

Increasing Engagement of ENL Students

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Abstract

This project aims to evaluate the engagement levels of English language learners at Canandaigua Academy School. This project explores the lack of engagement of ENL students in schools due to a variety of reasons related to a lack of family involvement, interest in the content level, poverty, world events, and anxiety. A professional development program is designed for teachers on how to incorporate student interests as well as culture into the curriculum, provide families with the opportunities to be involved in their children's school experience with support such as translators, and connecting with students through school events such as culture night, school activities and school clubs.

Keywords: English language learners, engagement, anxiety professional development, affective filter

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a teacher of Spanish and Italian to students whose first language is English, I have found that there are wide ranges of engagement among students of the same age, in the same class with the same number of years learning the language. I also noticed this trend during my observations in ENL classrooms. By student engagement, I refer to the degree of interest, attention, and passion that students show when they are learning in their language classes. Student engagement involves “their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes while being taught in class” (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 164). Indeed, engagement can be fostered and strengthened through relationships with teachers and care as well as attention for their mental and emotional well-being (Sunha et al., 2015).

I began to wonder about the factors that influence student engagement and why some students were less engaged than others in their language classes. Low engagement signifies a student who is not willing to persist in the face of academic difficulties or more advanced material. Research shows that ELLs are more likely to feel a disconnect with teachers, feel isolated in the school environment and even drop out of school. Therefore, it is important that ELL teachers engage students by making personal connections with them.

Lack of engagement can take many forms, such as poor grades, lack of speaking or writing in class, refusal to complete a task or can even manifest in the form of insubordination, which I have seen myself as a teacher. Engagement, or a lack of engagement, manifests in several forms such as through peer relations, academic grades and student-teacher rapport. Many students have anxiety and do not speak in class due to a fear of receiving poor grades or being wrong. When ENL students are completing an assignment, they feel anxious due to factors such as time given to complete a task, feelings about the instructor, and the size of assignments create

anxiety in ENL learners (Aydin et al., 2017). Increased anxiety can result in a low affective filter, which in turn affects how much of the language students can absorb and produce (Lin, 2008). This anxiety can prevent students from speaking in English as well as communicating with their teachers. A study conducted of children in grades 2-7 in an ENL class confirmed that students, particularly towards the older end of the study, showed increased anxiety when speaking with their teachers in English, especially after the teacher made suggestions and corrections (Aydin et al., 2017). This shows how anxiety over learning a new language can result in a lack of communication or effort to practice due to fear, which is how students end up unengaged in class.

Low levels of student engagement are problematic for several reasons. Students who find learning English to be difficult may give up if they are not engaged. Lack of engagement also negatively impacts students' relationships between each other and with their teachers (Nguyen et al., 2016, p. 164). A study of high school students showed that the school drop-out rate decreases by half when students feel cared for by their teachers (Sunha et al., 2015). This reflects the idea that students will not feel like they belong in the school environment if they do not connect with their teachers and peers. ELLs are more likely to experience acculturative stress which is, "linked to an increase in feelings of isolation and anxiety" (Forster et al., 2013, p. 417). Students with elevated levels of anxiety will not be able to perform optimally in the classroom.

Low levels of engagement among ENL students can result in poor school and social outcomes. ENL students and immigrant students can be more at risk for bullying, mental health issues and difficulties with school (Sunha et al., 2015). ENL students are more prone to these problems because it is more difficult for them to focus on class activities and connect with teachers and peers. ENL programs that lack any support socially or emotionally for students can

result in depression, substance abuse, and behavior issues in school for ELLs (Forster et al, 2013).

These issues cause a barrier between students and their academic success. The majority of ENL students are Hispanic, and “Hispanic students are more likely to report being in fights, being injured in a fight, and being threatened with a weapon at school” (Forster et al., 2013, p. 417). These types of issues distract students from academics and disrupt their emotional well-being by increasing the probability that they experience “depression, suicidal ideation, other internalizing psychosomatic problems, and risky behaviors” (Forster et al., 2013, p. 416).

ENL students are more at risk for these issues because they are trying to, “adapt to life within a dominant culture, while concomitantly balancing the conflicting cultural practices and perspectives of their family, country of origin, and host culture” (Forster et al., 2013 p. 417).

Thus, ENL students need additional support and specialized care that is culturally understanding, which can be done through, “school-based programs that facilitate the development of coping skills for students experiencing cultural and familial stressors” (Forster, 2013, p. 415). Many schools have emotional assessments in place that are significantly lacking tools and resources specific to ELL students (Lambert, 2018). Social emotional learning and training would help solve this problem by teaching staff members how to identify students who are struggling as well as teach students how to process their own emotions.

Students who receive social emotional lessons are able to, “feel more confident and competent in developing relationships, building friendships, resolving conflicts, persisting when faced with challenges, coping with anger and frustrations, and managing emotions” (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012, pp. 397-398). Many programs were not provided in ELL students’ home

languages or did not address their unique circumstances, which in turn results in ELL students being less likely to possess these skills.

