



FOCUS: INTEGRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

VOICES FROM THE FIELD—INSIGHTS ON “IN REAL LIFE” BEST PRACTICES FOR INTEGRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN VIRTUAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

Mayra Lavadenz is committed to continuous professional learning and peer collaboration, and employs looping as a research-based practice to foster strong teacher-student relationships and improve academic achievement. She maximizes learning opportunities for students by team teaching, especially now as teachers are rapidly adjusting to teaching in virtual contexts. Leveraging each other’s strengths as teachers, Mayra focuses on teaching math and science, “I’m a math lover – I love teaching math!” Her partner teacher teaches language arts, history social studies, and Designated English Language Development (ELD). Each deliver Integrated ELD for their respective content areas and incorporate visual and performing arts and physical education/movement. “[The] number one thing that has made us more successful is that we have amazing teachers to share and to learn from.”



Mayra approaches her transition to virtual teaching with a spirit of continuous improvement, “I’ve made lots of mistakes and I’m learning every day.” Prioritizing the language and learning needs of her English learners, she intentionally plans for Integrated ELD content instruction and shares, “One of the best things I am doing is applying the best practices that I did ‘In Real Life’ (IRL) to the distance learning forum.” Three research-based practices frame Mayra’s approach to Integrated ELD instruction as she envisions and designs “IRL” practices to virtual learning, ensuring that she “maintains all of the routines to help student make connections to what they know and to feel successful in what they are doing independently at home.”

Best Practice #1— Thematic Instruction: Mayra uses a mind map to identify interdisciplinary connections across content areas. In a virtual context, thematic instruction for ELs includes considering how to best select and apply digital platforms that support content and language learning. Mayra applies EL-focused text selection criteria to identify articles from platforms such as Newsela to engage students in learning, “what’s amazing about Newsela is that they have articles in Spanish in addition to various Lexile levels.” She looks for articles that connect to the selected theme, are relevant for her students, and present opportunities to create projects in the virtual home-classroom settings. Mayra uses her Google Classroom platform to organize digital materials, resources, and learning so that students can visualize and understand thematic connections across content areas. “I love thematic teaching and it really solidifies vocabulary and concepts not only for ELs, but for everybody.”

Mayra and her partner teacher, Judy McKiernan, plan virtually along with mentor teacher Leslie Hiatt to coordinate weekly learning experiences that integrate language and learning across content areas. Leveraging each other’s strengths as teachers.

Best Practice #2— Interactive Journals: In her virtual classroom, Mayra uses Interactive Journals/Notebooks to integrate reading and writing routines for math and science. She transitioned this “IRL” best practice for English Learners using several virtual learning platforms and strategies. Mayra anticipated the remote use of the Interactive Journals and asked her students to take them home to use as a learning tool. To support home-use, she creates mini-lectures and posts them to YouTube. These include think alouds, visuals and vocabulary support to model expectations and scaffold EL student output. She’s sure to “always make connections to my life and how I used to remember little things”. She consistently collaborates with her partner teacher to “use the same expectations for writing”, focused on ELD standards to bolster writing skills related to cause and effect, modifying and adding details, and connecting and condensing ideas. The use of Interactive Journals coupled with varied digital learning strategies allows students multiple opportunities to access supports and produce written output that promotes accountability and creates formative assessment opportunities. Mayra holds students accountable for journal entries and they “take a photo of journal work and upload it to Google classroom as part of their assignment.”

Best Practice #3— Student Planning and Self-Monitoring Tool: During Integrated ELD, Mayra continues to foster metacognitive strategy development such as self-reflection and autonomous learning. Her virtual classroom includes a student planning and monitoring tool that help students organize and monitor their learning. “Every week I create a google slide organized by thematic lessons and inclusive of various content areas, including art extensions with consideration for varied materials available at home.” This virtual tool simulates learning agendas and monitoring tools uses familiar routines for students to translate metacognitive processes to their virtual setting.

Mayra acknowledges that this type of teaching is “really, really hard, not easy”, but is satisfied that the translation of “IRL” best practices to distance teaching has allowed her to address what is in her control so that she can continue to facilitate and support equitable access to learning using EL-focused best practices to maintain the “constant connection to motivate my kids who need me.” Mayra maintains a positive outlook and is committed to staying “current and creative!”