

Improving General Education Teachers' Preparedness to Educate ELLs

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Abstract

This capstone project is intended as a tool to educate and support high school principals, assistant high school principals, general education teachers (grades 9 through 12), and ENL teachers (optional), to become more effective contributors in the education of English Language Learners (ELLs). Rochester City School District contains a fair number of ELLs, which require all teachers to be prepared to integrate ELLs into their classroom. Many general education content area teachers have not received proper training on how to successfully accommodate ELLs, and some possible solutions have been stated. These solutions include getting to know the ELL individual to better assess and meet their needs, provide a healthy socioemotional environment, modify curriculum appropriate, be an active advocate for their needs, and quarterly check-ins based off goals the educator has set for themselves. Conclusions based off the information presented include general education teachers feeling unprepared to educate ELLs. Some current, best practices to focus on to support these teachers include creating an inclusive environment, supporting their cultural background in the curriculum, helpful accommodations, and making sure ELLs have the proper funding provided to them. Recommendations consist of further research on the most effective online resources for ELLs, improving relationships with ELL families, and studies on the tools recently established, such as the goal setting and check-ins and usefulness of the templates provided.

Keywords: English Language Learners, professional development, mainstream classroom, under-educated teachers, socioemotional, advocate, accommodations, general education teachers

Chapter 1: Introduction

As I completed my bachelor's degree in childhood inclusive education, with an additional concentration on special education, I thought I was well equipped to engage with and properly educate pretty much any student I may encounter. When I chose to pursue my master's degree in TESOL education, I merely thought of this as an additional expansion of expertise, that was not required in the everyday, general education setting. Over the course of my field placements and education, I realize how incorrect my perception was. ELLs spend most of their day in the general education classroom, where they spend most of the time with the general education teacher, with the assumption there is not a bilingual or ESOL educator present in the classroom at all times. I have reached a level of knowledge where the unpreparedness of general education teachers on the needs of ELLs is concerning and depriving to the education of these students.

The number of ELLs has grown 60% in the past 10 years, and continues to be the among the fastest growing populations of students (Colorín Colorado, 2015). As of 2018, the average number of ELLs in U.S. public schools makes up 10.2% of the population, compared to 9.2% in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). As these numbers rise, the average school education systems quality and inclusion of these students is not (Mitchell, 2018). While ELLs are more likely to attend urban schools, there has been a large increase in more rural and suburban areas, catching educators and districts off guard and underprepared (Colorín Colorado, 2015). According to Reeves (2006), "Although... teachers want to welcome ELLs into the mainstream, the data also reveal a teaching force struggling to make sense of teaching and learning in the multilingual school environments" (p.139). Students should not have to struggle or suffer based off their educator's limited skill set and, therefore, why everyone should be prepared, regardless

of previous expectations of what student needs are. If teachers receive adequate training, they gain confidence and skills that will lead to successful students (Shreve, 2005).

While ELLs do require “specialized” education, they are not mutually exclusive to the needs that special education students typically require (Haynes & Zacarian, 2010). While there seems to be a positive general outlook on being open and receptive to ELL inclusion, attitudes toward coursework modifications, value of students’ native languages, and feels of being adequately trained are significantly lacking (Reeves, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to further analyze and understand what exactly is expected of general education teachers in regards to ELLs, and what we can do to better prepare them for this task. While general education teachers may not be in a position right now to sufficiently educate ELLs, we can absolutely make the necessary changes to eliminate this issue and ensure proper preparation for the future.

In attempt to mitigate the effects of this problem of general education teachers’ lack of training on effectively educating ELLs, I would propose that all teachers be required to obtain a minimum number of hours of professional development (PD) in the area of TESOL/bilingual education as a part of their standard expectations. Therefore, I will create a PD for educators, including full-time ELL instructional-support specialists to help ensure the success of educators and their students. I will explore the overarching question of what skill set and knowledge are necessary to be an effective teacher to ELLs. Previously, in New York City, it has been effective to begin with a five-day comprehensive program on techniques and tools for working with ELLs (Shreve, 2005). The anticipated outcome would include educators feeling more confident and prepared while providing instruction for ELLs, as well as better opportunities, scaffolding, and materials provided by educators. With some more clear and research-based practices put in place, educators can attend a professional development program that will better the education for

all ELLs. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature on the topic of ELLs in the general education setting and best practices moving forward for PD. Chapter 3 will then lead us to what was concluded from the research as to how to create a best practice by acknowledging resources and our community in how to provide a sustainable education for teachers of ELLs. In Chapter 4, I will conclude with implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Now that I have established why having general education teachers unprepared to educate the ELL community is an issue of great significance, this chapter captures a review of the literature that is relevant to the topic of general education teacher preparedness and views on educating ELLs. The themes emerged from the literature include: general education teacher self-reflection on the issue of their level of knowledge and preparedness to teach ELLs, actual level of preparedness of general education teachers to teach ELLs, relationship between school budgets and training/resources available, and methods general education teachers are using effectively with ELLs. These themes are all active pieces of what sets the stage for the current learning environment for ELLs in their general education setting. This chapter will conclude as an aide to help find solutions within the literature that can be shared to provide the most effective PD for mainstream educators. Before I discuss these themes, I will first present Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and sociocultural theory, and Ladson-Billings Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) theory, which can help unprepared teachers to understand ELLs' specific needs.

