

**Preparing General Education Teachers to Support  
English Language Learners**

by

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### **Abstract**

With ELL students being the fastest growing population in K-12 schools (Breiseth, 2023), the extensive need for preparing general education teachers to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) is trending across the nation. The problem is not the increase in ELLs, rather teaching ELLs is something that should be celebrated and valued. The problem lies within the unpreparedness of classroom teachers to teach ELLs. Research has revealed that many Teacher educators are unprepared to teach pre-service teachers about ELLs (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; de Jong et al., 2018). This leads to pre-service and in-service teachers being unprepared to teach ELLs in their classrooms (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; de Jong et al., 2018; Master et al., 2016; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013) which has a significant impact on ELL academic outcomes (Fredricks & S. Warriner, 2016; Master, et al. 2016; Murphy, et al., 2019; Ortogero & Ray, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020) Literature shows that through on-going, individualized, and collaborative professional development we can improve the readiness of general education teachers to serve their ELL students. (Master et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2019; Ramirez et al., 2018) To address this problem and to meet the needs of ELL students, I will be hosting an on-going, 3 part training for any interested staff member, but specifically geared toward the general education teachers with ELLs in their classroom, on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in my school district. The ultimate goal of this professional development is that through preparing classroom teachers to feel excited and feel more confident in their abilities to teach and work with ELLs, we will help our ELL students reach their full potential. Recommendations for further improvement are to offer more training sessions throughout the school year, offer book studies, and embed the teachings of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) components into other content area trainings offered in our district.

*Key words:* English Language Learner, Second Language Acquisition, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, professional development

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

According to NCES (2024), “The percentage of public-school students in the United States who were ELs increased overall between fall 2011 (9.4 percent, or 4.6 million students) and fall 2021 (10.6 percent, or 5.3 million students).” When I began the 2023-2024 school year as my district’s ENL (English as a New Language) teacher, we had 8 ENL students enrolled in our district. (*NYSED Data Site, 2023*) We currently have 21 students enrolled in our district and are projected to have 26 ENL students in our district for the 2024-2025 school year. These numbers are reflective of the increase in ELL students across the nation. The National Education Association (2020) predicted that, “By 2025, 1 out of 4 children in classrooms across the nation will be an English language learner (ELL) student.” (p. 1) As someone who has always been very passionate about teaching ELL students, I am energized by this statement. However, when I walk into classrooms to support the general education classroom teachers I am met with anxious, overwhelmed, and openly unprepared teachers. Teachers tell me, “I don’t any have training here” and, “I feel very unprepared.”

New York State Education Department (NYSED) Blueprint states that “All teachers are teachers of English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners and need to plan accordingly.” (p. 3) Delivering appropriate instruction to ELL students and providing language and content instruction and scaffolds is the responsibility of every teacher that interacts with ELLs. It is non-negotiable and it is our job. But to do this effectively, classroom teachers need more training. Ramírez et al. (2018) state, “The increasing diversity in classrooms throughout the U.S.

calls for teachers who are culturally competent and have quality professional development in working with dual language learners” (p. 85).

The literature suggests that since we are mainly placing ELL students in mainstream classrooms, there needs to be a shared knowledge base so all teachers, including teacher educators, can be better prepared. It is evident that there is a problem with the lack of training and the need for further training. The literature also suggests ideas for training in-service teachers (de Jong et al., 2018; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Thus, this thesis capstone project aims to draw attention to the problem of the lack of teacher preparedness to teach ELLs. Its guiding question is, “How can we prepare our general education classroom teachers to teach ELLs?”

In Chapter 2, I review the literature that shows the lack of training in teacher educators, and pre- and in-service teachers, along with the impact this has on students, and ideas for implementing professional development. Chapter 3 describes and demonstrates an on-going in-service professional development for all teachers at my school, but especially targeted to the teachers of ELLs. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the takeaways to this research and the intended result of the product, as well as implications for student and in-service teacher learning and recommendations for future improvement.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter contains a review of literature that pertains to the preparation of general education teachers to teach ELLs. The literature discusses the following themes, lack of teacher educator training in second language acquisition (SLA), lack of pre- and in-service general education teacher training in SLA, implications that this lack of training has on ELLs, and professional development characteristics for ELL instruction that can be implemented to support in-service teachers and their ELL students' success. Before discussing these themes, it is important to discuss theory in SLA research. Understanding how language is learned through theories like the learned hypothesis and the acquisition hypothesis by Krashen (1982) will support teachers while they simultaneously teach English and content to ELLs.

