

**Prepared Teachers for English Language Learners**

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**Abstract**

English Language Learners (ELL) are a growing population in the United States and more teachers are finding themselves unprepared to teach them. Research has identified three outcomes that could occur due to teachers' lack of knowledge on ELLs, over- or under-representation in special education, poor academic outcomes, and lack of cultural understanding. The literature shows these outcomes can be improved with proper education for teachers to better their understanding of ELLs academic and social abilities. To address these problems, a professional development (PD) to provide information and resources to teachers is proposed for Falconer School District, where teachers are invited to participate for an hour session. The goal of this PD is to provide teachers with information, resources, and strategies to become more effective educators for ELLs. Recommendations for further research and improvements include specialized training for special education teachers for ELLs that have disabilities and finding support available for schools that have migrant ELLs that travel from school to school.

*Keywords:* English Language Learners, Professional Development, Language Acquisition, Culturally Responsive Teaching

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine walking into a classroom in a new school and your teacher starts talking in a foreign language. You can understand some words that she is saying but you follow her to a desk with your name on it, sit down, and she opens a workbook to a page with words you do not understand. She walks away and begins talking again but you still can't understand her, this is what it can feel like to be an English Language Learner in a new country and school. English Language Learners, ELLs, are the fastest growing population of students in the United States. English Language Learners, ELL, are students whose home language, HL, is another language other than English. In the US there were about 4.5 million ELLs in 2010, which then increased to about 5 million ELLs in 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The New York State Education Department (2019) shows that from 2010 to 2018 an additional 20,000 ELLs enrolled in schools up from the over 240,000 ELLs already enrolled. With the growth of ELLs in schools there is an increased need for teachers who are well prepared to meet the unique educational needs of English Language Learners. In New York, all teachers are considered teachers of English Language learners and need to be ready to teach ELLs (NYSED, 2018).

The increase of ELLs in the state means that there not only will be more ELLs per class but also districts that normally do not have ELLs are starting to see these students in their districts. According to the New York State School Board Association, NYSSBA, (2019) only 13 percent of school districts in the state did not report to have any ELLs in their schools. That is 87% of school districts do have English Language Learners and are now learning how to teach a population of students that they are not familiar with. Although there is an increase in the number of ENL teachers hire there is a disproportionate increase compared to the influx of students. With the lack of ENL expertise in the classroom teachers are then left to use their own

knowledge, or lack thereof, to educate English Languages Learners. This leaves the general education teachers to little or no resources and support, making them unprepared to properly English Language Learners. These teachers have a lack of understanding in ELLs culturally needs, instructional needs, and the process of language acquisition leading to high dropout rates, low achievement of any subgroup and overpopulation in the special education setting (Murphy & Torff, 2019).

Lack of preparation of teachers can affect ELLs in different ways like over classification in special education setting, nationally lower academic achievement rates and high dropout rates. ENL teachers then become responsible for ELL students' learning and integration because general education teachers are unprepared and feel that it is not their responsibility to help ELLs through their education journey (Polat et al., 2019). Both general education teachers and ENL teacher should be working together to incorporate a learning environment that meets the students linguistic, academic, and cultural needs.

English Language Learners tend to be overrepresented as students with disabilities (Becker & Deris, 2019). These classifications may be inaccurate due to a number of reasons including lack of language acquisition, lack of cultural understanding or teachers lack of knowledge on how to educate ELLs (Parks, 2020). Unprepared teachers are unable to identify the difference between language and disability making it harder for them to provide the correct interventions. Interventions that normally would help schools identify the students who have disabilities are not designed for English Language Learners because they do not take into account students language needs or culturally difference (Ruiz, 2020). Some teachers group ELLs and students with disabilities because they view both groups as less than general education students because they are seen as less than their peers (Parks, 2020). ELL that are placed into

special education programs then receive services that do not fit their true needs rather what the teacher thinks they need. Coupled with the lack of knowledge that special education teachers have on properly educating English Language Learners and provide inaccurate services (Parks, 2020).

English Language Learners have a large achievement gap from their English speaking peers. This can be seen in academic test scores where ELLs score lower than their English-speaking peers (Soland, 2019). New York State Department of Education (2019) scores published for the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and Math tests in 2018, current English Language Learners received significantly lower scores than never ELL peers. These high stakes test do not improve instruction for English Language Learners or helps their teachers provide instruction for the students in the future (Blaise, 2018).

With low achievement in both the classroom and assessments English Language Learners may experience repeated low scores or grades making them feel failure after failure leading ELLs to dropout along with other reasons. ELLs have the highest dropout rate of any subgroup in the United States and New York State (Rodriguez, et. al., 2022). If the growth trajectory of English Language Learners and the lack of teacher preparation widens, which will result in less educated adults in the future. Students that dropout may not acquire the skills needed to participate in society. They have a less likely chance at finding a job or retaining their job causing them to live in lower socio-economic communities (Rodriguez, et. al., 2022). Students that drop out are also more likely to commit a crime and be incarcerated (Rodriguez, et. al., 2022).

In order for change to happen unprepared teachers need to understand what effects their teachings have on English Language Learners. I created a Professional Development, focusing

on enhancing classroom and content teachers' pedagogical knowledge around English Language Learners. In the PD, teachers will learn about language acquisition, improving teachers practice, and culturally relevant instruction and cultural needs. All teachers may end up working with ELLs as well and having that knowledge before working with them would be more helpful than later which could be done in teacher preparation programs. "All teachers are teachers of English Language Learners/Multilingual Learners" (NYSED, 2019). When teachers have both years of experience in teaching as well as training on working with English Language Learners they are more likely to be effective and prepared teachers of ELLs (Kim & Mullaney, 2020). In this project we will discuss the effects of unprepared teachers have on the education of English Language Learners. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature to understand what happens when teachers are unprepared, how it leads to lower achievement rates, higher dropout rates and disproportionate classification of special education. In Chapter 3 I will provide a Professional Development to better help teachers understand how to work with ELLs. Chapter 4 concludes with implications for teaching and learning as well as recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This Chapter outlines both learning theories and reviews the literature on the lack of preparation of teachers. As described in Chapter 1, despite the growing English Language Learners (ELL) population in the United States, there is a lack of teachers that are prepared and educated on how to adequately teach ELLs. In this Chapter, I will first explain Language Acquisition Theory (Cite) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (Cite). Language acquisition can play a role in how an ELLs learns English both socially and academically the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) can affect how an ELL learns based on the teacher's understanding of the student. Next, I will discuss the following themes emerged from the literature: Special Education and English Language Learners, Academic Outcomes, and Understanding Cultural Needs.