Understanding the ZPD and Sociocultural theory for ELLs and CRT Towards ELLs

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a key component of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which is referred to as the process of distinguishing what a person can do independently, in comparison to their potential with the guidance of an adult or capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky would commonly refer to the ZPD as a person's current level of cognitive development versus their potential level of cognitive development (Educational Technology, 2020) Students can be given a boost in their learning process by having someone present who has the desired knowledge and skills to skillfully educate and observe and practice

the skills, while providing activities that are appropriate towards leading the student to independence of the task (McLeod, 2019). This process is referred to as scaffolding, where a teacher will assess the baseline of what a student can do on their own comfortably, then what they can do on their own but is more challenging, and lastly, what they can do only with the support of a teacher or skilled peer. Learners are set up for success to achieve their goal by completing small, manageable steps (Educational Technology, 2020). Once the teacher evaluates the abilities of an individual, they can adjust the difficulty of the task accordingly (Educational Technology, 2020). Educators need to be knowledgeable in how to scaffold the information systematically to support student development, and attuned to the students' specific needs, for their success (Many et al., 2009).

A fair amount of emphasis is allotted to peer support and interaction in Vygotsky's beliefs, referred to as sociocultural theory. In fact, he is known as the father of social learning (International Teacher Magazine, 2017). Vygotsky views learning as being social in nature, and collaboration as a learned process that will help learners be successful later throughout life, as social interaction is a necessary skill for success in life (International Teacher Magazine, 2017). According to McLeod (2020), "Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society." The process, which is referred to as cooperative or collaborative dialogue, consists of a child seeking to understand the intentions of a parent or a more skilled person, where they then internalize the instructions and incorporate it into their own lives (McLeod, 2020). Based off this information, it makes sense that Vygotsky is a strong supporter of social constructivism, which

states that learning occurs when people create their own knowledge, influenced by their experiences and perceptions (Simple Psychology, 2020).

Vygotsky's theory is supportive in my research in terms of its views on students having the right amount of support they need to be successful, as well as the benefits of peer interaction. ELL students may not be at the same academic level as other general education students, and therefore, might need some closer attention put on them when assessing where their independent level is and where they need a teacher or more skillful peer to help them with a task.

Culturally relevant teaching (CRT) is a conceptual framework that recognizes students' cultural backgrounds and interests in the teaching and learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This style of teaching acknowledges the traditional texts that are typically used, like Shakespeare for example, but it also strives to include other literature from cultures that are more diverse around the world (Burnham, 2020). Providing more thoughtful and inclusive instruction will have exceptional positive impacts on ELL students. The aims of CRT include ensuring all students achieve academic success, improve cultural competence, and helping students develop a critical lens on social issues (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural competence is defined as "the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). To develop student cultural competency, teachers will use students' culture and interests as their mode for learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Providing a learning environment that is meaningful is essential, as it will increase their level of engagement and ultimately promote their success (Pino-James, 2015). Lastly, developing a critical lens is imperative as we filter through information presented to us that may be biased, incorrect, or

irrelevant (Pearson, 2021). Additional factors to consider include having a positive perspective on ELL parents and families and holding high expectations for ELL students (Burnham, 2020). Understanding multiple perspectives and filtering out opinions from facts is an extraordinary ability that should not be overlooked (Pearson, 2021). All of these elements of culturally relevant teaching should be considered when minorities are present, instead of only teaching to the majority.

The ZPD, which focuses on understanding what students are capable of independently and how to help them be successful in the next steps, followed by sociocultural theory, of analyzing the importance of interactions with others in the learning process, as well as CRT, where we integrate student interests and cultural differences into the curriculum, are all important terms to understand and implement in the classroom to ensure academic success of ELLs. All educators should be aware of what their students are capable of, mindful of making sure the curriculum is meaningful and engaging for all students, and presenting plenty of opportunities to work with peers. These are all important factors to consider for all students' success.

Under-Educated Teachers

Whether or not general education teachers view themselves as supporters of inclusion of ELLs in their classroom, many educators seem to be underprepared and insufficient in the task of educating ELLs. The analyses of observation and interview data with four "exemplary" language arts teachers of mainstream classes, who have no prior ELL training, aim to uncover if their strategies used were as successful with ELLs, as they were with the other students. Pass and Mantero (2009) found although they did have some useful strategies, they were ultimately unable to successfully integrate ELLs' culture differences and knowledge about similarities and

differences about their native language into the lessons. Similarly, O'Brian (2011) found most of the 123 content area social studies teachers surveyed and interviewed were not able to communicate with ELLs and modify coursework for ELLs appropriately. Ironically, however, all four teachers in Pass and Mantero (2009) claimed that they do provide supportive learning environments to ELLs, which would be a more accurate claim if they received additional understanding of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In fact, concluding a positive self-reflection of educators' ability to teach ELLs without any training in ELL education is a dangerous perception that will lead educators to not seek professional development on this topic. These findings suggest that teachers seem to rather develop a one size fits all lesson plan for students than to differentiate curriculum every day.