### **Acquisition View and Learned View of Second Language Acquisition**

Stephen Krashen (1982) proposes two distinct approaches to SLA, the learned hypothesis and the acquisition hypothesis. The learned hypothesis suggests that a second language must be consciously learned through formal instruction and study. On the other hand, the acquisition theory posits that a second language can be acquired similarly to a first language, through natural communication and interaction. There are many real-life examples of language being acquired by individuals with no formal instruction such as Julie from Ortega (2009, p. 14) whose first language was British English who became a late second language learner of Egyptian Arabic without any formal instruction and Wes, a young Japanese artist who learned English without instruction in Honolulu. (p. 55)

Indeed, many educators and policy makers place ELL students in mainstream classrooms with teachers who have minimal training in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Schools across the nation are not prepared to teach ELLs and they rely on this idea

that students will simply acquire English through content area instruction without formal instruction in TESOL. Unfortunately, as we discover from the literature in this chapter, this ideology can cause students to miss out on critical content knowledge instruction (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016). Understanding the learned hypothesis can help teachers implement structured language instruction focusing on grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and formal language exercises. Additionally, understanding the acquisition hypothesis can help teachers think of creating a classroom environment that fosters natural language acquisition through meaningful interaction including modeling, partner sharing, and role-playing.

Again, Krashen's learned theory of SLA states that the first language can be acquired but the second language must be learned and for a language to be learned, learners need to be provided with enough comprehensible input. Comprehensible input is another theory coined by Stephen Krashen and according to his research, "the single most important source of L2 learning is comprehensible input, or language which learners process for meaning and which contains something to be learned, that is, linguistic data slightly above their current level." (Ortega, 2009, p. 59). The learned view and comprehensible input require teachers to be trained and not just expect students to acquire English without instructional accommodations or modifications. While the research below on general education teacher preparedness does not debate these two theories, the research does show that there is a significant gap between teacher educators and pre- and in- service educators in their understanding of SLA and theories like the acquired view, learned view and the comprehensible input hypothesis which are important theories for teachers of ELLs to know for the linguistic development of the student.

### **The Influence of Unpreparedness of Teacher Educators on Classroom Teachers**

Many Teachers are unprepared to teach ELLs in the mainstream, general education classroom. One significant reason is that teacher educators are unprepared to teach pre-service teachers about ELLs (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; de Jong et al., 2018; Neal et al., 2008). de Jong and Naranjo (2019) interviewed and analyzed 11 course syllabi of 5 general education professors and 6 doctoral students who were all teaching infused courses. They found that courses infuse topics such as cultural diversity more often than infusing second language acquisition (SLA) topics. This finding suggests that teacher educators were not prepared to teach SLA topics to infuse them in their instruction. In fact, when discussing providing feedback to pre-service teachers, one instructor from this study stated, “Whether we judge those ESL accommodations appropriately and provide them appropriate feedback... I don’t know.” (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019, p.344). This statement demonstrates that instructors do not feel confident about providing SLA instruction to preservice educators. Likewise, through interviews and survey data of 24 professors at 15 colleges in Florida, de Jong et al. (2018) found that 74% of interviewees indicated that they felt they were either “not prepared” or “not well prepared” to infuse ELL related knowledge into their curriculum (pp. 178-179). This issue seems to be longstanding. O’Neal et al. (2008) found teacher education programs were not enough to prepare teachers for the growing linguistic and culturally diverse population. The analysis of interviews with 24 pre-service teachers in Duplin, North Carolina revealed that 75% of teachers said they did not feel that their instruction did not prepare them to teach ELL in their classroom.

As a result of teacher educators being unprepared to teach pre-service educators about EL content and knowledge, teachers go into the mainstream, general education classrooms unprepared to teach ELLs. An overall lack of training in SLA causes misconceptions about how to best teach ELLs. In Carley Rizzuto’s (2017) study of 10 teacher perceptions toward ELL



students and how their perceptions shape their practices, the analyses of interviews and observations of the participants literacy instruction showed that most of the teachers “held negative perceptions” about ELLs, the use of their native language in the classroom and instead encouraged an “English-only” setting, and their lack of understanding of SLA. (Carley Rizzuto, 2017 p. 190). Similarly, Fredricks and Warriner’s (2016) study of teacher and ELL student perspectives on language restrictions at a school in Phoenix, Arizona, where English-only policies are in place, showed, a student was reprimanded for not speaking English, which was a frequent occurrence and could even lead to detention. This shows the misconception that students should learn languages separately rather than using their first language to help them learn a second language, supporting a more fluid translanguaging approach. These misconceptions shape the practices of teachers and can cause harm to students both academically and socially and emotionally.

