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Comprehensive Center at Edvantia

Working with English Language Learners and
Bridging the Achievement Gap

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John Ross:

Hello and welcome to Working with English Language Learners and Bridging the Achievement Gap, a webcast sponsored by the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia. I'm John Ross, director of technology at the ARCC, and I'll be your host for today.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly one person in five reported speaking a language other than English at home. That's over 47 million U.S. residents age five and older. Some experts project that by the year 2030 nearly 40 percent of all school-age children will be English language learners or children who will speak English as a second language. But educators across the nation are taking steps to help address the needs of these children to help them reach their academic potential.

We've asked several experts to join us today to help determine what educators at all levels can do to support these children. Our first panel will consist of national experts on our topic: Anna Chamot and Kathleen Flynn.

Included in today's webcast are some visits to schools in Kentucky that will share some of their challenges as well as their successes in working with English language learners.

I'd also like to let you know that we will be providing an opportunity for you to present questions to our panelists during our webcast. You can do that by sending e-mail via the form on the webcast launch page. Get your questions ready and you can send them later in the webcast.

Before we get started let's complete the first polling question. On the left side of the webcast launch page please select the best answer for the statement "Educators in my state are well prepared to implement effective instructional strategies for English language learners who are struggling readers". How strongly do you agree or disagree with that statement? To see the most current responses simply hit the refresh or reload button on your Web browser. We'll review your responses later in the webcast.

Now it's time to turn to our first panelist, Kathleen Flynn. Kathleen is a project manager at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, better known as McREL, in Denver, Colorado. McREL is home to the North Central Regional Comprehensive Center and the Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Kathleen and her colleague Jane Hill have recently published *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners*, a book that provides instructional strategies mainstream teachers can use with the English language learners in their classrooms. Kathleen's going to provide a little more background on the current educational landscape in terms of working with English language learners as well as review some research-based strategies all teachers can incorporate to address the needs of these students.

Kathleen, welcome.

Kathleen Flynn:

Thank you, John, and good afternoon everyone.

Those of you who are viewing this webcast won't be surprised to learn that English language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the school-age population in the United States. Between 1979 and 2003 the overall number of school age children increased by 19 percent. During that same period the number of ELL students grew by 124 percent. About 5.5 million students in the U.S. are now learning English as their second language.

There are ELLs in all 50 states now, they speak a variety of languages, and they come from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Even states in my region of the country, for example, rural heartland states that have traditionally had homogenous White student populations, are now struggling to meet the needs of growing numbers of English language learners.

You're all aware that under the No Child Left Behind Act English language learners must meet performance standards. Although the Department of Education has recently provided some additional flexibility regarding the testing of English language learners, schools are realizing that to meet these performance goals, teaching English language skills to ELL students has become the responsibility of the entire school staff.

There was a time when we thought we could simply let the ESL specialist handle all of the ELL students' needs, just as we had once believed that the special education teacher could take care of all of the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Yet, just as we were told that we needed to include special education students in our mainstream classrooms, we now need to integrate growing numbers of English language learners.

Unfortunately many mainstream teachers are not getting the training they need to meet the needs of these students.

We know, though, that teachers are experienced accommodators when it comes to rates of learning, behaviors, and modes of response, for example. But for the most part teachers have not had to accommodate for language. In fact, language has always been the one thing we didn't have to think about in the classroom, we could just talk. Now, though, with greater numbers of English language learners, we must think very carefully about this one thing that we took for granted and, aside from accommodating for students with violent tendencies, accommodating for language is one of the most difficult tasks we face as teachers.

After all, learning English does not just happen for students, it is a much, much more complex process than many people believe. As teachers we need to make language learning explicit, purposeful, and intentional. To teach students a new language is to help them learn its sounds, its words, and its sentence structures. Not a small or an easy task.

Furthering this challenge is the fact that no two English language learners are the same. No two ELLs have the same amount of grounding in their native language and no two ELLs will be at the exact same stage of English language acquisition. Some students are born in the United States, but grow up in non-English speaking households. Others arrive in the classroom having received varying amounts of formal education in their native countries.

Others may have been in U.S. schools for a number of years, but will still be in the early stages of English language acquisition. The students' level of exposure to English, their educational histories, the socioeconomic levels of their families, and the number of books in their homes are all factors that play a role in their readiness to not only learn a new language, but also to learn in that new language.

So how do we help our English language learners learn English and learn academic content at the same time? Our other panelist, Anna Chamot, will speak to learning strategies students can use. Right now I will address some teaching strategies that allow for a combination of language and content instruction.

Several years ago researchers at McREL identified nine categories of instructional strategies that proved to be especially effective in increasing student performance. Some of you may already be

familiar with these strategies from *Classroom Instruction that Works*, McREL's book that describes this research and its findings. Our goal in *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners* is to show mainstream teachers how to adapt these strategies for use with their ELLs so that these students are as engaged in learning as their English-dominant peers.

However, before you can use these strategies with your ELLs you must be familiar with the five stages of language acquisition. If you know what stage your student is at you will know how to tailor instruction so that the student is participating at his or her maximal level in both language and content learning.

The pre-production stage lasts from zero to six months. It's frequently called the silent period because it's likely you won't hear students speak any English during this stage. At the next level, early production, students begin using single words or two-word phrases: yes/no responses, names, and repetitive language patterns such as "How are you?"

At the speech emergence stage, students are able to say simple sentences—I walked home, for example—and eventually, at the intermediate fluency stage, students can use sentences of increasing length and complexity until finally, at the advanced fluency stage, they demonstrate a near-native level of fluency.

