

Misidentifying ELLs and How to Best Place them

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Abstract

This project aims to address two main questions: 1) what is the most effective educational setting for English Language Learners (ELLs)? and 2) How can schools ensure appropriate placement for these students? ELLs face daily challenges in their personal lives, which should not persist when they enter the school environment. Misplacement of students often occurs due to insufficient funding resulting in limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of cultural understanding from parents. If schools could better support their ELLs, they would be better placed and have a higher chance of academic success. This project explores different proficiency levels under which ELLs are categorized, the various academic settings used in U.S. schools, and strategies for teachers to effectively place ELLs. Factors such as the students' literacy skills in their native language and parental input will be considered in the placement process. In this project, a professional development program is proposed to enhance teachers' understanding of ELLs' accurate placement, encourage collaboration among educators, and create a welcoming and engaging school environment for ELLs and their families.

Keywords: English Language Learners, misplacement, proficiency level, entering, emerging, transitioning, expanding, commanding,

Chapter 1: Introduction

English Language Learners, (ELLs) are an ever-growing population in United States schools. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (2023), in the Fall of 2020, there were approximately 10% or 5.0 million English Language Learners (ELLs) in U.S. public schools, with the highest concentration of ELLs found in more urbanized areas compared to rural areas. Historically, urban areas are less funded therefore leaving gaps in students' education and proper placement (Boterman et al., 2019)

While schools are becoming more diverse each year, seeing through the eyes of being a student in a diverse school district and then growing up to teach in that same district, I realized that not all students are placed in the correct academic setting for their needs. Growing up with classmates that had just moved to the United States from El Salvador, Haiti, Ecuador, and other countries, I had always wondered what, and how it would feel to move to a new country and not know many basic phrases, let alone words. These classmates of mine would be introduced and then sit in silence for the first week or so before the English as a New Language teacher, (ENL) teacher, could find a time to meet and figure out when in her schedule she can meet with these new students. It was not until I went away to college to become a teacher, that I realized how unfair this process was not only for the student but the child's generalized teacher and the parents of the student.

As a young student, I looked up to my teachers, they were the heroes, the ones that could solve any problem and always had an answer to my questions. Looking back, those teachers, who were not certified to teach ELLs had to improvise and find additional time in their day to support the students who did not speak English all the while, keeping the classroom moving. In fact, these classroom teachers would do anything for the students in their class and would make

this unknown environment home for the new student. Making a new environment home for a child would not solve the problem though. Those students needed a teacher who could best support them in a way that worked best for the child. However, many students were misplaced because there were inadequate resources to support them.

Students who enter school whether it be at the elementary level or high school level when coming from a new country, are often not placed in the correct setting (Whiting, 2017). They are placed in a lower-level class or not provided with the necessary attention to gain more language skills and confidence. When students are placed inaccurately, their schooling experience will change, they may become disengaged, fall behind, and therefore face additional struggles (Lopez, 2010). The problem of students being misplaced is due to sparse funding which leads to the lack of resources (Allegretto et al., 2022), limited training from teachers (Newcomer et al., 2020), and even the disconnect due to the cultural understanding from parents. If schools knew the best way to support their ELs, they would be more accurately placed and lead them to have a higher chance of success. Some solutions to the misidentification of ELLs include providing more adequate resources such as teacher training, parental involvement, and hiring certified TESOL teachers. In this paper, I aim to answer the following questions: 1) What is the most effective educational setting for English Language Learners (ELLs)? and 2) How can schools ensure appropriate placement for these students?

In Chapter 2, I delve into the existing literature concerning the issue of ELLs being misplaced, highlighting the problems and challenges associated with inaccurate placement of ELLs in educational settings. Chapter 3 describes a professional development plan that aims to get the school district and community involved and on the same page with one another about the different placements for students, and how to succeed in placing students accurately.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This Chapter reviews the literature that explores English Language Learners' (ELLs) placement and identification. In this Chapter, I first explain Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model, Halliday and Hasan's (1985) Functional view of Language, and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. These theoretical constructs offer insights for educators to develop more effective instructional practices, curricula, and support systems, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes of ELLs in diverse learning environments. Next, I discuss the different academic settings in schools, how teachers can best place students, and other topics that affect ENL students' age.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of Cummins' (1981) Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model, Halliday and Hasan's (1985) functional model of Language, and Vygotsky's (1978) learner's zone of proximal development helps identify and analyze factors that influence placement decisions for ELLs. According to Cummins, learners have a common underlying proficiency that encompasses cognitive and academic skills that can be transferred between L1 and L2, meanwhile underscoring the interdependence between a learner's L1 and L2 development. This development is viewed through ideas of different types of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). While BICS relates to social language skills necessary for conversations and communication. CALP can refer to the language skills students need for academic and cognitive tasks. These types work together to impact academic success and cognitive development for ELLs.

Like CUP, Halliday and Hasan's (1985) functional model of language explains the interaction between language and cognitive development. It emphasizes communicative functions of language, especially as they pertain to social contexts and purposes beyond basic mechanics of grammar. According to Halliday and Hasan, language serves three major functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational function is how information, ideas, and experiences are communicated. Interpersonal Function pertains to how language is utilized to build relationships with others. Textual function pertains to how language is organized and structured. Halliday and Hasan (1985) argue that language must be studied with both social and contextual ideas in mind. They cannot be separated from each other. In essence, understanding this theory can help ENL teachers determine if a student is ready for integration within a mainstream classroom or needs one-on-one or group support. Students who have both strong interpersonal function and ideational function could succeed in a mainstream classroom.

Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, or Zone of Proximal Development, recognize the importance of social and contextual factors in language development and learning. Vygotsky's ZPD refers to the gap between a learner's current ability and their potential level of development. This potential can be achieved with the assistance of another, who has more knowledge in the language through scaffolding and other guidance. This could be a classmate who has higher proficiency or an ENL or bilingual teacher who has knowledge and can provide guidance to the student to assist them in their growth. Vygotsky asserts that social interaction and engaging with more knowledgeable peers or teachers is crucial in facilitating learning and cognitive development.

