



Advancing Equity through ELL Program Reform: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

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ABSTRACT

In this introductory article to the 2022 issue of *Teaching for our Times: Centering Equity and Cultural Wealth*, we introduce the Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) English Language Learning (ELL) program reform and provide an overview of the articles in this issue and their relationship to the reform. We argue that comprehensive ELL program reform is linked to the broader struggle for racial, linguistic, and other issues of social justice. It requires not only pedagogical and programmatic change, but also broad collaboration across departments, a campus-wide reckoning and understanding of ELL students' cultural wealth, and institutional commitment to challenging and dismantling perceptions, practices, and policies that create barriers for ELL students' sense of belonging and academic success in the college.

This 2022 issue of *Teaching for Our Times* signals a transition and new focus of the journal on advancing equity and centering cultural wealth in higher education (see [About Us](#)). We highlight in this issue the federally grant-funded English language learning (ELL) program reform at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) with the goal of sharing the innovations, lessons and best practices that faculty and staff learned in leading it through the five-year reform process. BHCC instituted this reform to address glaring inequities at the college: the barriers – rooted in racial and linguistic injustices -- that our ELL students face in completing their degrees.

In this introduction, we provide a brief overview of the ELL program reform, the articles in this issue and the connections between them. Faculty leaders from the ELL Department have been at the helm of this reform, but the reform radiates outward and links to all disciplines, divisions and work areas at BHCC as well as outside BHCC. The articles in this issue – written by BHCC staff and faculty from multiple departments who were active participants and leaders in this reform – reflect the cross-disciplinary input, scope and impact of the ELL program reform.

In this issue, Puente (Ellenbird, Naggie, Shute & Puente) documents how the former ESL program at BHCC perpetuated racial disparities and inequities for our ELL students. The program was based on a gate-keeping model that required ELL students to complete as many as 36 credits with no transfer value before they could enter into college credit classes, leading to high attrition rates and costly delays for our ELL students.

Dennis addresses some of these issues by analyzing how monolingual ideology perverts the way ELL works are read and evaluated; while Cummings critiques the remedial model of instruction prevalent in many US colleges and proposes alternative humanistic pedagogies for teaching ELL students.

To address these inequities both within BHCC and within the field of ELL teaching itself, a team of administrators, faculty and grant writers applied for an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) grant. BHCC received the grant in 2016 and the ESL Department (now known as the ELL Department^[1] in an effort to be more inclusive of multilingual learners) agreed to take a lead role in carrying it out.

A major focus of this 5-year AANAPISI grant was on instituting a comprehensive reform of the ELL program. Grounded in theory and research, the reform resulted in an accelerated and streamlined course sequence with thematic and integrated-skills ELL classes, many of which are linked to credit content classes. This curricular reform was further supported by professional development, peer mentoring, and built-in collaboration opportunities for ELL faculty to engage with and incorporate best ELL practices and pedagogies. Ellenbird, Naggie, Shute and Puente discuss the key steps and critical elements of this program reform.

But the program reform has reached (and had to reach) much further beyond the ELL Department to fully address the varied inequities that had historically shaped the program. Support staff embedded student services

that the Language Lab coordinator and staff members played as co-collaborators in the ELL Reform process and in promoting a cultural wealth model.

Collaboration of faculty across departments has also been integral to this reform. Earlier reforms within the English Department helped pave the way for the ELL and ENG Departments to collaborate on writing assessment, assignment design, and curricular alignment as well as through co-teaching ELL-ENG learning communities. In this issue, Akai-Dennis, Burke Grehan, Paul and Valdez discuss the rationale, assessment and details of assignments they have developed that bridge the traditional disciplinary divide in their respective ELL-ENG learning communities. An ELL and sociology learning community course is another example of cross-disciplinary co-teaching and curriculum that was supported by this reform. Ellenbird and Bautista share their experience developing and teaching this ELL-SOC place-based learning community. Naggie and Shute (Ellenbird, Naggie, Shute & Puente) detail the important roles that non-ELL faculty have played as collaborators, allies and change makers in this reform.

It's also important to stress that this reform was grounded in research and theory. One of the first steps the ELL Department took was to conduct a faculty-led research review of best ELL practices. Ellenbird (Ellenbird, Naggie, Shute & Puente) discusses the important role that research played in supporting this reform while Ellenbird and Bautista show how these research findings inform their practice in co-teaching their ELL-SOC learning community. Additionally, many of the authors in this issue make explicit connections

autobiography as inquiry to critique feedback she gives on a student work.

Ultimately a comprehensive ELL program reform must be a campus-wide effort. The major impediment to program reform may not be pedagogical or program differences but rather an institutional identity or mindset that views ELL students through a deficit lens (Shapiro, 2011). In her multi-modal work in this issue, Naggie uses video clips of a round table discussion of BHCC faculty, staff and administrators - annotated with her synopsis and commentary - to tell the story of how reform leaders and supporters came to bring about a new institutional identity at BHCC. Shawna Shapiro, Associate Professor of Writing and Linguistics at Middlebury College and author of “Stuck in the Remedial Rut”, a seminal work in guiding the ELL reform at BHCC, provides an introduction and closing commentary to Naggie’s work.

And finally this reform - along with the inequities it attempts to dismantle as well as the inequities that still need dismantling – is ultimately linked to the world and events around us that are rooted in a history of racial, linguistic and other injustices. It is linked to the protests that erupted this past year over the police killings of African Americans and other people of color as well as the organizing through the Black Lives Matter Movement and other African-American led movements and initiatives to address this violence and other injustices targeting African-Americans. It is linked to the resistance and organizing of Asian Americans against the rise of xenophobia and violence during the pandemic targeting people who are perceived to be Asian.

in heaven,” depicts a series of arresting migrant figures, boldly facing the viewer, as if to declare their stories of triumph, hardship, and vitality. We editors saw parallels between this image, this title, and the ELL reform, which has also required an honest sharing and hearing of stories—at times, necessarily uncomfortable—and an understanding of equity and cultural wealth with depth, nuance, and a goal of true *opening* toward change. Fundamental to the ELL program reform was paying close attention to the plurality of cultural wealth BHCC students bring to their college experience. The quilt segments—shown in full on our [Artwork](#) page—throughout the journal display patterns from pieces created by students in Professor Emmanuela Maurice’s themed writing course, “Telling Our Stories,” ultimately unified by renowned artist and quilt-maker, Susan Thompson. Students supplied textile imagery representative of their cultural backgrounds and experiences, like Huacuja’s migrants, sharing some of their richly layered identities. Without recognition of our students’ cultural identities and assets, we would not have been able to enact productive reform.

The ELL program reform is one concrete step in creating more equity for our ELL students, but this reform is far from complete or sufficient in itself. Ibram X. Kendi writes “Like fighting an addiction, being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (p. 23). This issue aims to engage with that ongoing anti-racist work of supporting equitable teaching, curriculum and programming for ELL college students through interrogating the relationship between linguistic and

our ideals into action through evidence-based, student-centered scholarship and discussion.

[1] Both terms ELL and ESL are used in this article (and others in this journal issue), with ESL usually used to designate titles as they were known before this institutional change.

REFERENCES

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- Shapiro, S. (2011). [Stuck in the remedial rut: Confronting resistance to ESL curriculum reform.](#) *Journal of Basic Writing*, 30(2), 24-52.

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