Knowing these stages will allow you to use the two tactics we recommend in *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners*—first, tiered questions and second, a formula we called Word Mess, a name we thought would stick in the mind of anyone who has ever tried to learn or teach a second language.

The first tactic we recommend is the use of tiered questions, that is, questions that match a student's level of language acquisition. For each stage of language acquisition, there are appropriate teacher prompts and questions that encourage the participation of English language learners regardless of the level they're at.

For pre-production students you can give prompts such as "Show me the blank." Or "Where is the blank?" The student will respond by pointing, drawing, or nodding. Early production students can answer yes/no, and either/or questions.

At the speech emergent stage, students can answer why or how questions using phrases or short sentence answers. Intermediate and advanced fluency students can offer explanations and answer

questions such as “What would happen if.” Let’s see how this works.

This next slide shows how tiered questions can be applied in a particular classroom example. Imagine a first-grade literacy class that is working on summarizing the Three Little Pigs. Pre-production level students can point to pictures in the book as the teacher asks “Show me the wolf,” for example. Or, “Where is the house?”

At the early production stage, students will do well with yes/no questions. For example, “Did the brick house fall down?” And providing one or two word answers. “Who blew down the straw house,” for example?

For speech emergent students, why and how questions are appropriate. For example, “Explain why the third pig built his house out of bricks”.

Intermediate fluency students can answer questions such as “why do you think the pigs were able to outsmart the wolf?” And, at the advanced fluency stage, students can retell the story, including the main plot elements and leaving out insignificant details.

The second tactic we recommend is the Word Mess formula, a method of language stimulation which, like tiered questions, will also encourage you to engage your students at their stage of language acquisition. You can use the Word Mess formula to remind you to first work on word selection or vocabulary with pre-production students; second, model correct usage for early production students; third, expand what speech emergent students have said; and four, help intermediate or advanced fluency students sound like a book or, in other words, use academic language.

Using our first-grade Three Little Pigs example again, let’s look at how we would apply this Word Mess formula. Pre-production level students will need to learn vocabulary words such as wolf, pig, house, straw, bricks, and blow. Early production students will benefit from your modeling good English. For example, if a student says, “Wolf blowed.” You can say, “Yes, the wolf blew and blew.” Such modeling is far more effective than explicit corrections.

With speech emergent students, focus on expanding oral and written sentences. For example, if a student says “He blew the

house down,” you can expand with an adjective, “Yes, he blew the straw house down.”

Intermediate and advanced fluency students should be learning to sound like a book. For example, here you could help students use more complex sentence structures. “He blew the house down because it was made of straw.”

I hope these examples help you see how important it is to be familiar with the stages of language acquisition. This familiarity will allow you to be more attuned to the appropriate types of questions and prompts you can use to engage and motivate your English language learners. By using both tiered questions and the Word Mess formula you will become more competent at differentiating instruction to promote linguistic and academic achievement in all your students. And another very important bonus is that your ELL students will feel more confident because they are able to successfully respond to your instruction.

This has been a very quick overview and I have not even had time to delve into any of the categories of instructional strategies. If you have questions, I hope you will feel free to ask them when we get to the question-and-answer period. Thank you.

John Ross:

Thank you, Kathleen. That was really very practical information for helping educators better address the needs of English language learners.

For more detailed information on these topics you can pick up a copy of Kathleen and Jane Hill’s new book *Classroom Instruction that Works with English Language Learners* from your favorite online or brick-and-mortar bookstore.

This is a good time to remind our audience that you can submit questions for our panelists. This can be done through the form on the webcast launch page. Our panelists will answer those questions in a few moments.

But first, I have the pleasure of introducing Dr. Anna Chamot from the George Washington University. Dr. Chamot is associate professor of secondary education in the Department of Teacher Preparation and Special Education at the George Washington University.

She is also codirector of the National Capital Language Resource Center, also known as NCLRC, which is operated by the George

Washington University, Georgetown University, and the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Anna is also the codeveloper of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, or the CALLA Model. CALLA integrates content-area instruction with language development activities and explicit instruction and learning strategies.

Thank you for joining us, Anna.

Dr. Anna Chamot: Thank you, it's my pleasure.

We've seen from Kathleen some of the teaching strategies that are known to be effective in helping English language learners be successful in school. The other side of the teaching strategy is what learners themselves do to help themselves acquire both language and content. These are called learning strategies, the thoughts and actions that students use to complete a task successfully.

Learning strategies are goal oriented and conscious, especially in the beginning stages of an unfamiliar language or other learning task. Once a learning strategy becomes familiar through repeated use, it may be used with some automaticity, but most learners can, if they're required to, call the strategy to conscious awareness and tell you what it is. Learning strategies are very sensitive to the learning context and also to the learner's internal processing preferences.

If learners perceive, for example, that a task like vocabulary learning requires correct matching of a new word to its definition within a specified period of time, for instance as on a test, they will likely decide to use a memorization strategy. Which memorization strategy they choose will depend on their understanding of their own learning processes and what strategies have been successful in the past.

A different task, such as being able to discuss the theme of a short story, will require, obviously, different learning strategies, certainly not memorization. For example, students might make inferences about the author's intended meaning and also apply their own prior knowledge about the topic that they've been reading in the story.

Good language learners as well as good readers, good writers, and good problem solvers, have a range of learning strategies and they

know how to select and implement strategies that are appropriate to the task. That is, students who use strategic approaches to learning comprehend spoken and written language more effectively, they learn new information with greater facility, and retain and use their second language better than students who do not use effective learning strategies.