Low levels of student engagement can be a result of depression, anxiety, family factors or a lack of relationship with teachers. Low levels of engagement can result in a lack speaking and practicing in class as well as poor performance in school or even dropping out. The purpose of this project is to design and implement a professional development seminar that provides teachers with ways to improve student engagement in the classroom and to identify ENL students who may be struggling with anxiety or depression. Next, Chapter 2 will highlight specific research and evidence regarding engagement of ELLS by outlining several key points pertaining to relationships with teachers, cultural shock and school performance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As stated in Chapter 1, students who are truly engaged in their classes connect their own personal experiences and background information with the course content, interact with their peers, and feel a positive rapport with their teachers (Sunha et al., 2015). According to Nguyen et al. (2016), student engagement involves “their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes while being taught in class” (p. 164). In addition, engagement in class will increase test scores and the likelihood that ENL students not only stay in school but thrive in it and in the community (Aydin et al., 2017). In contrast, students who are not engaged in class are more likely to not only perform worse academically but suffer forming relationships with both teachers and peers (Nguyen et al., 2018). Lack of student engagement is due to several issues regarding personal matters, family matters and school matters, which can affect all students’ academic, social and emotional success as they move through school (Forster et al., 2013).

In this Chapter, I will discuss the specific reasons that ENL students are having difficulty engaging in class including situations regarding to self, family and school. I draw on Stephen Krashen’s (1978) Affective Filter and Monitor hypotheses and Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development to understand student engagement in class. These theatrical constructs posit that students who have more confidence in themselves and less anxiety are more likely to acquire a second language (Terrell & Krashen, 1983; Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021).

Second Language Acquisition: A Framework for Understanding Engagement

ENL students will be less engaged in class if they have a low affective filter, which is a metaphor to represent the students’ feelings and mindset (Terrell & Krashen, 1983). According to Stephen Krashen (1978), students who experience high levels of anxiety have a raised affective filter and therefore cannot fully absorb the material. This will decrease their

engagement in class. However, students who are calm and relaxed can fully take in the new language (Lin et al., 2015). A teacher who uses humor and makes the students feel calmer will have more successful students who are more proficient in the target language (Bilokcuoglu & Debreli, 2018). Students who are laughing will feel at ease and will have a low affective filter, which in turn will result in higher levels of engagement.

Similarly, the Monitor Theory relies on students editing their own output and fixing their own mistakes (Krashen, 1978). If the input students hear is too advanced, learners will lose confidence in their ability and not be able to hear errors in their speech. If it is too basic, learners will not advance in their language studies or engagement. Students who are in classes where the emphasis of the class is speaking may be too anxious and therefore disengage from the environment around them (Aydin et al., 2017). Teachers providing too much input at a level that is incomprehensible will discourage students, which will decrease their confidence and disengage them from the material (Mehmood, 2018). If students are learning without realizing they are acquiring new language, they may be less anxious and overwhelmed than if they are explicitly memorizing rules and concepts. To help in reducing student anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed, educators should draw on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

According to Vygotsky's (1978), ZPD is the gap between where students currently are and where they want to be. It elaborates on how, "learning is influenced by social, cultural and historical factors" (Lavadenz, 2011, p. 19). ENL students are more likely to have social issues such as substance abuse, fights in school and families with a lack of education (Forster et al., 2013). They are also more likely to experience culture shock due to emigration from other countries. These factors can result in lower levels of engagement. The learner requires a talented

professional when they are in this zone to scaffold them to the desired level (Eun, 2019). This affects ENL students because many of them did not receive or complete formal education in the countries they came from, which means they are starting at a lower point compared to their peers. ENL students also require personalized instruction and help which they do not get many times, which results in less engaged students who are not meeting their learning targets.

Personal Matters that Affect Engagement

Engagement and success in school opens up future job opportunities for ENL learners and helps set up successful futures for them. Immigrant students can be at risk for living in lower-income households and poverty, which increases the chances of being engaged in school (Motti et al., 2015). ENL students are more likely to be disengaged from their classes to do personal, family and school related issues. Expanding on this idea, one study done of ENL youth in primary schools in Athens showed that across all grades, ENL students were more disengaged than their peers (Motti et al., 2015).

Issues of disengagement can eventually lead to bigger issues such as dropping out, and non-white students are more likely to drop out of school than white students (Nguyen et al., 2016; Sunha et al., 2015). However, many schools do not provide ENL students with the additional support they need to fully engage in school and be successful (Motti et al., 2015). It is important that schools and educators understand personal matters that affect students' engagement in school.

Anxiety

When discussing the success and engagement of ENL students, it is imperative that teachers, parents and administrators discuss anxiety they have that can impede their academic success and their ability to be engaged. However, before tying anxiety to ENL students

specifically, it is essential to understand what anxiety is and how it can be damaging for students and their academic careers. Anxiety is defined as “the result of strain, stress, and tension or confusion from an individual’s mind and body” (Ismail, 2022, p. 161), which can affect all students’ academic, social and emotional success as they move through school. Academic success refers to how well students do in their classes, how much material they retain and what their test scores are. Social success refers to how well students relate to their peers and interact with their teachers. Lastly, emotional success refers to how happy they are, how they process their emotions and how they handle stress.

Anxiety can also be manifested regarding different topics of learning a new language, such as speaking, presenting, taking exams or completing group work. Any one of these experiences can cause anxiety for ENL students and decrease their engagement level, which is why it is so important for students to feel close to their teachers. In fact, the academic, social and emotional development of ELLs can be significantly affected if they lack proper support from their teachers, school and families.