However, simplifying the life of educators is not the goal. Instead, educators must be properly trained to give effective instruction to all students. Murphy and Torff's (2017) survey study asked general education teachers to rate descriptions of instructional strategies for ELL students and general education students that each had different levels of demand on critical thinking. The results of this study concluded that the teachers favored the lower critical thinking activities for ELLs, compared to higher level of critical thinking activities for the general education students (Murphy & Torff, 2017). It was made clear that the teachers judged higher critical thinking activities more appropriate for general education students than they do for ELL students, indicating that ELL students are regularly receiving less rigorous instruction in school (Murphy & Torff, 2017). What the study then asks us to consider, is if this is an appropriate modification for their success, or if it is inhibiting their success by creating a chain effect of never receiving rigorous instruction, and not pushing the students hard enough to enhance their academic performance (Murphy & Torff, 2017). In further exploration of teachers' personal

views and their affects. on ELL students' education, Rizzuto (2017) conducted a parallel mixed-methodology study on early childhood education teachers' perceptions of ELLs, and how it shapes their teaching practices. The study included ten general education teachers who taught at the kindergarten through second grade range, who had no ELL education or professional development. The participants were observed during their literacy instruction, as well as asked to complete interviews twice a week, over an eight-week period, and regular surveys. Some of the main findings include most (7 out of 10) educators held negative perceptions about ELLs using their native language in the classroom (Rizzuto, 2017). While this creates a negative influence on ELLs education experience, there was a correlation presented on expressing a positive attitude and high expectations for ELL students and their success (Rizzuto, 2017). By holding ELL students accountable and being a positive source of motivation, ELLs will be more affluent. Taking the time to analyze and incorporate the best strategies for ELLs, we can directly affect the quality of their learning experience.

Thus, it appears general education teachers have a more pleasant attitude towards accepting and being accommodating for ELLs after receiving training, opposed to before. In Pettit's (2011) study with trained bilingual education teachers, teachers not trained in bilingual education, and special education teachers of language minority students, she concluded that the trained bilingual education teachers not only had a more positive outlook towards ELLs, but used more student-centered approaches. Some may admit to their shortcomings in the area of ELL education, and others may not see them, so that is why training should be mandatory, in order to establish an equal field of opportunity for all ELL students.

In the past, general education teachers could expect ELLs to obtain their education from bilingual teachers. Presently, ELLs spend most of their school day in the general education

setting and there is a serious concern about the shortage of teachers who are prepared to effectively educate ELLs (Roblero, 2013). An anonymous survey was conducted on 71 TESOL professionals through SurveyMonkey, where they answered questions based on their own beliefs about the pros and cons of pushing in and pulling out ELL students during general education instruction time (Whiting, 2019). Having a TESOL educator push into the mainstream classroom has some well-known benefits, including the ELL student not missing out on the lessons and social interaction with peers (Whiting, 2019). What was more interesting, is the amount of negative perceptions the TESOL teachers associated with push-in methods. The survey revealed that many TESOL educators felt that their students and themselves are at a disadvantage in this scenario. The negative connotations include feelings of student embarrassment and anxiety, loss of teacher autonomy, loss of professional identity, and less focused instruction (Whiting, 2019). The TESOL educator is subject to follow the general education teacher's pace and teaching style, while it may not be the most appropriate method for the ELL student. On the same argument, the benefits that TESOL teachers perceived on pulling students out for ESOL instruction, according to the survey, include freedom from distractions, more control of the curriculum presented, and a safe zone, where an ELL community and relationships could develop, without any judgement from their peers (Whiting, 2019). Establishing a safe zone is also beneficial to students' socioemotional well-being. This is not to say that the TESOL teachers had any negative perceptions on the general education teachers, but that the ELL students' needs are better met in a more targeted environment of their specific needs. For more effective push-in practices, some changes that can be implemented include more in-depth collaboration of the TESOL and general education teacher on their roles and responsibilities and further education for mainstream teachers on how to instruct ELLs (Whiting, 2019).

In de Jong et al.'s (2018) study, the analysis of survey and interview data on the effectiveness of statewide ELL faculty professional development practices for general education teachers revealed how general education teachers felt after receiving the professional development. The results of the survey concluded that 74% of respondents indicated that the general education teachers were either "not prepared" or "not well prepared" to integrate ELLs in their classrooms (de Jong et al., 2018). To further explore this area of educators not being prepared for integration of ELLs, this relates to differentiating curriculum for them as well. A content-analyzed study of 149 lesson plans produced by pre-service teachers were reviewed with a focus on how they differentiated their lessons for diverse learners (Brown & Endo, 2017). The findings of this study illustrated that only about 23% had a "provision for special needs" section, but upon further analysis, they were all fulfilled with generic accommodations, being too broad to be meaningful to any diverse population, specifically ELLs (Brown & Endo, 2017). This information supports that general education teachers do not have the proper knowledge and tools to differentiate for students who have learning disabilities, or having English as a second language. Only about 5% of the lessons reviewed included provisions for ELLs (Brown & Endo, 2017). This relates to the larger, overall issue of educators feeling they are not properly suited to teach ELLs. This is supported by a survey that was conducted on high school general education content teachers, where 81.7% stated that they do not have adequate training to work with ELLs (Reeves, 2006). Studies are repeatedly witnessing general education teachers not providing ELLs with the necessary accommodations and set of cultural diversity that they need for success. If we can, not only educate mainstream classroom teachers on how to teach ELLs, but also help them want to be active participants in this change, ELLs will receive a much better education, in return.

Budget Affects

Federal money given to schools is an opportunity to fund supplemental programs that will assist in helping meet diverse students' needs and make education more equitable for students who are typically more marginalized. The amount of federal funding is decided by the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in each state, the appropriations being \$732,144,000 for the fiscal year of 2012 (Department of Education, 2021). This federal money aims to provide research-based instruction to help ELLs develop their English fluency and to be successful in achieving state standards in the content areas (Roblero, 2013).