Overall, these three theories provide a foundation for many of the ELL settings implemented in classrooms across the globe, especially in placement settings. For example,

using more knowledgeable peers can help a student develop more interpersonal relationships and improve the mechanical function of both languages as they grow, but especially the target language, which are important in the L2 functioning of Cummins' (1981) CUP, and Halliday and Hansan's (1985) interpersonal functioning. Guidance on mechanics through scaffolding through ENL teachers can help develop the target language needed while understanding academic contexts needed for them to succeed in school. The more knowledgeable an ENL peer, the more they can place in settings where they help others learn and more mainstream classrooms. If a student requires more guidance, they can be placed in settings where they have more guidance and scaffolding from others until they develop.

Placing ELLs in Academic Settings

Before getting into how students can be placed appropriately, it is important to understand the different settings for students to learn in as well as the different proficiency levels they can be classified under, which will be discussed later in this Chapter. This section will focus on the different placements for ELL students. In the education system, each student needs different support and resources to be successful. Even the students whose "learning comes naturally" require support, interventions, and strategies to ensure their success (Baker & Wright, 2021). ELLs are no different than these students in our system that they also require supports, interventions, and strategies shaped to the challenges they face in not only being a student in an educational institution, but being a student who is learning a language that is not their mother tongue. Finding the best learning environment will help them be successful.

Below, I discuss three settings for ELL placement: immersion vs. non-immersion, bilingual programs, and pull-in and pull-out. These three settings allow for the most optimal placement and support for ELLs. Also known as “dual language,” “two-way immersion” or “two-way bilingual immersion;” immersion vs. non-immersion programs generally involve a native English-speaking group, and a non-English speaking group are both taught academic content in both languages for an extended period (NYC Public Schools, 2023). The premise behind this setting is that both groups can develop academic proficiency in both languages, while learning appreciation for the other’s culture.

Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) note that it as “the program provides an atmosphere that allows students to acquire a second language and learn about another culture without sacrificing their individual identities,” which can be mutually beneficial to both groups of students. A non-immersion program would be the opposite of an immersion program, where students would not be using both languages to learn. This would imply they only are surrounded by and focus on one language in their learning environment, usually the target language. This is sometimes referred to as “mainstreaming” or a “submersive” program (Baker, 2011).

There is controversy regarding which method is more beneficial. For example, Reljić et al. (2014) note that the nature of these types of programs be tied to the issues of nationalism, immigration, and the politics of multilingualism which can have negative consequences. Other research indicates that there is not an empirical difference between immersion and non-immersion programs (e.g., Simonis et al., 2023). Other research indicates that dual-language models tend to have more academic benefits for ELLs. In their study of the language proficiency and achievement outcomes of 732 Grade 4 to Grade 8 Latino students enrolled in a dual language program who varied by language proficiency, Lindholm-Leary and Hernández (2011)

showed that the Latino student groups in the immersion program achieved at higher levels than their peers in English mainstream. The study also found that fluent English Proficient who were previous ELLs are the most Spanish proficient and bilingual, and achieve at higher levels in English and Spanish, and that this could close the achievement gap with native English speakers in English mainstream programs.

Similarly, Figueroa Murphy's (2014) study found academic benefits to dual language programs. Figueroa Murphy (2014) analyzed "transitional bilingual" and "dual language" educational models on proficiency in ELL students' home language (Spanish) in the first and second grades in a large urban elementary school found that both models produced significant increases in multiple dimensions of Spanish proficiency (alphabet/sight words, reading, writing, listening, and verbal expression); however, second-grade students in dual-language classrooms scored significantly higher in verbal expression skills.

These findings are supported by Watzinger-Tharpa et al. (2016) who investigated achievement in math of two samples of third and fourth grade dual language immersion students from one-way programs in three languages (Chinese, French and Spanish) and two-way Spanish-English programs. This study concluded that ELLs in dual language programs had success in mathematics. More recent research continues to support beneficial results of dual language programs, including Young-Choi, Van Pay and Beecher, (2023) study that found in this study that "balanced bilinguals," or students who were exposed to English and Spanish settings equally, showed the highest level of achievement over students who were exposed to one language more dominantly.

Bilingual Programs

Bilingual programs, also known as “transitional language programs,” are a different than dual language programs in that as opposed to dual language programs where approximately half of the students who know one language (i.e.: English) learning the other (i.e.: Spanish), and the other half of the class may be the opposite (I.e.: a native Spanish speaker learning English) simultaneously to promote proficiency in both languages; in bilingual programs the teachers in a bilingual program are required to speak in English, as well as the non-English language. The students will be initially taught in both languages, but as time progresses, their teachers will slowly phase out the non-English language and teach only in English. In the United States, this generally involves Spanish to English (Morris Grooms, 2011). Traditionally, these programs can be described as initiatives that aim to "enhance students' language and literacy skills, facilitate academic success, and foster sociocultural integration (Baker & Wright, 2021).

Similarly, to the research on immersion and non-immersion programs, the literature has mixed conclusions on the impact of bilingual programs on desired student outcomes and remains controversial. For example, Institute for the Study of Labor, or IZA, (2015), found that when using the native language during instruction, there was higher levels of academic attainment as students were able to help students with limited proficiency keep up with their fully proficient peers as they still learned the language and that bilingual programs support cultural inclusion and diversity. However, this study also found that by reducing exposure to English can be problematic in that bilingual education may slow the acquisition of English language skills and have social and academic consequences. This study also notes a theme that becomes recurrent in the literature, that shortages of bilingual education teachers can make it challenging to implement bilingual education programs as intended with quality needed for them to be successful.

In contrast, a foundational study done by Rossell and Baker (1996) concluded that transitional bilingual education is no better than structured immersion programs in developing English language skills. This study led to further studies, such as Umansky and Reardon, (2014) who found over a 12-year period, concurred with other findings as it takes students many years to be reclassified as a mainstream fluent English student. Additionally, they found that students tend to be reclassified the most towards the end of an academic period, for example, end of elementary school, end of middle school, or 11th grade, with 5th grade (entry into middle school) being the highest with a reclassification of 38 percent of students.