Because learning strategies can be taught, the teacher has an important role in explaining to students the importance of using learning strategies, of defining different kinds of strategies, and demonstrating how to use these strategies with different kinds of academic tasks.

Teachers also have a role in supporting students in their efforts to become more strategic, independent, and self-regulated learners.

Learning strategies are a central component of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, CALLA, an instructional approach for English language learners that integrates subject area content, academic language development, and explicit learning strategy instruction.

The major reason for integrating learning strategies into the instruction of academic language and content is the considerable body of research in both first and second language learning contexts that demonstrates that learning strategies, first of all, can be taught, and that their use improves students' proficiency in academic language and also improves their achievement in content subjects.

Learning strategies are a little bit slippery; for the most part they're unobservable, although some strategies may be associated with an observable behavior. Let me give you an example. Let's say a student is listening to some new information and they may use a strategy called selective attention which you, the teacher, cannot see, but with their selective attention they're making decisions about the parts of this information that are most important to try to remember.

Then, because there's a lot of information, the student might decide to take notes on that information. Now the student is engaged in something observable. The only way that the teacher can find out whether students are using selective attention while they're listening is to ask them, and this brings us to some of the research findings. Descriptive studies investigate the learning strategies reported by students. Again, you have to ask students.

Early studies of good language learners identified the specific strategies used by successful second language learners. These studies identified the good language learner as someone who is mentally active in their learning, someone who monitors language comprehension and language production, someone who practices communicating in the language, someone who makes use of prior linguistic and general knowledge, someone who uses various memorization techniques, and someone who asks questions for clarification. I'm sure you wish that all of your students had all of those qualities and skills.

Subsequent research compared the strategies used by effective and less effective language learners. Those studies have revealed a recurring finding that less successful students actually do use learning strategies, sometimes even as frequently as their more successful peers, but that the strategies are used differently.

Good language learners are skilled at matching strategies to the task they're working on, while their less successful peers apparently do not have the meta-cognitive knowledge about the task requirements that they need to select appropriate strategies. And, interestingly, this trend is apparent with children, with adolescents, and with adults learning a second language.

In addition, more proficient language learners use sequences of strategies to complete a task successfully. So they may start with one strategy, as in the example I gave for selective attention, and then decide they need a second strategy, like taking notes. Compared to less effective second language learners, effective learners are more aware of their own thought processes. They use a richer variety of strategies and they use more appropriate strategies with the learning tasks.

Increasingly, researchers are turning to instructional studies in language learning strategy research in order to investigate the teachability of strategies and what effect they have on learners. Instructional studies have focused on one or more modalities, including listening, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, speaking proficiency, and writing. And in mathematics and science, they focused on problem solving.

Results indicate that learning strategy instruction is effective in producing increased use of strategies and in enhancing learning, but that the success of such instruction depends on guiding

students to develop meta-cognitive awareness of themselves and learners who can analyze the characteristics and demands of a learning task.

Evaluations of school districts implementing CALLA with its focus on teaching learning strategies report accelerated achievement of English language learners, not only in their acquisition of English, but also in their content subject learning. For example, McAllen, Texas, has been implementing this model districtwide for nine years now and with each succeeding year their students overall have scored higher and higher on the Texas state assessments. Similarly, in another CALLA district, Allentown, Pennsylvania, they have had a very concentrated teacher professional development initiative which is focused on showing teachers how to teach learning strategies to their students, all students, English language learners as well as native English speakers, and they have found higher test scores for the classrooms where the teachers are actually implementing the learning strategy instruction.

The first step in explicit learning strategy instruction is to help students become aware of what strategies they are already using; remember that all students—whether they're effective learners or not—are using learning strategies of some kind. This consciousness raising helps students begin to think about their own learning processes.

Teachers should also model how the strategy can be used for a particular task. Often the teacher modeling takes the form of teacher thinking aloud while engaged in a language or a content learning task. After modeling, teachers should name the strategy. Too often strategies are identified by describing an action, such as the teacher saying, "When I'm reading I like to visualize what's happening in the story." This is fine as far as it goes, but the teacher needs to add to this statement a further explanation, such as visualizing is a learning strategy, it helps me make sense of a story. If I visualize an event in the story that doesn't make sense to me, then I know that I need to check what I just read because I probably made a reading mistake. In this way, students can attach a name to a learning strategy and can understand when, why, and how it can be used.

In addition to frequent teacher modeling, students also need extensive practice opportunities. Learning strategies are a skill and thus need as much practice as any other procedure or skill. In the beginning stages of practice, teachers usually need to remind

students to use the new strategies. However, as students become more familiar with the strategies, teachers need to fade their cues so that gradually students themselves assume responsibility for using the strategies. After all, a learning strategy is truly a learning strategy only when the learner uses it independently.

Once students are familiar with new learning strategies and have had opportunities to practice them, they generally find that certain strategies work better for them than others. Students differ in their approaches to learning and can be expected to have strong preferences in the types of strategies they like to use. At this point they should be encouraged to develop their own personal repertoire of effective learning strategies. Teachers should not force students to use one strategy or another, but encourage them to build their repertoire so they will increase their tools for learning.

A major learning strategy instructional goal is to help students transfer the strategies they've been practicing to new tasks and situations. Learning strategy research has shown that students often do not automatically transfer the strategies they learn in one context to a different situation. Students typically will restrict a learning strategy to the specific context in which that strategy was first learned, although students who have developed effective strategies in their first language are much more likely to transfer them to similar tasks in the second language.

