

Supporting Educational Opportunities for Rural ELLs

by

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July 23, 2022

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A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of
The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for MS. Ed. in TESOL

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Abstract

This capstone aims to support rural educators, administration, and surrounding community members who work with English Language Learners (ELLs) to increase educational opportunities. With the projected increase in this population it is a concern that the rural ELL population will grow; however, mainstream teachers may be underprepared from the lack of exposure to the ELL population. As a result, marginalization and microaggressions may exist. Solutions to the problems within rural areas such as Romulus School district include educating and supplying all K-12 mainstream teachers with culturally responsive teaching techniques and tools, providing electronic pen-pal opportunities with diverse students around the world, promoting participation of cultural events within the school district and surrounding communities, and advocating for parental involvement and/or district liaisons for ELL students. Several conclusions such as culturally responsive teaching techniques and measurements of advocacy are made in attempt to decrease the deficits found within rural school districts. In addition, recommendations are included to implement ongoing professional development of ELL students as the population within the Romulus School District rises. Other recommendations such as further research of rural ELLs themselves is discussed as much of this research focused more on the impacts of educators and not the students.

Keywords: English Language Learners, rural, deficits, culturally responsive teaching, liaisons, advocacy, parental involvement, professional development

Chapter 1: Introduction

English Language Learners (ELLs) or English Learners (ELs) are one of the quickest growing population of students within the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), 4.4% of about 5.1 million ELL students attend rural schools with a comparison of 14.8% in city schools. With this growing diverse population across school districts in all areas, it is increasingly important to direct our attention towards rural districts as they are lacking the resources, educators, and support from community and state to appropriately educate their ELL populations (Rucker 2021). For example, the Romulus School District, with a population of 434 students within K-12 (New York State Education Department, 2020) has a small population of one ELL student that began attending the district this year. Kathleen Stuck, the Special Education Coordinator, has worked within this school district for 27 years. Stuck states that within her time working at Romulus, she has only seen two ELL students attend the district. However, she worries with the growing population of ELLs that the district would have a challenging time supporting many ELL students as they have very few resources to draw from (personal communication, June 1, 2022) including certified ELL teachers, professional development (PD) opportunities for all educators, and the support from students and community members to make ELL students feel included within the school community.

Indeed, ELLs are seen as academically disadvantaged, have a higher rate of dropping out, and a lower rate of attending post-secondary schooling (Parsons & Shims, 2019). According to the Office of English Language Acquisition (2020), “Across the United States, the high school graduate rate for English learners during 2017-2018 school year ranged from a low of 31% in New York... The median state-level high school graduation rate for ELs was 68.4%”. This compares to an 85% graduation rate of non-ELL learners. In addition, there can be

disproportionalities of ELLs within special education programs in rural schools (Ruiz, 2020) due to the lack of knowledge of administration and educators. With these current statistics and educational disadvantages, it is clear that there must be more advocacy for the ELL population and for teacher education, or ELLs will continue to perform low.

Furthermore, evidence of racism can be seen in some rural school communities through struggles with marginalization, microaggressions, and the deficit theory (Parsons & Shim 2019) which all have a great impact on educating ELL students and making them feel as though they belong within the district. That is, the ELL population has been impacted in rural areas due to the lower number of diverse families that live within the area. The school and community have not had ample support or resources to learn how to appropriately communicate, educate and evaluate this student population. Tendencies of racism may be prevalent within these communities, not only within the student population, but within the educators as well. The sociocultural theory can help combat these negativities by helping educators and other school community members understand ELL students on more of a social and cultural level (Guerrettaz et al., 2020), which can increase empathy towards this population.

There should be more opportunities for teachers, students, and administration to interact with diverse populations in hopes to decrease the amount of marginalization, microaggressions, and/or the deficit theory that can be found within these small rural school districts of a mainly Caucasian population, including the population of the educators (Parsons & Shim 2019). ELL students spend much of their time at school, and it is important that the school district incorporates culture and includes family within educational decisions and when creating the school culture and education. There needs to be many opportunities for ELL families to engage with their child's education as there have only been positive reinforcement that comes with

parental involvement. Yet, it has been seen that administration has not realized how to incorporate the culture of ELL families (Parsons & Shims, 2019), a reason that ELL students are being labeled as disadvantaged and not performing as well in comparison to non-ELL populations. If this inequity towards ELL students continues as the population is rising drastically, there is going to be many students in the United States who are inadequately prepared to live within our society.

Without addressing such problems of underprepared educators within rural school districts, ELL students will continue to be at a disadvantage when compared to non-ELL populations. Hence, the purpose of this project is to appropriately educate all teachers, not just ELL certified teachers to successfully educate ELL students as well as bring some insight to the surrounding community members. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature that supports the academic disadvantages of ELLs due to the lack of culturally responsive knowledge of staff and students, the evidence of low advocacy within and outside of school districts, little parental involvement of ELL families, and limited access to funding. Then, I will explain the theories (deficit and sociocultural theory) and the issues mentioned above in more detail. Finally, I will present a solution that can resolve the issues and educational disadvantages that rural ELL students are facing. Then, in Chapter 3, I will create a professional development in attempt to educate all school staff and community members to better understand and educate their ELL students. Chapter 4 will conclude with recommendations on how to resolve the issue such as furthering PD opportunities and intensifying preservice teaching courses to focus more on the ELL population.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This Chapter reviews the existing literature relating to the issues surrounding rural ELL education. As discussed in Chapter 1, ELL educational disadvantages are due to administration, district, and educator issues such as funding, lack of knowledge, and low advocacy. Educators must have knowledge on how to successfully incorporate sociocultural factors of ELL students within their teaching, so they could eliminate feelings of marginalization and microaggression (Parsons & Shims, 2019) and increase the sense of identity, empathy, and understanding of the ELL population. Forms of discrimination such as marginalization and microaggression are often found within rural school districts that lack diversity. Marginalization and microaggressions expand ELL students' feelings of anxiety, making their willingness to learn disappear; in addition to increasing the sense of unwelcomeness within all environments; school, and community (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Parsons & Shim, 2019) which can have an impact on their academic success (Polat et al., 2019). Rural ELL students can feel disconnected to the content that they are learning, the peers that surround them, and even the educators that are teaching them. Ongoing professional development for educators is needed to increase culturally responsive education and advocacy for the rural ELL population. With this, discrimination will decrease as diverse cultural factors will be introduced into the school community and classrooms.

In this Chapter, I will discuss the following emerging themes: the lack of culturally responsive knowledge of teachers and administration, the absence of preservice education training opportunities that solely focus on ELL students, the difficulties pertaining to recruiting and retaining certified educators within rural school districts, and the shortfalls of advocacy for the ELL population. Before discussing these themes, I will present the deficit theory, which

explains barriers to the engagement and inclusion of ELLs (Gorski, 2008); and the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which can help educators combat the deficits found within rural school districts (Guerrettaz et al., 2020).