### **Theories of Language and Culture**

#### **Language Acquisition**

Language Acquisition is the process of learning a language and English Language Learners are going through second language acquisition when learning English (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). Unlike toddlers and young children learning to speak in stages and on their own timeline, second language acquisition happens in developmental stages and does not have a timeline of when an ELL will hit each stage. One stage that both first and second language acquisition has in common is the silent period (Krashen, 2003). This is when the brain is taking in the language but even in this stage it is different for the first and second language learner (Surayyo, 2022). First language acquisition happens naturally and subconsciously for children because of their repeated exposure to their home language and often only language. They continue to develop over time by observing and repeating what they hear. Whereas second

language acquisition is usually taught at an older age and when their first language is already developed (Surayyo, 2022).

Someone's ability to learn another language depends on the quantity and quality of the language they are learning and how close the home language is to the language they are learning (Surayyo, 2022). Most adults and children are exposed to the most English in school and depending on the teacher can affect the quality of English they are exposed to (Surayyo, 2022). Social interaction with the second language is also beneficial for learning another language because it creates motivation for the learner to want to be able to communicate with English-speaking peers in a less critical environment (Fuente & Goldenburg, 2020). The social interaction and language learning helps English Language Learners develop their speaking and listening skills even though they may not be as strong in the academic setting (Jong et al., 2013).

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is student-based teaching around all student's cultural background and experiences (Gay, 2000; Samuels, 2018). CRT allows for the students to have a deeper connection with the material they are learning and it requires the teacher to learn about their students' cultures as well as examining their own beliefs so that they may put their own aside (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The teacher and or students should have meaningful dialogue around the topic they are learning. This in turn provides a learning experience for all students involved, not just teachers or ELLs. All participants can hear different perspectives and share their own experiences.

ELLs can come from many diverse backgrounds and different forms of education and levels of proficiency in English. This then leads to different teaching methods needed to better help an ELL grow academically and linguistically. When CRT is used in the classroom ELLs

may feel more welcome to participate but also are able to connect to the material easier since it is based on their prior knowledge (Gay, 2000). Some ways to help understand a student's prior knowledge or culture is to build good home connections with the ELLs family even if it is through translated material or an interpreter. Other ways include trying to learn the ELLs home language, cultural traditions and providing material in the classroom of the ELLs home language. Lack of CRT can lead to ELLs feeling unwanted or welcomed, bias beliefs toward an ELL even if unintentional that could affect their academic or language learning in the classroom setting.

### **English Language Learners and Special Education**

Special Education and English Language Learners are often grouped together academically. In fact, in the US 15.5% of ELLs are classified with a disability whereas their English-speaking peers are 14.4% (NCES, 2022). ELL may be referred for a disability because the teachers are unaware of the difference between language acquisition and a learning disability (Becker & Deris, 2019; Parks, 2020). A learning disability is one of the 13 classifications a student can receive when being diagnosed with a disability. One component of a learning disability can be language-based learning, when a person struggles with comprehending and producing written or oral language (McDowell, 2018). This lack of understanding can be confused with a student's language acquisition if they are not given enough time to develop the language and if a teacher is not trained in identifying the difference.

Once referred to for testing of a disability an ELL has a greater than 50% chance of being classified with a disability (Becker & Deris, 2019). According to Rameriez (2018), "many school psychologists are not trained to assess culturally and linguistically diverse students". This causes the results to vary depending on the students but can cause the student to be classified when they may need other intervention strategies. Other factors such as untrained interpreters, language

proficiency testing that is inaccurate, and intellectual and academic assessments only tested in English the results could be inaccurate (Ramirez, 2018).

Over classification of ELL is a result of teachers' lack of understanding of language acquisition and lack of proper interventions before being referred for special education services (Becker & Deris, 2019). Many schools use Response to Intervention, RtI, models to provide labels and determine the level of intervention that a student may need. Students are screened using universal screeners that are supposed to allow for determination of which students may need early intervention strategies (Ruiz, 2020). Intervention screeners are also considered universal but do not consider language or cultural differences and teachers that are not trained on how to determine the difference may not be able to interpret it correctly (Ruiz, 2020).

Although the national numbers may state that there is an overidentification of ELL as students with disabilities this can be different in each school. Parks (2020) looks at the theories of “wait and be sure” or “the sooner the better” to see when the right time to determine if a student has gone through enough language acquisition and interventions to refer them to the Committee on Special Education, CSE. Park's (2020) research showed there was no right answer because the “wait and be sure” method created an underrepresented group of ELLs in the lower elementary level and an over-represented group in the upper elementary level. The study of over 1,000 children not only looked at over- or under- representation but how teachers, administrators, and specialist views affected classification timings (Parks, 2020). New York State also does not give clarification on when a student should or should not be referred to the CSE team but rather a checklist of what needs to be done before the student can be referred. This includes just stating that the student has enough time to become familiar and learn the English language, so it is up to the teacher and educators to determine what is enough time.