In de Jong and Naranjo’s (2019) study, teachers were being taught methods of ELL instruction that promoted an “add-on” approach, rather than a fully inclusive immersion of content and language teaching. They noticed that all ELLs were being grouped together regardless of level of proficiency, and that ELL student accommodations were also being grouped together with special education accommodations. This depicts the ELL student as just a “struggling student”, or worse, it could lead to misidentifying ELL students with learning disabilities. Additionally, many teachers are still being sold the myth that “ELL teaching is just good teaching” and it neglects the complexities of SLA. de Jong and Naranjo (2019) state that this teaching is problematic as it “may fail to position ELLs as equally academically talented, potentially gifted, motivated, and so forth as their native English- speaking peers and, in response, lower their expectations” (p. 349).

Low expectations for ELL students is an issue among many pre- and in-service teachers. Polat and Mahalingappa (2013) surveyed 94 in-service teachers and 101 pre-service teachers to explore their beliefs about responsibilities for ELLs' language and academic development. They found that more pre-service teachers believed that teaching ELLs was the content area teacher's responsibility, while more in-service teachers believed it was the responsibility of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. Furthermore, content area teachers often helped lower expectations for ELLs, a finding that aligns with de Jong and Naranjo (2019). One teacher in Polat and Mahalingappa (2013) stated, "Until students have learned to speak English, I shouldn't expect too much from them in my class." (p. 66) Additionally, Fredricks and Warriner (2016), found that all four teachers believed that language had to be learned before content. One teacher stated that the content "had to be sacrificed", resulting in the students falling behind on academic content (p. 315).

Since many pre- and in-service teachers are not being properly trained in SLA instruction, theory, and how to properly teach ELLs in the mainstream classroom, they are holding onto misconceptions like "English-only" in the classroom is best, ELL teaching is just "good teaching", ELL accommodations and Special Education accommodations are the same, having lower expectations for ELL students is appropriate, and language must be learned before content. These misconceptions are shaping their everyday practices and shaping their students by having a harmful effect on students' academic development and their social and emotional development.

### **The Impact of Teacher Preparation on ELL Academic Outcomes**

This lack of teacher educator training and pre- and in-service teacher training has a negative impact on students. For example, ELLs are behind non-ELLs in reading and math, and

graduation rates are statistically lower for ELLs (Dondero & Muller, 2012; Murphy, et al., 2019;; Rodriguez et al., 2020). Rodriguez et al. (2020) conducted a study with New York City Regional Bilingual Educators Resource Network . A questionnaire administered to 95 teachers, administrators, and counselors revealed that 68% of participants cited inadequate academic preparation as a major challenge, and 31% criticized the ‘one size fit all’ instruction or program approaches. In addition, 57% reported a lack of resources for tutorial or small instruction, and 46% agreed that the absence of a support plan for ELLs. Likewise, Dondero and Muller (2012) compared student success and teacher preparedness in districts with varying levels of experience teaching ELLs. They found that limited ELL support such as inadequate academic preparation of students, lack of resources for individualized instruction, and insufficient general education support, contribute to achievement gaps that are decreasing graduation rates of ELLs and have a lasting impact on students. This lack of teacher educator training and pre- and in-service teacher training also has a negative impact on students socially and emotionally, affecting their confidence and sense of identity. As mentioned above, Fredricks and Warriner’s (2016) found that all four teachers believed that language had to be learned before content, resulting in the students falling behind on academic content.

When teachers are unaware of the benefits of bi/multilingualism, they cannot share these benefits with their students. Instead, many states and educators still hold monolingual beliefs and ideologies that shape their teaching practices and undoubtedly portray English as a dominant language. This mindset can be harmful to students (Baker & Wright, 2021). In Fredricks and Warriner (2016), another scenario portrays a student stating that they are “not good at reading” because, “I speak a different language.” (p. 318) This shows that these students do not value their bi/ multilingualism, but rather see it as a limitation. That is, the consequences of the

language-as-a-problem perspective and the monolingual perspective can “be devastating for the short- and long-term educational prospects for ELL youth- resulting in low levels of academic achievement and negative self-perception” (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016, p. 319)

