

Preparing General Education Teachers to Teach ELLs

by

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Abstract

This capstone project aims to help general education teachers who work with ELLs in their mainstream classrooms. The ELL population is large in the Utica City School District. Research shows that general education teachers are not prepared to teach ELLs. This can be detrimental for the Utica City School District due to the size of the district and the number of ELLs in the district. There are possible solutions to increasing the preparedness of general education teachers in teaching ELLs, including mandating courses that focus on ELLs, giving preservice teachers time in the classroom to work with and observe ELLs, and offering more professional development classes to in-service general education teachers. A professional development program is offered to other districts who service ELLs.

Keywords: English language learners, general education teachers, professional development

Chapter 1: Introduction

Teachers' confidence in teaching ELLs increases when they have engaged in TESOL courses, professional development classes, or preparation courses (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Kiramba et al., 2022; Kolano et al., 2013; Turgut et al., 2016). Teacher preparation is therefore critical as the ELL population continues to grow, with an increase of 5.3 million students in the fall of 2021 (National Center of Education Statistics, 2024). It is important for teachers who spend the majority of their day with ELLs to receive adequate training to support these students. However, many general education teachers report feeling ill-equipped to teach ELLs in their mainstream classrooms and needing more support and specialized training (Grenz et al., 2023).

One issue that leads to the lack of course work is the State Education Agency's approved programs across the states. States vary on what is necessary to become licensed in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Fu & Wang, 2021). Therefore, there needs to be continuity in coursework that leads to TESOL licensure. In addition, in general education teacher programs ELLs are not the focal point in diversity courses (Kolano et al., 2013). Even when professional development courses are available and may be useful, they are not sufficient to prepare these teachers to effectively work with ELLs (Howlett & Penner-Williams, 2020; Kolano et al., 2013; Turgut et al., 2016).

Thus, this thesis capstone aims to prepare general education teachers to work with ELLs. Providing general education teachers with a professional development class that aims to inform them on ways to work with ELLs in a mainstream classroom can benefit both the teachers and the ELLs. In Chapter 2, I will review theories and studies that focus on the deficits and possible solutions to general education teachers feeling prepared to work with ELLs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims to present a review of the literature in regard to the lack of preparedness to teach ELLs in general education classrooms. This issue arises from general education teachers' attitudes and perceptions about working with ELLs, combined with insufficient TESOL preparation programs and a lack of professional development courses for teaching ELLs (Fu & Wang, 2021; Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2020; Leider et al., 2021). It is pertinent that general education teachers feel prepared to teach ELLs, because the ELL population is continuing to grow, and these students deserve a quality education. General education teachers not being prepared to teach ELLs can be problematic because they will continue to lag behind their peers who are not ELLs (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014). These issues can best be understood by Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's (1977) Input Hypothesis, and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis.

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development is when the student is challenged at their language level with the assistance from another person. Krashen's (1977) Input Hypothesis is the student being challenged on the language being acquired through listening and reading. Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis is the student being challenged slightly above their level by speaking and writing in the new language. After presenting the framework of these concepts, I will discuss general education teachers' attitudes and perceptions about working with ELLs, a deficit in TESOL preparation programs, and a deficit in professional development courses in teaching ELLs for general education teachers. Three solutions to the problems presented will also be discussed in this chapter.

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's (1977) Input Hypothesis, and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis are all important theories for general education teachers to know and understand. These theories help teachers to understand how language is acquired, which is important for general education teachers to know and understand when they are working with ELLs in their classrooms. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theorizes a student's ability level and the middle area between what the student can do with help from an adult or peer. Essentially, Vygotsky's theory was to find the middle area to challenge the student, however not too much that the student would become too discouraged from the work (Billings & Walqui, 2017).

This theory is essential for all educators to know when working with all students, not solely ELLs. When working with students, it is very important to challenge them to keep them engaged, but not too challenged that they are unable to comprehend the content being taught. This theory also requires teachers to know their students. The students in the classroom will all vary on where their zone of proximal development is. Teachers need to know their students' ability levels to make this theory and their students successful in their classroom.