Parks also found that the “sooner the better” method caused an overrepresentation of ELLs in the special education setting because it did not give students enough time to complete language acquisition. Like Becker and Deris (2018) research where they found that students that did not receive language instruction at a younger age were more likely to be identified with a disability. School districts like the one in Parks (2020) study tried imposing rules where an ELL must be in their district for two years before being evaluated for a disability. Teachers would find ways around the rule by asking parents to write a letter to request evaluations, sending the students to a medical center to be evaluated, or using speech to receive a classification but these methods worked seven out of nine times (Parks, 2020). In turn, the professionals that would be testing ELLs for disabilities may not be trained in evaluating an ELL for a disability (Becker & Deris, 2018). This is a disservice to ELLs as although they may be receiving special education services or accommodations those may not be what their student needs and instead hold them back.

While some States and Districts see an over-representation in special education of ELLs, others see an under-representation. ELL under-representation may be due to factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), racial, language and home factors. The idea of later classification from researchers was more supported by administrators and specialists but saw an underrepresentation of ELL in the special education setting (Morgan et al., 2015; Parks, 2020). Parks (2020) study saw a push in schools to provide more intervention opportunities for students where 75% of ELLs received a minimum of one year but most would receive four or five years. This “wait and be sure” method left ELLs that may have a disability without special education service or accommodation for four or five years because the district and some teachers wanted to see a large gap between ELLs performance compared to their English-speaking peers (Parks,

2020). Likewise, Morgan found that ELLs who were not identified as possibly having a disability sooner created an underrepresentation of students with disabilities.

Morgan et al.'s (2015) study of 20,000 kindergarteners examined how factors such as language, SES, race and ethnicity affected the rate of classification for minority students compared to their white peers. In this study researchers had parents fill out surveys about different personal information such as race, mother's age, birth weight, if they had insurance, family SES, and income as well as the parents' educational levels and occupations. They watched the students from kindergarten to eighth grade monitoring their behavior, achievement scores in math and reading, and if they were classified with a learning disability, speech and language disability, health impairment, intellectual disability, or emotional disturbance (Morgan et al, 2015).

Morgan et al.'s (2015) study looked at whether the schools families have an effect on the rate of classifying students with disabilities. Research showed an underrepresentation of minority students that were classified from the school with factors outside of school. The ELLs from the lower SES community were more likely to be classified as having a learning disability or speech and language impairment (Morgan et al., 2015). As seen in Becker and Deris's (2018) study this could be due to lack of professionals that are trained to work with ELL, untrained professionals or overall lack of funding for interventions (Morgan et al, 2015). Ruiz (2020) research supports that lack of funding is a problem when it comes to ELLs when it comes to providing intervention services. Overall, there can be an under-representation of ELLs in schools even though the national average shows an overrepresentation.

When ELLs are in a setting where their English-speaking peers are academically lower overall, they are less likely to be identified or considered to be tested for a disability. ELLs

academic scores may reflect low but still average to their also low performing English-Speaking peers. Teachers may miss students that are struggling because they do not stand out leaving ELLs without services they may need (Counts et al., 2018). Since not all districts and states may have overall low SES and diverse areas, they may not see this underrepresentation of ELLs in the special education setting. As a result of unprepared teachers with lack of intervention, personal beliefs and lack of proper assessment training are helping cause English Language Learners to be overrepresented or underrepresented in special education settings. Often services that are given to ELLs are incorrect for their academic or linguistic needs or at the wrong time. With improper service and another label that is seen as less than the English-speaking peer ELLs continue to perform lower (Becker & Deris, 2019).

### **Academic Outcomes**

Currently there is an academic gap between English Language Learners and their English-speaking peers, meaning ELLs are testing lower and as result causing poor academic outcomes such as high dropout rates. As there is an increase in ELLs in the United States this gap does not seem to be decreasing. According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) state exam for students in grades third through eighth grade, ELLs performed lower in both math and English language arts (2019). The scores reported were from 2015 to 2018 and in all four years ELLs performed almost 30% lower than their English-speaking peers in ELA and almost 40% lower in math. Although the results show that more ELLs were scoring higher their English-speaking peers were also showing an improvement in scores as well (NYSED, 2019).

This gap is not just seen in New York but across the country for all ELLs. One reason for these lower scores may be that ELLs are not given academic work at their ability as their English-speaking peers because of teacher lack of knowledge on ELLs. Murphy and Torff (2019)

conducted a study in the northeast part of the country with two school districts that contained 65% of students who were ELL. Murphy and Torff's (2019) study looked at how teachers' beliefs of ELLs access to rigorous material to better their education. The teachers themselves were asked to rate the material they gave ELLs on how rigorous they were.

Murphy and Torff (2019) found that teachers knew that they were not giving as hard of work to ELLs as they were to the English-speaking students. When looking at the results Murphy and Torff stated that none of the teachers that gave different work had any formal education or training in how to educate ELLs. This lack of training for teachers creates a lack of understanding on how ELLs can academically perform to their peers with the correct instruction given. ELLs were not given the chance to show that they were able to do academically when given appropriate work.

Similarly, Blaise (2018) examined the impact of academic work and its effect on high stakes testing for ELLs. Like many states, high stakes testing is how academic performance is measured. Blaise (2018) explored how ELLs are at a disadvantage because they are taught a curriculum that does not consider language barriers and are not appropriately taught to ELLs. Blaise's (2018) study examined a school in Boston Massachusetts over three years, where there is a large population of Spanish speaking students. The researcher notes that one factor that may have impacted the students was the environment the school was in as it was a poor neighborhood with little financial support to the school. Interviews were conducted with 13 ELLs to hear their experience about the academics they were given and the testing they took.

Overall, many of the ELLs who performed academically well in the classroom were more worried about the testing because of it being high stakes but also the language and vocabulary that was on the test was much harder for them to understand (Blaise, 2018). The ELLs started the

study with time with a bilingual teacher in classes to help facilitate the language barrier that may have been present but due to lack of funding the school was not able to keep the program. This resulted in the students in their classes with no support and their classroom teachers were not able to support the ELLs the same as when there was a bilingual teacher. As a result of teachers who lack understanding in how ELLs learn and high stakes testing, ELLs are at a disadvantage as shown in an academic achievement gap.