Many factors can cause anxiety such as recent moves, divorce, losing someone in their lives or instability (Roe, 2006). Differences in cultural norms or understanding can also cause anxiety, specifically in ENL students (Mogel, 2016). Anxiety in school settings in particular can be caused by a lack of, “time reserved for imaginative, creative, and rough and-tumble play” (Mogel, 2016, p. 98). Students who have time to release their energies in productive ways will be more engaged in class. Teachers should try to incorporate activities that involve moving around the room, walks, breaks and kinesthetic style activities to minimize anxiety. Many schools cut physical education time due to an emphasis on state testing, which in turn leaves students with even less time to exercise (Weaver, 2018). Expanding on this, students will have a more difficult

time focusing during class, which will reduce how engaged they are in the lesson and how well they do on exams and on school assessments (Rachman, 2013).

Anxiety affects students' engagement through their test scores. In their study of 264 high school seniors taking an exam to gain entrance to college in Turkey, Kültür and Özcan (2022) found data which reflects the idea of anxiety impacting school performance. The relationship was found to be "negative significant but weak" between anxiety and scores (Kültür & Özcan, 2022, p. 453). This is important because it shows that students who are anxious will have a higher affective filter and therefore disengage from class. Similarly, a study conducted in Italy of 337 students linked anxiety with students' social cognition. This includes how students interact with their peers and teachers. The results showed a negative correlation with depression and separation anxiety symptoms with mentalization. This finding that children with less distress can "go beyond the literal meaning" of an interaction or text (Scaini et al., 2020, p. 558).

However, there was a positive correlation with mentalization and generalized anxiety, which shows how different mental disorders can affect students' social cues and interactions (Scaini et al., 2020). This is significant because students will not be able to successfully interact with their peers, make connections, and feel a sense of belonging if they cannot understand nonverbal social cues.

Causes of Anxiety within Language Learning

There are several different causes of anxiety specific to learning a new language. Some examples include, "perceptions and attitudes towards foreign language learning, learners' beliefs, interpersonal relations, learning and teaching contexts, classroom practices, examinations, learners' perceptions of the target culture" (Aydin et al., 2017, p. 135). Other issues globally such as the pandemic, online learning and stress also increase anxiety (Villarama et al., 2022).

For example, immigrants are more likely to hold jobs in hospitality, retail, education and health, which made up 59% of the jobs that were eliminated during the covid-19 pandemic (Uro et al., 2020). This results in financial hardships for immigrant and ENL students.

Expanding on this idea, a study of 494 Turkish children who are currently learning English as a new language supports the idea of anxiety affecting one's ability to learn a language. The age group was varied and included children from elementary, middle and high school. The study provided useful data about taking examinations. It was concluded that children between the ages of seven and twelve were less nervous to take exams than other grades and ages groups (Aydin et al., 2017). This is important because ENL students who are worried about tests or who have test anxiety may disengage from class.

Teachers of these specific grades and ages can now be given training in regard to warning signs for test anxiety and how to calm down the class as a whole before an examination. In concordance with this study, a middle school in the United States conducted a questionnaire before, during, and after a test and concluded that students feel the most anxious after an exam due to fear of disappointment from their parents (Jones et al., 2019). This demonstrates how tests and examinations affects students' mental health. Test anxiety may be triggered by previous exams that did not go well or can be triggered by past experiences in general (Du, 2009). Students need practice taking exams and may not have previous experience taking exams, especially longer ones. Teachers may be able to ease this anxiety by providing practice exams beforehand and giving students the format of the test before they take it.

Anxiety seems to decrease student engagement in class. Teachers should be able to look for the warning signs of anxiety, especially signs specific to learning a new language. This can include reluctance to speak or share thoughts in class, refusal to participate in group work, or

low-test scores. Certain classes bring anxiety for specific reasons. For example, anxiety in mathematics class has a strong link to gender (Ismail et al., 2022). The affective filter needs to be low in order for students to fully grasp a new language. Affective filters also include the level of motivation a student has when learning a new language, as well as the confidence they have in themselves (Krashen, 1978). If a student is not motivated to learn a new language or does not see the importance of it, they will be less engaged in class.

When learning a new language, “motivation is a construct, affected by intrinsic or extrinsic factors, and a change in variables usually brings about a change in learner motivation” (Mehmood, 2018, p. 131). Some of these variables can include the connection a student has with their teacher, the pacing of the class, as well as the involvement of their family. Students who are highly motivated to learn a new language and see it as important have a low affective filter, which will allow them to fully absorb the content from class. Another aspect pertaining to the affective filter is the confidence level of the student in themselves and in their ability to learn another language. Researchers have found a “direct relationship between classroom atmosphere and learner self-confidence” (Mehmood, 2018, p.132). These aspects affect students’ performance, especially during evaluations (Mehmood, 2018, p. 132). It is especially important to calm the anxiety that students have when learning a new language because it will affect their performance in school (Ismail et. al., 2022). Students will be less willing to talk, will be more distracted when they are supposed to be listening to the teacher use the language and may be less likely to interact in groups.

World Events

Events going on in the world can also cause students to disengage from class. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, students transitioned to remote learning rather than

learn in-person. The pandemic itself caused people to feel “adverse emotional reactions” (Villarama et al., 2022, p. 242). Once students lost the socialization of attending school in person, their anxiety, depression and mental health issues continued to rise dramatically. Students lost “community stability and social support needed for a healthy mind” (Villarama et al., 2022, p. 242).