In concurrence with Umansky and Reardon (2014), Valentino and Reardon (2015) found in the short term, by second grade, there are substantial differences in the academic performance in ELA and math among ELL students who start with different instructional programs in kindergarten. Unlike previous findings, Valentino and Reardon (2015) found that by seventh grade, students in Dual Language Immersion and Transitional Bilingual programs have much higher ELA scores than those in English Immersion classrooms and that despite the slow growth in elementary school, ELLs in two-language programs catch up or surpass their English immersion peers by middle school.

Push-In and Pull-Out Programs

Another form of ELL strategies involves a “push-in” and “pull-out” model. This strategy, similar to the previously discussed Bilingual program and immersion vs. non-immersion strategies have mixed conclusions that can be derived from literature to determine their effectiveness and when they could be appropriate. "Push-in" and "pull-out" are terms to describe to describe different program models for supporting language development in non-native English speakers in ELL programs. These models are typically implemented in schools to assist ELL

students in acquiring English language skills while also participating in regular, mainstreamed academic instruction.

In a push-in program, support is provided within a mainstream classroom setting entirely (Baecher & Bell, 2017). In this model, an ELL or bilingual teacher collaborates with a classroom teacher to deliver targeted language instruction to ELL students in a co-teacher model. The ELL teacher "pushes in" to the regular classroom, working with individual students or small groups while the rest of the class continues with their regular lessons. This model allows ELL students to receive language support without being pulled out of their core classes (Whiting, 2017).

In a pull-out program, ELL students are temporarily "pulled out" of their regular classrooms to receive focused English language instruction in a separate setting. Typically, ELL students are grouped by proficiency level and receive intensive language instruction in the target language to help students build vocabulary, mechanics, and speaking skills among other aspects of learning a language. After completing their intensive session, the student will return to their mainstream classroom (Baecher & Bell, 2017).

The most common programs in the United States have a combination of both push-in and pull-out. The educators and research point to varying perceptions of success of these programs which by nature, require higher degrees of collaboration and resources (Bell & Walker, 2012; Lehman & Welch, 2022; Whiting, 2017). In their study to investigate if mainstream teacher collaboration with the push-in method, Bell and Walker (2012) found that there were many positive outcomes of collaborations: a sense of community and belonging, creative cross-curricular teaching, purposeful meaningful work for teachers and students where mutual goals were set and accomplished, professional growth on both sides, enhanced lessons promoting academic achievement for ELLs, and mutual ownership of ELLs.

However, collaboration is not always easy. Barriers do exist, and considerations must be made, especially in terms of attitudes between collaborating teachers, and the ELL teacher's caseload. This is a reoccurring theme amongst other studies with this method, such as the Becher and Bell's' (2017) study which questioned the effectiveness and attitudes of push-in and pull-out models of ELL instruction from the perspective of ELL instructors. They found an overall dissatisfaction with the method in teacher attitudes, and in quality and quantity of support being provided to the ELL students. Educators also reported a seemed to lack focus in instruction, and a lack of support from administrative to provide the level of quality they feel they should and feeling like "second-class" teachers.

These sentiments are echoed by Whiting (2017), who also found teachers reporting they feel as second class teachers. He also concluded from his study that the perception towards the teaching conditions outlined in ideals of mainstreaming ELL education were overwhelmingly negative. Educators surveyed in his study also remarked that in the push-in model, can sometimes adversely impact students who are prone to anxiety. Contrary to Becher and Bell (2017), Whiting found some benefits to this method of instruction. The three most perceived benefits for the push-in model were that teachers appreciated the students not missing their mainstream work, having a pulse on the mainstream curriculum, and for some ELL students, experiencing self-confidence boosts.

ENL Proficiency Levels

To understand where a child is at, it is important to know the different proficiency levels a student can be classified under. A common method of placing ENL students is through using the classifications outlined by "World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment," or "WIDA" (2020). There are five proficiency levels. Entering (L1) is the beginning and most basic of the

levels. Emerging (L2), Transitioning (L3), Expanding (L4), and Commanding (L5), the highest of the levels. Each level is determined by how skilled or experienced an individual is in a language. The WIDA framework currently directs 37 states including Washington DC and is increasingly having a Policy presence (Desimone et al., 2019). The premise behind WIDA is to provide a more centralized approach to determining entry points and exit points of a language proficiency program.

The standards framework behind WIDA consists of five components: Can Do Philosophy, Guiding Principles of Language Development, Age-appropriate Academic Language in Sociocultural Contexts, performance definitions, and strands of model performance indicators (WIDA, 2020). These are built on the theoretical foundation of a functional model of language, developed by Halliday and Hasan (1985) and ideas of learner's zone of proximal development by Vygotsky (1978). Using this framework, they created a model of three broad statements which comprise their guiding principles: Language is organized around its communicative purpose; language is used in a communicative context; and Language development occurs over time and depends on many factors (WIDA, 2014).

While the guidance provided by WIDA is a common and valuable method to assess proficiency levels among students, it is important to recognize that it is not a permanent categorization and is primarily intended to monitor students' language acquisition progress. For placement purposes, it serves as a useful tool to identify students who may require additional support. For instance, a student assessed at the L1 level may receive more support and participate in dual language programs throughout the day, whereas an L5-qualified student would be mainstreamed with minimal additional assistance. According to Harsch (2017), proficiency levels indicate the practical application of subject knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios.

Students can be placed in classrooms and or other ENL classes based on the level they test at, to determine which areas they may need more support. Furthermore, the idea of categorizing students and placing students can create issues, as outlined in the next section.