In addition, when teachers are uneducated on the types of accommodations and scaffolds that should be used to support students learning a new language at a variety of proficiency levels, there is a negative impact on student growth. What tends to happen next is teachers wrongfully refer their “struggling student” for a special education evaluation, leading to an overrepresentation of ELL students in Special Education. (Becker & Deris, 2019; Ortogero & Ray, 2021) A study was done by Becker & Deris (2019) to identify the role staff member’s efficacy plays in the proper determination of an ELL with a language difference or disability. This study was completed in a large district of nine schools. Fourteen participants representing various education background areas, including teachers, social workers, learning disability consultants, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists, completed a survey and an “in-depth interview process” (Becker & Deris, 2019, p. 2). Their results revealed that many participants had not heard of “the silent period” of second language acquisition. The silent period is another theory in SLA research from Stephen Krashen (1988) which refers to a period of time, typically about 1-6 months, when a learner will begin to comprehend the new language, but are not willing or unable to speak. Instead, they referred to the silent period as “selective mutism”, a psychological disorder (Becker & Deris, 2019, p. 5). Additionally, Cooc (2023) studied trends in growth rates of ELLs in special education from 2006 to 2020. They found that, “the number of ELs with disabilities increased at a rate seven times that of non-ELs with disabilities since 2006” and the total number of ELLs with disabilities increased by 50%. (p. 113) Rizzuto’s (2017) research also concluded, “misguided notions regarding SLA can cause teachers to deliver a

watered-down curriculum to ELLs or even misdiagnose ELL students as learning disabled and refer them for special education services.” (p.196)

Thus, researchers and educators have highlighted the importance of professional development where teachers can learn more about the strategies and knowledge needed to help ELL students succeed academically (e.g., de Jong, et al., 2019; O’Neal et al., 200). In fact, de Jong, et al., (2018)’s findings are worth noting that a mindset shift in the teachers from “we have to do this” to “we get to do this”, a more tailored approach versus a “one-size fits all” approach, and connecting to personal experience with teaching ELLs will enhance a teacher’s desire to participate in the professional development offered. In Becker and Deris (2019), “school professionals wanted more training in topics that affect CLD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) students to include testing and second language acquisition, believe cultural competence of the entire staff is critical, need more bilingual CST (Child Study Team) members, and believe bilingual program options for ELLs help decision-makers be more effective” ( p. 5). They also call for more teacher training for a school’s CST, pre- and in-service teachers to teach ELLs. Overall, the need for training at the collegiate level is critical to the success of our teachers and therefore our students.

### **The Need for On-Going In-Service Training**

To meet the needs of ELL students and help them reach their full potential, all teachers need more training. Ramirez et al. (2018) found that teacher characteristics play an important role in developing students’ bilingual abilities. They defined teacher characteristics as the amount of training, years of experience working with ELLs, and cultural beliefs and practices, which can affect students' performance in language, literacy, and math. Collected from 217 Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and between 66 and 79 teachers, data showed the teachers with more

training teaching ELLs had “significantly higher scores” on several of the formal assessments given to the students (Ramirez et al., 2018, p. 90) However, the number of years of experience a teacher had working with ELLs did not have a significant impact on the academic success of the students in this study. This study also found that for professional developments to be effective, they should be intensive and on-going. (p. 94) Likewise, Master et al. (2016) conducted a study examining grade 4-8 math assessment results for ELL students in NYC public school systems. They also surveyed all first-year teachers in NYC schools to collect information about their pre-service training, specifically related to teaching ELLs. There were 702 first-year math teachers who were part of the data sample. This study also found that experience teaching ELLs does not predict greater student success; however, first year teachers can improve their effectiveness by teaching ELLs in their first year of teaching. What had an even greater outcome was training experiences that, “address specific instructional strategies for teaching ELLs predict significantly differential efficacy in math instruction” (Master et al., 2016, p. 275). Likewise, Deng et al.’s (2020) study also found that training experiences and experiences working with ELLs “are positively associated with novice general education teachers’ perceptions of preparedness to work with multilingual students.” Overall, these findings show that teaching ELLs is not the same thing as just good teaching of all students and ELLs need specific instruction integrated into the content areas and tailored to their language learning needs. Again, proving that explicit instruction and training on behalf of the teacher is important for ELL students' success.