Understanding the Deficit Theory and the Sociocultural Theory

The deficit theory “holds that inequality [of ELL students compared to non-ELLs] is the result, not of systemic inequities in access to power, but intellectual and ethical deficiencies in particular groups of people...” (Collins, 1988, as cited in Gorski, 2008, p. 518). That is, the underachievement of rural ELL students is seen as their own fault due to the sociocultural differences found within the student populations. Rural educators may not understand the cultural differences of ELL students, and therefore their lack of academic achievements falls onto the students. ELLs are labeled as “at-risk” or “disadvantaged” due to their low English proficiency, and with this low proficiency comes the assumption of having low intellectual abilities (Parsons & Shim, 2019; Polat et al., 2019; Ramos, 2018; Ruiz, 2020). With this diversity in the classroom, educators have become unaware of how to appropriately educate and evaluate this growing population due to the lack of a culturally responsive identity, preservice education, and ongoing PD. Furthermore, the majority of the educators examined within these studies were Caucasian/White teachers (Coates, 2016; Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Linville, 2020; Polat et al. 2019; Ramos, 2018; Stairs – Davenport, 2021; Tyler & Garcia, 2013). Therefore, it is likely that the large Caucasian teacher population is unfamiliar with these deficits and can potentially be a part of the deficit themselves as the educators are unfamiliar with understanding and incorporating diversity and culture within their classrooms. These deficits have led problems such as rural ELL student being wrongly placed within special education classrooms (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz, 2020), dropout rates

increasing, and graduation rates decreasing due to the academic and social challenges (Parsons & Shim, 2019; Walker, 2012). If this issue is not resolved, ELLs will continue to be academically disadvantaged when compared to the non-ELL population. It is crucial that educators understand and incorporate the sociocultural theory into their classrooms, and school wide. This will support the increase of retaining educators as they will have the knowledge and confidence to successfully educate ELLs, in addition advocacy for rural ELL students will increase with this understanding of social and cultural environments.

The sociocultural theory supports educators in learning about different cultures and creating a sense of empathy towards ELLs (Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Ruecker, 2021). This theory focuses on how students absorb information from their surrounding environmental and cultural factors, and how exactly these factors affect the learning processes of students (Eun, 2021). Rural ELL students can be in a state of culture shock as they may have lived somewhere with different societal norms, and therefore will hold an identity that is constantly shaping as they gain cultural experience. If administration and educators hold a sociocultural perspective when looking at rural ELLs, they will gain understanding of the mental processes of these students from a social and cultural context. In turn, can aid in the misinterpretation and disproportionality in special education (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018). This sociocultural perspective includes teachers being familiar with the demographics of their school community to understand the variety of factors (cultural, linguistic, social, etc.) that are affecting rural ELL students, and to gain cultural experience to incorporate into the classroom (Coates, 2016; Polat et al., 2019). Educators can grow their cultural experience by participating in community events and getting to know the community members and families associated with the school district. Without this social and cultural knowledge, misinterpretation of rural ELL academic knowledge can be

prevalent (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz, 2020), and can increase the academic disadvantages. When educators become aware of the deficits found within rural education such as marginalization and microaggressions, the sociocultural theory can assist them in advocating for ELL education and including them within education.

Recruitment and Retainment of ELL Educators in Rural Schools

Rural school districts face challenges of hiring and keeping teachers. Using the National Center for Education Statistics as guidance, Ruecker's (2021) case study of five rural school districts found that hiring and retaining educators was the largest and most consistent challenge that rural schools faced. This can be due to the fact that preservice teachers generally obtain jobs that are in close proximity to their universities, therefore there may not be many preservice teachers within rural areas. Similarly, in Ruiz's (2020) study conducted with two student participants, she supports the fact that rural school districts have a hard time recruiting and retaining professional ELL educators. This can be due to the isolation and limited resources that rural school districts have. In turn, rural ELL students are negatively affected academically and socially by the challenges of retaining certified educators. Within this study, authentic data such as language proficiency, cultural and educational background, experiences with culture shock, and concerns expressed by parents were reviewed to understand the impact on rural ELL learning. Although the impact of retaining and recruitment is not shown directly in the findings above, it can be concluded that rural ELL education is negatively affected as there is low retention rate of educators. This can only lead to underprepared teachers as districts have not been able to adequately hire certified ELL teachers that are willing to stay within rural areas. In addition, shortfalls of advocacy can be present as these educators lack the cultural and linguistic lens of fully understanding the rural ELL population.

Funding is a part of the challenge for recruiting and retaining certified ELL teachers. It is a major difficulty for rural schools to fund an ESL position to an individual willing to stay due to competing salaries from other districts (Ruecker, 2021). Therefore, often you can find one educator taking on many roles, possibly across multiple school districts, who can have limited knowledge of appropriate ELL education due to their widespread duties. In addition to limited knowledge, these teachers can lack advocacy as they have many duties outside of ELL education. For example, in Ruecker's (2021) study, "The Spanish teacher was either the primary ESL teacher or provided additional support in 3 of 5 schools" (p.19). Hence, these schools rely not on a certified ELL teacher, rather an educator that can simply understand the language and possibly the culture that surrounds this student population. These educators may also struggle making personal connections with these students as they may not always be present within a specific school district. Although these may be foreign language teachers, they still have limited training and/or experience in teaching ELL students as their knowledge focused on teaching a foreign language or another content area located within mainstream classrooms (Besterman et al., 2019; Ruecker, 2021). There needs to be opportunities of effective training for rural educators, and advocacy for the need of funding towards ELL programs and educator knowledge.

Due to low funding within rural areas, it can be difficult to successfully identify ELL students and appropriately place them in programs that best fit their academic needs. Ruiz (2020) discusses the potential benefits of response to intervention (RTI), which can help educators by, "having the ability to intervene early, using differentiation more effectively, and reducing the number of students referred for special education evaluations" (p. 36). However, she agrees that rural areas are challenged more greatly due to the lack of funding and specialized staff that are

imperative to implement the RTI process. To combat this issue, the need for explicit PD on how to appropriately educate ELLs within mainstream classrooms is needed, which can increase the confidence of rural educators and decrease the amount of ELL students being inappropriately placed in special education classrooms (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz, 2020). Instruction will become more accessible to ELLs as educators learn how to differentiate based on their academic and cultural backgrounds of the students. Similarly, Hoover and deBettencourt (2018) explain this disproportionality of ELLs within special education programs. Mainstream educators may inaccurately refer ELL students to special education programs as they can lack cultural and linguistic knowledge. In other words, they do not fully understand the mental process of these students. Teachers are unaware of how to support these students through incorporating diversity within teaching, thus, in-service PD opportunities and the growth of in-service education programs is needed to allow educators to gain cultural experiences to further their understandings of the diverse population.