Children of immigrants and minority groups also faced more obstacles during the pandemic than the rest of the United States population. For example, school districts that serve low-income populations must utilize state aid to fund their schools, whereas wealthy school districts receive more money in property taxes. This has been brought to light after aid for schools was initially cut during the covid-19 pandemic (U.S. House of Representatives, 2022). Also, Black and Latino employees already faced higher levels of unemployment, and yet “faced a disproportionate share of layoffs” once the pandemic started (U.S. House of Representatives, 2022, p. 8). Many ENL students are Latino and therefore may have been affected by these recent events. Students who have unemployed parents or are facing financial struggle may find it difficult to focus during school and engage. Many students from low-income families also relied on school for their meals, and in 2012 the government spent 100 billion on food supplies for families in poverty (Gunderson & Ziliak, 2014).

School Closures

When schools closed, this surely caused anxiety in students who were uncertain when they would eat their next meals. Many schools with a large population of ENL students do not have the sufficient resources to meet their needs, specifically with identifying potential mental health issues they could be facing caused by these issues (Lambert et al., 2018). This is

significant because students will have more difficulty being engaged in class if they are worrying about these outside issues.

These issues may detach students from school and put them at risk for dropping out. Many people who decide to permanently leave school are battling, “crime, frequent unemployment, and low-wage employment” (Kim et al., 2015, p. 336). Furthermore, the poverty rate for certain minority groups such as Black and Native American citizens is at 20%, but for White citizens it is half of that (Harry & Klingner, 2022). This is significant because students who are living in poverty do not have access to materials they need for school and have outside issues that can prevent them from truly engaging in school.

Racial Aspects

ENL students, immigrant, and minority students face larger issues that contribute to their engagement levels in schools. They are less likely to fit in with their peers, interact with their teachers and stay in school. In their analysis of national data from the database NLSY97 to understand high school freshman including White students, Black students, Hispanic students, and ELLs for four years up until their senior year, Kim et al. (2015) showed a strong importance of relationships with teachers, and students who reported favorably about their teachers were more likely to stay in school.

Why are many ENL students disengaged in class? First, many ENL students are quick to be classified as special education and are put in classes that move at a pace which is too slow for them, simply because they cannot communicate their thoughts or ideas (Artiles et al., 2004). When programs are not designed to support ENL students, they will be unable to keep up linguistically and academically.

Low-Income Districts

ENL students are disproportionately in low-income school districts, which receive fewer resources and funding on both a state and federal level. For example, in Tennessee, the state government provided resources to support schools with a 1:23 teacher to student ratio. In wealthier districts, schools were able to get the ratio down to 1:19 due to taxes from the community, however in poorer districts it increased to 1:24 (McKillip & Farrie, 2020). Having larger class sizes means that students are receiving less individualized attention from the teacher in the room and are less likely to make a connection with the teacher. Teachers making connections with students is an essential way to engage students in school and in their classes. If there are too many children in one classroom at a time, the teacher will not be able to pay as much attention and foster a relationship with each student, which is essential for student success (Dzoldov, 2018).

Another issue is staffing shortages in low-income school districts. These school districts lose teachers quicker and more often than other schools districts, which harms the students by not providing them with stability. For example, in Tennessee, poor districts hired new teachers using funds that are 10% more than what the state allocated, whereas wealthier districts hired teachers with 18% more funds (McKillip & Farrie, 2020). Across the United States, enrollment in teacher education programs at the university level has decreased, which results in less people choosing education as a profession (McVey & Trinidad, 2019).

The BEP formula is a formula used in Tennessee to calculate how much aid schools will receive from the state government to operate. This number did not increase for low-income student populations in schools or for low-income schools in general. Students living in poverty need more money for supplies, food and other necessities that their peers have (McKillip &

Farrie, 2020). A lack of resources and funding will disengage students because they will be focused on more serious issues instead of their classes and academics.

Relationship with Teachers

Teachers should be able to identify students who are engaged or disengaged from their class. Students who feel that the teacher is invested in their growth as a student are more likely to be engaged in class. Students may think, “The teacher cares if I’m learning. The teacher notices me. The teacher cares about me. I never feel afraid to ask the teacher questions” (Dzoldov, 2018, p. 10). These statements come from a form of an evaluation provided to students. Students were given a list of these statements that they had to respond to based on their personal experiences with the teacher. A teacher can be extremely wise, but without students who agree with those statements, the teacher will not have an engaged class. It is necessary to connect with students in order to have successful students (Dzoldov, 2018). Similarly, students who feel a deeper connection with their teachers are less likely to drop-out of school and more likely to continue their studies in school in the future (Sunha et al., 2015).

Another key step to identifying a student who is truly engaged is a student who is connecting their background information and experiences with the class content. Engagement is connected to students’ interest, and “when students’ interests are engaged, their motivation to learn is increased (Dzoldov, 2018, p. 12). Engagement is when a student is interacting with material and can answer questions from “share talk” which refers to questions such as, “Can you tell me more about your thinking? Do you agree or disagree with ____’s idea? What in the text made you think this?” (Dzoldov, 2018, p. 12).

Students who are engaged in a lesson are not afraid to share their thoughts regarding the material, which in turn deepens their learning and connection with both the class and teacher. For

ENL students, engagement is even harder due to language barriers and cultural differences. Teachers may include current events or background information that ENL students do not understand or cannot relate to, which in turn may make them shut down or disengage from the lesson.