This lack of education does not just show a gap in achievement but is also seen in lack of self-esteem in ELLs. Soland (2019) did a study on the correlation between ELLs achievement test scores and their self-efficacy, or confidence in their academic goal/outcome. The study was done in an urban school where 90% of the students were ELLs and low income. One third of those students had been in that school district since kindergarten. Soland (2019) found that as the students got to middle school their self-efficacy score decreased even though their academic scores increased. This was because there was still a large academic gap between their English-speaking peers who also increased their academic scores at the same time as the ELLs. Soland (2019) stated “If students do not believe they can accomplish difficult academic tasks, they have little incentive to attempt them.” As talked about in Murphy and Torff’s (2019) study when ELLs are not academically pushed they not only are not exposed to material to become successful but their willingness to do the work becomes less over time.

The outcome of ELLs who are low scoring and less motivated to learn results in high dropout rates among ELLs. As a result of Blaise’s (2018) study mentioned earlier, ELL that are low performing are dropping out of school because they are not able to perform on tests that states consider important for college. In New York, the NYSED (2019) reported that in 2014 about 27.5% of ELLs dropped out compared to their English-speaking peers at 5% that dropped

out. While there was a steady decrease in English speaking and overall dropout rates, ELLs did not see a steady decrease but rather inconsistent pattern staying in the upper 20% range.

Rodriguez et al. (2022) identified the different factors that affected this high dropout rate. The researchers conducted their study with 65 teachers, administrators and counselors that worked in New York City public schools where they were asked three questions. Those questions were, what factors affect ELL dropout rate, what changes need to be made to instruction to decrease dropout, and what services should be provided to help academic learning for ELLs. The results for question one about factors found that in the academic setting not passing NYS high stakes test was the biggest reason the participants' believed ELLs were dropping out followed by poor prior academic teachings. These two factors go together as students need to build into prior knowledge for the state exams but when an ELL continues to fail because of their lack of prior knowledge their willingness decreases (Rodriguez et al., 2022). The results for question two regarding what changes needed to be made teachers noted that the reading material needed to be easier for them to read and recommended that more specialized instruction be given to ELLs so that they have a better chance at understanding and succeeding. Finally, the results for the third question about what services would increase ELLs academic success, teachers were more vocal in their comment because it wrapped all their responses together. Teachers wanted additional support, whether this be financially, thought professional developments, or alternative programs for ELLs to be able to graduate (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

Teachers that work with ELLs understand that they need support for ELLs to have a positive academic outcome. Unfortunately, teachers feel as though they are not equipped with understanding how to properly educate ELLs and ELLs continue to be impacted negatively in their academics. This dropout rate is slowly decreasing for ELLs, but teachers and students need

support to better help. With adequate training teachers will not only be able to better educate ELL academically but also help build self-confidence.

### **Understanding Cultural Needs**

New York State Education Department (2018) urges schools and districts to use ELLs' languages and cultures as a way to promote diversity and to use their prior knowledge to help bridge new content. However, some teachers do not use this concept of promoting diversity or using the students' culture or language and prior knowledge as part of their instruction, making them unprepared to teach ELLs effectively. Teachers need to look at their own perspectives and understand how ELLs learn and any biases they may have.

A study done by Polat et al. (2019) with 35 students in teacher preparation programs that have never worked with or have been educated to work with ELLs. The idea of the study is to examine teachers' biases and if caught soon enough could change this in teacher preparation programs. The ELLs and student teachers were paired to pen pals which they would talk about books that were given to the ELLs in their home language. The data was collected by three surveys, the student teachers' belief on inclusion, their belief on responsibility of an ELLs education, and their beliefs on culturally responsive teaching. This was done in a pre- and post-survey collection to see the change of beliefs in the student teachers.

As a result, from this Polet et al.'s (2019) study there was an increase in response to inclusion of ELLs, despite their lack of English proficiency. There was also an increase in including cultures into the classroom and using students' prior knowledge when creating and teaching a lesson. The largest response was to the student teachers' beliefs in if they were responsible for ELLs academic and language development. The pre-surveys showed that many of the student teachers believed that it was the English as a New Language (ENL) teachers who

were responsible for ELLs and their academic and language success. In the post-survey, many student teachers changed their beliefs stating that it was their responsibility to help ELL learn academically and in learning English (Polat et al., 2019).

A teacher's perspective and beliefs are important as they can impact an ELLs ability to grow both academically and linguistically. Oftentimes a teacher's perception and or belief is enough to adequately meet the needs of an ELL. Kim and Morita-Mullaney (2017) conducted a study in Indiana on teachers' beliefs and their effectiveness to teach ELLs. These teachers were participating in a one-day professional development where data was collected from a survey about their confidence in instruction, curriculum and assessing ELL and participating in an interview around the same topics (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2017). The teachers were separated into two initial groups, low years of teaching and high years of teaching then separated again by if they were certified ENL teachers.

The results of Kim and Morita-Mullaney's (2017) study revealed that both newer teachers and teachers with many years with certification in teaching ELLs were more effective and more confident in their teaching of ELLs. The teacher with the lowest years of teaching without a certificate resulted in being more effective in teaching because they were more willing to modify and change their teachings to better benefit ELLs. The teachers who had been teaching for longer with no certification were least effective because they were not as willing to change their teaching styles. One teacher even said in the interview that they follow the curriculum that the district provides with no accommodations or modification. While another teacher states that they just minimize the vocabulary for ELLs (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2017). These are not effective ways of teaching as ELLs are then not exposed or able to access the materials being taught.