Reasons for Student Misplacement

Placing students in educational programs or levels is a nuanced process that requires careful consideration of various factors. The literature suggests that students who enter school whether it be at the elementary level or high school level when coming from a new country, are often not placed in the correct setting or could require additional support not being provided to them (Whiting, 2017). To Whiting (2017) and Beacher and Bell (2017), many ENL teachers feel as if they receive the level of support necessary to support the teacher collaboration required for effective support. The WIDA model is based on ideas of “renewed commitment to teacher collaboration,” which may not exist in many education systems designed to support ENL students. The centralized approach can also make challenges arise when districts do not operate similarly and do not have standardized programs, despite having standardized frameworks and assessment models (Stornaiuolo, et al., 2019).

Systemic challenges, such as lack of support in districts become even more challenging when noting that not all students learn the same way, which is the premise of the Stornaiuolo et al.’s (2019) study. The study notes that when centralized systems are used to analyze student placement, there can be a bit of a struggle between concepts of centralization and individualization providing challenges to placement and implementing supports. Some students have different attributes that can help them succeed in certain environments, or some students could be facing additional challenges, such as having an undiagnosed learning disability, that could affect the way they learn language and process information. This is where other strategies

and techniques can be useful to be implemented to supplement a student's learning plan and support or where problems in appropriately placing students by proficiency can truly emerge.

There are several reasons for this occurrence that highlight problems in the system. Those reasons include ELLs not having enough advocacy, limited resources and funding from the district (e.g., Baker et al., 2014), limited teacher training (e.g., Stairs-Davenport, 2023), and cultural understanding from parents (Terantino, 2022).

Lack of Advocacy

At a young age, it is difficult for students to advocate for themselves. Imagine being a child and having to move states. Everything you have ever known, your friends, your school, your routine, needs to start over. Now imagine being a child that has to move to a new country. That means not only do you need to make new friends and get a new routine, but also to learn a language you are unfamiliar with or have little experience using daily. It is the first day at your new school. Someone asks you your name and where you are from. You have practiced this, and you are prepared to answer.

But now they ask if you want to play Cops and Robbers at recess. You have no idea what this means so you stare back. You enter the classroom, and your teacher has a big smile and makes you feel welcome. Math is at the beginning of the day, and you can follow along decently. After lunch and recess, it's time to read and write. You have no idea how to in English, so you stick with your native language. The teacher calls you over and looks concerned that it is in a foreign language to her. How are you to tell your teacher you do not know how to read or write in English? This is far too common for many ELLs. They want to please their teacher, to fit in but they are unable to do so.

This narrative is supported by extensive empirical data, especially in the Latino population, who are the most prevalent group of ELLs, making up about 77.7% of all ELL students (Lindsey & Howard, 2013). Statistics show most children in the education system now who are Latino are first-generation or second-generation Americans themselves, and the first to go through the American high school and higher education system (Reyes, 2013). Since they are navigating the system for the first time and no one before they have, young Latino students lack the social capital that can help them navigate complex systems of K-12 and higher education, more so than other ethnic groups. In 2018, 23% of Latino children under age 18 lived in households where no parent had completed high school (PNPI, 2021). The data support the assertion that since many ELLs' parents are often ELLs themselves, this population is more vulnerable in the education system because they may lack the linguistic ability, cultural knowledge, or political capital needed to advocate for their selves and put this population at an immediate disadvantage.

Furthermore, immigrating to the United States can be a traumatic experience for many students. Duran (2019) discusses in detail what students can experience because of immigrating, using Somali refugees as an example. When these refugees came and settled in Minnesota, Police, schools, and educators were reported to have engaged in discriminatory practices against the refugee youth. The observed practices included name calling, racial profiling, and criminalizing, which the students experienced in coalition with their interrupted education, financial hardship, and inadequate issues.

Latino students who are immigrants can also experience trauma. Gordon (2006) outlines some common trends of what children may experience. Children, especially from Central and South America will be separated from their families while a parent immigrates to the United

States, often being left behind with a relative such as a grandparent until the family has the means to bring them to the US. This often results in feelings of abandonment, feelings of silence, difficulty adjusting to a new family, and new language. Additionally, sometimes the experience can be violent for the child, depending on what they face in physical challenges. Undocumented students are at risk for this especially. Although empirical data, these assertions and trends are supported by and discussed briefly in more recent publications (Crosnoe & Ansari, 2015). Gordon also recommends a trauma-informed approach when dealing with immigrant children, which can be important in advocacy.

Not much literature exists on effects of advocacy on the classroom, but Linville's (2016) study does find that educators overwhelmingly deem it important. Classroom based advocacy, school-based advocacy, and community-based advocacy were rated the most important, but the participants supported classroom and school-based advocacy actions more than those in the community beyond the school. The lowest ranking advocacy actions involved policymaking. With this knowledge, the researcher asserts that teacher education programs can have a key role in developing teacher advocacy skills.

Advocacy needs to start before the child arrives. The fact that ELLs' parents are often ELLs themselves also makes this population more vulnerable in the education system because they may lack the linguistic ability, cultural knowledge, or political capital needed for advocacy. Teachers need to make sure that their students have a voice in their education. To do this, students need to feel comfortable speaking with adults in the school building. According to Leal (2022), it is essential for school leaders to prioritize creating an environment where students feel at ease when communicating with them. Since ENL children have a more difficult time speaking up for themselves, it is more difficult for them to vocalize and identify their needs. Thus, it is

crucial for teachers to receive training through their teacher preparation programs or professional development to be able to advocate for their disadvantaged students (Linville, 2020).

Resources and Funding

School districts across the United States can receive disproportionate funding, which can affect students' academic achievement (Ballard & Maiden, 2018; Greene et al., 2007; Ding & Sherman, 2006). This can be problematic for schools that do not have as much funding to support academic achievement, and interventions that could be necessary to ensure students are successful later in their educations.

There are a few factors that influence the funding provided to each school. Baker et al. (2014) break it down into student factors, such as the child poverty rates and a location factor, regional wage variation, economies of scale, and population density, all leading to the state and local revenues per pupil. In 2011, some states averaged \$17,000 per pupil funding while other states such as New Jersey or North Carolina only averaged \$,300 per pupil. How is that enough to support a child's learning? Districts cannot provide certified and qualified teachers, additional support, or even extra-curricular activities on that small of a budget.