Funding

The last important factor that affects the engagement of ENLs students is school administrations, funding, and the allocation of money. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act went into place, which include the School Improvement Grant program (SIG). This money was given to school that served low-income communities and families. A study of 11 schools that receive government funding concluded that all 11 schools had significant ENL populations. Some of the requirements to receive the money from the grants included recruiting and hiring more staff, adding seminars and professional development, and changing the management of the school (Golden et al., 2014).

This is exacerbated by ENL students who have families disproportionately unemployed or laid off (U.S. House of Representatives, 2022). The schools who received SIG money had populations of 72% receiving free school lunch and 88% being ethnic minorities. There was a wide variety of students such as refugees, undocumented students and students with a small amount of prior education because coming to the United States (Golden et al., 2014). The study concluded that teachers were happy with the progress ENL students were making and the culture that they bring to the school community. This means that many ENL students are engaged in these classrooms which received more support and funding. Students who are sharing background information about themselves and making connections are more engaged in class (Dzoldov, 2018).

Expanding on this idea, Montgomery County Public Schools had an enrollment increase of over 2,000 students over the course of a seven year period (Montgomery, 2015). Not only was it found that the level of students living in poverty was increasing, it was more likely affecting ENL families (Montgomery, 2015). This demonstrates how many times ENL students cannot fully be engaged in class because they are worrying about serious issues they are facing at home.

Parental Involvement

Many teachers are overwhelmed teaching ENL students because they do not have enough resources to meet their needs. For instance, many students coming to the United States have not had any previous education and are not literate in their home languages. As one teacher said, “They don’t know how to use a pencil and write, or what a notebook is and what you use it for, and what a textbook is” (Golden et al., 2014, p. 6). This will severely prevent the engagement of ENL students because they are unable to follow instruction provided by the teacher. Many ENL students stayed at an intermediate level of English proficiency and could not be placed out of ENL support, which can affect the credits for classes they can receive and even their graduation (Golden et al., 2014).

Many ENL students who struggle due to lack of previous schooling or language barriers do not score well on examinations, and then they are placed into special education courses (Harry & Klingner, 2022). This affects their engagement by being placed into classes that truly do not reflect their capabilities but are the result of other obstacles out of their control. They may become bored or unable to follow the class and then disengage. When parents and families reinforce the curriculum and importance of school at home, children are more successful (Golden et al., 2014). Similarly, a study done by Iwaniec 2020 demonstrates how high school ENL students in Poland whose parents did not attend higher education have less confidence in their

abilities to learn English. Teachers speaking with families regularly provides useful information about the challenges low-income schools face when trying to support ENL learners the best they can and keep them engaged in class and school.

Summary

When discussing a lack of engagement of ENL students in their classes and schools, there are a multitude of factors that need to be incorporated into the conversation. First, to be truly engaged is to share information in class, connect the information with one's own experiences and contribute to the discussion. Students will feel more comfortable doing this when teachers go out of their way to incorporate student interests in the lesson as well as establish positive rapport with each student (Sunha et al., 2015).

ENL students face more challenges outside of school that affect their engagement in school. First, many ENLs attend low-income school districts, which have trouble receiving funding and serve families where the parents are disproportionately laid off or unemployed. Many families rely on schools for meals and lack the proper supplies and resources to send their children to school ready to engage in class (Lambert et al., 2018). This prevents ENL students from engaging because they are worried about their families and financial struggles. ENLs also have added school challenges such as a lack of literacy in their first language, a lack of experience in school and family who are unable to be involved in their educational experiences. All of these factors contribute to why ENL students may not be engaged in the classes they are in. Anxiety related to tests and performance in school can also result in students disengaging from class (Aydin et al., 2017).

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the purpose of the professional development seminar, and specific ways teachers can identify a lack of engagement as well as boost engagement in their

classes. This professional development seminar will be a two day opportunity. The first day will be a PowerPoint presentation to bilingual and ENL teachers about the importance of both family involvement and the incorporation of culture into the classroom (Kambouri et al., 2022; Chou, 2011). The second day will be a culture night which allows parents to come to the school and share about their culture, which will result in a united and strengthen ENL community. This professional development opportunity will address the issue of engagement of ENL students in schools.

Chapter 3: Description of Tools and Products

Research in Chapter 2 has revealed many ENL students are not engaged in their classes or school environment due to a variety of reasons. These reasons include issues within themselves such as anxiety, family issues such as poverty, and school issues such as a lack of resources (Aydin et al., 2017; Golden et al., 2014). These issues transcend into a lack of engagement such as refusal to participate, low assessment scores and even potentially dropping out of school (Sunah et al., 2015). In this Chapter, 3 I will elaborate on a professional development opportunity to improve the engagement levels of ENLs through a two-day professional development seminar for teachers at Canandaigua Academy High School which includes a PowerPoint Presentation on day 1 and a Culture Night event on day 2. The goal of this event is to involve families in their children's' learning, strengthen connections between students, teachers and parents, provide students with the opportunity to discuss and teach others about their cultures and form a sense of community among ENL students and their families.

Agenda of Events

The first day will be a professional development opportunity for bilingual and ENL teachers through the use of a PowerPoint Presentation (See Appendix A). The PowerPoint Presentation will cover the importance of fostering relationships between parents and teachers and the importance of providing students the opportunity to share information about their native languages and culture. Formulating and maintaining relationships between parents and teachers is essential for student success. Strong parent and teacher relationships have a positive effect on both the social skills and emotional health of the student (Kambouri et al., 2022). Strong relationships also help when a student is struggling. To Kambouri et al. (2022), when a school is

debating placing a child into special needs courses they tend to ignore the opinion of parents and focus on school protocol only.