Furthermore, Krashen's (1977) Input Hypothesis posits that language is acquired when input is a little higher than their level currently. It also states that if the input is lower than their current level, then the student will not learn/acquire anything new to them. Input refers to language being acquired through listening and/or reading. This theory is very important for general education teachers to know when working with ELLs. Although ELLs may be pulled out of the classroom or work with an English as a new language (ENL) teacher for a part of their day, they spend most of their day with the general education teacher. This is why it is pertinent to

general education teachers to have some knowledge on theories when working with ELLs. Having some knowledge of the Input Hypothesis can help general education teachers when planning and teaching lessons to their classroom with general education students and ELLs (Freeman & Freeman, 2014). General education teachers can become aware of the language they are using in their lessons. They can begin to adjust the words being used in the lesson to match their ELLs' abilities. This will allow students to be challenged to their ability level and not to the point that they lose interest.

Relatedly, Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis can help teachers when working with ELLs. It states students need to utilize output that is slightly above their language level. This allows the students to practice their new language to help them fully understand how to utilize the new language (Freeman & Freeman, 2014). Output refers to language being acquired through speaking and/or writing. This theory is also very important for general education teachers to be aware of when working with ELLs.

As mentioned previously, ELLs may be pulled out of the classroom or work with an English as a new language (ENL) teacher for a part of their day, they spend most of their day with the general education teacher. Students should be given an opportunity in the classroom to use what they have learned. This practice allows them to understand how to use their new language but also become more confident in it. This is why it is very important for general education teachers to understand the Output Hypothesis. This will help teachers to plan and guide ELLs in using the new language verbally and through writing. The teacher can accommodate the ELLs by providing them with questions and/or statements at a language level they are able to understand and respond to at their language level. Providing questions and/or

statements at their language level is important to building the students' confidence, if the questions/statements being used are above their level, then they will lose confidence and interest.

General Education Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions About Working with ELLs

General education teachers have different attitudes and/or perceptions when working with ELLs. According to an online survey of 76 teachers by Grenz et al. (2023), 47.4% of teachers did not feel adequately prepared to teach ELLs. They had felt they needed more training, more support, and more opportunities for growth for working with ELLs. In a questionnaire answered by K-12 teachers delivered by Kiramba et al. (2022), teachers felt more prepared when they had received training in working with multilingual students. The teachers who did not receive training in working with multilingual learners did not feel prepared to work with multilingual learners or ELLs.

General education teachers not feeling prepared to teach ELLs continue in written reflections prior to and after taking a semester-long course on teaching ELLs. Turgut et al. (2016) found all participants felt prepared to teach and more confident in working with ELLs. Teachers who are not receiving training or coursework in working with ELLs are not feeling prepared to teach ELLs. Teachers who receive training or coursework working with ELLs feel prepared to teach ELLs.

Teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs because they do not have the linguistic knowledge to work with ELLs. Research conducted by Kiramba et al. (2022) concluded teachers who receive training are more prepared to teach ELLs compared to teachers who did not receive training. The researchers discuss some teachers' lack of language acquisition knowledge due to not receiving training in working with ELLs. This contributes to teacher's feeling unprepared to work with ELLs. Gomez and Diarrassouba's (2014) study determined that teachers do not feel

that they have what they need to teach linguistically diverse students. The survey also discovered the teachers disliked how ELLs are placed in regular education classrooms as they do not feel prepared to teach these diverse learners. These teachers felt that the students would benefit more by being taught by teachers who have received specialized training in working with linguistically diverse students.

Regular education teachers struggle to make linguistic accommodations for ELLs as determined in a study by Fu and Wang (2020). Teachers who do not have the linguistic knowledge or the knowledge of second language acquisition will not feel prepared to teach their linguistically diverse students. Lopez and Santibanez (2018) discuss the importance of linguistic knowledge. Lopez and Santibanez (2018) emphasized, "... all teachers of EBs must have knowledge of linguistics to prevent 'misconceptions, misunderstandings, and contentious debates, as well as misclassification and misteaching of children'" (p. 13). In research conducted by Kolano et al. (2013) participants mentioned their college courses did not teach them about ESL students. One participant went on to suggest, "that having more instruction on specific linguistic theories such as basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) were completely left out of the teacher-education program" (Kolano et al., 2013, p. 49). Some teachers want to learn about language acquisition so that they are prepared to teach the ELLs in their classrooms. Having linguistic knowledge and second language acquisition knowledge lead to both effective teaching and prepared teachers for working with ELLs.

Teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs because they do not have the cultural knowledge to work with ELLs. In a study consisting of reflections completed by 48 K-12 teachers by Li and Peters (2020), teachers did not feel they were culturally prepared to teach

ELLs. Cultural knowledge is important for general education teachers because the lack of knowledge can have an effect on the students' classroom participation (Li & Peters, 2020).

Kiramba et al. (2022) argue that general education teachers can use their cultural knowledge to differentiate their lessons for all learners. ELLs can feel more connected and engaged in a lesson that is culturally responsive to who they are.

Although culture is important to understand when working with ELLs, teachers do not feel they are culturally prepared to teach ELLs. In surveys consisting of 89 participants, Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014) found teachers do not feel prepared when teaching culturally diverse students. Like in Kiramba et al.'s (2022) study, some teachers in Gomez and Diarrassouba's study received cultural training, however, they were not able to create lessons that include cultural knowledge. Other studies mention one participant state, "I did take a class that talked about culture, but we really focused on black kids who were disadvantaged somehow. We talked some about race, but not really anything else" (Kolano et al, 2013, p. 49). Diversity is more than race. Diversity includes race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, culture, disability, sexual orientation, and more. Diversity is not one single topic, so it is important that general education teachers are taught about culture and diversity in their preservice educational programs.

Deficit in TESOL Preparation Programs

Teacher education programs have deficits in preparing preservice teachers to teach English to speakers of other languages. A document analysis of the State Education Agency's approved programs for ELLs revealed many educators who do not have sufficient preparation in working with ELLs (Leider et al., 2021). There is no continuity between the 50 states regarding preparing teachers to teach ELLs. Some states only offer a TESOL program by itself, some states offer TESOL as an add on to their licensure, and some states allow licensure in TESOL solely

from passing an exam. Furthermore, a study using a survey of 278 participants conducted by Fu and Wang (2021) discussed the lack of continuity between the states regarding educating teachers on teaching ELLs. The study determined the array of differences in education programs has led to a lack of preparation for teachers in working with ELLs.

In the same study of 80 participants, Kim and Morita-Mullaney (2020) revealed an ESL licensure leads to higher levels of preparedness in teaching ELLs. The participants not certified in TESOL were not as prepared to teach ELLs compared to those who received courses to become certified in teaching ELLs. Teacher education programs need to be altered to help preservice teachers feel prepared to teach ELLs (Fu & Wang, 2021).

Furthermore, Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014) focused on teachers not feeling like they had what they needed to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students. Participants in this study felt “helpless” (p. 96) when they were working with their students and they had difficulty understanding the concepts being taught. Teachers in Gomez and Diarrassouba (2014) reported “their lack of training in language issues, how important training in language issues was to them, and how lack of training affected their ability to help ELLs” (p. 97). Teachers are not prepared in their general education coursework to work with ELLs even though ELLs are an evergrowing population.

Courses specializing in working with ELLs can help make teachers feel more confident or prepared when working with ELLs. According to data collected from 11 participants and interviews with 3 participants, Guler (2020) showed the participants’ teaching had improved when working with ELLs. The participants were able to modify classroom instruction for their ELLs, stating that they need “to learn more about the ELL education and SLA” (Guler, 2020, p. 90). The participants in this study found courses that focused on teaching ELLs to be beneficial

towards their teaching methods. Relatedly, in their study reviewing 187 articles regarding the preparation of future mainstream teachers teaching ELLs. Mills et al. (2020) found that courses with and without field work experience in working with ELLs gave the participants a better understanding of the adversities ELLs go through.