With lack of education on ELLs also comes the lack of understanding ELL language development and its importance to their culture. Oftentimes language is closely related to one's culture making language important in an ELL's home but teachers who do not take time to learn ELLs culture make inaccurate assumptions about ELLs. One teacher in a study done by Rizzuto (2017) stated that the students who did not speak English had a hard time playing with their English-speaking peers and that the ELLs were too rough and must have learned it at home. Rizzuto (2017) interviewed, gave a diversity survey, and observed 10 teachers in grades pre-kindergarten to second grade. In the interview the researcher asked about the teachers' perspectives of ELLs in the general education classroom and how they monitored their practice to better educate ELLs.

Results varied between teachers, but the greatest results came from the observations as a teacher who reported to sometimes use a student's home language in the lesson had an English-only rule in her classroom. This was the same teacher who had a negative attitude toward the ELLs playing too rough and was a correlation in the study for teachers who used English-only in their classroom. On the other hand, the teachers who although were not able to speak another language but allowed their ELLs to bring in their home language were seen as more welcoming and had positive views on ELLs (Rizzuto, 2017). A teacher's understanding and willingness to understand their ELLs language and culture provides a welcoming learning environment for their students.

Even when teachers are open to learning about ELLs cultures and languages they may run into areas they are unfamiliar with leading to the avoidance of topics. Samuel (2018) did a study with 200 teachers that used their students' cultures and prior knowledge in their teaching to gain their perspective on how this style of teaching is working. Through four or five interviews

spanning four months Samuel (2018) gathered that although this style of teaching was working well for ELLs there were still concerns. Most if not all the teachers talked about controversial topics being brought up that they did not feel comfortable talking about or had little background knowledge themselves so they would avoid or minimize the topic altogether. Some of the topics were based on cultural beliefs that the students may have and teachers did not know how to have conversations around them even when they may have students on both sides of the topic. The teachers stated between their own biases and institutional biases it was harder for them to have student-centered teaching causing them to revert back to standard teachings (Samuel, 2018). Allowing ELLs to be able to use their prior knowledge and language increases their ability to succeed in the classroom both academically and linguistically.

### **Conclusion**

Based on this research, English Language Learners benefit from teachers who have been prepared and educated on how to adequately teach ELLs. When ELLs are provided teacher who understand the language learning process and are able to identify when an ELLs may have a disability and correctly assess and classify the student. Also, prepared teachers can better support ELLs in the classroom academically so as they progress through the years, they can close the achievement gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. A better understanding of ELLs cultural needs allow them to feel welcomed and motivated to participate so they are more motivated to succeed. As well as better achievement, this support for ELLs could help decrease the dropout rate providing for better job opportunities and futures.

Using this research as evidence, general education teachers need better preparation and professional developments on ELLs. The goal of the professional development is for teacher to better understand their roles as teachers of ELLs, evaluate their own biases towards ELLs, how

to provide a well-rounded education for ELLs, how to help linguistically, and who they can contact for help. Professional Development is not only a way for teachers to learn how to educate ELLs but to also have a conversation of what the learning environment in the school looks like overall.

### **Chapter 3: Description of Professional Development**

Teachers and educators are unprepared to teach English Language Learners, ELL, for many different reasons. As discussed in Chapter 2, teachers who are properly trained in educating, understanding, and assessing ELLs provide a better education for ELLs (Ruiz, 2020). When teachers have proper training they are able to provide welcoming learning environments for ELLs and in turn provides more self confidence in the students (Soland, 2019). If teachers are not trained we see both an under- and over-representations of ELLs in special education, low achievement schools, high dropout rates and low self confidence in ELLs (Blaise, 2018; Murphey & Torff, 2019; Parks, 2020; Rizzito, 2017).

In this Chapter, I will describe professional development (PD) that aims to help educators working with or may with ELLs in the school setting including. These educators include but not limited to general education teachers, special education teachers, and ENL teachers. It also serves a reminder for those who have already worked with ELLs. The PD could be for teachers of all grade levels and subject areas as it is anyone who works with ELLs in the school setting. The goal of this PD is for teachers to be better prepared to educate ELLs.

I will first describe the agenda of events for participants to understand what we will be talking about. Next, I will gain an understanding of the audience's prior knowledge on ELLs with a short activity. Then, I will clarify the roles of the different teachers involved with ELLs followed by activities and discussions about what ELLs need from their teachers both academically and socially. The session will conclude with a discussion centered around the participants' own classrooms or community and how they envision the use of strategies in the classroom. The final activity will be reviewing what the participants learned from the session.

### **Agenda of Event**

This PD will be presented to Falconer Central School during their professional development day December 9th, 2022. It will take place in the Falconer Middle/High school building in the project room from 1-2 o'clock. This is a one-hour session that allows me to explain the different roles of teachers that work with ELLs as well as different resources teachers can utilize. The teachers will be given handouts and worksheets that will be accompanied by a slideshow presentation and conversation (see Appendix A &B). Participants expected outcome is to be better prepared for working with ELLs and if they find themselves in a situation where they are not as confident then they are able to know where their resources are. The PD will be broken down into helping teachers become aware of their role, the ENL teacher's role, strategies to help ELLs/Intervention strategies, and where can teachers find support for ELLs.

Teachers will be expected to be open minded and participate in conversation especially about different strategies that work best for their district and students' needs. Since teachers' perspectives drive how they teach, the more open they are about learning how the ELL process goes, the better understanding they will have of their ELLs. Research reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed how often teachers believe that they are not responsible for ELLs and may often turn to the English as a New Language, ENL, teacher to take on full responsibility (Polat et al., 2019). Thus in this PD focuses on the roles of both the general educator and the ENL teacher so both understand their position as co-teachers and support. It also offers teachers what strategies and supports that can help them better teach students.