Content Teacher Preparation for ELL Students

Content teachers within rural school districts lack the knowledge on how to appropriately educate ELL students. Within many preservice teaching programs across the country there is not a mandated requirement for learning about ELL education (Polat et al., 2019). This includes preservice teaching experience within their coursework and fieldwork. Without this experience and knowledge, content teachers are misinterpreting ELL academic abilities and are not able to sufficiently support their education (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz, 2020). In addition, most of the educator population within the United States are Caucasian (Coates, 2016; Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Linville, 2020; Polat et al. 2019; Ramos, 2018; Stairs – Davenport, 2021; Tyler & Garcia, 2013), and therefore, lack knowledge on culturally

responsive teaching and how to advocate for rural ELLs. All of which can add to the deficits that the ELL population is facing. More pre-service and in-service PD opportunities must be available to all mainstream teachers throughout the school year.

Beginning the discussion with the lack of diversity amongst the educator population will aid in the understanding of ill-prepared content teachers for the rural ELL population. As Guerrettaz et al. (2020) argued, “Rural US universities face unique challenges when it comes to teacher preparation for ELL education” (p. 3). One of these challenges being the simple fact that during preservice education, these non-diverse educators are not receiving the opportunities to interact with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Therefore, when these preservice teachers enter the working force as in-service teachers, they already are lacking the appropriate culturally responsive knowledge to teach the ELL population (Tyler & Garcia, 2013). Thus, I can confer that our current educator population is struggling to advocate and connect academically with the rural ELL population as they are lacking cultural knowledge. Learning can become increasingly difficult for ELLs as they do not see forms of their cultural in their school districts, including within the curriculum and what the students are learning, and across the teacher population (Linville, 2020). In turn, it can be challenging to advocate for a change in the demographics of our current teacher population. Therefore, it is crucial that administration and school districts allow for opportunities of ongoing professional development that surround the diversity of the ELL youth.

With the ever-growing population of ELL students, it is evident that each teacher will have an ELL student within their classroom in the near future. As a result, all teachers, regardless of their content-area will become ELL educators. In their study K-12 STEM teachers from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), Besterman et al. (2019) explored their PD and credentials

relating to the education of ELLs and found, “nationally, across the STEM disciplines represented, the number of participants who indicated they possessed a degree, graduate certificate, or state certification in an area that was categorized as either Cultural or Linguistic was extremely low” (p. 45). Likewise, Stairs-Davenport (2021) performed an inquiry that also examined mainstream educators and ELL students in a school district where the ELL population had begun to increase and found that teachers are generally underprepared to teach rural ELL students. Furthermore, Polat et al. (2019) conducted a quasi-experimental study of 74 preservice content-area teachers and found that mainstream educators struggle teaching the ELL population due to their beliefs of the ELL population. With the low interaction with ELLs before entering the teaching force, educators are unfamiliar with how to include ELLS within the mainstream classroom and how to employ culturally responsive teaching. The results of both studies indicated that there is a critical need for preservice preparation and on-going PD opportunities for mainstream teachers.

In addition to the study of PD and credentials, Besterman et al. (2019) also examined the population of ELL students, and the implications of this. It is evident that within the service load of mainstream teachers in rural school districts there will be at least one ELL in the classroom. (Besterman et al., 2019; Guerrettaz et al., 2020). When considering the statistics of the credentials analyzed in the Besterman et al. (2019) study, and how few teachers have cultural and/or linguistic certifications; mainstream teachers have little knowledge of how to appropriately educate the ELL population. Stairs-Davenport (2021) also discussed the growing population of ELL students, and the under preparedness of mainstream educators. Within this study, there were selected-response and open-ended survey questions regarding the teaching of rural ELL students. One topic discussed was building a community for ELLs. Stairs-Davenport

(2021) indicated that these types of questions involved how to incorporate ELL families within their child's education. In other words, how to include culturally and linguistically aspects within their teaching. This information reveals that educators are also struggling to understand how to incorporate all cultures within their school district. Possibly due to factors such as the deficit theory, marginalization, and microaggressions (Parsons & Shim, 2019) that are found within rural communities. All these factors reveal that rural content teachers are underprepared to educate the diverse ELL population. The rural educator population would benefit from gaining more PD that surrounds culturally appropriate teaching methods (Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Therefore, if educators have the opportunity of on-going professional development that includes understanding the demographics and surrounding cultures within the community, then educators can incorporate this knowledge into their teaching.

Furthermore, rural educators can have a difficult time understanding how to differentiate their lessons based on their low cultural and linguistic knowledge of the ELL population. From these results, there should be opportunities of PD for these teachers. However, "Despite over half of all teachers in the STEM disciplines reporting that they had ELL students in their service loads, less than a quarter of the teachers... participated in ELL specific professional development activities" (Besterman, et al., 2019, p. 36). Very similar data can be seen in Stairs-Davenport (2021) study of 118 K-5 teachers across three different schools where only 19.2% of these educators had the equivalent to one full day of PD related to specific ELL services. With this increase of ELL across all school districts, and as the student population has been diversifying, there has not been ample or appropriate PD opportunities offered to educators within rural school districts.

Ramos (2018) conducted a self-study with 18 undergraduate participants focusing more on preservice educators within rural areas and how they effective they are at teaching these diverse learners. Throughout this study, the participants interacted with ELL students to further understand their cultural and linguistic diversities. She found that with this opportunity to work closely with ELLs during their preservice education allowed the educators to gain insight on how to appropriate plan and implement culturally responsive lessons (Ramos, 2018). By implementing the requirement of having preservice educators gain experience with ELLs before having their own classrooms, these teachers can gain empathy through understanding their backgrounds, and feel comfortable to advocate for this diverse race.

In addition, Ramos (2018) argued that being a culturally responsive educator and understanding how to include diversity within teaching can be extremely difficult within rural settings where there may not be many ELL students to have the opportunity of working with. To research this issue, Ramos (2018) constructed a 12-item pre- and post-course survey to see if there were any shifts in the perceived effectiveness of preservice educators. The findings of this survey after the participants had finished the course concluded that 94% agreed that they felt confident to teach the diverse population of ELL students, and that their empathy for ELLs had increased (Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Ramos, 2018;). Polat et al., (2019) found similar data within their quasi-experimental study. Throughout this study, participants took part in an electronic pen-pal program that allowed them to converse and work with ELL students during their pre-service education. Polat et al. (2019) found that with this interaction during pre-service education, teachers gained beliefs that could positively impact the education of rural ELL students. These educators understood that ELL students should not be excluded from the classroom due to their linguistic differences. In turn, educators should welcome these linguistic and cultural differences

and incorporate them into the educational day to advocate for the student population. Thus, all preservice teachers should be required to take an undergraduate course that surrounds ELL teaching to be prepared for the growing population.