This also allowed the participants to see themselves as an ELL teacher and not a teacher who has ELLs in their classroom. Faez and Valeo's (2013) study revealed that their teachers felt more confident working with ELLs when they were able to gain some teaching experience. A lot can be learned in college courses or professional development but gaining teaching experience is very beneficial. Gaining teaching experience allows teachers to try out tools, strategies, theories, and more to discover what works for them and what does not. Indeed, coursework changes the perspectives of teachers working with ELLs. Turgut et al. (2016) used pre- and post-writing reflections of six questions. Their participants included eighteen participants in their junior and senior year of teaching education programs. Prior to taking the course, 89% of the participants did not feel prepared to teach ELLs in a general education classroom. However, after taking the course, all participants felt prepared to teach ELLs in a general education classroom upon graduation. One participant stated, "I definitely believe this course has played a huge role in my preparedness to teach ELLs as a future teacher" (Turgut et al., 2016, p. 299).

Having general education teachers prepared to teach ELLs is very important. ELLs may be pulled out of class or have an ENL teacher push in for part of the day, however they are going to spend the majority of the day with their general education teacher. Teachers need to have the knowledge and the confidence to teach ELLs effectively. Overall, the participants at the beginning of the course did not feel prepared to teach ELLs. However, after the course they felt more confident in working with ELLs in a general education classroom.

Relatedly, in an online questionnaire and follow-up interviews of 115 novice teachers, Faez and Valeo (2012) concluded 59% of the participants felt they had an increase in their preparedness to work with ELLs. Participants from this study "... reported feeling more prepared once they knew where and how to find appropriate resources for their classrooms and how to design more effective lesson plans" (p. 460). TESOL programs or coursework that teaches novice teachers about ELLs can have positive effects on the teachers. Teachers learn how to work with ELLs and feel more confident in the classroom with them. This will have a positive effect on the ELLs in their classrooms.

Deficit in PD Courses in Teaching ELLs for General Education Teachers

Many teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs and could benefit from professional development classes that specialize in ELLs. The analysis of surveys completed by 87 in Madler et al. (2022) revealed teachers were not prepared to teach ELLs. Well trained teachers who had no specialized training in working with ELLs found it difficult to meet the needs of their ELLs. Likewise, Grenz et al.'s (2023) survey study of 76 teachers found only 51% of the participants had ever received training for working with ELLs. Only 37% of the participants felt they had the expertise to effectively teach ELLs. Although some teachers receive training for work with diverse learners in their preservice programs, they still need more training. Madler et al. (2022) argued:

Instead, they should possess a solid understanding of the diversity they will encounter and know what skills and dispositions are required to best teach diverse learners. Then, new teachers should have access to additional training and mentorship that helps them to appropriately address specific learner needs. (p. 61)

Being a teacher is a lifelong learning career, so it is imperative that once teachers learn a concept and/or a skill, they need to continue working and learning about it. Professional development courses can be useful for teachers, especially when working with ELLs.

Professional development classes can help teachers feel more prepared to teach ELLs in their classrooms. The analysis of pre and post surveys of 198 educators in Howlett and Penner-Williams (2020) revealed that the educators had an increase in awareness for analyzing classroom tasks for ELLs. Although they had an increase in awareness, they did not feel they were proficient in preparing lessons using what they had learned in their professional development class. That is not to say they will never be proficient in the future with more professional development classes.

Another study that examines professional development classes was conducted by Kolano et al. (2013). Their study researched why teachers believe they should be prepared for ELLs. The researchers mentioned that their participants found professional development classes to be beneficial for them. These teachers had utilized staff development, in-service workshops, and conferences to be beneficial for them in learning how to work with ELLs. However, one flaw these classes had was that there was no follow-up to what they had learned. Since there was not a follow up to the classes they had taken, they did not implement strategies taught at these staff developments, in-service workshops, and conferences. This study is not perfect because the professional development class needs to be adapted to become more effective. More studies will need to be conducted using more effective professional development classes to determine how general education teachers feel about working with ELLs.