Several researchers have argued for on-going training that is specially designed for the learner to be effective (Murphy et al., 2019; Ramirez et al., 2018). In O’Brien’s (2011) study, many teachers chose to reflect on the poor quality of the training provided by their school

district. In fact, “no participant mentioned that this training left them feeling particularly efficacious at teaching ELLs.” (O’Brien, 2011, p. 27) This reminds me of the complaint from teachers in de Jong et al. 's (2018) study where the teachers mentioned that the one-size fits all approach to teaching ELLs and the one-time 45-hour professional development experience was not preparing them for the classroom. This tells me that not just any professional development will do, but a more targeted and specific approach is needed. Participants in O’Brien’s (2011) study also mention how they would benefit from someone modeling ELL instruction, which would mean continuous work with teachers of ELLs rather than a one-time, one-size fits all training. This could be improved through a co-teaching model. A co-teaching training model would provide teachers with instruction in a specific area of need. Guise et al. (2023) studied the growth of one in-services teacher over three years in a co-teaching model. This study analyzed teachers while they participated in co-teaching, co-planning, and co-assessing, as well as quarterly workshops for the teachers. Researchers found that with more time in a co-teaching model, shifts in teacher practices and learning benefits can occur, supporting the need for on-going professional development. Similarly, Guise et al. (2021) explored co-teaching and co-teaching coaching as a method for teacher education programs to help both in-service and pre-service teachers. This study examined the effects of co-teaching on 68 participants. They also found that both pre- and in-service teachers positioned themselves as learners but for the greatest benefit, the co-teaching model should be on-going and occur frequently.

An on-going cohort model that encourages modeling and co-teaching and provides on-going training is an effective method for preparing general education teachers to teach ELLs. Murphy et al. (2019) conducted a 12-month study on 28 teachers’ perceptions of a mentoring cohort model to teach in-service general education teachers how to best teach ELLs. These

participants were paired with a mentor teacher that they met with once a month for 12 months to demonstrate instruction, observe and provide feedback, and discuss teacher candidates' questions and concerns. The researchers concluded from previous research and literature reviews that a cohort model can provide teachers with support as they teach ELL students. Their study supports their research in 4 major themes. The study found that all the in-service general education teachers, who began feeling like they had no idea how to teach ELLs felt supported, felt like they grew from classroom teacher to teacher of ELLs, feel aspirations toward leadership roles in their school for teaching ELLs, and expressed positive attitudes about their learning within the cohort. All participants “unanimously affirmed that an ELL mentoring program should be in place for all teachers.” (Murphy et al., 2019, p. 306)

Similar to Murphy et al.'s (2019) cohort model, Bohon et al. (2016) completed a study of the effectiveness of one weeklong professional development for teachers of ELLs using “Kolb’s (1984) well-known experiential learning theory” (Bohon et al., 2016, p. 614). This training focused on Kolb’s cycle of learning, incorporating concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. 230 in-service secondary content area teachers participated in this study and training and the results revealed that teacher knowledge increased and that Kolb’s learning theory. Knowledge specifically increased in the areas of reflection and experience which were extremely beneficial to the learning of the participants. In a further attempt to educate teachers on theory, Dwomoh et al. (2022) created a study of a 4 week online training module that introduced 68 pre- and in-service educators and administrators to a “critical understanding of English as a second language for English learners and the contemporary issues ELs face through the lens of critical theoretical approaches” (Osei-Tutu et al., 2022). They used concepts of Critical Race Theory and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in



their course with the intent to prepare teachers to be more linguistically responsive. They surveyed participants to learn about their prior experience working with ELLs, what they plan to do to help ELLs after taking the online course, and what the implications are for the participants of the course. (Dwomoh et al., 2022, p.1413) The study demonstrated that the impact of teaching critical theoretical approaches transforms educators and helps them view themselves more confidently as a teacher of ELLs. After this course, educators were also able to discuss many appropriate actionable plans that they intend to use with their students.

Another study done by Hegde et al. (2016) conducted a survey and interviews on 20 kindergarten teachers in North Carolina. The research showed that even though teachers believed they were not properly trained to teach ELLs in their pre-service programs, they did learn how to effectively teach ELLs in the classroom and through their school district professional developments. 59% of teachers reported repeatedly attending in-service training to support their ELL students and even if a training didn't specifically address ELLs, it still included some SLA instruction through infusion of the other topic. While 69% of these teachers mentioned feeling prepared to teach ELLs, they still desire more training for teaching ELLs. These studies clearly show that teachers desire to learn more to support their ELL students, but not just any training will suffice, an on-going, targeted, and individualized approach is necessary to meet the needs of teachers from different content areas and backgrounds. Specifically, integrating ELL strategies into other content area professional developments.

In addition to providing specific training in SLA, teachers need training that promotes an encouraging attitude toward multilingual stances and multilingualism. The following literature supports the need for culturally responsive training to support ELL academic outcomes. Mellom et al. (2018) studied the effects of "The instructional conversation project" on teachers' attitudes.

