

Advocacy For English Language Learners in the Elementary Mainstream Classroom

by

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Abstract

Increasing numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs) in elementary mainstream classrooms have made it difficult for classroom teachers in this setting. ELLs face many challenges in and out of the classroom and teachers are nowhere near prepared on how to advocate for this group of learners. In order to understand the issue, the review of literature aims to address the overarching question of how can elementary mainstream classroom teachers be an advocate for ELLs within their own classroom? Findings indicate that when the advocacy strategies are applied in the classroom, it leads to an increased positive relationship between the teacher and student. Findings also showed improvements in ELLs learning experiences and second language acquisition. A professional development (PD) was created to inform classroom teachers of the barriers ELLs face and advocacy strategies teachers can use to help their ELLs succeed. Implications for this research include that when schools provide PD addressing the needs of advocacy for ELLs, it encourages teachers to participate in professional committees that advocate for ELLs and students in general.

Keywords: English Language Learners, advocacy strategies, challenges or barriers, professional development, mainstream or general education elementary classroom

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Throughout my experiences teaching in the elementary school, I have noticed ELLs facing many problems within the classroom setting that lead these students to failure. ELLs in the United States are a diverse group of students who speak hundreds of different languages from many parts of the world and they differ in ethnicity, culture, educational background and socioeconomic status (Perez, 2016). ELLs who enter this country and then enter a new classroom are expected to abandon their native language and learn English at the expense of their academics, and to keep up with their peers. Students find themselves constructing a new identity of themselves because they feel they are not accepted which can also lead to stress, anxiety and depression within the student (Khong & Saito, 2014). ELLs do not receive the proper instruction, attention or resources that they need to succeed. According to Szpara (2017), teachers lack the training to work with ELLs and these students are often pushed aside in the mainstream classroom and fall even more behind in academics.

Therefore, in this capstone project, I will be examining the overarching research question: How can elementary mainstream classroom teachers be an advocate for ELLs within their own classroom? For the purpose of the capstone, I will define an advocate as a person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy or a person who puts a case on someone else's behalf (Fenner, 2013). Advocacy in regards to this capstone emphasizes acting on behalf of ELLs inside the classroom, and advocacy activities include public education and influencing public opinion, researching problems and suggesting solutions, lobbying, implementation, monitoring, and feedback. Advocacy is making a change. Elementary mainstream teachers with ELLs in their classrooms need to step up and make a change for these students so they can

succeed within the classroom. Classroom teachers need to be the voice for these students as they are so vulnerable and can easily get lost in the crowd. Without a proper advocate, students would not receive the proper services and instruction ELLs are entitled to.

Significance of the problem

Acts of advocacy for ELLs are an important part of a teacher's job because it can make or break ELLs learning experience in the general education classroom. Advocating for the ELLs in a classroom may be a way to mediate the challenges ELLs face around language acquisition, socialization and even assessments. Although approaches to advocacy may vary, the main goal is to make sure individuals are treated equally and have access to the resources they need to succeed. "In order to be effective advocates for ELLs, educators must be aware of the areas in which ELLs require advocacy efforts and the reasons these efforts are needed" (Fenner, 2013, p. 7). Consequently, an educator needs to get to know their students and their families to be able to know which advocacy action is appropriate on their behalf.

The challenges ELLs face includes academic challenges, socioeconomic status, socio-emotional strains and many other obstacles that hinder their learning (Perez, 2016). These challenges affect the way ELLs learn in the classroom and acquire language. Therefore, teachers need to be aware of these challenges so they can help in any way possible. For instance, educators know that students are overwhelmed when they enter a new classroom. Teachers ease the stress by setting up a welcoming environment for students. In the case for ELLs, the teacher should also learn about the cultural background of ELL students and incorporate it to make a welcoming environment for everyone. In addition, teachers need to tailor their instruction to fit the needs of each student and differentiate assessments in ways that will help the ELLs succeed.

Another important consideration for the teacher-advocate is learning to modify instruction. ELLs needs are needed to be met in order to promote academic, social and success in assessments.

Purpose

Attending professional developments (PDs) are an important way teachers who work with ELLs can help support them in the classroom. PDs help promote policies and practices to empower language minorities and help bilingual education survive in a hostile political climate (Télliez & Varghese, 2013). An effective PD engages teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection. They use inquiry, are collaborative, connect to and derive from teachers work with their students, are intensive and supported by modeling and coaching, and connect to other aspects of school change (Télliez & Varghese, 2013). PDs teach educators how they can fight for their students and their programs.

For this capstone project, the purpose of my PD is to educate teachers on how they can be advocates in their elementary mainstream classroom for their ELL students. The PD will take place in the summer two weeks before the new school year. There will be three different PD sessions ranging from 1-3 hours. The PD will go over specific strategies teachers can use in their classrooms to advocate for their ELL students to help them succeed throughout the year. The information learned in the PDs will allow teachers to set up their classrooms accordingly and plan instruction effectively. To mitigate the challenges ELLs face, teachers attending the PDs will learn rights of ELLs, learn how to collaborate with colleagues, create a culturally diverse classroom environment, communicate with parents, plan lessons that incorporate the culture of their students, and provide students with appropriate scaffolding.