Lack of Advocacy for ELL Students

There are many different forms of advocacy when discussing rural ELL populations including advocacy for ELL students inside the school district and within the community. Linville's (2020) study with educator participants across five school districts that had an average of 11 years teaching experience revealed two types of advocacy: The Instructional Advocacy Action Scale (IAAS) and the Political Advocacy Actions Scale (PAAS). The IAAS scale describes advocacy within the immediate educational context such as within the classroom and on school grounds (Linville, 2020). This can include attempting to prevent deficits such as marginalization and microaggressions (Parsons & Shim, 2019). On the other hand, the PAAS looks at advocacy found beyond the classroom within the community they live in (Linville, 2020). This type of advocacy can include incorporating the diverse families within the typical school day. These forms of advocacy can closely relate to the forms of culturally and linguistic advocacy discussed in Hoover and deBettencourt (2018). For instance, this study examines the contemporary framework behind advocacy for this specific ELL population. These features focus on educator demographics, disproportionality of ELLs in special education programs (Ruiz, 2020) and parental involvement (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018). When this variety of advocacy is evident within school districts, educators can support ELL students with their education and inclusion within the community. Advocacy for this diverse population will also support the decrease of deficits found within rural communities.

For example, as Parsons and Shim (2019) discussed the deficit theory and forms of marginalization and microaggressions, Linville (2020) also mentions this through triple segregation. She asserts that, “ELs often experience ‘triple segregation’ in that they are more likely to attend economically, racially, and linguistically segregated schools... with general education teachers who lack preparation to work effectively with them...” (Linville, 2020, p. 2; Parsons & Shim, 2019). All of which can promote the low academic achievement of the ELL population compared to non-ELLs. Teachers must advocate for ELL students inside the classroom with instructional advocacy, as well as beyond the classroom with political advocacy. To further these ideas, on Linville’s (2020) IAAS one item that was explored was having conversations with school administration about rural ELL student’s educational rights. 79.6% of participants agreed that they complete this form of instructional advocacy. Therefore, it is important to note that this advocacy is not only found amongst the educators, however within administration as well. ELL students must see the support and advocacy within all parts of their school district to feel included and have willingness to learn (Linville, 2020). On the other scale, PAAS, 86.4% of teachers stated that they educate the rural ELL population to speak up for their rights in education (Linville, 2020). With the deficits presented, ELL students will feel isolated, and to prevent this isolation, Linville (2020) found that when ELL students are aware of their rights, educational advancements will be made as advocacy will grow.

As rural school districts lack diversity, it is common that forms of advocacy can be challenging for the ELL students that attend the school. These challenges of advocacy can be seen in the school district throughout administration, educators, and the student population (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Linville, 2020). Furthermore, with this quick increase of ELL students, teachers did not have the opportunities to learn how to advocate for this diverse

population. For teachers to provide appropriate advocacy, they must be aware of the sociocultural theory for ELLs (Guerrettaz et al., 2020), as this will support the educators in understanding the cultural differences of their students. This will help educators collaborate with families and incorporate the culture of students in the classroom; both of which can be seen in Linville's (2020) study. Moreover, rural ELL students also must be aware of the deficits that they are facing (Parsons & Shim, 2019) and their rights towards an equal education (Linville, 2020) when compared to the non-ELL population. By educating the entire rural school district population on forms of advocacy, educational advancements can be made for rural ELL students.

Fundamentally, teachers are more likely to advocate for ELL students inside their classrooms (instructional advocacy) when compared to beyond the classroom (political advocacy). For example, about 91% of the participants in Linville's (2020) study agreed that they collaborate with other teachers to improve education for ELL students on the IAAS scale, whereas only 79% of teachers agreed on the PAAS scale stated that they work cooperatively with ELL families to heighten advocacy for their students. Thus, it can be beneficial for educators to have PD opportunities surrounding sociocultural aspects such as parental involvement to heighten the advocacy for ELL students beyond the classroom. This form of political advocacy will support the student's academics as their parents will be involved with their education, and possibly reduce the amount of discrimination (Linville, 2020; Parsons & Shim, 2019, Ruiz, 2020). In addition to parental involvement and gaining advocacy outside of the classroom; this can also help the instructional advocacy as educators will have the opportunity to invite parents into the school to support their child's education.

Instructional and political advocacy can also be defined as forms of culturally and linguistic advocacy as educators are understanding how to effectively educate and include ELL

students within all communities (Hoover & deBettencourt 2018; Linville 2020). One concern that Hoover and deBettencourt (2018) noted was the lack of diversity within educator demographics, meaning that much of the teacher within the workforce are monoracial. This can cause challenges when advocating for the ELL population as many mainstream educators feel underprepared to educate them as they have low cultural experience (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018). Teachers should be provided opportunities within their preservice work and in-service experiences to constantly grow their sociocultural knowledge of the student population within their district. This low understanding of ELL students can also be linked to the disproportionality that we see within special education programs (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz, 2020). Rural teachers are likely to misinterpret the academic abilities of ELLs due to their lack of knowledge of the varying language abilities. This can lead to them being misplaced in programs that are disadvantaging their academic achievement. (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Ruiz 2020). Advocacy is needed not only for ELL students and their academic achievement, but for teacher populations and their access to PD opportunities to further their educational knowledge of diverse rural students.

Parental involvement is another key aspect of advocacy that can decrease deficits of ELLs and increase their ability to learn (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Linville, 2020). For example, Hoover & deBettencourt (2018) describe a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that includes advocacy amongst the home, community, and school. Without this connection between home and school there will continue to be a divide amongst student populations as ELLs are academically disadvantaged when compared to non-ELLs. Emphasizing the concepts of marginalization (Parsons & Shim, 2019), Hoover and deBettencourt (2018) discuss that ELL students can feel marginalized as their identity is not reflected within the current curriculum.

This can create barriers to learning as rural ELL students feel as though they do not have a connection with their peers, or with the topics being studied in the classroom. With a MTSS in place in rural school districts, educators and administration can defend against the racism and divide of academic achievement of ELL students compared to non-ELLs. The parental involvement is crucial in the advocacy process as it will help educators incorporate cultures within their classroom and learn best how to appropriately educate rural ELLs that are lacking support.

To further explain the concept of identity within the theme of advocacy, it is important to note that identity will constantly be changing throughout life as you gain new cultural experiences. Relevant to the sociocultural theory as it explains how student identities are frequently changing from their exposure to new information, and environmental surroundings such as their peers and home life (Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Ruecker, 2021). Therefore, it is important that educators understand how to use culturally responsive teaching within their classroom to maintain the rural ELL student cultural identities (Polat et al., 2019; Stairs-Davenport, 2021). Rural ELL students can break out of the current stereotypical identity such as marginalization and microaggressions that they are living with by gaining advocacy from their surrounding administration and educators. In addition, Stairs-Davenport (2021) argues for the advocacy for teacher identity. For example, educators must hold a professional identity where they are welcome to learning about all cultures to further their teaching knowledge. With the lack of diversity amongst the educator population, it is important that they are provided an opportunity to further their professional identities through culturally responsive PD experiences.