### **Teachers Roles**

At the start of the presentation I will introduce myself and my credentials as a Special Education teacher and soon to be ENL teachers. Then, as a group the participant and myself will

talk about what they already know about ELLs to help start thinking about the topic. We will write these things down on a large poster on the wall to look back at later. We will then go on to review who are ELLs and how they are categorized into the different levels of ELLs. This activity aims to help teachers understand that not all ELLs are the same because some students can understand little to no English compared to some students who can speak English but may not be able to spell or their sentence structure is off or students who are able to read and write in English just at a lower level than their English-speaking peers (Appendix A). Following the explanation of who ELLs are, we will start discussing the role of the ENL teacher by having participants talk about what they think the ENL teacher does and their responsibilities in groups and then all together. Afterwards we will look at the required minutes that the ENL teacher needs to work with the student both for standalone time and integrated time (Appendix B). We will also discuss the different responsibilities that the ENL does such as the language interview for new students, helping provide materials for the students, and using that stand alone time to work on the student language acquisition. Then we will switch to the general education teacher role because many teachers believe that the ENL teachers provides all the support and are solely responsible for the ELLs. We will follow the same structure as we did for the ENL by talking about the general education teachers 'responsibilities and then going into detail about what it really looks like.

Discussing the roles of each teacher is important because, as we see in literature, the general education teachers that are unprepared to teach ELLs tend to push the responsibility to ENL teachers (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2020; Polat et al., 2019). If each teacher is aware of their role they then can be better prepared or spend time preparing for what they need to be doing. One of the combined roles that general education teachers and ENL teachers share is how

they view or perceive their students. If a teacher feels confident in their teaching or assessing, they are more likely to have more motivation and put more effort into their teaching (Becker & Deris, 2019). This confidence along with this PD increases a teacher's overall efficacy and competence when working with ELLs. In Kim and Morita-Mullaney (2020) study they found that an experienced ENL teachers concern was that general education teachers did not understand the students' language needs and that just because the ELL was not completing the assignment as their English peers they may still be achieving language goals while completing the assignment in a different way. Now that each teacher can understand their role they can start looking at their teaching practices that come next in the PD.

### **Providing Support**

Next, we will discuss what support looks like for both ENL and general education teachers. One activity will be giving the participants a short paragraph in another language, Spanish, asking the participants who can read or pick out words they may not know. Then I will read the first few sentences and ask who can tell me what the passage is about. The assumption is that none of the teachers will be able to answer the question with detail because they don't know how to speak Spanish. This is because we expect our ELLs to be given English documents and still read them or comprehend and if they do not teachers believe if they listen to the story they would understand better but this is not supporting our ELLs. This shows that if we try to use conventional intervention methods we are not looking at the language aspect of our ELLs (Ruiz, 2020).

Next we will talk about how we need to get to know our ELLs as humans before we can even start academics. I will talk about how getting to know their students' cultures can eventually lead to helping a student academically. Since Falconer is a semi-rural area in western New York

I will ask the teachers to talk about surfing and to tell me what they know about it. Most of the teachers may have a vague idea about it but many of them many know nothing about it. This is to show that although the concept they are teaching may be a familiar concept to them it may not be to our ELLs who have never heard about it. Understanding where our ELLs are coming from will better prepare teachers in how to educate their students based on their prior knowledge. Another form of cultural support is communicating with the parents and creating a school to home connection. Falconer uses a communication app called Class Dojo, which allows parents and teachers to have conversations back and forth. One thing the teachers may not know is that it can also translate the message for the parents. If a parent or guardian is not someone with technology both the county and BOCES provide programs for interpretation. Depending on the service provider the interpreter could be over the phone or in person so it is important that the teacher finds the best service and method for the parents to communicate.

The first step to academic support is how we identify students' abilities going back to the different levels that an ELL can be categorized as. We will go back to the example of the Spanish passage, I will then give them a translated version of the passage in English and ask them the same questions. At this point the teachers should be able to read it and tell me a detailed account of what's happening in the passage, emphasizing that as a general education teacher they can provide translated material for their ELLs. Another form of differentiation that the teachers can use that we will talk about is verbal responses or responses in their home language. Oftentimes when learning another language people learn social language before academic language so ELLs may be able to give a general understanding of a concept without the vocabulary or writing it down. I will then ask the teachers to spend time coming up with ways

that they can support their students academically at different levels. They will be provided a notes sheet to help record both my suggestions, their thoughts or other teachers' thoughts.

### **Resources**

Finally, we will look at different resources that teachers can use when myself or an ENL teacher is not around but they are unsure what to do. All of the resources used today will be on a Quick Reference page (See Appendix B) and there will also be a link sent in an email and on the page where there are resources to the NYS education website about ELLs. The participants will discuss different resources in their schools that they have such as the ENL teacher and if the school has different people who may speak students' languages such as any language teachers in the building or community members that would be positive role models to bring in. We will also discuss if the school has any outside resources that teachers can use to connect with their students to better understand them and their community or culture. Other resources may include different ways to communicate with parents and tools to help translate work for students correctly into their home language.

### **Final Activity**

Wrapping up the PD we will go back to the chart of things the teachers created and I will ask again what they know about ELLs and how to educate them. After this I will ask the teachers to spend a few minutes talking about what they as teachers can implement in their classrooms, what their plan would be for welcoming an ELL and what could our district or myself do to better support the teachers who may receive an ELL. This is to get their minds thinking but also allowing them to be specific for their content or grade but also possible share ideas that the district could change. When the teacher buys into the learning outcome they will be more involved so if they believe their suggestion may be heard and used they may be more engaged.

The intended outcome of this PD would be that the teachers have a better understanding on how to structure their teachings towards ELLs. Providing an opportunity for teachers to consider how their school educates their students, not just ELLs, and possibly make informed decisions moving forward. Schools that see their ELLs as individuals and tailor their instruction to meet their needs see a performance increase as well as a positive learning environment (Becker & Debris, 2019). Teachers who are willing to take time to consider ELLs when planning their assessments and interventions will see a more efficient classroom.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to identify why teachers were unprepared to adequately educate ELLs and how to provide a meaningful PD for those teachers. Teachers who understand ELLs academic, cultural and social needs are better prepared to help ELLs thrive in the school setting (Samuel, 2018). Unprepared teachers can affect ELLs in different ways like over classification in special education setting, nationally lower academic test scores and high dropout rates. ENL teachers then become responsible for ELL students' learning because general education teachers feel that it is not their responsibility to help ELLs through their education journey (Polat et al., 2019). Both general education teachers and ENL teachers should be working together to incorporate a learning environment that meets the students' linguistic, academic, and cultural needs.