Conclusion

Elementary mainstream teachers need to advocate for their ELL students in their classroom so they do not fall behind their peers. ELLs get lost in the classroom due to the lack of training teachers receive in regards to working with ELLs. The PD presented in this capstone will help classroom teachers develop advocacy strategies to decrease and eventually eliminate the challenges ELLs face in the classroom. In chapter two of this capstone, I will present a review of the literature on the areas of challenges ELLs face that educators should be aware of, along with appropriate advocacy strategies to help ELLs succeed. In chapter three I will present my PD and materials will be included as appendices. In chapter four I will present my conclusion.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

According to Nieto (2009) the English Language Learner (ELL) population increased by 52 percent in the 1990s and the amount of diversity in the U.S. is continuing to change dramatically. Despite a growing multilingual population in the United States, the United States has not demonstrated great sensitivity to tolerance of linguistic diversity historically (Rojas & Reagan, 2003). This can be very frustrating for many immigrant students because sometimes they are forced to abandon their native language to acquire the dominant language which in the U.S., is English. According to the national census, it is estimated that 20% of the population of children will come from homes that speak other languages and about 40% of these students will be in the early childhood classrooms (Bell et al., 2013). Because the ELL population is rapidly increasing, it is crucial for elementary teachers to support and advocate for their ELLs in order for them to be successful academically as well as socially. This review of literature aims to address the overarching question of how can elementary mainstream classroom teachers be an advocate for ELLs within their own classroom? This review of literature will explain the problems ELLs face and advocacy strategies teachers can incorporate to make sure the ELLs in their classroom have a positive learning experience.

Challenges ELLs Face

ELLs have many of the same barriers as their mainstream peers, but on top of that they also have the barriers of learning a new language. The learning process of ELLs differs from their mainstream peers because of their cultural and linguistic differences (Khong & Saito, 2014). “ELLs enter a system that believes they should learn English at the expense of their academics. They face the dual challenges of learning a new language while keeping up with the academic content of their grade level” (Perez, 2016, p.3). ELLs need special attention and instruction

conversely if they do not receive the instruction they need, they are being set up for failure. In addition to academic challenges, ELLs also face social and socio-economic challenges. Parents are an important part of a child's education however, ELLs parents may also face similar difficulties.

Socio-Emotional Challenges

As stated above, the United States does not favor bilingualism as other countries do, and these students are forced to create a new identity of themselves. Schools fail to invest in appropriate resources to support ELLs needs and for the most part, schools in the United States are not prepared to work with ELLs. Bell et al. (2013) states that because schools are not prepared to work with ELLs, they often do not get the individualized attention they need. Furthermore, ELLs also do not receive many interactions in their primary language to help with classroom content. The lack of interactions in the student's native language results in a negative outlook on their personal identity and cultural identity. As a result, Bell et al. indicate that ELLs develop a negative perception of themselves and their language and begin to feel disconnected from their home, culture and family.

Perez (2016) states that when ELLs start to become proficient in English it presents them with various socio-emotional challenges. For example, ELLs tend to have a thicker accent and are subject to discrimination and harassment from teachers and peers, they have an added stress level on them to translate for their parents who are even less proficient in English than they are and having this big responsibility can cause them to feel embarrassed, and they are known to have responsibilities at home to help provide for their family which forces the student to be independent. Perez claims that all of this creates the ELL to experience stress, depression, and anxiety because the student is expected to leave their home and restart a new life in a completely

new language. These issues are important for educators to be aware of when creating a classroom environment that is welcoming to all students.

Socioeconomic Challenges

According to Perez (2016), ELLs often live in poverty and lack the resources needed to succeed. Approximately 75% of ELLs come from low-income families. When a student comes from a low-income family, their parents are usually working long hours and are unable to help their child with schoolwork. Parent involvement has been an issue for the school system where ELLs attend. With the lack of appropriate guidance from parents, ELLs are unable to continue the learning at home and fall behind in school. Perez suggests providing workshops and parent nights to build rapport with parents of ELLs. In doing this, Perez in turn believes it may provide a welcoming atmosphere for the parents. Educators cannot view poverty as an excuse to not educate ELLs (Fenner, 2013). They need to be aware of this challenge ELLs face and do what they can to help keep the parents involved and help give ELLs the resources they need to succeed.