Within the review of literature, there are possible limitations and gaps that are present. For instance, in many studies there were a variety of surveys used that were self-reported from

the educators. Therefore, the study had to rely solely on the answers that were provided to them, rather than conducting an observation or physical study. Limitations may include teacher beliefs, and different interpretations of questions that were presented (Linville, 2020; Polat et al., 2019). In addition, in her self-study course Ramos (2018) worries some limitations from the survey can be the participants attempting to please her as she was the instructor. Other factors such as what as in Guerrettaz, et al. (2020) study, where it focuses more on language teacher education rather than mainstream educators. However, these findings can still be put into perspective for other teachers. Additionally, some studies focused on a few school districts (e.g., Ruecker, 2021) or two focal students (e.g., Ruiz, 2020), therefore further research may be needed to better understand how to appropriately educate and include ELLs within rural school districts. Nevertheless, with these limitations the results that were found can still relate to the issues of rural ELL education.

The reviewed literature reveals the necessity of ongoing professional development for all educators that will help resolve the issues of the lack of culturally responsive teaching amongst educators and administration, the absence of PD for pre-service and in-service educators, and the shortfalls of advocacy. In Chapter 3, I will discuss my professional development (PD) plan designed to improve the education for rural ELL students within the Romulus Central School District. This PD will assist administration and educators in understanding how to appropriately advocate for the diverse ELL population. Through this advocacy, educators within the Romulus School District will learn how to increase parental involvement of the rural ELL population to heighten learning opportunities (Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018) as well as encouraging and supporting teachers in create linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms that fit the needs of

all learners. Furthermore, educators will gain a professional identity through understanding the variety of cultures that can be found within their school districts.

Chapter 3: Description of Product and Tools

This Chapter presents a professional development (PD) plan that aims to educate rural teachers on culturally responsive techniques to utilize within the classroom and surrounding communities to support the educational advancement of rural English Language Learners (ELLs), specifically within the Romulus School District. Working in the district for 27 years as the Special Education Coordinator, Kathy Stuck states that there has been a very low amount of ELL students within their rural school district (personal communication, June 1, 2020). However, she has concerns regarding the future as the ELL population is expanding to rural areas, that mainstream educators are underprepared to teach and provide inclusive environments to such a diverse population within their district. There are many aspects within rural communities and school districts that are disadvantaging the ELL students such as the lack of diversity and cultural knowledge of students and staff, low advocacy, little parental involvement, and evidently limited access to funding. Thus, the professional development will focus on low budget strategies that the Romulus School District can use to increase educational abilities of ELL students.

The Romulus Central School District is a Kindergarten through 12th grade educational system within a rural community. Therefore, the participants of the professional development are mainstream content teachers. Currently there is not a certified ELL professional hired within the school district, thus professional development is crucial as all educators are ELL teachers. Administration is also encouraged to participate within the professional development as they play a grand role in creating a culturally responsive environment and fostering advocacy within the community. In addition to the participants of the PD, the students that will be impacted by the implementations will range from K-12. The demographics of the student population within

Romulus is mainly Caucasian, and therefore deficits such as microaggressions and marginalization (Parsons & Shim, 2019) exist. Thus, with the creation of a sociocultural and culturally responsive environment, ELL students will obtain the same educational opportunities as their peers.

Description of the Professional Development

The professional development will take place during the summer teacher conference days at Romulus CSD. The PD will be presented within the auditorium on August 31st and will have a duration of one session. This will take place from 8am to 11am. The 3-hour long session will allow for the participants to ask questions and communicate amongst peers about the PD. The participants will be expected to listen to a professional development plan surrounding the concepts of implementing culturally responsive knowledge within the school and community environment, in addition to increasing ELL advocacy through parental involvement and community liaisons. This will be presented in the form of a Slideshow Presentation and will include a variety of handouts and materials (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, & F) to further guide the discussion and learning. The intended outcomes of sharing the PD and tools with this rural school district is to prepare the mainstream educators and administration in creating a socially and culturally responsive environment for the ELL student population to ensure academic success. The topics discussed are culturally responsive education and advocacy with subsections of possible solutions. The subsections described are as followed: mainstream educators using culturally responsive teaching techniques, electronic pen-pal programs, parental involvement, and community liaisons all of which contain low-budget strategies to support ELL students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques

Educators within rural areas are at a disadvantage as there are not ample opportunities for meaningful interactions with ELL students when compared to suburban school districts due to the population differences (Ramos, 2018). Thus, it is important for all mainstream educators to learn varieties of culturally responsive teaching techniques to heighten the academic abilities of ELL students. In Ramos's (2018) study with 18 undergraduate participants completing a course focused on ELL teaching, educators understood that ELL's academic knowledge demands are higher due to cultural and linguistic diversity. Teaching strategies such as using visual aids and gestures within the classroom can help build the ELL academic abilities as they are receiving the necessary scaffolds to learn. This aspect of culturally responsive teaching can be done in several ways. For example, educators can have visual posters (see Appendix A) hung around the room with different languages and visual aids of everyday questions such as "May I use the restroom?". The use of different languages presented in the classroom will make the ELL students feel more included within their environment and can increase the learning opportunities of all students. In contrast, educators can incorporate this strategy into their physical teaching such as acting out a specific vocabulary words that are taught or using pictures and video as a support.

In addition to visual aids and gestures, Ruiz (2020) discusses other potential culturally responsive teaching factors that can be done without constraints or set programs in place, thus low funding will be required. Ruiz (2020) states that rural educators can:

Learn to connect new content and skills to ELs' previous learning; integrate visuals, manipulatives, and realia into daily instruction; include language supports within daily lessons; use text chunking and webbing to help ELs to comprehend new concepts; plan for multiple points of access to content that match ELs' different academic and language

proficiency levels; use cooperative learning and interaction to support ELs' cognitive, linguistic, and social development. (Ruiz, 2020, p. 37)

Thus, in addition to adding visual aids and gestures into instruction, educators can learn how to appropriately educate ELLs by relating the instruction to their own lives. ELL students will be more open to learning while these connections are made as they can see their own culture within instruction. Rural communities lack diversity, and therefore mainstream educators should do their most to expand the cultures that are found within their classrooms. Many of these strategies (ex. Visual aids, chunking of text, etc.) educators have learned during their undergraduate preservice experiences, therefore should be easy to implement within classrooms and teaching practices. Educators can implement the option of graphic organizers to help the mental processes of ELLs or complete partner activities to booster interaction and sociocultural evidence within the classroom and district.