This may result in children being misplaced or not receiving services they need. Many teachers provide parents with limited opportunities to be involved which center around responsibilities at home such as helping with homework and signing contracts (Arapi & Hamel, 2021). In their study, Arapi and Hamel (2021) demonstrated how parents prefer teachers to reach out immediately when there is a problem in order to solve it together. Not doing this may result in problems continuing or growing which will decrease student engagement. Providing students with the opportunity to share about their native languages and culture is an important component of increasing student engagement. Sharing about culture provides background knowledge for the other students, which increases and strengthens comprehension of the material (Chou, 2011). Students who learn about their own cultures in the classroom that are not the dominant culture show more academic progress and emotional growth (Beghin, 2022).

The Culture Night event will take place at Canandaigua Academy High School on Friday, September 29th. The event will take place in the gym. It is preferable to have the event at the beginning of the school year to allow the relationships formed between teachers, parents and students to cultivate and continue to grow throughout the year. Canandaigua New York has a population of 26,581 people with an immigrant population of 3.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The Culture Night will be 7-9 pm, which is a little later than most events to give working parents time to arrive. The gym was chosen as the most optimal location due to several reasons: the gym is spacious for students and their families; eating is permitted in the gym, and the parking lot is located right outside of the gym. It will be around two hours to allow for several activities. First, the ENL teachers will introduce themselves, talk a little about themselves and outline the

program. Next, parents were asked to bring in traditional dishes from their home countries to share with everyone. Each dish is labeled with the name, where it originates from, and the ingredients. Families will go around and try new foods from around the world. Lastly, students will create and color an All About Me poster with their families. Several forms of assistance will be provided to families to help make sure they are able to attend.

The first support that will be provided is transportation. Immigrants utilize public transportation more than non-immigrants, and their use of public transportation decreases after living in the United States for 10 years (Kim, 2009). Parents will be sent a paper survey in the mail before the event asking if they are able to arrive at the school on that day and time, and parents who list transportation as being an issue will be picked up by bus (See Appendix B). There will be several buses who pick up families from three of the different towns that the school serves.

The second support that will be provided is food ingredients and cooking supplies. Many immigrants, especially in developed countries, are considered a disproportionate percentage of the poor population (Eugster, 2018; Kazemipu, & Halli, 2001). Therefore, families may want to bring food to the event but are unable to afford groceries to cook for a large number of people. Therefore, a list will be sent home with the letter explaining the event to sign up for certain ingredients that parents will need delivered to their homes to make the dishes they will bring (See Appendix C).

Policies and Practices

Day 1- Presentation

The first part of the professional development seminar will be a PowerPoint presentation to bilingual and ENL teachers regarding the importance of family connections and students'

cultural information in lessons. The presentation will be delivered at Canandaigua Academy High School on Thursday, September 28th at 7:00 pm (See Appendix A). This presentation will begin by outlining the importance of parents being involved in their children's education. The presentation will be divided into three parts.

During the first part, teachers will receive information in a PowerPoint presentation regarding the current problems faced by ENL students (See Appendix A). The second part will be a group activity. Teachers will be divided into groups in order to have the opportunity to chat with their coworkers they may not usually have time to converse with. Each group will take the time to share their current observations of problems faced by ENL students and share any solutions they have used in their classrooms. Groups will come back and some solutions to the problems will be given. Lastly, a video will be shown to the teachers outlining some potential solutions for these issues faced.

Language Barrier

Providing opportunities to directly engage parents is important because they face a language barrier which can impede their comprehension of school letters sent home, assignments and notices, and this barrier is made even stronger for parents emigrating from Latin America (Crosnoe & Ansari, 2015). One way to form the connection with parents is to send notices home in their native languages or to hire an interpreter for the district. Another way to ensure parents feel included is to hire more bilingual staff.

Rapport

Another aspect highlighted in the PowerPoint is the importance of teachers and parents establishing a close relationship in order for students to succeed. Specifically, for immigrant students, a negative relationship was found between parents who are very involved and drug and

alcohol abuse (Walsh et al., 2010). Having parents involved in school activities can keep students from engaging in these behaviors. Crosnoe and Ansari (2015) highlighted how student learning is enhanced when the parents and teachers are working together and encouraging each other's ideals and routines. Therefore, students will be more engaged in class if they have parents who are active members of the school community.

Students' Background Information

A third aspect that will be covered in the PowerPoint is the importance of providing students with the opportunity to share background information about their own cultures in the classroom. It is important that bilingual and ENL teachers provide students with culturally diverse material when selecting readings and videos for class. When students have background information about the topic beforehand, they are more likely to retain the information and perform better in class (Chou, 2011). Teachers should provide students with opportunities to share about their native languages and culture during class time and show the students that it is valuable.

The last component of the presentation will be information about the Culture Night. This component will cover how the Culture Night, which is the second day of the two-day professional development opportunity, will incorporate those previously mentioned aspects that are so important for ENL families. The Culture Night provides families and students the opportunity to share about their culture by encouraging them to bring in a dish with the name of it as well as the ingredients list.

Teachers will also receive their expectations for the night. Each teacher will be assigned to a different table so this way they can really get to know the families and have deeper and more meaningful interactions with them. Following dinner will be an All About Me Activity where

students will fill in information about themselves and their families to share with the other students, families and teachers. They will be able to color in this poster as well.