The correlation between inadequate funding and ELLs' academic success is ultimately the result of insufficient resources for ELL students. Based off a study on Colorado school districts, academic success of all students was investigated and the effects that inadequate funding has on ELLs (Ramirez et al., 2014), which is a deficit of about -\$246 per student. While comparing educational achievement, the results show that ELLs have significant shortfalls in reading, but less so in math (O'Brian, 2011). Based off this study, it is implied that lack of funding is the cause of the academic shortcomings of ELLs, but more research is necessary. However, it is confirmed that receiving the funding is an issue. For example, in California, nine districts were part of a case study analysis of the districts' Local Control and Accountability Plans and interviews with education leaders on ELL equity (Lavadenz et al., 2019). The study concluded that funds were being directed to benefit all students, and were not allocated to the needs of ELLs (Lavadenz et al., 2019). It was apparent that schools were directing funding to curriculum and staffing, much less was allocated to support services, technology, or extra curriculars for ELL students. Upon further reflection, curriculum and staffing are areas that are necessary of all students, not just ELLs. It is the areas that have a more direct effect on

exclusively the ELL population that are lacking. Even though these funds are necessary for schools to be able to differentiate instruction and resources for ELLs, they are used improperly (Lavadenz et al., 2019). Contreras and Fujimoto (2019) also conducted research on this issue, focusing on exactly how school districts are using funding to ultimately prepare ELL students for college (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). The study analyzed 13 school districts in their efficiency of preparing students as college-ready. Ultimately, the results revealed that ELLs have limited access to AP courses and rigorous curriculum and limited academic support (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). The recommendations based off these results include having a more transparent plan of action and distribution of financial resources, because they are not currently clear in the reports (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019).

Analyzing California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), Armas et al. (2019) found in their study that there are lacking specifics on how exactly funds are distributed to meet the needs of ELL students. This quantitative and qualitative research study aims to understand how districts respond to new funding formulas and their process of implementing new practices, based on the goals of the policy (Armas et al., 2019). More clear presentation of spending habits and the direct benefits associated with the costs will help ensure the money is being used for its correct purpose, and also benefiting the target group of students. Considering the goal of federal funding for diverse groups being to improve the equity of their educational outcomes, without it, educational attainment and living standards will decline for millions (Armas, et al., 2019). The study concluded that in order for equity to be retrieved, more efforts need to be arranged for systemic coherence and alignment to best approaches for ELLs (Armas et al., 2019).

Based off this information, we can conclude that ELL funding is a direct issue of receiving the proper funds, however, more research should be conducted on the impacts it has on ELLs academic success. Due to limited knowledge on ELLs and their needs, it makes sense that they may be pushed to the side and not considered when free money is involved. Making sure the money is allocated to the right cause is only half the battle, knowing what appropriate resources would benefit the students and having evidence to support the success it creates is equally important when we consider ELL funding.

What's Working

What we need to focus on is how to advocate and raise awareness for ELLs so that they get the proper education and resources that they are entitled to. Thus, it is critical to be sure that the methods of training provided to general education teachers are effective and beneficial to ELLs. A case study was conducted on two elementary school teachers in Washington State that serve refugee background students (Newcomer et al., 2020). Over a period of 6 months, the teachers were observed 10 times for about 30-45 minutes, along with pre and post interviews. These educators strongly advocated for socioemotional well-being of their students. Having students share more personal aspects of their lives, for example, is a great way for students to open up and feel more comfortable (Newcomer et al., 2020).

The socioemotional well-being of students has an impact on their success. Adelson et al. (2017) collected data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort on 9,046 fifth grade students to investigate the effects of socioemotional well-being on both ELL and general education students' success. The students were classified as monolingual English speakers, Spanish-speaking ELLs, and Asian-language ELLs. The results indicate that Spanish-speaking ELLs experienced more socioemotional difficulties, compared to monolingual English

speakers, that also had a negative impact on their academic achievement (Adelson, et al., 2017). Interestingly, Asian-language ELLs were also not significantly impacted by socioemotional difficulties. What also is compelling, is that the educators of the ELL students projected fewer socioemotional challenges than what the ELL students personally produced, compared to the mono-English speaking students (Adelson et al., 2017). While linguistic and cognitive development are essential to accommodate for when working with ELLs, their social and emotional needs should not go overlooked. Gottfried (2014) found the positive peer effects of classroom diversity on not only the socioemotional well-being of ELLs, but for all students. There are multiple benefits of integrating ELLs with general education students, including learning about diversity, patience, and being accepting of differences (Gottfried, 2014). Not integrating ELL students' differences into the general education classroom would be a disservice to the monolingual English speakers, as they will miss out on the opportunity to learn about the backgrounds and challenges these students face.

Some other key factors when working with ELL students include forming supportive relationships with parents and families, as well as a variety of scaffolding techniques, strong student-student relationships, and strong teacher-student relationships (Newcomer et al., 2020). Parent-teacher communication is an area of great importance that can provide ample benefits for the student, through teacher-parent productive collaboration (Shim, 2013). By using qualitative methodology, Shim (2013) sought out to explore the effects of ELL parent-teacher interactions. The participants included six volunteer ELL parents, who engaged in two interviews; one lasting 15 minutes and the other one was an hour (Shim, 2013). There were three major takeaways concluded from this study. The first area to address is on the parents' perceived judgements from the teachers during interactions. A common misconception people make, is when they correlate

English ability to a person's intelligence level, which is not a valid comparison, to either the parents or the students (Shim, 2013). The parents reflect on feelings of being looked down upon, based on their inferior level of English proficiency. The second finding was on parents' feeling on their inability to influence teachers' decisions. This idea is referring to feelings of knowing that the teacher holds all the power, where they are being talked at, instead of talked with. The subjects felt as though the teacher wants and expects them to be in agreement with whatever they say. This also included feelings of intimidation, even when the parents were not directly intimidated (Shim, 2013). Thirdly, parents presented a fear of negative repercussion against speaking up (Shim, 2013). In one of the interviews a parent stated, "There are many times I want to say something or ask something, but I end up not saying anything because I am afraid that my child will be penalized by a teacher because I made the teacher angry by asking her a question" (Shim, 2013, p. 6). This implies that the teachers these parents have had conversations with are leaving a narrow door, where discussion is not encouraged, rather a one-sided view, of the teacher's beliefs. These three concerns brought up by ELL parents are disheartening and concerning. Strengthening communication and providing a more welcoming and conversational floor to the parents is absolutely an area that needs to be reflected on and improved.