The underfunding only puts those already at a disadvantage, such as ELLs or other students with disabilities at an even larger disadvantage. In certain areas, this is improving. For example, New York has recently allocated more funding towards ENL and Bilingual Education through their Teachers of Tomorrow Grant Program, “to assist school districts in the recruitment, retention, and certification activities necessary to increase the supply of qualified teachers in school districts experiencing a teacher shortage, especially low-performing schools” (NY State Department of Education, 2022). This program is allocating \$25,000,000 to assist with

recruitment, training, and school district support including for ENL teachers and Bilingual Education Teachers.

Teacher Training

Not all teachers are trained to be teachers of ELLs officially. In today's world, all teachers will be teachers of ELLs. According to Stairs-Davenport (2023), historically mainstream teachers in the United States have typically received minimal to no training or preparation for instructing ELLs. The lack of proper training for teachers persists as a significant obstacle in effectively supporting ELLs, leading to ongoing academic challenges for these students (Leal, 2022). Educators require specialized professional development to effectively handle the demanding task of addressing content, language, and literacy development simultaneously within an integrated, subject-matter-driven language program (Whiting, 2017). However, the scarcity of qualified teacher educators and immersion specialists capable of delivering relevant and beneficial professional learning experiences further compounds the issue (Baker et al., 2014).

How to Best Place Students

Although there are many issues that can arise when placing students appropriately in ENL and English Proficiency programs other strategies and techniques can be useful to be implemented to supplement a student's learning path and bolster their success. These can include Parental involvement/ conversation, cultural understanding, and screening the student.

Parental Involvement

Erol and Turhan state, "Families have a primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children and need to make contributions at every stage of their child's education" (2018). As children grow up, they look to their elders for guidance and support. Maybe it is a grandparent to learn manners, an older sibling to learn a new sport or skill, a friend but most importantly a

parent or adult they live with. Children want to feel accepted, heard, and valued by their mom or dad. Parental involvement can help students be more engaged and strive to do their best at school (Erol & Turhan, 2018).

It goes beyond showing up for soccer games, the school play, or getting their child off the bus. Parents can easily be physically present, what is needed is for them to be present with the child's homework. Sitting down next to the child, with no other distractions, and helping them complete the work. Asking questions about the school day, remembering their classroom friends' names and the specials they have on each day. Checking in with the child to find out what they are not understanding and the concerns they may be having. Allowing the child to feel comfortable and supported by their adult will only help them exceed. They will know how to ask for help, they will know that they can trust their adult to help them.

It may be easy for some parents to get involved at home, helping with homework, providing healthy and balanced meals, limiting screen time, and fostering unique opportunities for children, but some parents may find it difficult to get involved with the school. Schools and districts need to support and encourage parental involvement. Hosting family events such as bingo night, reading night, picnics, and more allows families to get together at school to bond, make memories, and connect with their children, their child's teacher, and the others that they are with on a daily basis. For those that speak the native language of the school, it is less intimidating and easier to attend these events. Districts and schools need to facilitate nights specific for English Language Learners and their families to feel connected and invited as well. A school can host this same bingo, reading, and picnics, just catering to those who speak another language. Make sure there is enough staff at the events to host, include and engage the parents that may not speak English. The ENL teacher can facilitate, maybe there are parents on the PTA

that speak another language, and even inviting students to translate fosters a healthy and inclusive atmosphere.

Adult education classes are another way for parents to get involved. Edwards et al. (2021) discuss providing classes for parents to be involved in and requiring parents to complete five hours a month. Workshops and classes include health and diet, life skills, literacy, and other topics. Having these classes helps parents stay up to date on the topics students are learning in the classroom. Providing these workshops in English as well as another language will make for a more inclusive school community for parents to be involved in their child's education. Another way to involve parents of different languages is by providing resources they can use to support their children. Teachers can share books in the child's home language to encourage reading together. Additionally, teachers can upload videos and examples of the topics that were covered at home to Google Classroom.

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Parental Involvement

Families bear the primary responsibility for nurturing and raising their children, and they play a vital role in contributing to their child's education at every stage (Erol & Turhan, 2018). As children grow up, they look to their elders for guidance and support. Maybe it is a grandparent to learn manners, an older sibling to learn a new sport or skill, a friend but most importantly a parent or adult they live with. Children want to feel accepted, heard, and valued by

their mom or dad. Parental involvement can help students be more engaged and strive to do their best at school (Terantino, 2022).

It goes beyond showing up for soccer games, the school play, or getting their child off the bus. Parents can easily be physically present, what is needed is for them to be present with the child's homework. Sitting down next to the child, with no other distractions, and helping them complete the work. Asking questions about the school day, remembering their classroom friends' names and the specials they have on each day. Checking in with the child to find out what they are not understanding and the concerns they may be having. Allowing the child to feel comfortable and supported by their adult will only help them exceed. They will know how to ask for help, they will know that they can trust their adult to help them.

It may be easy for some parents to get involved at home, helping with homework, providing healthy and balanced meals, limiting screen time, and fostering unique opportunities for children, but some parents may find it difficult to get involved with the school. Schools and districts need to support and encourage parental involvement. Hosting family events such as bingo night, reading night, picnics, and more allows families to get together at school to bond, make memories, and connect with their children, their child's teacher, and the others that they are with on a daily basis. For those that speak the native language of the school, it is less intimidating and easier to attend these events. Districts and schools need to facilitate nights specific for ELLs and their families to feel connected and invited as well. A school can host this same bingo, reading, and picnics, just catering to those who speak another language. Make sure there is enough staff at the events to host, include and engage the parents that may not speak English. The ENL teacher can facilitate, maybe there are parents on the PTA that speak another language, and even inviting students to translate fosters a healthy and inclusive atmosphere.