Day 2- Culture Night

After the presentation on Thursday, teachers will prepare for the Culture Night the following day. Families will go to the high school for the event on Friday, September 29th for all ENL students across the district. This includes ages k-12. The event will be held from 7-9 pm. There will be three different activities during the Culture Night at the school.

Introduction

To begin the evening, teachers will introduce themselves and share a little bit about themselves as well as the program. Teachers will then have the students and parents go around and share their names as well. Students, parents and teachers are all grouped at different tables based on the students' ages. This way, students can interact with other students in their grade or around their age. Teachers are seated with the parents to establish a strong rapport and connection throughout the evening. Teachers and parents having a strong relationship allows children to thrive in their academics and improve their school performance (Kambouri et al., 2022). There will be several ice breakers asked at each table to continue conversation and allow people to begin to open up.

Food

After the introduction, dinner will be served. Parents were asked to bring in a cultural dish and write the name as well as the ingredients on it. This is because people will be going around the gym and trying new foods, and it would be beneficial to learn the names of new foods and what they contain. After they get food, parents, teachers and students will all sit at their

tables and eat together. Beghin (2022) elaborates on how including culture in children's education is beneficial for their academic, social and emotional growth.

All About Me

The last activity will be an All About Me activity (See Appendix D). This will have students and their families answer questions related to what they like to do, where they are from, what languages they speak, what their favorite foods are, if they have any pets and any other questions to further connection among the school community. Students will also be given supplies to color in these sheets. After, teachers will collect them in order to read about their students.

Summary

The purpose of this two-day professional development seminar is to provide bilingual and ENL teachers with opportunities to improve their relationships with students, because improving relationships with students results in students who are more engaged (Sunha et al., 2015). The first day of the seminar provides ENL and bilingual teachers with a seminar on the importance of parent-teacher relationships (Arapi & Hamel, 2021), importance of the students' cultures in the classroom (Beghin, 2022), and their roles in the Culture Night. The Culture Night is the culminating activity that puts to practice the skills and information taught in the presentation (see Appendix A). The Culture Night will begin with introductions, continue with food and end with an All About Me activity for students. By completing this professional development opportunity, teachers will be able to engage their ENL students further.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This project has explored the engagement of ELLs in their classes and school environments. To better understand engagement in the classroom, this project was guided by Stephen Krashen's (1978) affective filter and monitor hypotheses and Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development. According to these theoretical concepts, students with higher self-confidence and reduced anxiety are more inclined to acquire a second language successfully.

Research has shown that ELLs are prone to experiencing disconnection with teachers and feelings of isolation within the school environment, resulting in reduced involvement and academic (e.g., Ismail, 2022; Sunha et al, 2015). These challenges served as motivation to investigate ways of supporting students and enhancing their engagement, ultimately leading to improved academic performance. In this Chapter, I first summarize the major findings of this project. Next, I discuss implications based on these findings, and conclude recommendations for future questions.

Summary

The existing literature has highlighted the insufficient involvement of ELLs and its consequences such as lower low academic performance and drop-out rates among students (e.g., Sunha et al, 2015) and emotional difficulties (Weaver et al., 2018). Research has also shown many ELLs experience poverty, which can impact their level of school engagement (Motti et al., 2015). Additionally, many students living in poverty attend schools that suffer from understaffing (McKillip & Farrie, 2020). Moreover, students who heavily rely on school services may face disadvantages during times of crisis, such as the pandemic (Uro et al., 2022).

In response to the challenges outlined above, schools have various options to address the lack of engagement among ENL students. They should consider the services provided for

families, tutoring and support programs, and the relationships fostered between teachers and students. Encouraging family involvement in the learning and education of ENL students is also vital. By implementing meaningful and positive changes to enhance engagement and creating a supportive environment, schools can effectively support the success of their ENL learners

Studies yield several important findings relevant to addressing the levels of engagement among ENL students. Firstly, a lack of physical activity during lessons or classes contributes to lower engagement levels (Weaver et al., 2018). Prolonged periods of sitting without sufficient movement can be a factor in reduced engagement. Secondly, ENL students demonstrate higher engagement when their teachers incorporate their interests and hobbies into lessons (Nguyen et al., 2018). When lessons align with students' interests, their engagement is more likely to be sustained. Additionally, anxiety can increase among students due to exams and parental pressure, leading to a decreased ability to absorb content (Ismail et al., 2022; Krashen, 1978; Kültür, Y. Z., & Özcan, B, 2022).

Additionally, the impact of poverty in the areas where ENL students reside can affect school staffing, resulting in teacher shortages and potentially challenging classroom environments that hinder student engagement (McKillip & Farrie, 2020). Larger class sizes can lead to a lack of personal connection between teachers and students, which is crucial for full engagement (Nguyen et al., 2018). Lastly, students facing poverty-related concerns, such as access to food and housing, may encounter difficulties engaging in their school classes (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2014).

Implications

This project offers valuable implications for teaching, especially for ENL and bilingual teachers to consider in the future. There are numerous strategies that can help alleviate the challenges faced by ENL students in their school experiences. First, teachers can minimize anxiety and enhance engagement among ENL students by building strong rapport and fostering warm relationships to create a comfortable learning environment. Integrating student interests, such as sports, music, or other activities they enjoy, can significantly increase student engagement (Nguyen et al., 2018). For example, at Canandaigua Academy school, teachers participate in Culture Night and the All About Me Activity to get to know their students better (Appendices A and D). Additionally, incorporating aspects of the students' cultures and native languages into the classroom can make them feel valued and engaged (Beghin, 2022), which can be done through articles, videos, or culture nights (Appendix A).