Another important relationship to consider is that of the ELL student with their teacher and peers. Seeking evidence of ELL and non-ELL interaction, Case (2015) conducted research on high school level students completing a video project together. The participants included eight ELL students and three non-ELL students. Results on the effects of peer interaction between the students were collected through observation, interviews, and project artifacts (Case, 2015). While the ELL students did not make significant English language development progress through working with the non-ELL students during the five and a half weeks working on the

project, they did evolve in terms of building friendships, by having a common purpose and gaining familiarity with one another (Case, 2015). The more opportunities for peer interaction you present to ELL and non-ELL students, the more interactions and connections they will build. Carhill-Poza (2015) also acknowledges the role of peer interactions on ELL students. Through a mixed methods study, the role of peers in the process of developing oral academic English skills on 102 Spanish-speaking ELLs during adolescence was observed (Carhill-Poza, 2015). Students took part of an interview process, which was between 35 and 75 minutes long. Out of the participants, only 13% reported that any adults in their lives provided them with academic language support, while about 56% recognized peers, followed by about 30% who said siblings, and 15% who acknowledged other community outlets, such as church or neighbors (Carhill-Poza, 2015). The findings conclude that ELL students who collaborate with peers on academic English language tasks made advancements in their academic English proficiency (Carhill-Poza, 2015).

Through the process of establishing better relationships within the ELL students' networks, the goal is to create the most inclusive, beneficial environment as possible. A study was conducted on two elementary schools who were going under ESL reform to make education more inclusive (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Using a case study method, the data collection was taken on the schools for a span of three years, where additional visits and interviews occurred, an analysis of the reforms made. When the schools were compared for their similar goals in their reform process, these common elements included integrating students home languages, eliminate pull-out services, all teachers are responsible for ELL success, ongoing communication with families, and regular PD for educators (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Analyzing environments where ELLs are respected and a high priority is a key factor in obtaining information that should

be considered for PD. Understanding the most effective practices is the first step to implementing more changes in more classrooms to come.

Chapter 3: Description of the Product and Tools

In this chapter I will present a professional development plan to better prepare general education content teachers on providing adequate education and resources to ELL students at Rochester City School Districts in New York. The professional development aims to provide educators with better knowledge and skills to accommodate for language barriers and transitions through scaffolding and getting to know their students at a more individualized level. In the following sections, I will present an in-depth outline of the strategies to be used in the professional development. The participants will include the high school principals, assistant high school principals, general education teachers (grades 9 through 12), and ENL teachers (optional). The primary focus of the PD is on how to properly integrate and educate ELL students in the general education setting. After a brief overview of the plan, I will address the activities and lessons in which educators will partake.

Agenda of Events

The participants will be completing the professional development course throughout the Rochester City School Districts. They will attend the course over the summer, before the school year begins. The professional development will take place at one of the Rochester City School District locations, at school number #19- Dr. Charles T. Lunsford school. The sessions will be on August 23rd, beginning at 9am and ending at 1pm. The participants who are receiving the professional development are expected to attend the full duration of the course, be active participants in discussions and activities, and to implement the knowledge and skills they learn into their own classrooms to benefit the needs of ELLs. There are four topics to be addressed that will be covered during the duration of the professional development course. Educators will receive a folder of the organized information that they can keep with them to reflect on in their

career. There will also be quarterly check-ins about how successful educators have been in implementing the changes in their classrooms and creating future goals to work towards.

The intended outcome of the professional development course is that the high school content education teacher attendees will develop a wider scope of knowledge on how to best educate and accommodate for ELLs in their classrooms. The teachers will not only be able to better understand and assess students' needs, but also provide accommodations in a more appropriate way. The intended outcome will be achieved through the following components: understanding the individual ELL and their unique needs, ensuring a healthy socioemotional environment, modifying course work appropriately, and advocating for resources and equity for ELLs.

Activity 1: Getting to Know the ELL Individual

As discussed in Chapter 2, a major area that general education teachers lack knowledge in, is how to successfully educate ELLs. The issue lies in understanding how to properly integrate their cultural differences, as well as understanding the similarities and differences that correspond with their native language to English, and apply that knowledge into lessons (Pass & Mantero, 2009). This area of professional development will focus on providing educators with the knowledge of what questions and information are important to obtain from their ELL students, and what they can do with the information from there. A template (see Appendix A) I created will be provided to teachers that they may use with their students that highlight the questions I deemed as most critical which include: what is your native language? How long have you been speaking English? On a scale of 1-10, what would you rate the difficulty of learning English? What are some of the holidays and traditions that are important to you and your family? What are your hobbies? What can I do for you that would help you be successful in my

classroom? Going over these questions in depth will be a part of the professional development curriculum, where participants can form questions and discuss with peers. These questions may need to be rephrased using terms that the ELL students are more familiar with so that they can better understand the questions.