Adult education classes are another way for parents to get involved. Edwards et al. (2021) discuss providing classes for parents to be involved in and requiring parents to complete five hours a month. Workshops and classes include health and diet, life skills, literacy, and other topics. Having these classes helps parents stay up to date on the topics students are learning in the classroom. Providing these workshops in English as well as another language will make for a more inclusive school community for parents to be involved in their child's education. Another way to involve parents of different languages is by providing resources they can use to support their children. Teachers can share books in the child's home language to encourage reading together. Additionally, teachers can upload videos and examples of the topics that were covered at home to Google Classroom.

Parental involvement can serve a huge role in better placement for ENL students. According to Terantino (2022), a significant number of Latino parents view education as a valuable asset for their children and express a desire to actively participate in their children's learning journey. Parents know their children better than anyone, especially at a young age when students cannot advocate for themselves. It is critical to have conversations with the parents to learn more about the child's education experience. When a young ELL moves to the US, the new district will need to rely on the parent's input on how their child performed at school in their home country. Were there struggles in the native language? Does the child comprehend what they read, have the basic literacy skills been accomplished in the first language?

Parents may not be able to have these conversations in English but providing them with a translator will allow them to truly vocalize their thoughts. Terantino (2022) states that teachers should provide conversations in the parents' native language. Conversations and invitations to

their child's education and school events can come in the form of emails, flyers, phone calls, or videos. Whichever mode it is, it should be provided in the native language.

Furthermore, there is extensive empirical evidence that supports that Parental involvement in education is beneficial to students. Latino parental involvement seems to be a predictor more so than many other factors identified beyond the effects of teacher and peer support and other demographic factors such as parent education, nativity, and language proficiency in the success of Latinos academically (Alfaro et al., 2006). This indicated that parental involvement in their education and social capital are crucial to their success in their academic pursuits. LeFerve and Shaw's (2011) study concluded that when parents are involved either formally or informally, the data seems to show that parental involvement is beneficial in Latinos, even beyond K-12 education and can be a predictor of academic success even in college. Parental involvement can also help educators have a clearer picture of the student's culture and experiences outside the classroom that can impact their activities and behaviors inside the classroom.

Cultural Understanding

When approaching placing ENL students, it is important to be culturally cognizant. The Census Bureau's 2016 American Community Survey found that 72% of the school-aged ELL's, ages 5-17, were born here in the United States, making the other 28% foreign nationals (2018). That 28% of students may have limited experience with school and literacy. Country to country, state to state, town to town, family to family, everyone has different beliefs and customs. It is crucial to advance children's schooling experience with racially and ethnically diverse content. When a family moves here to the United States, it is more likely than not, going to be an adjustment, especially when it comes to schooling.

Young children will need to make new friends, fit in with the cultural norms of the school and learn the language and lingo. It is essential for schools to partner with all families to create and foster student support systems (Newcomer et al. 2020). It is important to recognize that ELL newcomers and their parents may vary in terms of cultural and linguistic proficiency, which can impact their capacity and willingness to engage actively in their children's education (Han & Love, 2015; Terantino, 2022). Improving the culture of the families of ELLs will benefit the communication that occurs and overall, the students' academic success.

Screening the Student

As always, each student deserves to be understood and supported while at school. Once a child can advocate for themselves, it is important to take into consideration their opinion when placing them in an academic setting. When determining the placement of an ENL student. Consider where they will best learn and absorb the language. Is it being pulled out of the classroom in a small group to get more individualized attention? Is it to immerse them in a dual language program? Screening the child on their abilities is only part of the equation. Understanding where a child feels comfortable will help them be that much more successful. If a child struggles with the anxiety of being pulled out of the classroom in front of their classmates, a pull-out program may not be the best fit for them. Another aspect of screening the student is determining their literacy in their native language (L1) and determining if their academic struggles are due to literacy barriers or other learning difficulties. Kuhn and Albers, (2022) state that differentiating between genuine learning difficulties and the process of second language acquisition can pose particular challenges. This all circles back to learning the child's culture and what their schooling was like when they were back in their home country.

Chapter 3: Description of the Product and the Tools

This Chapter discusses a professional development opportunity to help parents understand their child's ENL services and teachers understand the cultural background that students come from. I propose creating professional development materials such as PowerPoints, flyers, and brochures, to invite families to events such as Open House, Family Game Night, and music concerts. As discussed in Chapter 2, parental involvement can help students be more engaged and strive to do their best at school (e.g., Erol & Turhan, 2018). To help engage families in their child's education, encourage teachers to learn about their student's culture, and break down the levels and programs children can be placed in during their schooling. Through these different professional development and family-targeted outreach, the goal will be to engage families, connect the teachers, and overall support and encourage students to be the best student that they can be.

Each of the products and events is targeted specifically at ELL families while being able to include the entire school and their families. The professional development slides will be targeted at teachers and other staff members on how to best accommodate and include ELLs and their families throughout the school year.

Agenda of Events

Each item within the professional development plays a vital role in getting families engaged and supporting ELLs. The plan will be presented right before the start of the school year. It will take place at Bay Shore High school auditorium where the district office is located. There are 5,843 students enrolled. 30% of those students identify as Hispanic or Latino (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The development will occur over a few hours. The first two hours of the day will consist of ways to get families involved, there will be a lunch break for

individuals to get lunch on their own and absorb the information presented during the first half of the day. When the staff returns from their lunch, the professional development will cover the district's different programs and ways to help best place ELLs for this coming school year. The last hour of the day will include a question-and-answer portion that allows staff to express additional ideas and clarify some of their concerns or questions. By the end of the day, teachers and staff will have a better understanding of how to best place their ELLs, plan events to encourage ELL families to come to the school and engage with their child's education as well as learn more about their student's culture.

Materials and Activities

The professional development will be presented in the form of a Google Slideshow as Google is the Platform that the district uses and therefore making it most accessible to faculty, staff, and family members. The slideshow will include links to the additional flyers and materials for accessibility and edits purposes. Teachers will be utilizing the day to begin brainstorming events that can be hosted throughout the school year. The staff will have time in the afternoon to break up by grade level or content area to create the materials that can be used throughout the year. Incorporating ideas that were discussed earlier in the day as well as new ideas that will benefit their students based on needs. Faculty will be learning how to use the Google platform, such as forms, slides, documents, and other modes based on their needs.