During this activity, participants will listen to a 10–15-minute presentation that will describe a variety of culturally responsive teaching aspects. Following this, the mainstream educator participants will be instructed to turn and talk to an individual to brainstorm other culturally responsive techniques to share with the group. The outcome of this activity will be to present to educators that they can utilize culturally responsive teaching techniques within their mainstream classrooms, regardless of content area and whether they have ELL students present. Reviewing the culturally responsive teaching techniques will allow educators to implement a more appropriate education within their classrooms to reach the needs of all learners. Therefore, the educational opportunities of rural ELL students will be more accessible as mainstream educators understand how to involve and educate all students within their classrooms.

Electronic Pen-Pal Programs

When ELL students are not accessible at rural school district, it can be difficult for mainstream educators to understand how to appropriately educate them. Implementing programs such as electronic pen-pals with ELL students can support educators (and students) in becoming culturally diverse as authentic interaction will be accessible. In addition, learning opportunities for all that are involved can increase depending on the conversations taking place. Polat et al.'s (2019) study with 74 preservice content-area teachers found that with this interaction, educators began to understand ELL students and what they are capable of linguistically and academically. One item within the results revealed that educators strongly agreed that "ELs should not be excluded from content-area classrooms because of their low English proficiency" (Polat et al., 2019, p. 231). Hence, educators became more comfortable with the idea of diverse students within the classroom and began to understand the culturally responsive techniques to use to appropriately educate them. Understanding this set of marginalized students more on a personal level will support the sociocultural understanding of how ELL students fit within the rural school district communities.

Furthermore, not only do educators gain personal connections with ELL students, however they are also able to get insight on the academic abilities of ELL students through programs such as the electronic pen-pals. Polat et al. (2019) describe that the participants were also able to support the academic language of ELL students as they were interacting with novels that they were reading. Participants were able to learn together, relate the novel to their everyday lives, and share ideas; all promoting academic achievement of ELL students and the peers or participants. This can be especially beneficial for educators within rural school districts as there may not be a large ELL population evident. In addition, students within rural school districts can also benefit from participating in activities such as electronic pen-pal programs with ELL

students. Students would be able to gain appreciation and understanding of culture and diversities that may not be present within their immediate communities in addition to enhancing their learning opportunities. Therefore, enabling a safe environment for ELL students when they do arrive within the school district.

The electronic pen-pal section of the professional development is expected to last 20-25 minutes. In addition to the presentation, participants will be asked to individually look at the provided list of websites that they can use to implement pen-pal programs individually or for their classrooms (see Appendix B). The participants will also be given time to review some of these websites and ask questions if needed. Finally, there will be a short discussion from the participants on how different content areas can utilize pen-pal programs within their classrooms. The intended outcome within this section of the professional development is to provide mainstream educators with a low funded program that they can use within their classrooms to learn how to appropriately educate the rural ELL population. There are many positives to incorporating a pen-pal activity within school districts such as gaining appreciation of culture and learning new teaching techniques to implement within the classroom.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a key aspect in educational advancement for any student. However, it is especially important for the ELL population who are underserved and underrepresented within the current educational system. Linville (2020) describes the differences between instructional advocacy and political advocacy as discussed within Chapter 2. The results noted that educators within rural school districts were more likely to utilize instructional, in other words, forms of classroom advocacy to support their ELL students. Meaning that educators are more likely to collaborate with their peers (other educators) to improve instruction for ELL

students rather than collaborating with parents. Only 79.0% of educators stated that they were cooperatively working with ELL families to improve the education of these students compared to 90.9% of educators who stated that they collaborate with other educators to improve the educational instruction for ELL students. The results show that rural educators would benefit from gaining understanding of how they can incorporate ELL families within rural school districts.

Parsons and Shim (2019) explain a variety of examples of how rural educators can increase ELL parental involvement and engagement within the district.

Fortunately, the survey respondents also addressed ways to better engage and involve ELL families. Responses included: (1) “go to the ELL families; do not wait for them to come to the schools”; (2) “specifically, individually, invite them to the schools to answer their questions”, (3) “more bilingual events and communication... concerted efforts towards collaborative partnerships”, (4) “advertising using non-traditional means” with “more personalized connections... family nights, Heritage, Culture nights, etc.” (p. 34).

Therefore, there are ample opportunities for mainstream educators to implement parental involvement within rural communities. However, one concept that the participants will focus on are using more non-traditional means of involvement such as family nights or promoting community events (see Appendix C). This would allow educators, parents, and students to come together to learn, and gain appreciation of the diversity within the school districts and surrounding communities. Having programs that encourage family involvement do not only support the educators in making improvements to their instruction based on the connections they make. However, this also allows parents to understand what their children are learning, and

potentially can lead to supporting their education at home. Thus, furthering the educational abilities of ELL students.

The parental involvement part of the professional development is projected to last 20 minutes. Following the presentation, participants will be asked to complete a think-pair-share activity within small groups. Participants will receive a handout (see Appendix D) where they will be required to brainstorm other parental involvement activities that they can do within their classrooms and/or outside of the school environment. Following the think-pair-share in small groups, participants will be asked to share some of their ideas with the larger group so participants can write down ideas to use within the future. The intended success of this part of the professional development is for educators to understand the significance of parental involvement and all the positive aspects that come with it.

Community Liaisons

Following the discussion of parental involvement, community liaisons can also be a beneficial concept of advocacy to implement within rural school districts. Often rural communities lack diversity, hence communication with ELL families can be increasingly difficult as linguistic diversity is limited. Therefore, a liaison, or an individual designated for family communication can be helpful to support the communication between school and home. Again, furthering the educational opportunities and abilities of rural ELL students. Parsons and Shim (2019) express that a liaison is "...someone who could go home, talk to the parents, find out what their issues are, concerns are... [or] what we could do for them" (p. 35). Thus, it is possible that the liaison does not have to be an educator, rather it can be a parent themselves. Having a liaison in place for ELL students will allow the communication between home and school to flourish as parents will be more comfortable with a concrete individual to converse

with inside their home. Therefore, allowing educators to gain insight on how to incorporate diversity or culturally responsive techniques within their classroom to appropriately support the ELL students.

Furthermore, Ruiz (2020) also supports the utilization of liaisons within rural school districts. When rural schools do not have a high population of ELL students, educators are at a disadvantage as they may not feel comfortable educating or including them within the community. Hence, it is crucial to have a parent, local organization staff member, or possibly a religious leader to support the school in educating and bridging conversations between this population (Ruiz, 2020, p. 42). From this communication, educators can understand the academic abilities of ELL students at a personal level, which can decrease the drop out rates and increase the graduation rates of this student population when compared to non-ELLs. Through liaisons teachers can gain insight on the behavioral differences between ELL students and non-ELL students and begin to understand that many of these are due to cultural differences and not academic abilities.