In Turgut et al.'s (2016) study of 18 written reflections, the participants felt more confident in working with ELLs. The difference between the two studies was the length of the

professional development which could influence the level of proficiency between the two studies. The study conducted by Howlett and Penner-Williams (2020) had a professional development class that was 3 days long for a total of 18 professional development hours. The study conducted by Turgut et al. (2016) had a professional development class that was a semester long. More research would need to be conducted to understand the level of proficiency compared to the time spent on professional development. This would make future professional development classes more effective for the teachers and in turn their current or future students because they would feel more prepared to teach them.

Potential Solutions

There are several solutions that can help general education teachers to feel more prepared to teach their current and future ELLs. One potential solution to creating more prepared general education teachers is to require an ESL focused course to teacher education programs (Lucas et al., 2008). Not all teacher education programs require general education preservice teachers to take a course that focuses on working with and knowing ELLs. Even just a little background knowledge on second language acquisition can make a difference. The theories of second language acquisition can help general education teachers understand how a new language is learned. This can help them when preparing lesson plans and accommodating their ELL students. Being aware of culturally diverse students is also important when working with ELLs.

A course that is designed to teach preservice teachers how to work with and learn about ELLs can help with this. Although there are many different cultures in the world, and it can be impossible to know them all, knowing some is better than none. Being a culturally responsive teacher is important whether you are teaching general education, special education, or ELLs. Knowing your students is very important. Knowing your students helps build a strong

relationship with them. Students want to learn from someone who they connect with and have a positive relationship with. Knowing your students helps make accommodations to help them succeed. For example, a student may have just moved to the United States from another country. A student may not be familiar with a lesson if it is talking about tornadoes. The student may be from a country who does not have tornadoes, so they do not learn about them. The child would find it very difficult to comprehend the new language alone, but also if they do not know what a tornado is in their own language. This is why it is very important to know your students. Know who they are, what they like, where they come from, their culture, etc. This will make teaching and learning more successful.

Another potential solution to creating prepared general education teachers in working with ELLs is to require preservice teachers to spend time in classroom settings with ELLs (Fu & Wang, 2021; Lucas et al., 2008). This can be done through fieldwork and/or student teaching. Not all school districts have ELLs, however, a lot of school districts do. Requiring preservice teachers to complete fieldwork and/or student teaching in a classroom that contains ELLs can be very beneficial for the preservice teacher. Gaining the experience with them can prevent stereotypes perceived by the media of immigrants and/or refugees (Lucas et al., 2008). Seeing or working with ELLs during fieldwork and/or student teaching can also help preservice teachers visualize and conceptualize how to implement what they have learned in their coursework with ELLs. However, this will only work if the preservice teachers have completed coursework in courses that focus on ELLs. Preservice teachers would also benefit from seeing a veteran teacher working with and implementing effective teaching strategies for their ELLs. The teacher would also be able to utilize the building ENL teacher to collaborate and learn how to work with the

ELL students. This is why it is also important to require general education programs to require a course dedicated to teaching and working with ELLs.

A third solution to creating prepared general education teachers in working with ELLs is professional development classes in working and knowing about ELLs. New teachers and veteran teachers of all educational backgrounds can benefit from professional development classes in working and knowing ELLs. New teaching strategies are always being discovered, so professional development courses would benefit new and veteran teachers. In research by Howlett and Penner-Williams (2020), they revealed that educators had an increase in awareness for analyzing classroom tasks for ELLs. One professional development class would not suffice, because like I have mentioned, new teaching strategies are always being discovered, so teachers can always learn something new at these professional development classes. In Turgut et al., (2016) they found that a semester-long professional development course led to teachers feeling more prepared to teach ELLs. The ELL population is continuously growing, so it would be beneficial for all teachers to complete professional development courses, because it may be more likely than not that they will encounter an ELL in their classroom at some point in their teaching career. I must also mention in a previous research study how one participant mentioned that even though some teachers may have taken a course in their education program, they may still benefit from a professional development course. Learning about an ELL is different from teaching an ELL. Therefore, in-service and preservice teachers should have opportunities to experience ELLs in their preservice programs and have opportunities to attend professional development classes.