Google Slideshow

The Google Platform allows faculty, students, and parents to stay connected on all devices, making it easily accessible to view information whether at home on the desktop or while parents are at work using their cell phone. During the Professional Development Day, the Google Slideshow (see Appendix A) can be used as the presentation base. Each slide can be broken

down into talking points, important information, and highlight the other, tangible materials that will be discussed. For example, slide one would be the welcome slide, slide two will include the table of contents so the audience will understand the topics that will be discussed. Slide three will include the agenda of events and break down the format of the day.

Slide four includes the first talking point of proficiency levels. World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, of “WIDA” (2020), break down into five levels. Entering (L1), Emerging (L2), Transitioning (L3), Expanding (L4), and Commanding (L5), which will be broken down using the professional development google slides.

The next slide will break down some sample events that the school can host to invite and include ELLs. Events such as back to school night, family game night, and others will be discussed as a group. Following the events slide will be the materials that were created as examples for the professional development to provide the teachers with ideas on how to create materials that cater to all students, but especially ELLs and their families. Next will be the time in the day used for collaborative activities. The teachers will have an opportunity to break up into two separate groups. Part of the day, teachers will be broken up by grade level to create materials that can be used universally for the grade and the other group will include other teachers that work on a different grade level, or content area.

This will help to gain some outside perspective on materials and ideas you have come up with, with your grade level. Using the Google Slideshow will allow the audience of parents and faculty to view the projected screen but also allow individuals the opportunity to open it on their own device and take notes on each slide as well as click on helpful links or materials that are provided within the presentation.

Flyers

It is important to get information out to parents in a quick and effective manner. Parents need to receive the basic information up front and then later have a scheduled time to speak more in-depth about a topic. Parents, of ELLs are working more hours or multiple jobs to support their families. Fathers may have two to three jobs to cover the cost of living with numerous kids where mothers may stay home to care for their children and possibly nieces and nephews. With the stressful work and stay at home environment, it makes having an in-depth conversation more difficult.

Sending home, a flyer with a large font or the keywords and the follow-up steps allows parents to understand what the conversation needs to be and then can help them be prepared and have questions ready when it is time to have the conversation. For example, if a teacher needs to send information about the different proficiency levels, a flyer (see Appendix B) would include bulleted points briefly explaining what each level entails. If parents do not have time to have an in-depth conversation about the different levels and where their child may categorize, sending a PowerPoint with information on each level and other necessary information is a great next step to provide the information. After a parent reviews the slides, they may have specific questions that can be emailed directly to the teacher or can help with a more productive phone conversation.

Another idea is a back-to-school flyer seen in Appendix C. This will highlight key information needed such as the date, time, and location. Parents can hang this on the fridge as a reminder or add it to their Google calendar. The flyer will help to get the word out quickly without overwhelming the parent with an abundance of words on the page. The National

Education Association (2021), suggest using shorter texts or talking points to get the message across and then having an in-depth conversation at a later time if necessary.

Additionally, this flyer should be sent home in the native language of the student's parents to help them feel more included in the event. Parent-teacher conference information can also be sent home as a flyer. This material would include the basics such as dates available, times available, and location. Again, this material should be sent home in the native language, asking additional questions about the preferred language used and if a translator is needed. This material can be found in Appendix D.

Literacy Lists

Parents want to be involved in their child's education. The difficult part is finding out how to be involved. One easy way is for parents to encourage reading at home. O'Brien et al. (2020) suggest that before children go to school, they should be exposed to literacy at home which then prepares them for learning at school. It is important to “acquire foundational skills” and this can be accomplished in the home before attending school at the age of five (2020). This can look different in each home. Some parents may want to read books to their child, others may want their child to read books to them, and some may even opt for “book club” conversations where the parent and child read the same book but separately and then come together to have discussions.

These are easy ways to get families engaged with one another. The trickiest part here is for parents to find books that the child can comprehend or read the language. This is where the teachers need to step in and provide literacy lists for families. As seen in Appendix E. The teachers can send home individualized literacy lists to families based on their child's interests, reading level, native language, and cultural beliefs. Appendix F shows an example of a literacy

list for students that are comprehending at a lower grade level. The next step would be for teachers to have these books in their class library or find them within the school library to send home with a child that way the parents do not need to go out and buy them.

Communication

Another topic of professional development is communication with parents and other important family members. It is important to remember that ELLs are typically watched over by grandparents or older siblings after school. It may be helpful to have their contact information if an urgent matter comes up while the child is under their care. Utilizing the Google Platform provided by the district is a great way to communicate with families. Whether it be by scheduling phone calls or meetings on google calendar or sending out Google Forms to gather more information to keep track of each family's preferences. At the beginning of the year, before students come into the classroom on the first day, teachers can send out a Google form with a list of questions to learn about each family's style and preferences. These questions can be about parents' preferred language at home and persons who will be picking up the child to and from school.

This list serves as a resource that teachers can refer back to throughout the year when needed. These questions should be sent out with both languages available and directions for parents to complete, making it a more inclusive resource right off the bat. If a teacher is not successful with communicating with a parent via email, letters or other written mail sent home, it is the teachers responsibility to get on the phone with a translator available and speak with the parent. Parents want to be involved in their child's learning but their literacy skills may also be weak, causing them not to respond in a written form (Dunn Shiffman, 2019). An example of a Google form can be found in Appendix G. In addition to sending parents a form, teachers can

send something similar to students to learn more about them before the start of the year. ELLs may come in on the first day of school with some anxiety and concerns, especially if their English is not strong. Finding out about these worries earlier on will help prepare teachers to support them the minute they walk into the classroom.

