

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNERS

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August 14, 2018

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

My capstone paper examined laws and jurisprudence that expanded the rights of English Learners in federally-assisted educational programs in the U.S. with a particular focus on nondiscrimination provisions for adult English Learners in adult basic education programs. To answer the research question “*How can adult education programs provide more equitable access to education for adult English Learners?*”, my paper examined concerns related to equal educational opportunity for adult English Learners enrolled in programs governed by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014). In addition, my paper explored best practices and remedies for increasing equitable access for adult English Learners. To even begin to see those ideas taken up by local programs or state officials, one cannot discount the role of advocacy.

Project Overview

The project I undertook was the development and delivery of a professional development presentation on increasing equity for adult English Learners in adult basic education. The goal was to inform adult educators and administrators about our legal and ethical obligations to adult English Learners with respect to language access to all programs and activities of federally-funded adult education programs. I selected this educational advocacy presentation project because equity for English Learners in federally-funded adult basic education programs has been thoroughly discussed and

arbitrated at the K-12 level but overlooked in the adult education field and in research on adult basic education. Adult English Learners' rights are often unknown to teachers, administrators and the learners themselves.

My project included two professional development presentations of an hour and fifteen minutes each on this topic to my department colleagues at Kirkwood Community College and to adult education colleagues and administrators at our state adult education conference on July 18, 2018 . I used Powerpoint to deliver the presentation in a visually-supported, interactive manner.

I also provided an issue brief and program self-assessment handouts to accompany the presentations. In the future, I may present the same equity concerns and legal information to immigrant advocacy groups in order to reach more learner communities. I may also reach out with the issue briefs to our municipality's equity coordinator and human rights investigator.

Each presentation was presented with the following structure:

- 1) a rationale for discussing equity
- 2) illustration of equity concerns
- 3) research demonstrating the urgency of redressing inequities
- 4) summary of the rights of adult English learners participating in federally-funded adult education programs
- 5) Recommendations and action steps for increasing equitable access for adult English Learners in state and local adult basic education programs.

- 6) Participant self-assessment and presentation assessment - reflective discussion questions, self-assessment handouts, and “exit tickets” for participants to provide feedback at the end of the session.

Rationale for advocacy project

While this project itself did not involve research on human subjects, my goal was to share the research on educational rights that I found in my literature review. Research that stays tucked away in databases or libraries does not benefit educators or learners (Mills, 2018 citing Noffke, 1994). Therefore, this project attempted to engage adult educators and administrators in an interactive presentation to learn about adult learners’ educational rights, which may challenge “taken-for-granted assumptions” of their current or future experience in the adult education system. The presentation equipped educators to take action in their individual “sphere of influence” (Gorski, 2018). Johnson & Stephens (2017, citing Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) describe teachers as core change agents of policymaking, as well as learner communities and advocacy groups. It also contributed to public scholarship because there is very little research on equity concerns related to adult English Learners in adult basic education.

Because in my research I found that the nature of the adult ESL educator workforce is highly part-time, transitory, and widely undertrained, I realize that empowering educators as advocates may only go so far. After this capstone project, I may adapt the presentations to share with learner communities and advocacy groups as well. Samson and Collins (2012) suggest that English learners, being a vulnerable population socially, politically and economically, may not feel “sufficiently

empowered and confident about their rights to seek change"; however, they also reference the courts as an important "catalyst" for changes to educational policy for English Learners in the past.

The victories of seemingly powerless people - 12 year old Susan Clark in *Clark v. Board of Education*, the immigrant parents of Kinney Kinmon Lau in *Lau v. Nichols* and Linda Brown in *Brown v. Board of Education* - demonstrate that from time to time, inequities must be addressed through legal means by learner communities themselves.

Rationale for presentation format

For the live presentation itself, my rationale is based on Knowles' (1992) principles of adult learning for conference presentations. Knowles argued that the more interactive a presentation becomes, the more learning is created. According to Knowles, interaction occurs:

- *at the platform level* - with the platform being the speaker(s), and with interaction enhanced by visual aids. In this regard, I added digital visual support through Powerpoint software accompanied by intriguing and relevant images.
- *between the platform and audience* - perhaps involving a poll, response, or audience input or feedback of some type. To incorporate this principle, I structured periodic interactions between myself and the audience throughout the presentation:
 - To open the presentation, I asked participants to raise their hand if they represented a category of adult education professional -

teacher, administrator, staff member, department of education official, current or former K-12 teacher, etc.

- About twenty minutes into the presentation, I asked learners to make small discussion groups to identify barriers to success for adult English Learners and share their feedback with me afterwards as I wrote it on the board.
- About forty minutes in, I asked participants how much they already knew about nondiscrimination laws and provisions for adult English Learners and wrote their responses on the board.
- Throughout the section on legal obligations to English Learners, I engaged participants in a bingo game as I presented on several landmark cases and policy expansions. As they heard or saw me reference an item on their bingo grid, they checked it off; I handed out prizes to winners.
- I also handed out a green sticky note, in what educators often refer to as an “exit ticket” assessment, in which individual audience members demonstrate what they learned, or how they might apply it to their “back-home” situation (Knowles, p.13), or what challenges they anticipate when trying out new ideas in their local context.
- *between audience members* - involving interaction in small groups. In my presentation, I engaged participants in two “think-pair-share” activities

related to discussion questions about barriers to student success as well as reflective questions about equity in their local programs.

In spite of the presentation being heavily informational, the goal was to make the presentation as participatory as possible, as Knowles recommended.

PROJECT LINKS

[Increasing Educational Opportunity for Adult ELLs presentation](#)

Professional development presentation slides shared at Iowa Adult Education & Literacy Conference on 7/18/18. Includes references list in final slide.

[Equity for Adult ELLs Fact Sheet](#)

Handout that accompanied presentation. Includes references used on fact sheet.

[Equal Educational Opportunity Bingo](#)

Activity that accompanied professional development presentation.

[Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally-Conducted and](#)

[Federally-Assisted Programs](#)

I shared pages 8 - 14 of this document from the Department of Justice at my presentation in the final stage for participants to use as a reflective tool.

www.tinyurl.com/adultELLaccess

I shared this URL at the conference with the participants in my session; it links to a Google Folder with the resources listed above.

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