The purpose of this week-long training was to shift teachers' "prejudiced" (p. 98) ideologies about their students' linguistic abilities and view their students' multilingualism as a strength. In the beginning of the study, prior to the training, teachers connected their students' use of their first language with things like poverty and crime and teachers consistently answered negatively about students' home language use (Mellom et al., 2018, p. 102). However, by the end of the training, Mellom et al. (2018) found, "training in culturally responsive pedagogies (in this case the Instructional Conversation pedagogy) can seem to mitigate those negative attitudes over time." (p. 98) Likewise, in Fredricks and Warriner's (2016) study on restrictive language policies, they also found that even in such a restrictive environment, many students still demonstrated value to their bilingualism by using their language skills as a resource during the school day. Fredricks and Warriner (2016) states teachers need to, "resist ideologies, policies, and practices that devalue multilingualism by engaging in practices that allow and promote language-as-a-resource orientation." (p. 309) de Jong published an article on multilingual stances and their importance in schools. She states that we need to "develop a multilingual perspective as we prepare all teachers to work with EAL (English as an Additional Language) students, including mainstream teachers." de Jong also acknowledges that this can be challenging work for many teachers who identify as monolingual. Training teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy and encouraging a language-as-a-resource orientation will help establish a multilingual mindset that teachers can carry through in their teaching practices.

As my district's ENL teacher, this research informs my next steps to implementing a more beneficial TESOL training for all teachers in my school. Through the research on professional development for teachers of ELLs, I have learned that teachers learn best from an on-going collaborative model, like the cohort model. Hegde et al. 's (2016) research also

provides a table of most popular and least popular strategies that teachers prefer when working with ELLs at the early childhood level that is a very supportive resource. This professional development should focus on both educating teachers on SLA and modeling a variety of techniques and strategies that support ELLs in the general education classroom, as well as culturally responsive teaching pedagogy and being readily available to problem-solve and advocate for ELL students' needs.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter 2 discusses a major problem in schools in the United States. The problem is that teachers and schools are not prepared to teach ELLs in the general education classroom setting. This is a problem due to a lack of teacher training in SLA. Research shows that this problem starts at the top with teacher educators being unprepared to teach pre-services educators. Since teacher educators are not prepared to teach SLA theories and strategies, in-service teachers enter the classroom unprepared to teach their ELL students. This leads to teachers holding on to many misconceptions, lower expectations, and monolingual stances for ELLs which all has a significant impact on students academic growth and social and emotional growth. Statistically there is an overrepresentation of ELLs who receive special education services as well as a gap between ELLs and non-ELLs academically and ELLs having lower graduation rates than non-ELLs (Dondero and Muller, 2012). This is all detrimental to the emotional well-being of the child. However, having a multilingual stance can affirm students' identities, bring attention to the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, and encourage teachers to value their students and their strengths, all leading to students' academic success (de Jong, 2018). It is critical that teachers receive and are receptive to this work as, “the implication of affirmations, scaffolding and accommodations, and power and influence as an educator are all mechanisms for addressing the

validity of students who otherwise find themselves marginalized due to language barriers and apparent issues of race and culture.” (Dwomoh et al., 2022, p. 1424)

My proposed solution to this problem is on-going in-service training for general education teachers. This training is something that I will be implementing in my school district in the 2024-2025 school year. My training will consist of 3 sessions that include presentations and collaborative work that support and develop teachers' understanding of culturally responsive teaching, SLA theory, shifting to a multilingual mindset, assessment, and bridging content and language. As the research shows, for training to be effective, it should be on-going. Therefore, In addition to the formal professional development training, I will provide consistent collaboration, modeling, mentoring, and co-teaching to the classroom teachers of my ELL students on a daily basis. This series of professional developments is further discussed in chapter 3.

### **Chapter 3: Description of the Product and Tools**

Research in Chapter 2 has revealed the need to better prepare general education teachers across the nation to teach ELLs (e.g., de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; de Jong et al., 2018). As my school district's ENL teacher, I feel a strong responsibility to support the teachers in my school with this work. In this Chapter, I propose an on-going professional development training course for all interested teachers in my school, including those general education teachers who have ELLs in their classrooms. These teachers will also benefit from working side-by-side with me while I support the ELL student in their classroom. However, as we know, all teachers are teachers of ELLs, so it will be open to any teacher in the district. Below I describe the product and tools that I will use for the professional development opportunity in my school.