Teachers can assist in strategy transfer in two ways; first, by developing students' metacognition through strategy instruction, and second, by providing explicit instructions for using a learning strategy in a different context. For example, the ESL teacher might ask students to use a strategy that he or she has just taught them in a content subject class and then come back to the ESL class and report on its effectiveness. Or the math teacher might ask a student to use a strategy in a science class and then come back to the math class and report on whether it worked or not.

Other approaches are to have students teach the strategies they're learning to a friend or younger sibling and then evaluate how effective they were in explaining and modeling the strategies to others.

I remember one class that decided that they would develop a class book on learning strategy tips and that that class book would be passed on to students in the teacher's next class the following year. By showing students how to apply learning strategies in new contexts, teachers help them develop automatic and skilled use of

strategies with a wide variety of academic tasks and the knowledge base to use the strategies effectively.

John Ross:

Thanks, Anna. You've helped us to come full circle to better understand how we as teachers can help our students develop and incorporate strategies to support their own achievement.

Now it's time to hear from you. This is your opportunity to get answers to your questions. You can submit your questions through the form on the webcast launch page. Please include your name in the submission and your e-mail address in case we can't get to all of your questions during the webcast.

While our first questions are coming in, I'd like to review our first webcast poll. In that question we asked you to rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement "Educators in my state are well prepared to implement effective instruction strategies for ELLs who are struggling readers."

According to that poll, none of our viewers strongly agree with that statement. Only 15 percent did agree and 69 percent disagreed, and 8 strongly disagreed. Luckily, we have something later in the show to show them how the state is doing something to help them out.

Kathleen and Anna, it should be no surprise that our audience has already submitted some questions prompted by your presentations. Here is one for Kathleen to get us started.

So, Kathleen, you mentioned that the number of English language learners is growing even in rural areas that have had no non-English speaking students until recently. What can these communities do to meet the needs of these new populations of students?

Kathleen Flynn:

Thanks, John. That's a really good question and something that we've definitely had to deal with in my region of the country.

I can speak specifically to a project that we did over the course of several years in a small district in Wyoming that had a rapidly growing number of English language learners. We took a three-pronged approach: we built a leadership community, we worked on instructional development, and we worked on building the capacity of families and communities. The leadership community had to start out at a real basic level just knowing what the requirements were for meeting the needs of their English language learners,

learning about professional development that they could provide their teachers, and learning how best to build contact with the parents of their English language learners.

For the instructional piece of this program it was interesting, this is actually one of the areas where we realized that the *Classroom Instruction that Works* strategies that I had talked about earlier would be useful with English language learners. And finally, for our parent involvement, we started with some very basic things, putting signage up in the native language in the school so that parents would feel welcome. We had translators at PTA meetings, we started providing English courses for parents who were interested in them, and over the course of two years we saw fairly dramatic gains in the performance of those English language learner students.

John Ross:

That's great. And I think you'll see some of those strategies in some of those schools we get to visit later in the webcast.

I had a question for Anna. I think specifically knowing, having read some of the self-regulation strategy and having read the National Research Council, I know that many of your strategies are just good strategies for all kinds of learners and our question relates to how can we scale some of this up to focus more on secondary schools; that a lot of work is being done with English language learners in elementary schools, but what about middle schools and high schools?

Dr. Anna Chamot:

That's a wonderful question, John, thank you. Middle school and high school students who are new coming in to this country and without any or very little English proficiency have, in my opinion as a secondary person, greater needs than even the elementary children, and the reason I say that is because they have so little time to become successful academically in school. We would like all of our immigrant students to at least be able to graduate from high school. So teaching them the learning strategies I think is one very effective practice.

Another, a number of school districts have what is variously called content-based ESL or, in the western part of the country, it's often called sheltered content, and what it is is providing even students at the beginning level with some actual authentic content from the general education curriculum. This helps them develop the academic language, which we know is harder to develop and takes longer than the social language, which comes pretty quickly because students are exposed to other English speakers who are

using social language a large part of the day. But academic language is the kind of language that is spoken when the teacher is explaining a new concept, it's the language of textbooks, it's closely allied to literacy. So teaching older students academic language from the beginning, not waiting, teaching reading from the beginning, not waiting until oral proficiency is developed, it's very important to do everything we can to speed up this process of acquiring academic language as much as possible with the secondary student.

John Ross:

Great, thanks, Anna. We've got time for one more, but please do continue to send your questions in in case we need to address them afterwards. Both Kathleen and Anna said that they would respond to e-mails afterwards.

Kathleen, I think many of us as educators are familiar with the non-research-based strategies and it's really great that you and your colleague have sat down and helped us to understand those with an ELL audience, but this question says, "If I needed to get started tomorrow, is there one that I might really focus on? What is my foray into going into these research-based strategies?"

Kathleen Flynn:

Well, probably the first one, John, that comes to mind, is cooperative learning—especially because there is a lot of research out there showing that it's especially effective with English language learners. Cooperative learning just involves breaking your students up into small groups, four or five students in a group. It's best to have a heterogeneous group so mixing ELLs at different levels of acquisition in together works best. One of the reasons it's so effective is because, I think as one researcher put it, cooperative learning demands language. Students have to speak and they need to also, what another researcher says is negotiate meaning, they need to make sure that their language is accessible to people who don't speak English as well as them, as well as those who speak it slightly better.

I think Anna has done a number of projects with cooperative learning, too. I don't know if you want to address your research.