A teacher will not know what works for their student until they are working with the student. Once a teacher experiences first-hand what it is like to teach an ELL, they may find themselves unprepared. Learning about teaching in an education program is much different than

teaching in the actual classroom. A lot is learned through trial and error and when we still cannot succeed, we should look to professional development courses for help. This is when professional development courses are very beneficial. Going on a professional development course can be very beneficial when a teacher knows what they specifically need help with. At the class teachers can ask questions and learn new strategies to try out with their students. After gaining experience in the classroom, teachers will be able to pinpoint exactly where they are struggling. When this occurs, they can research or ask the leaders of the professional development classes for help. Even if a teacher feels prepared to teach their ELLs, they may still benefit from a refresher class.

ELLs have certain teaching strategies that they find more beneficial than others when they are learning in the classroom. In questionnaires of 20 students studying English, Khansir et al., (2021) found 4 strategies to be “good” or “best” in learning English. The strategy that was liked by 80% of the participants was, “In class, I like to learn by pictures, films, and video.” This is a strategy that can be taught in professional development classes. In a questionnaire of 11 general education teachers by Olds et al., (2021), they also found visuals to be an effective teaching strategy for ELLs by general education teachers. The second most liked teaching strategy was, “In English class, I like to learn by reading.” This is another strategy that can be discussed in professional development classes. The third most liked teaching strategy was, “I like the teacher to help me talk about my interests.”

All three strategies are great tools that can be taught to general education teachers, so they feel more prepared to teach ELLs. Professional development classes should talk about effective teaching strategies, but they should also talk about ineffective teaching strategies so general education teachers know which strategies to avoid in the classroom. The least liked teaching strategy was, “I want to write everything in a notebook.” This is great to know and

inform general education teachers in professional development classes, so they can use effective teaching strategies. In their study, Owens and Wells (2021) found building strong relationships led to ELL students being more successful in the classrooms. Having strong relationships with students can have positive effects on the ELL students such as, higher engagement, a feeling of wanting to learn, and more. Teaching vocabulary is another strategy that can be taught in professional development classes. August et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of vocabulary knowledge. ELLs need vocabulary knowledge to be able to comprehend, speak, and write. They fall behind their non-ELL peers, because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge. Professional development classes need to teach general education teachers vocabulary learning strategies to benefit the ELLs. Khansir et al. (2021) found ELLs like and want to learn vocabulary words, so it is even more beneficial for professional development classes to teach vocabulary strategies to general education teaching working with ELLs.

The three solutions presented in this capstone are possible solutions to create more prepared teachers in working with ELLs. Although all three may be difficult to implement altogether, implementing just one is still beneficial. Professional development classes would promote second language learning theories and strategies that benefit ELL students. Mandating college education preparation programs to require a course dedicated to working with and knowing ELLs can be difficult, but not impossible. The benefits would outweigh the difficulty. Requiring preservice teachers to experience ELLs during their fieldwork and/or their student teaching is possible. The ELL is constantly growing, so many preservice teachers would not have difficulty finding a placement with ELLs in the classroom.

However, for those unable to find a placement with ELLs, there could be a requirement to watch videos of classroom teachers working with or teaching in a classroom with ELLs. This

would not be the most beneficial way, but this does allow the preservice teachers to see what it is like to have and work with ELLs. This would possibly prevent preservice teachers from having stereotypes from the media, because they are still seeing an ELL in action. Professional development classes would be the easiest way to prepare teachers to work with ELLs. School districts can offer opportunities for their teachers to join a professional development course in working with and knowing ELLs. This would reach all teachers new to veterans.

All teachers could benefit from the classes because new strategies are being discovered and implemented all the time. This can help teachers who have not taken any courses in working with ELLs, because it could teach second language acquisition theories to help teachers understand how a second language is learned. This could also teach these teachers strategies that are effective in teaching ELLs. Professional development classes not only help teachers who have no background in ELLs, but also with teachers who have taken courses on ELLs (Doss & Estep, 2023; Grenz et al., 2023; Madler et al., 2022; Turgut et al., 2016). Refresher classes are always great for teachers, because sometimes teachers forget information over time. Professional development classes benefit all teachers.