After going over the template and explaining how this information is beneficial for the educator, the focus will turn to how we can use this knowledge to improve the education they receive. Documenting and remembering their native language is important because we want to be able to have conversations with our students about their backgrounds. If we confuse where they are from or what their native language is, we will likely make them feel as if they were not important or being equally considered in the classroom. Assessing ELLs' perceived level of English difficulty is another important factor to consider, as we want to provide a happy medium of enjoyment, as well as challenge to student education. Understanding their hobbies, holidays, and traditions is important as we can take a look at this information and find ways to integrate these into the curriculum in meaningful ways. When student interests are incorporated, the learning becomes more meaningful to them, which will increase their level of engagement and success (Pino-James, 2015). The last question is to give students the opportunity to share what has worked for them with educators in the past and give them a voice in how they will feel comfortable and successful.

Activity 2: Healthy Socioemotional Environment

As research reviewed in Chapter 2 shows, effective and beneficial methods to educating ELLs include strong support for the student's socioemotional well-being, directly relating to them being able to open up and feel more comfortable (Newcomer et al., 2020). ELL students have their own unique struggles with language and curriculum, but an educator's first priority

should be to make sure that their students feel that they are in a safe and comfortable environment, where learning can occur. Forming an inclusive environment for students is an essential reform for schools to make (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Establishing a healthy socioemotional environment stems from building a community with one another. The PD (see Appendix B) provides three examples of helpful strategies on how to build community with all students within our classroom. This includes exercises on how to connect students, reaching out to students who are withdrawn, and give them opportunities to share about themselves and their lives. Each of the three categories on the worksheet gives a little more background knowledge on why the strategies are useful and how you can incorporate them into your classroom.

As the information is reviewed during the professional development, we will spend ample time on each area. The first area being connecting students, I will explain that games are an excellent way to get peers engaging with one another. Once students start to talk, they will form connections and friendships, which will ultimately strengthen the sense of community within the classroom. The game examples I provided are icebreakers and morning meeting exercises. These are both common examples that most educators are familiar with and most likely used in their own classrooms at some point in time. The idea is to go around the room and have students share fun information about themselves, which can be factual or fiction based. As students listen to their peers, they can pick up on common interests or have a good laugh or bonding experience with one of their classmates. These examples do not even skim the surface of all the games out there that educators can incorporate into their classrooms, or even activities out there that will promote forming connections between students. This may include some type of content area project, discussions on a relevant topic, or any other task that gets them communicating and working together in an engaging experience. There are some lines provided

below this section were participants are asked to jot down any ideas they have on games or other activities that they can see themselves realistically using in their classroom to engage students and help form connections.

The next area on building healthy socioemotional environments is how to reach withdrawn students. Paraphrasing what is written down on their copies, I will explain that when students are withdrawn from the class, there is a deeper root cause that needs to be discovered. If they are not engaging with their peers and building a sense of community, we need to eliminate whatever barriers are causing this and make them feel more comfortable and a part a team. This will be best achieved by talking to the student. Ask them how they are feeling, or other open-ended questions that show you care and notice they are withdrawn. We cannot make assumptions, but some issues they may be going through may include emotional challenges associated with being an ELL (e.g. difficulty with the language and making friends), the curriculum is too challenging (or too easy), or the curriculum is not based off their interests and hard for them to get engaged. Based off the information just discussed, I will then ask participants to use the lines provided under that section to bullet out some leading questions they could ask withdrawn students to help them get to the root cause and make the necessary changes to get them more connected to the class. After given about 5 minutes to do this, participants will then be asked to volunteer to share out some questions they created to help others gain ideas and see what they have come up with.

Next, we will discuss the importance of and how to provide opportunities to self-share. I will explain that learning is best achieved when we can relate to the topic on a personal level, because it is more interesting to us and we can relate and engage. If we can relate the topics of the curriculum to our students at a personal level, then they will have information to share and

want to participate in that lesson or discussion. This can be achieved by any type of opinion piece, sharing about their background knowledge, or letting them share about a personal experience that relates to the topic. Participants will be asked to brainstorm for 10 minutes, collaborating with peers, on how they can fit self-sharing into their classrooms, and jotting down their ideas in the provided space.

Activity 3: Modifying Curriculum

In Chapter 2, research has documented that one of the biggest challenges that general education teachers face when working with ELLs is their inability to modify coursework (e.g. O'Brian, 2011). Teachers have standards that need to be addressed for all students, but it is common for them to not have proper training on how the curriculum can be altered for ELLs to meet those same standards. Educators have to be willing and knowledgeable of how to integrate ELLs' cultural differences into the lessons (Pass & Mantero, 2009).

This section of the professional development emphasizes to teachers that they are expected to provide ELLs with equal access to curriculum, and this must be done through accommodations and modifications. In the Appendix C section label "Helpful Tips on How to Accommodate for ELLs in the Mainstream Classroom," a bulleted list of ways to provide appropriate accommodations for ELLs has been started. The list includes graphic organizers, concrete manipulatives, flashcards, and content presented in their first language. After reviewing these examples and the benefits to each, participants are asked to come up with more ideas, which may include extended time, audiobooks, peer collaboration, and more. After given about ten to fifteen minutes to complete their lists, participants will be asked to volunteer and share out their ideas to the rest of their peers and open for discussion.

Activity 4: Active Advocate

Advocacy for students is an important element of being an educator and should be practiced every day. Doing so will help educators form more supportive and form stronger relationships with ELLs (Newcomer et al., 2020). Advocating for ELLs can be done in many different forms. The forms I want to focus on are touched on in chapter 2, which include: being knowledgeable and an active voice for how school funds can be used to benefit ELLs (Lavadenz et al., 2019), ensuring they feel comfortable and proper equity is being provided (Newcomer et al 2020), and providing ongoing communication with families (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). The professional development course will focus on those three categories on how be an advocate for ELLs.