Dr. Anna Chamot:

One of the things that we have found on the research I've done is that cooperative learning, you can take the cooperative part, cooperation, and teach it as a learning strategy. For example, one of the things that I suggest to my teachers that they do is ask your students why they think that you have them working in cooperative groups, and listen to their answers to be sure that they understand the purpose. Now I've done this and students will say things like,

“Oh, because it’s more fun when we work together.” Or “Oh, we can learn from each other.” And yes, yes that’s the whole point. But then I’ve also had students who say, “Oh, my teacher has us working in cooperative groups because it’s less work for the teacher.” Anyone who has worked with cooperative learning knows that it’s much more work, but the point is that students need to understand the purpose of it. That they are learning by interacting with others.

So exactly what you were saying, Kathleen, for the benefits of cooperative learning, in language that students can understand, they need to know that, too.

John Ross:

Well, thanks a lot, I would like to thank both Anna Chamot and Kathleen Flynn for both the great information you had up front as well as being able to respond. We will be able to respond to additional questions via e-mail.

But now, for the second half of our webcast, we’re going to look at a successful program that is helping educators in one state address the needs of English language learners.

The Kentucky ESL Academies are the result of a unique partnership between districts, the state, and regional service providers, and we have representatives from each with us today to help describe the program and the factors other states can consider in replicating these efforts.

But first let’s take a quick video tour. I had the great fortune to visit two elementary schools in Kentucky whose faculty and staff are working hard to meet the needs of their English language learner population. First, let’s visit with Principal Betsy Rutherford and her faculty at Russell Cave Elementary in Lexington, Kentucky.

Betsy Rutherford:

Hi, I’m Betsy Rutherford. Welcome to Russell Cave Elementary in Lexington, Kentucky. We are a K-5 elementary school. In the past 12 years we have grown from a one-family ELL school to currently a 54 percent population ELL school. Welcome to our school.

(multiple voices in classroom)

The factors that led us to determine the need for ELL intervention are our students who are ELL learners continually scored novice on our state test scores. Also, according to federal guidelines, we

did not meet our adequate yearly progress for No Child Left Behind. It was our Hispanic population in reading.

So based on these factors we decided that we needed some interventions to help our Hispanic population.

Female Speaker 1: As a classroom teacher we know that the test scores aren't, our kids are not achieving at high levels, but we see them every day performing and for us we need to bridge the gap from how do we get them to perform on the tests and show what they know that we see everyday and implementing some of these instructional strategies have helped to build that bridge.

Also, the teacher's training and having teacher background and knowledge in what instructional strategies are best for these kids is really what is getting at raising the achievement and hopefully with the building capacity schoolwide with the teacher's ability and focusing on the needs of the kids, we're going to start to see what we need as far as the NCLB and the state tests.

Cathy Stuphen: And as the Family Resource Center coordinator, one of my responsibilities is to involve parents in what's going on in the school. So one of the things that we really try to do is to bring the families in, let them be much more a part of what's going in the school, and talk with them about what their responsibilities are, help them with strategies that they can use at home in terms of helping with their children, and letting them be aware that here in the U.S. that we are really more concerned about them being involved academically with their kids.

Female Speaker 2: Well, I collaborate in three different grades so in each classroom it's a little bit different, but in general you'd see the students a lot of times working in groups. They will do a lot of activities that encourage language, that's what we really try to do so that they're communicating with each other.

Before we do that, though, we model the language, the appropriate language that they are to use in that particular activity so then that gives them a chance to practice the exact language that they should be using.

In the third-grade classroom I work in we're trying to use a lot of visuals, so along with the vocabulary words that we're doing, we match a picture up, so we use a program called Writing With Symbols and I brought an example of some of the things we're doing. For my English language learners we make these cards for

them and “pretended” was one of the vocabulary words we had so we’ll make a picture and then when I come to the group we discuss the word and we talk about different words that come to their mind when they think of this word. So then the visual gives them something to think about when they hear that word later.

Female Speaker 3: Well as the sign-up coach I go into the teacher’s classrooms once a week meeting with the appropriate grade level, and we take a look at their units, their different lesson plans, and work together on creating content language objectives if they’re having difficulty maybe with a specific concept. We also take a look at the different interventions or strategies that they’re using.

As an example, we could use the food chain and with our English language learners a good strategy is to have them draw pictures, because a lot of times they have in their head what they know, but it’s hard to express either in writing or in speaking, So they would start out with the sun and then grass and different animals and things and then talk about well, what part of the food chain is the sun and how could you draw me some arrows to show me how are they all connected? How do they transfer the energy?

So it’s a lot of drawing pictures and then talking about it and labeling and then eventually moving on to sentences and paragraphs.

Lea Steinle: One thing that I’ve participated in this summer is the ultimate home visit where I was afforded the opportunity to go to Mexico for two weeks and live with a family and see schools very similar to the schools our children are coming from, and having firsthand experience with what they’re coming from has helped me to see and design instruction specific for their needs.

Female Speaker 4: I also attended the ultimate home visit this summer and I agree with what Ms. Steinle said, it gave a big picture of where our students are coming from and there is a vast difference. So, with that kind of understanding, we have programmed in how to help parents understand what educational system is in the United States, specifically Lexington, Kentucky, where Russell Cave is, and then we can program, you know, make the home/family connection and then we can also look at instructional strategies that work for Hispanic kids.

Female Speaker 5: Preparing this faculty for interventions with English language learners and instructional strategies started from building-wide professional development. A three-day professional development

focused on specific instructional strategies, starting small and then working up. Working one-on-one with teachers throughout the rest of the year to coach them on what's working and what's not working in your classrooms, what we're seeing that's effective, what's the data showing us that's effective, and really continuing that through the past three years as well as reinforcing the school-wide professional development at faculty meetings and summer trainings has helped to build capacity for, not just the classroom teachers, Title I teachers, reading teachers, the FRC coordinators, the whole staff of the school being involved in this has really brought it together and made it effective.