This section of the professional development is projected to last 20 minutes. Participants are expected to listen to the presentation, then following the presentation, participants will be asked to brainstorm a list of individuals who they believe would be a good fit for community liaisons within their school district. They will be encouraged to think of individuals who may speak more than one language, parents that want to become more involved within the community, etc. Participants may work individually, or they can work with a partner to compile a list. The intended outcome for this section of the professional development is to show educators that educational advancement of ELL students is not only on them, however it is a

community process that each member plays a role in. Thus, a community of advocates will begin to grow for the underserved and underrepresented student population.

Summary

The activities described above: culturally responsive teaching techniques, electronic pen-pal programs, parental involvement, and community liaisons are all intended to support the academic achievement of rural ELL students. Educators will learn new skills to implement within their classrooms that meet the linguistic and cultural needs of the students. In addition, appreciation and understanding of diversity can grow through pen-pal programs. Following forms of advocacy such as parental involvement and community liaisons will support educators in understanding more about the underrepresented student population who they may have not had much interaction with. After the completion of the professional development presentation, there will be an allocated 20 minutes for participants to ask questions if needed. During this time, participants will also be asked to respond to the reflection questions (see Appendix E) that will measure what was taken out of the presentation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This capstone project has examined the lack of preparedness of mainstream teachers to educate ELLs across many rural school districts, including Romulus Central School District. This deficit can result in microaggressions, marginalization, and increase the chances of drop-out rates amongst rural ELLs (e.g., Parsons & Shim, 2019; Walker, 2012). The project has not only explored factors inside the school district such as the lack of cultural and linguistic preparedness of educators. In addition, to fully investigate the academic abilities of rural ELLs when compared to non-ELL students, I researched factors of parental and community involvement in addition to educator preparation. During my research, the relevant theme of underfunding (e.g., Ruecker, 2021; Ruiz, 2020) of rural schools became a large factor in preparedness for ELL education as educators have not had access to ongoing professional development opportunities to further their teaching abilities. All these themes represent a lack of educational opportunities of rural ELLs. Several research questions were developed throughout my research such as:

How will rural school districts be impacted by the growth of ELLs?

Do K-12 mainstream educators lack the culturally responsive knowledge that is required to teach this diverse population?

Are there appropriate measure of advocacy inside the school and within the surrounding communities to decrease deficits of rural ELLs?

How is rural ELLs academic achievement when compared to non-ELLs within the same school district?

In this Chapter, I will summarize the literature. Then, I will discuss the implications for teaching and for student learning. Finally, I will conclude with some recommendations for further research.

Summary

A variety of studies have been reviewed based on the educational opportunities that ELL students receive within rural school districts. This included the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity and knowledge of students and staff (e.g., Polat et al., 2019; Ramos, 2018, Ruiz, 2020), in addition to low advocacy measurements which include parental involvement (e.g., Linville, 2020; Parsons and Shim, 2019; Ruiz, 2020). Drawing on this research and my research questions, I was able to conclude that due to the little sociocultural perspectives of staff and students (e.g., Coates, 2016; Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Linville, 2020; Polat et al. 2019; Ramos, 2018; Stairs – Davenport, 2021; Tyler & Garcia, 2013), rural ELLs are marginalized (e.g., Parsons & Shim, 2019), and thus have lower academic achievements and abilities when compared to non-ELLs. Furthermore, it became evident that there are some appropriate measures of advocacy for ELLs within rural school districts. However, most of the advocacy is taking place inside of the classroom (Linville, 2020) rather than within the community involving family members in the education of their language learners.

In relation to these conclusions of the research, it was clear that rural school districts are majorly underfunded (e.g., Ruecker, 2021; Ruiz, 2020). Most research did not have a confident solution to this issue rather than advocating for funding from the state and local employers (e.g., Ruecker, 2021), which can be difficult and time consuming. Therefore, I have presented budget-friendly solutions within my professional development plan and supporting tools to further the advocacy for rural ELL education. These products seek to help educators, students, and surrounding community members in gaining cultural and linguistic awareness to support the education of the ELL youth.

Implications for Teaching

The educators aimed to benefit from my research and product are K-12 mainstream content teachers. There are three major implications for educators that I will discuss within this section. First, content teachers can gain culturally responsive knowledge and teaching techniques (see Appendices A, B, & D) through implementing the inclusion of different cultures within curriculums and school districts. When educators utilize visual aids (see Appendix A) and gestures such as acting out new vocabulary words (Ramos, 2018; Ruiz, 2020), they are reaching to the educational learning needs of all students within their classroom. In addition, these culturally responsive teaching techniques may not only support ELL students; however, can also support non-ELL students within the classroom as well. Furthermore, with the inclusion of culturally responsive teaching, educators can assist in decreasing the amount of discrimination (Parsons & Shim, 2019) that is found within rural school districts. For example, educators can benefit from the product of including diverse cultures through pen-pal activities (see Appendix B), by exploring and understanding different cultures with the students.

Additionally, content teachers will benefit from having the opportunity to reflect (see Appendices C & E) on their current teaching philosophy and strategies they use within their own classrooms. As noted within the research, many rural content teachers felt underprepared (Besterman et al., 2018; Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Polat et al., 2019; Stairs – Davenport, 2021) to educate ELL students due to the lack of exposure to diverse cultures. Thus, with the reflection activities found within the product educators can begin to understand where to make changes within the lessons, and how to implement those changes within their actual teaching. In addition to the understanding, teachers will also benefit from the advancement of their cultural appreciation, which in turn, can also benefit the empathy (Guerrettaz et al., 2020; Polat et al., 2019; Ramos, 2018) and cultural appreciation of students as well. Moreover, the last implication

for teachers is the importance in understanding the utilization of advocacy, or in other words, parental and community involvement (see Appendices C, D, & E) within rural education.

Teachers within rural school districts must understand that the education of ELLs is not only their responsibility; rather it is a community effort. Research has shown that parental involvement within a student's education is one of the key aspects to a student being successful within the real world (Linville, 2020; Parsons & Shim, 2019; Polat et al., 2019; Ruiz, 2020; Walker, 2012). Thus, by providing educators with tools and strategies to increase parental involvement, there will be a decrease in discrimination and drop-out rates with an increase in educational opportunities and abilities for rural ELLs.