Following the order presented on the sheet participants will have from Appendix D, I will review the importance of attending board meetings, specifically where budgeting will be discussed. It is fairly common that school funds that are intended to go to minority groups who could use extra resources, are getting neglected while the funds get distributed to benefit the general education population (Lavadenz et al., 2019). It is important to know your students' needs and rights and to advocate for them. This is crucial because ELL students may not know how to do so themselves, or have family members who are capable, in the sense of their English-speaking abilities, to advocate for them, placing the faith in their educators.

Next, we will discuss having regular communication with ELLs' parents and families. This may seem impossible if they know little to no English, however, we do have technological resources that can help us adapt. If your school does not have a designated translator, then we need to work on getting one, but to make due until then, there are free sites available to anyone on the internet that provide translated versions of information. I will then go to the hyperlink that is also written on their sheet, and show it as an example of one resource teachers can utilize. At

this time, participants can volunteer other resources they have used or heard about that will be useful for communication with non-English speaking families.

Teaching students to be self-advocates is final component. I will explain that this is something that will take time for teachers to model and help build every day in the classroom. The foundation for this to occur is educators providing a comfortable, safe environment where students will vocalize their needs comfortably with the teacher. They need to understand what works well for them and what they need to be successful in the classroom. Helping them form accountable talk is a great start to how they can express their emotions and information on their needs.

Summary

The intended outcomes of the professional development are that high school general education teachers of Rochester City School District will form more meaningful relationships with ELLs, provide them with a positive learning environment, modify their coursework appropriately, and become active advocates for their education and resources they receive. As a closing activity, participants of the professional development will be asked to reflect on the information that was provided to them throughout the course and to pick what they find to be the most valuable skill they learned that they will be incorporating into their classroom, immediately. Participants will be asked to write this down on a sheet of paper, along with an explanation of how they will make this change approachable in their classroom setting. At some point during the first quarter of the school year, all general education teachers will undergo an observation/check-in, where they will be expected to recall back to this piece of information they have written down and evaluate if they have properly executed their goal in making that change. A new goal will then be created, and assessed every quarter of the school year.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Over the course of this project, much time has been dedicated to address the concerns of underprepared general education teachers working with ELL students, including among Rochester City School Districts. General education teachers are not receiving the proper education to provide effective education for ELLs (Reeves, 2006), overall, negatively impacting their quality of education. We must reevaluate how general educators interact with ELLs and provide them with information they should know. In this Chapter, I will summarize the literature, followed by implications for educators, and concluding with recommendations for future research.

Summary

After reviewing various studies based on general education teachers taking on the role of educating ELLs, it has been made apparent that intervention is required. The research reviewed in Chapter 2 addressed methods of “exemplary” mainstream language arts teachers (Pass & Mantero, 2009), mainstream educators’ views on educating ELLs (Reeves, 2006), general education teachers’ perceptions about their biggest challenges when working with ELLs (O’Brian, 2011), the effectiveness of professional development focused on educating ELLs (de Jong et al., 2018), budgeting effects on ELL education (Lavadenz, et al., 2019), and methods of integration of ELLs in general education settings (Newcomer, et. al., 2020). Based on research findings, I was able to create a professional development course with the best approaches to prepare general education high school teachers in the Rochester City School District, on how to properly educate and interact with ELLs. The “best approaches” include getting to know the ELL individual, providing a healthy socioemotional environment, modifying curriculum appropriately and being an active advocate.

In principle, establishing ways to better prepare school districts and their educators should be explored. Depending on the individual school district's attitudes and knowledge towards ELL education, the professional development and interventions may look different at each district, based on what is necessary. Considering the demographics in the Rochester City School District area, I created a professional development plan that aims to encourage a more inclusive and thoughtful approach to educating all students, with an extra attention on ELLs. I have considered various factors, based on research, that can have effects on ELLs' education, and want them to receive support from as many sources as possible.

Implications

The areas of research that expressed concern were transferred as the highlight of the professional development plan to be further addressed and corrected. ELLs will have better opportunities to share about their personal backgrounds and learn how to self-advocate for their needs. As ELLs enter the mainstream classroom, educators have been prepared with a template of appropriate questions to ask that will obtain basic information about their background and current relationship with English (Appendix A). As these are all open-ended questions, students can give as much information as they would like. This is a great opportunity for the teacher to connect with the student on a personal level and understand their needs. The professional development training also provides general education teachers with tips on how to be an advocate for ELLs, as well as how to help them be their own advocates (Appendix D). Having educators understand and promote diverse students will help ELLs feel more comfortable speaking out on their needs.

Educators are the main focus of the professional development, as they are the ones who interact with and shape the educational experience of ELLs. On top of the benefits obtained from

the student questions and digger deeper into advocacy for ELLs, educators are also provided with information on how to make their classrooms more inclusive and ways to go about making appropriate accommodations. Guidelines on how to promote a healthy socioemotional environment are provided (Appendix B), and provide tips on how to more effectively connect students together, reach withdrawn students and providing them opportunities to self-share. Comfort and establishing a safe environment need to be asserted before learning can occur. General education teachers have also expressed a common concern of not knowing how to modify curriculum to fit the needs of ELLs (O'Brian, 2011). To address this, the professional development takes educators through appropriate examples and gives them the opportunity to collaborate with other colleagues and add to the provided list. Having strategies on hand that will make learning more meaningful and appropriate to students needs is an essential practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the professional development I have created is a step in the right direction for educators at Rochester City School Districts to improve their skill set while working with ELLs, more research is highly recommended. As the participants of the professional development proceed with their school year and follow up with their quarterly check-ins and creating goals, this will be a great way to understand how beneficial the professional development was, and where further research and time is needed. Further research, including interviews with ELLs is needed to assess what they perceive to be working or not working in their classroom, and how they think it ultimately affects the quality of their education. Another research area that could be useful in understanding the success of ELLs is the effects of online resources. With new resources being created every day, it would be worthwhile to filter through which options are the most beneficial to ELL students' learning. This may include online reading sources that include

their native language, simplified version of content-based lessons, engaging games or activities, and much more.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with ELL families is an area that was briefly touched on in the professional development, but further research would be greatly valued. It would be interesting to take a survey on ELL families and assess their perceived level of connectedness with the school and teacher, as well as an open-ended question on they think could be done better. Providing equal opportunities to families is a part of the overall fight for inclusion, making sure no one is at an unfair disadvantage.