John Ross:

I'd like to thank Principal Betsy Rutherford and her faculty and staff for allowing us to visit and sharing the challenges they are facing with the growing population of English language learners. It's a nice way to help us understand the real challenges schools across the nation are facing in terms of helping all students meet their academic potential.

In light of that, I'd like to introduce you to three people who have helped schools in Kentucky better address those needs. Our next panel represent district, state, and regional organizations that have partnered together to help schools in that state build a capacity to work with English language learners.

First is Marti Kinny. Marti is an ESL or English as a Second Language specialist with Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky and has a unique story to share on how Kentucky's ESL Academies got started.

We also have Rina Gratz with us. Rina is an achievement coordinator for the Kentucky Department of Education and was also involved on the ground floor in helping the ESL Academies get started.

And Michelle Cheney is the senior educational specialist for the Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training, also known as ESCORT. I'm glad to say that ESCORT is a partner organization in the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center and we routinely call on the expertise of people like Michelle in topics related to English language learners.

Welcome, folks.

Marti Kinny:

Thank you.

Rina Gratz: Thank you.

Michelle Cheney: Thank you.

John Ross: Well, I'd like to start off with just maybe you could tell me what was the impetus for starting these ESL Academies in Kentucky?

Female Speaker 6: Well, prior to the 1990s we had pockets of population, English language learner populations in Kentucky, but they were mostly in our big cities. In the mid to late 1990s we began to see a rapid growth, and we began to see English language learner populations, even in the rural areas, and so as a consequence we recognized that there was a great need to build capacity with our districts and our schools to serve the academic and language needs of these ELLs. And so that was how we began to think about a systemic approach to professional development for our teachers.

John Ross: Great, I think that's kind of represented in what Principal Betsy Rutherford said about their population growing so much in such a short amount of time.

Female Speaker 7: And I don't think it's unique to Kentucky.

John Ross: No.

Female Speaker 7: You'll see nationwide that the English language learner population has expanded over the years and people are now looking to find answers for better educating these children.

Michelle Cheney: And I think we needed to recognize that when we brought people together from across the state we'd be bringing together the district that had the one family and then the district that I come from, a large metropolitan district where, yes, we had served English language learners, but we still needed to improve our practice.

John Ross: Well, I think other states might be interested in your model or some of the things that you've learned from these ESL Academies. So can you give me an overview of what some of these academies are like or how it was developed?

Female Speaker 6: We started out thinking about providing regional academies because Kentucky is geographically wide. So we provided three satellite academies in the west, more towards the east, and more towards north central, and when we thought about designing these academies we thought about the time frame. We had professional development teacher academies in Kentucky for our content areas,

so that was a model that already existed in our state, and what we needed to do was modify it for our audience because what we wanted to fashion together was a model that would involve both mainstream and ESL specialists as well as leadership at the local level because we recognized that a systemic approach to building that capacity at the school level required buy-in from lots of different people.

Michelle Cheney: And I think the one thing that we all brainstormed and thought about extensively behind the scenes was we don't want this to look like traditional professional development, where typically teachers go off for a few days, they come back, and very little of what they learned is ever implemented back in the classroom. And we got input from some folks in the field and one of the things that we heard them say over and over again was that you need key stakeholders at the table—the people who have the power to make changes in the schools that perhaps a classroom teacher wouldn't have.

So it was critical when we were planning this that we build it upon teams of ESL teachers, mainstream teachers, school literacy and math coaches, school-level principal and other administrators, as well as district-level administrators all be members of the team.

Female Speaker 7: And that helped us with the whole struggle of how to sustain the initiative after the academy was over, that we would have a team from a building that represented different roles in the building, and then we also planned ways to continue our contact with them after.

John Ross: So Michelle, you mentioned that planning was really important in bringing in some of those stakeholders, what, tell me what some of those stakeholders might do when they come to address the different needs, what do you as a regional person bring to the table?

Michelle Cheney: It might be helpful just to sort of give an overview of what the general academy looks like and then talk about folks within their roles.

John Ross: Great, yeah.

Michelle Cheney: We had an application process and I'll let you all sort of talk a little bit about that.

Female Speaker 6: Essentially the application process asked them to form teams at the school level and to think about, we gave them suggestions on who

needed to be on that team. And we also, the important piece of that was we wanted to give them the information up front about the expectations for the academy, because this was a different kind of professional development model that considered the professional development standards for our state being ongoing, job embedded, and therefore we needed to spread it out over the year, seven days throughout the year. So it required a lot of commitment of time and resources on the part of schools. So one of the things in the application process was an assurance form that both the school principal and the district superintendent had to sign saying that the members of the team are committed to the process and seeing it through.

John Ross: And that's really the time, you said, making sure the appropriate stakeholders know so it's not just teachers going out and learning really great stuff but not having any impetus to be able to do anything about it.

Female Speaker 7: And so what we did is we asked them to submit a written application, we asked for some demographic information and, of course, the state was able to provide some of that just so that we could get a snapshot of what their English learner population looked like, what trends have occurred during the past few years. We asked them to answer a few questions as a team around why they wanted this type of training, how they planned to use it, how it fit in with other initiatives in the school as well. And then we asked for personal buy-in, so there were a couple questions that each individual team member had to respond to briefly about how personally this was going to help their professional development growth and what they would see as useful in the classroom and how they were going to take it back and what their role would be in taking this back to the school and working within this framework.