Chapter 3: Descriptions of the Product & Tools

As stated in Chapter 2, many teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs in general education classrooms (e.g., Kiramba et al., 2022; Lopez & Santibanez, 2018; Turgut et al., 2016). This Chapter describes a product designed to address the problem that general education teachers are not prepared to teach ELLs in their classrooms. The product created for this capstone is a professional development presentation intended for all general education teachers in the Utica City School District. It will be held at the beginning of the year before the students start school in the Utica City School District. This professional development class will be for all general education teachers in the Utica City School District. The goal of this professional development class is to give general education teachers some information on how languages are acquired through theories and strategies that are beneficial for ELLs.

Agenda of Events

The professional development class will be held at the Stanley Theater in Utica, New York during the last week of August when Utica City School District teachers return to work. Holding this professional development course before school starts is beneficial because this allows teachers to put the new theories they have learned and strategies to use at the start of the school year. The professional development class will take place 10am-11am at the Stanley Theater. This is the best place to hold the professional development class because the Utica City School District consists of 10 elementary buildings, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school. The Stanley Theater is large enough to accommodate the number of general education teachers in the Utica City School District. An hour will be needed to complete the presentation and activities that go along with the presentation.

Language Acquisition Theories

The first part of the Google Slides presentation is designed to inform the teachers about three important second language acquisition theories including Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, Krashen's (1977) Input Hypothesis, and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis. Each theory is first defined, and then simplified by explaining each of its principles and practical implications. Research indicates that many teachers have not received adequate training in language acquisition including these theories (e.g., Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014) and understanding these theories is crucial for general education teachers, who often report feeling unprepared to effectively teach ELLs (e.g., Turgut et al., 2016). By presenting these key theories, this professional development section aims to fill this gap, providing teachers with the necessary theoretical background to better support their ELL students.

Teaching Strategies for Working with ELLs

The second part of the Google Slides presentation informs the teachers of three different teaching strategies to help them teach ELLs. There is a slide to discuss visual aids, vocabulary words, and group work. Each strategy is discussed in more detail and how the strategy benefits the ELLs. As discussed in Chapter 2, teaching strategies are important because general education teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs (Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014; Turgut, et al., 2016). Teachers may feel more at ease teaching ELLs when they learn strategies that benefit ELLs.

According to Owens and Wells (2021) building strong relationships with students and a sense of community in the classroom can lead to students feeling more willing to focus on their learning. Building relationships with students can be done by getting to know what they like, what they dislike, about their culture, about their family, incorporating their interests into the

lessons, etc. Students will want to learn from a teacher they have a connection with, that is why it is important to build a classroom community and relationships with students.

August et al (2016) discussed the importance of vocabulary knowledge in all domains. ELLs are at a disadvantage compared to general education students in vocabulary knowledge (2016). Research conducted by Khansir et al (2021) showed ELLs like and want to learn vocabulary. There are many ways that vocabulary can be taught to ELLs whether it is embedded or extended (August et al., 2016). Vocabulary can be taught through visuals, graphic organizers, charades, using a dictionary, word walls, and much more.

Group work and collaboration between teachers or students are beneficial towards ELLs. Teacher collaboration leads to effective instructional practices (Owens & Wells, 2021). ENL teachers should collaborate with their students' general education teachers. Group work/collaboration between students is also beneficial. Pairing students up based on their level, either homogeneous or heterogeneous, are both effective for student learning (Owens & Wells, 2021). Students can work together to help each other succeed in the classroom. According to Khansir et al. (2016), ELLs like to work in pairs or small groups. Students enjoy learning and working with their peers.