Final Thoughts

While ELLs are among the fastest growing population of students, the average quality of education and inclusion of these students is not keeping up at a compatible rate (Mitchell, 2018). The stigma of general education teachers not being responsible for the academic achievement of ELL students is unhelpful and detrimental to the success of these students. All teachers are responsible for the success of all students, and in order to make this possible, general education teachers need to be given the proper tools and funds of knowledge to work with. Educating teachers and making them aware of their impact on ELLs' achievement will hopefully lead to a much more diverse and inclusive environment, where equity is restored.

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Essential questions to get to know your ELL student:

Name: _____

(Make sure to clarify pronunciation for first and last name.)

1. What is your native language? _____

(We want to know this so that we can look out for potential cognates in English and their native language, as well as a way to start forming background knowledge on this student.)

2. How long have you been speaking English? _____

(Knowing how long they have been speaking English is a valuable piece of information, as well as listening to the fluency of their speech as you complete this informal interview, to gauge their current level of comfortability and experience with English.)

3. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your difficulty level of learning English? 1 being easy, 10 being very difficult. _____

(Knowing where a student rates themselves in an area gives information, not only on how successful they think they are/have been, but also is an indicator of their enjoyment of the learning process. For example, if a student scores the difficulty very high, they most likely are not enjoying the English learning process.)

4. What are some of the holidays and traditions that are important to you and your family?

(NEVER make assumptions about a student's religion or tradition based on their native language or where they are from; instead, ask them! You can use this information to your advantage as you choose texts and modify curriculum that will be more personal and meaningful to them.)

5. What are your hobbies?

(This is a great way to gauge their interests and perhaps form some personal connections with your student. You can also use this information to find them books within their reading level on what they enjoy and use it to your advantage on how to make them engaged in the classroom.)

6. What can I do for you that would help you be successful in my classroom?

(This question is great because it is open-ended. Perhaps this student has worked with teachers in the past and know what strategies work really well with them, or the opposite, where they know what they prefer you don't do. Give them ample time to think and if they cannot come up with anything you can start asking more specific questions that will help you decide what learning styles they prefer.)

Appendix B

3 Strategies to Build Healthy Socioemotional Environment

1. Connecting Students:

Games are a great option to get students talking and more comfortable with peers!

Once students have interacted and learned more about one another, they will start to form stronger connections and make them feel more comfortable in their learning environment. Some examples of games you can play to initiate this process include:

- Icebreakers- go around the room and have everyone state their name, along with their favorite animal or some other funny, or interesting fact they can share!
- Morning meeting exercise- each day, have a new question to go around the room and have students answer. These questions may be about themselves or more fictional scenarios. Whatever you think will be engaging to students that they will enjoy!

- Other ideas:

2. Reaching Withdrawn Students:

Students who are withdrawn may require some extra effort on the teacher's end to get them engaged and feel more comfortable. Some helpful strategies may be to better understand what emotional challenges they may be going through and addressing them, modifying the curriculum to make sure their interests are incorporated to make them more engaged, or asking them what they would like to do in school and try to make a point of setting aside some time to do it.

Leading Questions:

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3. Opportunities to Self-Share:

Often times, peoples' favorite topics to talk about is ourselves. It's something we are very familiar with and engaging because it's about us! Giving students opportunities to share about themselves, whether it be verbally or written, is a great way to begin to practice communication. In addition to building on their oral/writing skills, it will also give others the chance to learn more about an

individual and perhaps help them realize similarities and form connections with each other.

Ideas for incorporating self-sharing into the classroom:

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Appendix D

Being an Advocate for ELLS

- Attending board meetings where funding is discussed and be a voice for ELLs:
 - Being present in board meetings is a great place to create a voice for ELLs. There have been instances where federal funding is not implemented by schools how it was intended to be used, and it is important that ELLs be acknowledged and receive the proper funding and resources.
- Have regular communication with families/parents:
 - Communication with ELL families can be challenging if they do not speak fluent English. Luckily, we live in a day and age where technology is on our side. If your school does not have a designated translator available to you, that is another thing you can be advocating for. There are other free sites out there that provide translated information, for example www.primaryresources.uk/letters has forms that translate into about thirty other language options. Be resourceful and share what works well with colleagues.
- Teach students to be self-advocates:
 - This is something that should be implemented into the classroom every day. Self-advocacy is being able to vocalize your own needs. For students to be able to feel comfortable doing this, it starts with creating a safe environment where they feel they can express themselves comfortably with the teacher. To

be a self-advocate, students need to know enough about themselves and their needs in order to be able to successfully convey them. This takes time but should be worked on every day.

Accountable talk:

- I have a question about...
- I am confused about...
- I agree...
- I disagree...
- Could you explain that in another way?

Appendix E

Professional Development Slides

<https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/18110267/114992711/106930389>