Michelle Cheney: The application process was really important in that it gave, they had to sit down and look at the data they already had.

John Ross: Great.

Michelle Cheney: And examine well how are our English language learners doing and many of them had already done it, but as a group they needed to do it, and so it gave them a focus of what they were hoping to accomplish.

John Ross: Well, that really sounds like a challenge though, because you've got all these states, as you said, all these schools across the state,

it's a big state, it's a wide state, three different regions, and schools of different levels. You had those schools in the city that might have had larger populations than others. So how did you address that? I mean what could you do to help these different schools coming in?

Female Speaker 7: Well, I think Michelle and our other providers, they modeled differentiation just as we want our teachers to do in the classroom.

John Ross: Great.

Michelle Cheney: They were great at doing that in providing the professional development, and it didn't matter what stage of expertise people came in with, I think everyone benefited from it and I know from my district we have participants who are our so-called ESL instructional coaches, but they come to it to learn more about they have the basic background in second language acquisition, they know that, but they were learning different strategies on how to provide professional development. So it didn't matter what stage you were coming in with, you were benefiting from –

Female Speaker 7: You want me to give a couple examples? We do try to practice what we preach and so we are in there modeling the very same practices that we're asking those folks to go back and use in their schools and in their classrooms, and what we tell them sometimes is that not everybody does the same thing at the same time and sometimes not everybody does the same thing. And so one example of our differentiated instruction with these school teams is that when they come in we have them do a little self-assessment for some of the different areas that are topics of discussion and topics that we're looking at throughout the presentations. We took a look at their program plans and their delivery of service and folks were in very different areas, and so we gave them opportunities to work with new information and develop those plans which would be starting from where they are and then growing their plan as necessary, but we also then gave them the opportunity to reflect on what was happening within their own schools and their own districts and then sometimes we've set them up to network with other schools to find out how folks were doing it in different places and then they could borrow some of the good ideas that they heard. So they learned from one another also.

John Ross: Well, I really like the way that you used the work differentiation. We at the ARCC are trying to differentiate our technical assistance to the states that we work with and then by modeling that the states are then differentiating the technical assistance they're providing to

districts and schools, and so I know as a classroom teacher differentiation was difficult, but I think it's important that we all try to do that.

So Kentucky's been doing this for a little while and so you have some examples of some success, how are you sustaining this momentum? How are you sustaining the great work that you've been doing?

Female Speaker 6: I think a great feature of the academies is that every year we solicited feedback from our participants –

John Ross: Great.

Female Speaker 6: – and I think that enabled us to challenge ourselves on how to make it better for them. How to make it an experience that was more responsive to their needs. So we really took that feedback seriously, and so as a result of that over the years there were some additions to the program that I think really enhanced their learning.

Michelle Cheney: One of those additions was providing the opportunity for what we called a continuing grant after they had finished the academy the following year, and that was one of the occasions where teams would collaborate with one another, go in and see each other teaching. We provided the money so that they could hire subs so that they could be released and do this modeling and have their colleagues come in, watch it, meet after school, discuss it, critique it, plan next steps.

Female Speaker 7: And we did try to model that sustaining and maintaining throughout the academy. Not only did we have three to four separate sort of workshop settings, but in between each setting folks at different points in time were participating in an online learning community where they were able to exchange questions and answers, provide information for one another, there was a webliography there. It was very interactive. As a matter of fact, Kentucky was fantastic about hiring two folks to oversee that entire process and monitor and so we could track how much time people spent online participating in that online learning community between each of the face-to-face sessions.

We also set it up so some folks who chose to could participate in a graduate course component associated with the academy and so they did some additional work to earn graduate credits through Eastern Kentucky University and presented on all of their work and findings and research that they spent several months on. So it

was a way for folks to sort of exchange ideas and expand on what was happening.

And then at one point in time we had some what we called demonstration schools, who received additional on-site support, and the thought behind that was then they could help the other schools in their surrounding areas with sustaining and maintaining the momentum once this got going.

John Ross:

Well, it sounds to me like you're doing so many really good things. Using data and using that data to drive your decisions or to base your decisions on and it's not just one point in time, but it's continually looking at multiple measures and using those to inform the program and then differentiating what kind of instruction goes on. And as we know, job-embedded and ongoing professional development is so important. Research shows that if professional development is not job embedded and sustained and providing these additional grants for teachers to continue to look at their data so that you can actually lead the way reminds me of our first panel talking about teaching learning strategies and then slowly pulling away as you get better.

So I'd really like to congratulate you all, it has been fascinating visiting the schools in Kentucky and I really enjoyed getting to work more with Michelle and to meet Rina and Marti and we're going to finish up with a quick visit to another school in Kentucky.

But before we do that, let's take a second polling question. Using the webcast launch page, please let us know about the training efforts in your state by telling us how you strongly or, how you agree or disagree with the statement "Training opportunities exist in my state for educators to develop effective teaching and learning strategies for use with English language learners."

While you're thinking about that, let's visit McFerran Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, and Principal Carol Miller. McFerran Elementary School represents a school with a more mature program that has been implemented for approximately 12 years. Despite being a school with such challenges as having high poverty and high at-risk student populations, it's a high-performing school.

Carol Miller:

Hello, my name is Carol Miller. I'm the principal of McFerran Elementary in Louisville, Kentucky. Welcome to our school. We have 660 students K through 5 and we have 18 percent English language learners.

The factors that led us to develop ELL strategies among the staff were when we first received the unit of English as a Second Language students, and that was a new program to our school and although we had worked with minority students before, we had not worked with students from different countries. So we needed something for the whole staff, some training on culture, differences, awareness, as well as teaching strategies at that point, so we did whole-staff training.