Furthermore, teachers and schools can support family involvement by providing translation services for parents who may need them to communicate with the school (Crosnoe & Ansari, 2015). This involvement allows for reinforcement of ideas at home and valuable input from families and parents regarding their students (Nguyen et al., 2018). To facilitate family engagement, schools can use various communication methods such as google forms, emails, weekly letters, phone calls, or home visits. Additionally, providing transportation for families who face difficulties in bringing their children to school events due to work or transportation issues (Appendix B) and offering donations to families in need can help minimize barriers to attending school events (Appendix C). These strategies can play a crucial role in supporting and engaging ENL students and fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment.

All teachers, especially ENL and bilingual teachers, will benefit from this seminar. Teachers will learn about the effects anxiety can have on learning a new language, as well as way to mitigate and reduce it. Teachers will learn specific ways to incorporate students' cultures and families into the classroom and make students feel valued. Lastly, teachers will be able to put these ideas into practice at a culture night held at the school, where they will be sitting with families and students and interacting with them as they eat meals cooked by the families. This will allow for ENL and bilingual teachers to connect with the students and families they will have during the school year, which is why a culture night in September is a great time to have one.

Recommendations for Future Research

The professional development seminar holds significant value for Canandaigua Academy, Bilingual, and ENL research. Several ideas for future research on this topic come to mind. Firstly, conducting surveys among the community and parents to gather their input on activities they would like to see during the culture night can enhance the event's appeal and align it with their interests. This will also provide valuable insights for teachers regarding students' and families' preferences. Further research can also explore additional activities that foster relationships between families, parents, and teachers during culture night. Teachers can then gather feedback from the community through surveys to identify the most preferred activities.

Additionally, conducting research on alternative locations for holding culture night, such as restaurants or venues with ample space and food offerings, can reduce pressure on parents to cook and prepare dishes. Exploring different activities, such as museum visits or art shows, can also add variety to the event. Schools can also investigate further ways to engage ENL families beyond culture night. Scheduling home visits, arranging parent-teacher conferences, and

introducing regular check-ins can strengthen the connection between teachers, students, and families even after the event concludes.

Final Thoughts

The engagement of ENL students in their classes and school communities is very important for all students. The engagement of ENL students is affected by their socioeconomic status, rapport with teachers, involvement of family, and interest in the content area taught in lessons. Teachers can further engage students by finding new ways to involve their parents as well as topics of interest to them. Programs such as the Culture Night at Canandaigua Academy allow students, teachers and parents to all share experiences together.

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Appendix A

Professional Development Presentation

Appendix B

Parent Letter

Culture Night

Canandaigua Academy School Gymnasium

Friday, September 29th, 7-9p.m.

435 East Street, Canandaigua N.Y.

Please mark the box for one of the following statements:

I am coming and I have my own transportation.

I am coming, but I need bus transportation including pick up and drop off to and from my house.

I cannot come, regardless of transportation.

Please have your child hand in this survey by placing it in the box in the Main Office labelled

Culture Night Transportation.

Thank you!

Appendix C

Food letter

Culture Night

Canandaigua Academy School Gymnasium

Friday, September 29th, 7-9p.m.

435 East Street, Canandaigua N.Y.

Dear Parents & Guardians,

We are so happy you are attending our Culture Night on Friday, September 29th. Each family is encouraged to bring a dish to share for dinner representing their culture or home countries. If there are any ingredients you would like to sign up for at no cost, please indicate them below.

You may sign up for 3 free ingredients. Your child will pick them up at school from their teacher.

Thank you,

Canandaigua ENL & Bilingual Teachers

Ingredients:

1 .

2.

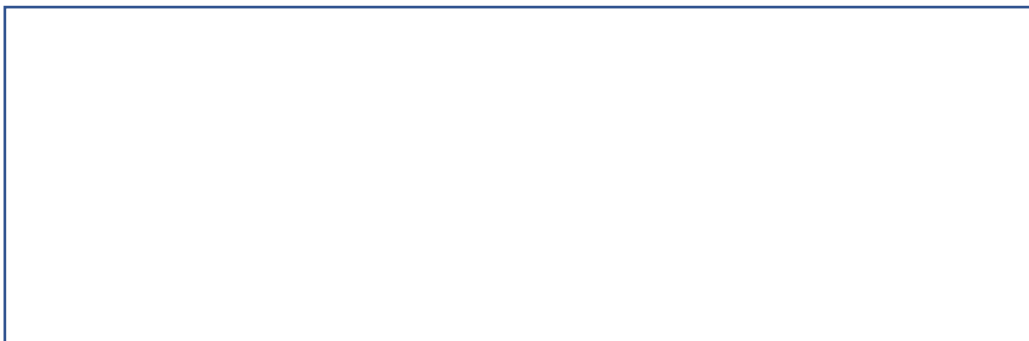
3.

Appendix D

All About Me Activity

All About me

I speak _____ at home with my family!



(Draw a photo of the flag representing the country you come from)

Three things I like to do are:

1.

2.

3.

Favorite Food: (Draw below)

Here is my family:

(Draw your family and label their names!)