Implications for Student Learning

Students will also benefit from the concepts presented within my research and product. For instance, with the culturally responsive teaching techniques and forms of advocacy (see Appendices A, B, C, & D) implemented by the educators; an inclusive environment will begin to flourish. In addition, a sense of connectedness will be brought about from the inclusive environment and through the connection of culture, reality, and everyday life. Thus, with connectedness and inclusivity, the opportunities for educational advancements will grow as well as rural ELL's academic abilities. From the implementation of visual posters (see Appendix A) of typical classroom questions that include three different languages (English, Spanish, and Sign Language), students will feel more connected to the environments that they are living in. Furthermore, deficits such as marginalization (Parsons & Shim, 2019) will decrease as students gain a sense of culturally and linguistic awareness and appreciation. However, inclusive classroom and school environments should not be the only inclusive environment present within rural ELL lives. There must also be an inclusion and sense of connectedness (see Appendices B

& C) between ELL education (school life) and the community they live in (home life) (Eun, 2021). Students will see the connection between education and their home life, and understand the importance of education within the society they live in.

Furthermore, through the promotion of cultural interaction through events and places (see Appendix D) within the rural community, ELLs sense of connectedness can also be heightened. If educators and other students take part of traditional cultural aspects such as authentic concerts or learning traditional Spanish dances, ELL students will see how they are a part of the community they live in (Eun, 2021; Linville, 2020; Hoover & deBettencourt, 2018; Parsons & Shim, 2019; Ruiz, 2020; Stairs – Davenport, 2021; Waler, 2012). Again, decreasing the evidence of deficits and increasing the opportunities of sociocultural learning. Through the provided research and product, rural ELL students will gain a sense of connectedness and a variety of educational opportunities will be accessible to them as culturally responsive knowledge is built.

An additional benefit for student learning that is not seen within the appendices but can be found within the product, is the implementation of a ELL liaison within the school district. A liaison would be an individual (faculty member, parent, administrator, community member, etc.) who would communicate with an ELL family and the school (Parsons & Shim, 2019; Ruiz, 2020). Allowing for growth of parents understanding the expectations of their child's education, questions being directly answered as liaisons can complete home visits, and growth of a socio-cultural environment where all are included. Having a concrete liaison within a school district, is not only a benefit for student learning, however, can also increase student teaching as educators will have the opportunity to gain insight on student behavior and preferred learning techniques. Moreover, personal relationships and cultural understandings will increase with the direct line of ongoing communication.

Recommendations

The current professional development and products that have been provided are a good starting point for advancing the educational opportunities for rural ELLs within the Romulus Central School District. However, in the near future, when the population of ELLs increases within the district further professional development will be necessary. The utilization of ongoing professional development will allow educators to continue their growth of teaching philosophies and strategies to use within classrooms. In addition, some aspects of the professional development should change such as Appendix D as new cultural activities and events may be brought to the Finger-Lake region. Also, updates may be made to visual posters (see Appendix A) as new languages are found within the school. Thus, allowing for the continuation of inclusion and sense of connectedness. Furthermore, I recommend that the school district creates a directory or list of liaisons that are willing to work with ELL students and their families. This list may change from year to year as new staff will be added into the district, and other individuals may be interested in the position. It may be beneficial for districts to search for more than one liaison is there are multiple languages found within a school district. Having multiple liaisons will allow the ease of communication between home and school and foster personal relationships.

Further research should be conducted to better solve the issues of underfunding found within rural school districts. Current research shows that rural school districts lack the necessary research to create confident solutions when it comes to funding. Thus, if rural school districts are able to gain more funding from the state or another outside resource, the educational opportunities of ELLs can increase as new tools can be implemented. Lastly, I believe that there should be further research conducted on rural ELL students themselves. Much of my research

focused on the educators within rural school districts, which lacked the perspective of rural ELL students and how they feel within the rural environment. This would allow educators to gain even more insight into the underrepresented and underserved population.

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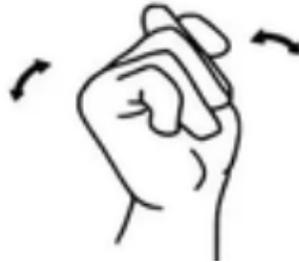
Appendix A:

Visual Posters for Culturally Responsive Teaching Techniques



May I go to the bathroom?

¿Puedo ir al baño?



May I go to the water fountain?

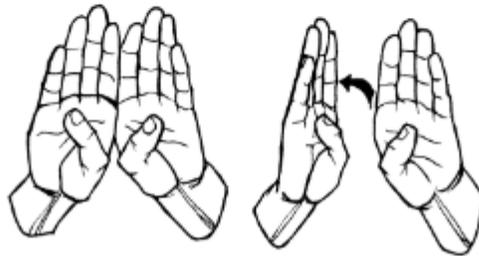
¿Puedo ir a la fuente de agua?





May I go to my locker?

¿Puedo ir a mi armario?



May I have a pencil?

¿Puedo tener un lápiz?





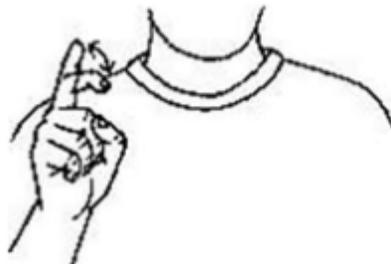
May I make a comment?

¿Puedo hacer un comentario?



May I ask a question?

¿Puedo hacer una pregunta?



Appendix B:

Electronic Pen-Pal Program Examples

PEN-PAL PROGRAMS

- 1** 

PenPal SCHOOLS

A Global Project Based Learning Community

PenPal Schools connects students from 75 countries through grade-level based learning projects about topics ranging from climate change and environmental sustainability to robotics and hardware with [penpalschools.org](#)
- 2** 

Language Penpals | Cambridge Assessment English

Introduce your students to Cambridge Assessment English's Penfriends activity. Connect with schools around the world...
- 3** 

InterPals Penpals

InterPals is a friendly community of over 5 million friends, language learners, travelers and penpals. Use Interpals to connect with native speakers, travelers and people from...
- 4** 

Penpal Club

Global PenFriends is a safe and secure place to meet international friends and penpals from all over the world. Our members correspond by internet or small mail and are...

Appendix C:

Parental Involvement Questions

What are some activities that you can implement inside the classroom to promote parental involvement?



My ideas:

My partner's Ideas:

What we will share:

What are some activities that you can implement outside of the classroom to promote parental involvement?



My ideas:

My partner's Ideas:

What we will share:

Appendix D:

Promotion of Interaction with Cultural Events and Places

Cultural Events & Places in our area!



Geneva Latino
Festival
End of August or Early
September



Authentic Spanish
Restaurants
El Morro
El Rinconcito Bakery & Cafe



Traditional Spanish
Dances
Salsa Ithaca



Authentic cultural
music
2022 Geneva Music Festival

Appendix E:

Professional Development Reflection Questions

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why is what I learned today relevant or meaningful?

2. What new ideas did I learn today to implement into my teaching practices?

3. What questions or concerns do I still have?

Appendix F:

Link to Professional Development Presentation Slideshow

<https://voicethread.com/share/20390723/>