In order to find appropriate strategies for our teachers and students we're fortunate to have a great central office staff and we also have teachers with special knowledge who came in and had materials, but even over time we have explored and found different materials and better things to help our students to learn the language and different activities.

We've done some research. We are very data driven about what is successful. As a state that has high-stakes accountability and with the No Child Left Behind testing, it's important that we make sure we're using proven strategies that work with children in order for the children to be successful.

Female Speaker 8: Our ELL experts in the building get with new teachers to the building, teachers that have not had ELL children before, and they help us to become familiar with the accommodations that each child is entitled to have. They teach us to use these techniques and you don't always have access to the translator, but you learn yourself as a teacher how to use the techniques, the slowed-down language and, although I can't translate, I can provide these other accommodations.

Female Speaker 9: At the school we are very consistent in everyone speaking the same language and in the same language in reading and in science. Linda mentioned earlier about the scaffolding. We have even implemented a behavior management program that is utilized throughout the whole school, so with these children hearing the same thing because there needs to be lots and lots of repetition, that has been very successful.

Female Speaker 8: And then as Ms. Miller said, we are driven by the data so, for example, in fourth grade the children are tested weekly in science over core content and they have those accommodations during the test. Then when we enter that on the classroom assessment system that will spit back out some scores and we can look and see how a particular population of children is doing and we can compare how

they were doing in August or September to how they're doing later in January or in the spring.

Female Speaker 9: A program that we had working on character education with our children, because we are a school in poverty, was the Child Development Project, and part of it dealt with setting up classrooms and having the teacher create in her classroom a warm, caring environment to invite and support all children and so that children would feel comfortable in sharing experiences. Children would feel comfortable in participating and that they work as a group.

Female Speaker 8: I think that the Child Development Project really helps all of the children in the class to have a sense of ownership and community with that class and what we do the first two weeks of school, and it's done schoolwide, is just have some challenges that have guaranteed success, that cooperative groups can do together. And so that's the first two weeks, but that's a springboard to fix up strategies that we use in the community every day, all year long really.

Female Speaker 9: At this school we do a lot of family involvement because it has to do with a school that's in high poverty you try to do a lot of family education because where there's one child there's usually three or four. So if I can educate them on how to work with one, so we have family and book nights and they come and we'll have dinner and then the teachers will work on a reading strategy with the parents while the children are in a different program. Then everybody gets a free book, the child gets a book and the parent gets a book. Then we bring them back together for parent and child time where they practice the reading strategy that we have taught in the classroom hoping to get strategies to the parents to work with the children so that we can get input and improve reading.

Female Speaker 8: You know success looks like a child that is a native English speaker bragging about what their ELL friend just did. To me that is a big community success.

Female Speaker 9: It's ELL children coming in with huge smiles on their faces, parents saying "My child cried when he or she couldn't come in."

Carol Miller: That's the picture for me is that they're happy to come to school, they enjoy being here, they run in, they bring their parents to all the programs, they're proud of being here. If you were here in the morning, when you see them coming in they'll come in twos and

threes holding hands and swinging their arms, you know? They visit with each other and they're invited to parties and included in things. But as the principal, the biggest piece of success for me, of course, would have to do with seeing their success on the state testing systems and that, when given good instruction from excellent teachers and when you get all the pieces of the puzzle together, that they too can achieve and learn.

This school is a place where, it's like a cupcake, you have a cupcake and then there's icing because there's already diversity in the building and a unique combination, but the ESL program is like sprinkles on top of the cupcake. It's very colorful, it's been very exciting, but the greatest thing it has done, it has increased everybody's awareness of the different cultures and the importance of having them in our society, and it's been an enriching experience.

John Ross:

For helping us with that segment on McFerran Elementary School, I'd like to thank Carol Miller who was named Outstanding Principal of the Year in Kentucky by NAESP recently.

Because of time if you have some questions for our panelists, please use the form on the webcast launch page—we'll reply to you via e-mail.

And now I have the responses from our audience to the statement "Training opportunities exist in my state for educators to develop effective teaching and learning strategies for use with ELLs." The numbers are much stronger on the agree side, with 6 percent strongly agreeing and 50 percent agreeing. But still 31 percent disagreeing and 6 percent strongly disagreeing to that. So there's still some work we can do there.

Before we wrap up today I'd like to remind you to take the final polling question on the Web site; this question is designed to help us determine topics for future webcasts, such as the topic we explored today, which was the most frequently requested topic during our last webcast.

I'd also like to invite you to complete a short evaluation survey of today's event. This, too, is designed to help us better meet your needs. You'll find a link to the evaluation survey at the bottom of the webcast launch page.

I'd like to thank all of our panelists for joining us today, including Kathleen Flynn and Anna Chamot from the top of the hour, our

panelists from Kentucky and beyond—Marti Kinny, Rina Gratz, and Michelle Cheney—and especially the faculty and staff at both Russell Cave Elementary in Lexington, Kentucky, and McFerran Elementary in Louisville, Kentucky.

I owe a big thanks also to my colleague Robert Hagerman, who was instrumental in coordinating this event. We also owe thanks to the video experts at Digital Vision Works in Dunbar, West Virginia, and New Media Mill here in Washington, DC.

Our panelists have highlighted the needs of ELL students and to help educators close the achievement gap that currently exists. As the numbers of ELLs continue to grow, educators at all levels will be able to draw from the effective programs and practices highlighted today to serve these students.

For the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia, thank you for joining us, I'm John Ross.

(Music playing)

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