#### **Description**

This training will provide teachers with formal and informal support in their work with ELLs. The formal instruction will take place over three days throughout the school year. I have already been asked by my administrator to create a presentation about working with ELLs to present during our staff opening days on either August 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>. This is where the first formal professional development opportunity will take place. This session will take about 30 minutes, and I am treating it as an introduction to TESOL and to the other two available sessions. The first introduction session will focus on culturally responsive teaching in relation to ELLs. The goal of this session will be to get teachers invested in this work by seeing the importance of culturally responsive teaching (Muhammad, 2019) and giving them a sense of hopefulness that they can learn and improve their practices with support.

First, I will complete an activity that places the teachers in the position of the ELL students in their classrooms to try and build empathy and awareness of what our students experience. Then, I will model a few simple strategies that teachers can use to help eliminate the barrier for English newcomers. Next, I will begin instruction by focusing on concepts of identity teaching. For example, the importance of pronouncing students' names correctly. We will discuss the importance of this, why it matters, and I will share a strategy that I use to help me pronounce my students' names correctly. To close, I will share the first chapter of the book *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning* by Pauline Gibbons (2014), which is offered for free online. In addition, I will present staff with information on joining the full book study and the two future dates that I have reserved as a part of my school wide professional development on TESOL.

My school has professional development courses offered, and we are contractually obligated to attend two professional development courses throughout the school year. These courses are typically led by staff in the building. For my next two sessions, I will be leading two,

one-hour trainings on TESOL to any interested teacher in the fall and in the winter. These sessions will incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices but will mainly focus on SLA concepts such as accommodations and scaffolds, addressing common misconceptions, and creating appropriate language objectives and assessments. Teachers will be expected to come to the training prepared by reading the assigned chapters of our book study on Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning by Pauline Gibbons (2014).

Participants will use what they learned through the presentation and the book study chapters discussion to collaborate in groups to explore “what would you do?” scenarios with anonymous and unidentified, or even fictional, ELL students where the teachers need to come up with a plan to support that student, connecting to learned strategies and theories. Depending on the teachers that participate, I also think it would be beneficial to have teachers bring a lesson or activity that they plan on doing in the upcoming weeks and in groups, teachers can create a language objective and scaffolds to support their ELL students with the lesson content. Also, I will provide on-going support to all teachers of ELLs in my school. This will look like co-teaching, modeling, and collaborating to cultivate a more inclusive environment for the ELL students in the general education classrooms.

This product resolves the problem of general education teachers being unprepared to teach ELL students because it provides on-going professional development training. The literature has revealed that consistently working with teachers of ELLs, modeling strategies in the classroom, and providing feedback is beneficial for teachers and a method of learning that is appreciated by them (Guise et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2019; Ramirez et al., 2018). The sessions will provide explicit training to the teachers of ELLs in my school and the on-going training and feedback will come from my consistent work with them and the ELLs in their classroom.

Additionally, research reviewed in Chapter 2 shows that teachers learned best from professional developments that were on-going, addressed specific instructional strategies for their students and their content, collaborative, and linked content learning to language learning (e.g., Jong et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2019; Ramirez et al., 2018). Over my three sessions, the book study, and my ongoing in-class support, we will address these areas.

The intended outcome of this professional development is for teachers to feel more prepared and be more prepared to teach the ELL students in their classroom. Through enhancing the teachers' preparedness, my hope is that the students will have a more positive learning experience and will have more opportunities and support for academic and linguistic success. I also hope that by making the teachers more culturally and linguistically aware, they can develop a stronger sense of identity to support them socially and emotionally.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to draw attention to the problem of the lack of teacher preparedness to teach ELLs. This capstone idea was inspired by my desire to support my colleagues in their work with ELLs after repeatedly hearing concerns of not knowing how to teach ELLs, from nearly all of them. What I discovered through my research was that many teacher educators are unprepared to teach pre- and in-service educators about how to support ELLs (de Jong & Naranjo, 2019; de Jong et al., 2018; Master et al. 2016). When I first began teaching in Arizona, a state that follows a Structured English Immersion (SEI) program model, I did not have ELLs in my classroom because another 3rd grade teacher was the SEI teacher. During my first year of teaching and the following summer, I took classes and earned my SEI certification which allowed me to teach ELLs for the remainder of my time in Arizona. In addition to these classes, I constantly sought out to improve my practice by attending volunteer and mandatory training on teaching ELLs. If it weren't for my desire to seek explicit training in TESOL, I would have been in the same position as my colleagues when I moved to New York State because my undergraduate program in Pennsylvania only provided me with one course that was geared toward teaching ELLs. When I took the class in 2014, it was the first year it was being offered due to new graduation requirements. The experienced professor, admittedly, didn't know much about teaching ELLs, so a lot of the course material was self taught through my interest in working with ELLs. In a state like New York where ELL students are placed in general education classrooms, it is imperative that teachers receive more training to support these students.