### **Summary**

Research has shown many different conclusions about unprepared teachers, but for the best representation in special education, academic outcomes and cultural needs of ELLs, require well informed teachers. For example, some teachers understand their ELLs may not be able to fluently speak English so they may give less intensive assignments making ELLs feel less than or unable to perform compared to English-speaking peers. If an ELLs fall behind academically a teacher may refer them to special education or not understand that the ELL has no prior knowledge on the topic the class is talking about. These are perceptions or lack of understanding of the ELLs that affect the students chance to succeed (Becker & Deris, 2019; Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2020; Murphey & Torff, 2019; Polat et al., 2019, Samuels, 2018, Soland, 2019).

Overall, this project concludes that with proper education, preparation, and resources teachers could be better equipped to educate ELLs. Teachers would know that by understanding

their students' culture would also help them to understand the ELL's academic needs. A teacher's role in each child's learning environment can make an impact on the student's self confidence and academic success over time. Providing proper services and support to ELLs is one positive impact that a teacher can have for an ELL. Support such as differentiating material so that an ELL can comprehend the content and allowing them to provide responses to the best of their language ability. This support may also require resources such as translated material, using the expertise of the ENL teacher or reaching out to community resources.

### **Implications for Learning**

ELLs, as well as other students, would benefit from this PD as it brings new ideas and thoughts to teachers about their style of teaching. Teachers who get to know their students personally and academically before providing content to the students are able to differentiate and provide a welcoming learning environment. Learning environments that are supportive and inclusive help students self confidence and academically effective. ELLs also have the support of their general education teacher as well as their ENL teacher. Teachers as resources may be the ELLs only academic support depending on their home life situations. The PD may also provide ELLs a chance to receive the correct services at the correct time. Instead of waiting for language to develop, teachers can identify the difference between language and disability or not jump to conclusions too soon and assume language learning is a disability.

### **Implication for Teachers**

General Education Teachers and Special Education Teachers could benefit from this PD as it can help their understanding of ELLs. Oftentimes teachers learn the basics of ELLs in their college programs and for school districts or teachers that do not work with ELLs regularly they can often forget what ELLs need. As seen in research, a teacher's effectiveness when teaching

ELLs is impacted by whether or not they have training in supporting ELLs (Kim & Morita-Mullaney, 2020). The PD provides a refresher based on the teacher's knowledge of ELLs already and then is tailored with activities and discussions around educational practices that best fit ELLs in the teacher's classroom.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

Based on the number of school districts that do not have ELLs in New York, research on how districts handle ELLs that are migrant would be beneficial. Although the PD provided is a good resource the impact on ELLs could potentially help school districts like those with proper planning and implementation. Similarly to the topic of schools that do not have many ELLs and unprepared teachers, more research to better help school psychologists and special education teachers test for ELLs with disabilities. This research would better help teachers not only know what to look for when referring an ELLs to special education but then help special education teachers navigate language and disability barriers.

Another area of research that could be done is how schools that are not bilingual but a large population of students may be bilingual affects ELLs academics. Some districts that have large numbers of bilingual people in a community may not be labeled as ELLs because English is spoken in the home but because another language is used socially in the community or school, what effect does that have on ELLs whose home language is not English. Research shows that bilingual teachers tend to be more effective because they understand what the student is going through but having a majority of peers that are also bilingual may change how ELLs are viewed in the school and by teachers.

### **Final Thoughts**

English language learners are a growing population in the United States with a much slower rate of teachers who are prepared to educate them. Teacher preparation programs may expose teachers to ELLs but they do not go in depth on language development, differentiation, or cultural differences a teacher will see in their classroom. Lack of preparation of teachers can affect ELLs in different ways like over classification in special education setting, nationally lower academic achievement rates and high dropout rates. Creating a program for teachers to relearn the aspects of teaching ELLs can cause a positive effect for both teachers and students.

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Appendix A

Quick Guide to ELL + Resources

Quick Guide to ELLs + Resources

Level	Description of English Language Proficiency Level	Notes
<b>Entering</b> (Beginning)	A student at the Entering level has great dependence on supports and structures to advance academic language skills and has not yet met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).	
<b>Emerging</b> (Low Intermediate)	A student at the Emerging level has some dependence on supports and structures to advance academic language skills and has not yet met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).	
<b>Transitioning</b> (Intermediate)	A student at the Transitioning level shows some independence in advancing academic language skills, but has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).	
<b>Expanding</b> (Advanced)	A student at the Expanding level shows great independence in advancing academic language skills and is approaching the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).	
<b>Commanding</b> (Proficient)	A student at the Commanding level has met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings). He or she is not an ELL.	