Closing Activity

Before the end of the professional development day, teachers will break into groups of people they have not worked with during the day. A presentation panel will be conducted. When broken into groups, teachers will be presenting to their group members the materials they created using the Google Platform. Discussing the ways, it is inclusive to the ELLs and their families, how it will positively impact their students, and why they think it is important they included the information they did on the material. Those in the group will ask questions, provide feedback and suggest ways they can make the material better or more inclusive.

Summary

The products that are used during the professional development day will motivate teachers to be more inclusive with their students' families. It is known that parents want to be involved in their child's learning process (Terantino, 2022) and the professional development is one way for teachers to better their understanding and efforts to involve and include ELLs and their families. The day provided them time to begin brainstorming and creating these useful materials that way they do not need to spend as much time on them once the school year has begun. Teachers have the opportunity to plan out their year and the events that they want to host.

With that in mind, they can have their flyers and other materials ready to go. Creating their Open House materials prepares teachers to be inclusive and encourage and engage all of their families, no matter their background in attending the event and feeling included. As stated

in chapter two, parents need to contribute to all aspects of their child's learning, this can include attending school events (Erol & Turhan, 2018).

The intended outcome of hosting professional development for faculty is important for a number of reasons. The first and most important is making sure everyone is on the same page and has a sufficient understanding of programs, services, and how to help the student be most successful. Next, it will help parents become more involved in the school community and their child's education. Overall, providing faculty and teachers with professional development is important for their personal growth but just as importantly, the school and district's growth. Every school should strive to be the most inclusive and up-to-date school in their area. The professional development provides a place for teachers to learn more about their community, the families that reside there and fosters relationships with individuals that you may not otherwise get to see based on the building, grade, or content area you specialize in.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Nowadays, schools exhibit a remarkable diversity with students with distinct academic histories, requirements, and native languages. However, many of these students face inappropriately placement within the educational system. This project has highlighted this issue and ways in which school districts can effectively address it. In this Chapter, I first summarize the major findings of this project. Next, I conclude with implications and recommendation.

Summary of the Findings

The literature has shown that there is no one right model for an ELL to travel through during their learning. If a student comes to a district at an entering level for their L2, they will need as much support and resources from teachers as possible. This might look like a dual language classroom where they can be comfortable using their L1 while beginning the process of learning English. As time goes on, their literacy and social skills will evolve. They may move from a dual language classroom to a push in model where there is a time during the day that the ENL teacher supports them later they may push out for only one period of the day. Each EL is unique and their academic path needs to match their current literacy skills. In addition, young children face the challenge of building new friendships, adapting to the cultural norms of their school, and learning the language and jargon. Consequently, it becomes crucial for schools to collaborate with all families in establishing and nurturing student support systems (Newcomer et al., 2020; Terantino, 2022).

Implications for Teaching

The purpose of this paper was to address the issue of the misplacement of ELLs and how to best place them moving forward. The learning needs to mostly be done with faculty and staff.

It is imperative that teachers, no matter their content area, can accommodate and advocate for all students, especially ELLs.

The professional development is beneficial for teachers, both general education and ENL teachers for several reasons. Coming together as a school or districts helps motivate teachers and staff as well as create a community for everyone to support one another. With most teachers not having the necessary background to teach ELLs efficiently, the professional development allows the general education teachers to speak up about their concerns, ask questions and build a relationship with the ENL and other certified EL teachers in the building. It helps everyone to understand that what they are going through is normal and happening across the United States.

The day allows teachers to gain valuable information that they can then put in place within their classroom. Teachers need to understand how to best support and teach their ELLs for the ELLs to be comfortable and willing to learn a new language and content. Learning about different cultures and how each is so different, opens teachers minds up and allows them to see each of their ELLs as an individual, not grouped under the title EL. Understanding different cultures will allow teachers to best approach and recognize the differences between languages and learning skills from each child.

Implications for Parents

Being involved in your child's life is vitally important for their success. Parents need to do more than asking how their child's day at school was or if they finished their homework. Parents should know their child's friends at school, what activities they have each day understanding the attendance policy and the events that the school is hosting and attending the events is what children need. They need their adults to be present, to show up and be active in

their life. The flyers will help include parents that do not speak English. It will give them the information they need to stay up to date and involved.

Specifically, the proficiency level flyer breaks down the different levels that a child can fall under. I believe this helps parents better grasp how their child is doing with the new language, academically. The Google form allows parents to share information about themselves that can have the teacher best keep them in the loop and engaged with their child's academics. An event that the school hosts is another great way for EL parents to show up and participate, even if they do not speak the language. Translators and other bilingual families can help to include parents that do not speak English.

Recommendation for Further Educations

Hosting a professional development at the beginning of each school year is a steppingstone to supporting teachers, support their students. The professional development will provide resources and collaboration. One way to improve the professional development is to bring in a training program to give some pointers and additional supports to general classroom teachers. Having some outside training will help bring an unbiased view on the students and allow teachers to think outside the box. The professional development can also be broken down into numerous topics throughout the year.

One suggestion would to be host another professional development for teachers toward the end of the first term and allow teachers to reflect on the practices that were discussed before the school year started. Additional topics throughout the year can include how to support reading at home, how to use the native language to support growth, or helping parents understand the New York State Standards. Continuous check ins with teachers and parents will help continue to foster an inclusive environment to best support the children.

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Appendix A

To access the Professional Development Slides, please click [here](#).

To access the recorded Professional Development Slides, please click [here](#).

Appendix B

To access the Proficiency Levels Flyer in English, please click [here](#).

To access the Proficiency Levels Flyer in Spanish, please click [here](#).

Appendix C

To access the Back-to-School flyer in English, please click [here](#).

To access the Back-to-School flyer in Spanish, please click [here](#).

Appendix D

To access the Parent Teacher Conference Flyer, please click [here](#).

Appendix E

To access the Literacy List (grade level), please click [here](#).

Appendix F

To access the Literacy List (below grade level), please click [here](#).

Appendix G

To access the Communication Google Form in English, please click [here](#).

Appendix H

To access the Communication Google Form in Spanish, please click [here](#).