The literature continued to show that in addition to pre-service teachers not receiving proper training, in-service teachers were also not receiving enough training from their district to



support ELLs and the little training that they did receive did not benefit them or their students (de Jong et al., 2018). This led to teachers continuing to teach everyday with monolingual stances and having low expectations for their ELL students (Carley Rizzuto, 2017; Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Jong and Naranjo, 2019; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). This lack of training and lack of effective training has a negative impact on our ELL students. It affects their social and emotional development, leads to lower graduation rates and larger achievement gaps between ELLs and their non-ELL peers, and can also lead to overrepresentation in special education. (Fredricks & S. Warriner, 2016; Murphy, et al., 2019; Ortogero & Ray, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020)

Therefore, the guiding question for this research was, “How can we prepare our general education classroom teachers to teach ELLs?”. I learned that there are many ways in which we can support in-service teachers. First, we need to get teachers to “buy in” to the training and help them see the importance of this work. As de Jong, et al., (2018) says a mindset shift in the teachers from “we have to do this” to “we get to do this” is needed. We can also help teachers see the benefits of bilingualism and adapt a multilingual stance that will be reflected in their teaching practices for their students to see. One of the most notable studies from this research was Murphy et al. 's (2019) study on in-service teacher cohorts that provided a year-long collaborative, modeling, mentoring, and co-teaching model. The participants in the study “unanimously affirmed that an ELL mentoring program should be in place for all teachers.” (Murphy et al., 2019, p. 306)

Realistically, as the district ENL teacher, I am unable to complete a cohort model with all of the general education teachers of ELLs grade K-12 because my role is not “mentor teacher” it is “ENL teacher” and I have different responsibilities. However, when creating my professional

development training, I tried to mirror the idea of a cohort model to support my colleagues because of the effectiveness Murphy's (2019) study had on participants. During the 2024-2025 school year, I will be hosting an on-going, 3 part training for any interested staff member, but specifically geared toward the general education teachers with ELLs in their classroom, on TESOL. To achieve my desired results, I will present SLA theory and practice to staff, but also create a collaborative environment where teachers will implement what they've learned and support each other. Another big component of the cohort model is modeling and co-teaching, which is something that I can implement as I push-in to support my ELL students in their content area classes.

### **Implications for Learning**

My current and future students will benefit from my professional development project because the classroom teachers that they spend the majority of their time with will have more knowledge and confidence on how to support them. My first goal is that teachers will become more culturally responsive, develop multilingual stances, and celebrate what our ELL students can bring to the classroom community as a resource. I want our teachers to be excited about having ELLs in their classroom because students can feel this and it will impact and shape how students view themselves, their culture, and their linguistic abilities. My next, bigger, goal is that teachers will better understand SLA theories, strategies, and techniques to be able to help our students connect to content areas and learn language simultaneously even when the ENL teacher is not with them. This will help our students because it will help close the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs by providing students with scaffolds, accommodations, and support that they have a right to in an equitable learning environment.

### **Implications for Teaching**

General education teachers will benefit from this research and these professional development sessions because research shows them that they are not alone, but that with the increase in ELL population in the nation, it is their job to learn how to support these students. Teachers will leave each session with more tools on their teacher tool belt and more confidence in their work as they continue growing as professionals with my consistent support. Teachers will also quickly see how many of these accommodations and scaffolds will support other students in their classroom and be more likely to continue using them. This growth will be reflected in their daily teaching, on their yearly performance rubrics, and our district-wide performance.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include a focus on training the educators who are teaching pre-service general education teachers. This is where our training as teachers begins and the increase in ELLs calls for more training for all pre-service teachers. As de Jong et al. (2018) quote from Ladson-Billings (1999), “How can professionals teach what they do not know?” (p. 98) Therefore, I recommend more research on how best to prepare these educators and what exact areas in SLA should be focused on in their courses. I would also recommend more studies on the effects on ELL students whose teachers have appropriate training in SLA. This research could be used to motivate all teachers to give more attention to the practice of teaching ELLs. Additionally, more studies on how teachers can implement certain ELL strategies into different content areas more effectively would be beneficial to students and educators.

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**Appendix**

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