to support the academic success of English learners. *Journal of Science Education & Technology, 21*, 494-503.
- Daniel, M.C., & Cowan, J.E. (2012). Exploring teachers' use of technology in classrooms of bilingual students. *Education and Learning Research Journal, 97-110*.
- Doran, P.R. (2014). Professional development for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners: Teachers' experiences and perceptions. *Global Education Journal, 3*, 62-80.
- Kose, B.W., & Lim, E. (2011). Transformative professional learning within schools: Relationship to teachers' beliefs, expertise and teaching. *Urban Rev, 43*, 196-216.
- Liu, M., Navarrete, C.C., & Wivagg, J. (2014). Potentials of mobile technology for K-12 education: An investigation of iPod touch using for English language learners in the

## Running Head: USING TECHNOLOGY WITH ELL STUDENTS

United States. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 17, 115-126.

Liu, S.H.J., Lan, Y., & Jenkins, J.R. (2014). Technology-enhanced strategy use for the second language vocabulary acquisition. *Journal of English Teaching & Learning*, 105-132.

Mellati, M., Zangoei, A., & Khademi, M. (2015). Technology integration: EFL learners' level of anxiety and their performance in writing tests. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Education*, 5, 240-252.

Martinez-Alba, G., Cruzado, J., & Pitcher, S. (2013). Glogsters and other motivating technology: A multiple case study for English learners. *Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*, 14, 253-262.

Nemeth, K., & Simon, F.S. (2013). Using technology as a teaching tool for dual language learners in preschool through grade 3. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, 48-52.

O'Hara, S., Pritchard, R., Huang, C., & Pella, S. (2012). The teaching using technology studio: Innovative professional development to meet the needs of English learners. *TESOL Journal*, 4.2, 274-294.

Peck, K. (2015) The future of our field. *TechTrends*, 59, 20-30.

Rivera, C.J., Mason, L., Moser, J., & Ahlgrim-Delzell, L. (2014). The effects of an iPad multimedia shared story intervention on vocabulary acquisition for an English language learner. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 29, 31-48.

Ross, K.E.L. (2013). Professional development for practicing mathematics teachers: A critical connection to English language learner students in mainstream USA classrooms. *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 17, 85-100.

Yildirim, R., & Torun, F.P. (2014). Exploring the value of animated stories with young English

language learners. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 13, 47-60.