Closing Activity

The goal of the professional development class is to help general education teachers feel more comfortable teaching ELLs. During the professional development course, they were able to learn about language acquisition and strategies that will help them when working with ELLs in the classroom. At the end of the professional development course, teachers will be given an exit ticket to check for their understanding of the class. The worksheet will list three questions, name and explain one language acquisition theory, name and explain on teaching strategy for ELLs,

and what question(s) do you still have when working with ELLs? The exit ticket will be collected and used to create a more effective professional development class in working with ELLs.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine and convey the attitudes/perceptions of general education teachers working with ELLs and the deficits in preparation programs and professional development classes. General education teachers feel more prepared to teach ELLs when they take courses related to working with ELLs and when they take professional development classes in working with ELLs (Guler, 2020; Howlett & Penner-Williams, 2020). Courses that focus on ELLs educate preservice teachers about the cultural and linguistic knowledge needed when teaching ELLs. Professional development classes focus on analyzing classroom tasks for ELLs which lead to better prepared teachers. Deficits in teacher education programs and professional development courses that focus on ELLs lead to unprepared general education teachers.

Summary of the Reviewed Literature

Several conclusions were stressed from the research. One conclusion found in the research was that teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs. This was found throughout several studies. Teachers did not feel they had the training needed to feel confident in working with ELLs in their mainstream classrooms (Gomez & Diarrssouba, 2014; Grenz et al., 2023; Kiramba et al., 2022; Turgut et al., 2016). Another conclusion from research was that teacher preparation programs rarely educate preservice teachers about ELLs. This led to general education teachers not feeling they had the knowledge to work with ELLs, because they were not explicitly taught how to in their programs.

The teachers who did attend courses that focused on ELLs did in fact feel more confident compared to the teachers who were not taught how to work with ELLs (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Fu & Wang, 2021; Gomez & Diarrassouba, 2014; Guler, 2020; Leider et al., 2021; Turgut et al.,

2016). The last conclusion drawn from the research was that teachers seldom participated in professional development classes focused on teaching ELLs. Teachers did not feel confident working with ELLs because they were not participating in training to gain the knowledge needed to feel confident working with ELLs. However, the teachers who did attend professional development classes in working with ELLs did feel more confident having ELLs in their classrooms (Grenz et al., 2022; Howlett & Penner-Williams, 2020; Madler et al., 2022).

Overall, this capstone determined three solutions that can help solve the issues discussed. Education programs need to require a class that is dedicated to learning about ELLs. This course would provide preservice teachers with the knowledge of ELLs and the cultural and linguistic knowledge needed to make ELLs successful in the classroom. Another solution to the issue discussed is that professional development classes need to be offered to districts that have ELLs in their classrooms. These teachers would benefit from learning how to work with ELLs in their classrooms. Teachers are not feeling confident in working with ELLs, however mandating ELL coursework in education programs and offering professional development classes can increase the number of teachers feeling prepared to teach ELLs.

Implications for Learning

Several implications and a recommendation for teaching can be made based on the research findings. A professional development class has been created to help prepare general education teachers to work with ELLs in their classrooms. Professional development classes educate general education teachers' strategies and theories in working with ELLs. These can lead to teachers feeling more prepared when they have ELLs in their classrooms. They know what resources to use and how to address their students who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Therefore, the Teaching ELLs PowerPoint will aid teachers in feeling more confident when working with ELLs in the classroom (see Appendix A).

Recommendations for Future Research

The professional development class created is a start to making general education teachers feel more prepared when teaching ELLs in their classrooms. After the professional development class is presented to the Utica City School District changes will be made based on how teachers respond to the class. Edits will be made to the presentation leading to a more effective professional development class. Teachers' suggestions will also be welcomed to help create a more engaging and effective professional development class.

Future research that determines the effectiveness of professional development classes would benefit general education teachers in the future. More research needs to study the effect the length of the professional development class has on the preparedness of general education teachers towards ELLs. This research would help determine how to create more effective professional development classes.

Final Thoughts

General education teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs. This can hinder the learning of ELLs because they spend most of their school day in the classroom with their general education teacher. General education teachers need to be prepared to teach ELLs. Education programs need to teach preservice teachers about ELLs and in-service teachers need continuous training on how to work with ELLs. These can lead to an increase in preparedness in general education teachers to teach ELLs.

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Appendix A

PowerPoint [Presentation](#)

Appendix B

Exit Ticket

Grade Level You Teach: _____

1. Name and explain 1 language acquisition theory.

2. Name and explain 1 teaching strategy when working with English language learners

3. Write any question(s) you may still have when working with English language learners