CR Part 154-2 (K-8) English as New Language (ENL) Units of Study and Staffing Requirements

All ENL classes, including integrated and Stand-alone offer home language support.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL	ENTERING (Beginning)	EMERGING (Low Intermediate)	TRANSITIONING (Intermediate)	EXPANDING (Advanced)	COMMANDING (Proficient)
<b>ENL INSTRUCTIONAL TIME (MINIMUM)</b>	2 units of study per week (180 min.)	2 units of study per week (180 min.)	1 unit of study per week (180 min.)	1 unit of study per week (180 min.)	Former ELLs must continue to receive services for an additional two years
<b>STAND-ALONE ENL</b>	1 unit of study in ENL (180 min.)	3 unit of study in ENL (90 min.)			
<b>INTEGRATED ENL</b>	1 unit of study in ENL/ELA (180 min.)	1 unit of study in ENL/ELA (180 min.)	3 unit of study in ENL/ELA (90 min.)	1 unit of study in ENL/ELA or other Core Content Area (180 min.)	
<b>FLEXIBILITY</b>		3 unit of study can be STAND-ALONE ENL, or INTEGRATED ENL/Core Content Area (90 min.)	3 unit of study can be STAND-ALONE ENL, or INTEGRATED ENL/Core Content Area (90 min.)		3 unit of study per week of INTEGRATED ENL in ELA/Core Content Area, or other approved Former ELL services for two additional years*
<b>TOTAL</b>	360 minutes per week	360 minutes per week	180 minutes per week	180 minutes per week	
<b>STAFFING/ PERSONNEL</b>	<b>STAND-ALONE ENL</b> K-12 Certified ESOL teacher		<b>INTEGRATED ENL – 1 Dually Certified Teacher</b> ESOL and Common Branch (K-6) or Content Area (7-8) teacher who holds both certifications <b>INTEGRATED ENL – 2 Individually Certified Teachers (Co-teaching)</b> A certified ESOL teacher and a K-6 certified elementary school teacher A certified ESOL teacher and a 7-8 certified content area teacher (ELA, Math, Science, or Social Studies)		
The maximum allowable grade span for grouping instruction in grades K-12 English as a New Language or Bilingual Education classes is two contiguous grades, except for English Language Learners in a Special Education class, as defined by section 200.1(u) of this Title. All programs must be provided during the school day.					

\*Other services that are approved by the NYS Commissioner that monitor and support the student's language development and academic progress. Core Content Area shall mean ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies. One unit of study = 180 minutes of instruction per week per year.

Updated May 6, 2015



**Emerging –**  
ENL Instruction ~35 minutes per day  
Co-taught ~35 minutes per day

**Emerging –**  
ENL Instruction ~ 20 minutes per day  
Co-taught ~ 35 per day  
Either extra ~20 minutes per day

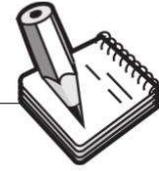
**Transitioning –**  
ENL Instruction ~ None required  
Co-taught ~ 20 minutes per day  
Either extra ~20 minutes per day

**Expanding –**  
Co-taught ~35 minutes per day

**Commanding –**  
Either ~20 minutes per day

Notes:

Notes:



<u>General Education Teacher</u>	<u>ENL Teacher</u>

Dojo Translation



Android

Parents can view translated Class Story posts, School Story posts, and messages when they log into their account on the web or on the app. To see the translated posts and messages, parents must have their language settings set to their desired language. Any time a post or message is written in a language other than the language their account is set to, they'll have the option to translate.

To Set An Account Language/Via a Parent Account:

Please pass this info to interested parents

- 1 Log into the website at <https://home.classdojo.com>
- 2 Click on your name in the upper right corner of the page
- 3 Click on "Account Settings"
- 4 Under "Language Preference," select your desired language
- 5 Click the blue "Save Changes" button.

From the Web

Parents can view translated Class Story posts, School Story posts, and messages when they log into their account on the web or on the app. To see the translated posts and messages, parents must have their language settings set to their desired language. Any time a post or message is written in a language other than the language their account is set to, they'll have the option to translate.

To Set An Account Language/Via a Parent Account:

Please pass this info to interested parents

- 1 Click on your name in the upper right corner of the page
- 2 Select "Account Settings"
- 3 Under "Language and region," select your desired language
- 4 Click the blue "Save changes" button

**Note:** When a parent has translated your Class Story post or message, you will see "Translation viewed by X parents" beneath the post.

When you click on the phrase, "Translation Viewed by X Parents," or click on the number of views, you will see a globe icon next to the names of parent(s) who have translated your Class Story post.

iOS

Parents can view translated Class Story posts, School Story posts, and messages when they log into their account on the web or on the app. To see the translated posts and messages, parents must have their language settings set to their desired language. Any time a post or message is written in a language other than the language their account is set to, they'll have the option to translate.

To Set An Account Language/Via a Parent Account:

Please pass this info to interested parents

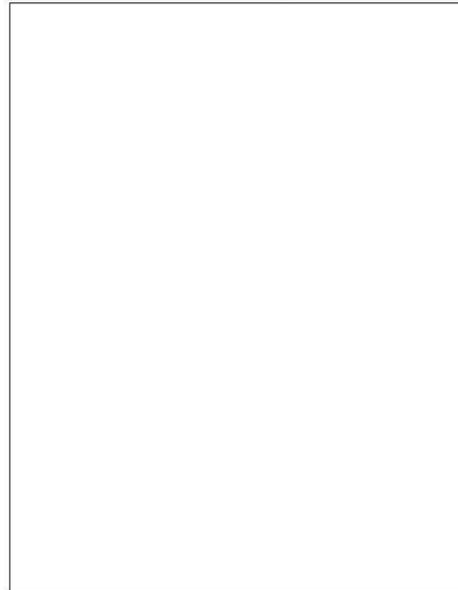
- 1 Log into the app
- 2 Tap on your photo in the upper left hand corner
- 3 Tap the gear icon to the right of your name and photo
- 4 Tap on "Language" and select your language of choice

**Notes from slide:**

- Each student's proficiency in English will determine how much support they will need
- Reading a passage may help some students but NOT ALL!
- Find translated passages and questions when possible
- If the lesson is not centered around the article but a concept find something at the ELLs level
- Allow verbal responses
- Allow written responses in their Home Language (Google translate has a photo option)



**Notes/what can you do?:**



**Resources Link**

- English Language Learner and Multilingual Learner Educator Tools and Best Practices - <http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-cd/english-language-learner-and-multilingual-learner-educator-tools-and-best-practices>

**Notes/Resources in your Community:**



**Appendix B**

**Google [Slideshow](#)**