Academic Challenges

Khong and Saito (2014) argues that one of the biggest reasons ELLs struggle academically is because teachers lack the training to work with this specific group of students. Teachers undergo little or no professional development regarding working with ELLs. ELLs perform significantly below their English-speaking peers and it's often because they don't have the sufficient resources to keep up. According to Fenner (2013), only 20 out of the 50 states require that all teachers have training in working with ELLs. This lack of preparation of teachers does not serve the best interest of the growing population of ELLs. Most ELLs spend the majority of their day in the mainstream classroom with the content area teacher who is most likely not trained in

working with them. The lack of training that these teachers have affects the learning and achievement of ELLs (Fenner, 2013). The language acquisition takes over the need to know academic content and when ELLs enter this type of learning atmosphere, it sets them up to fail. It is important that educators get the training they need to support ELLs in the classroom.

Advocacy Strategies

Khong and Saito (2014) states that “to work effectively with ELLs, a need exists to reform educational policies, curriculum, materials, and management, as well as teacher training” (p. 212). Different types of advocacies are needed to help ELLs in different schools and areas, and there is no one single method of advocacy. “Advocacy holds different meanings for different people, but at its core, advocacy is about action” (National Education Association, 2015, p. 10). Advocacy strategies can include participating in professional developments, knowing the rights of ELLs, including the parents in their child’s learning, using the student’s primary language, incorporating different cultures into the classroom and creating a positive classroom environment. Since advocacy for ELLs is complex and needs great attendance in the following section, I will present research on the following topics: Rights of ELLs, positive classroom environments, teacher preparation, beyond the classroom and scaffold advocacy.

Rights of ELLs

According to Gonzalez (2020), how we serve English Language Learners is mandated by federal law. It is important to know these laws so we can serve our students appropriately. Knowing the laws will help us be able to identify ELLs, what programs districts have in place for them, what accommodations are available for them, and what tests they do/don’t have to take. Knowing these laws and being able to be a voice for your students can help take an immense amount of pressure off the student. Ferrin (2013) discusses the laws and rights of ELLs that are

important to consider when advocating for ELLs. The U.S. Supreme Court declared that an intervention or program is required to remove language barriers that might impede ELLs' participation in any federally funded program, including public schools, under *Lau v. Nichols*. *Lau v. Nichols* states that students cannot be denied equal education or the right to participate in activities based on language. This Supreme Court case emphasizes that discriminating against students who speak another language is similar to racial discrimination, and it's important to make sure all students have the same opportunities in the classroom. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 should also be recognized when advocating for ELLs. The Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, color, religion, or national origin (Bent-Goodley, 2014). Because of this law, school districts and teachers must make sure they take appropriate steps when creating instruction that they make available to ELL students. Their classroom community, instruction and overall environment must stay in compliance with the law so that all students receive fair opportunities no matter what their race or ethnicity is. Ferrin (2013), states that these laws and court cases are informative and important to see for those who are seeking to serve ELLs such as educational agencies and districts, because they provide an explicit example of how to determine whether an ELL program supports evidence of being able to actually serve ELLs appropriately.

Positive Classroom Environment

Tran et al. (2016), discusses incorporating pedagogical practices into the classroom of students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. If teachers do not have specific skills in applying culturally responsive pedagogy, ELLs will struggle in the classroom. In Tran et al. the researchers investigated culturally responsive teaching which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference. Culturally responsive teaching refers to teacher attitudes

and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum and culturally congruent instructional strategies. The purpose of Tran et al. study is to explore teacher's pedagogical practices with students of immigrant backgrounds in three upper secondary schools in Iceland. The research questions which guided the investigation in this study are: What are teachers' perspectives of their pedagogical practices and their interactions with immigrant students? What do immigrant students say about their school experiences and interactions with teachers at upper secondary school in Iceland? In order to gain a deep understanding of teachers' perspectives on culturally responsive teaching, data were collected through face to face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with teachers.

The findings of this study showed that the teacher's own experiences of being or living in a different country, and their own backgrounds helped with the understanding and appreciation of the immigrant students' language, cultural and academic backgrounds. The teachers' backgrounds and prior experiences influenced their empathy, understanding and commitment to students of immigrant background and guide them in their interactions with the students. These teachers established positive relationships with their students and set clear goals in their teaching to set their ELL students up for success. The teachers were dedicated to their students' needs and believed in their capabilities. Instead of pushing these students away because of their language, race and religion, the teachers respected them and recognized them as valuable resources for their education. Teachers can help students learn by allowing them to use their language, incorporate their culture and bring in their previous knowledge which all relates with culturally responsive teaching.

Tran et al. argues that culturally responsive teaching practices benefit students greatly. These types of practices justify student worth by giving recognition to their ethnic and cultural

backgrounds and taking into account different learning styles. By incorporating a variety of cultural knowledge, experiences and perspectives of students and culturally responsive teaching, the teacher can create a positive learning environment, instructional techniques and a positive student-teacher relationship with their ELLs. Culturally responsive teaching allows students to become better people and more successful learners by increasing their self-confidence and willingness to participate. Tran et al. (2016) shows that high expectations from teachers and support for students increase the likelihood of student achievement. Teachers can empower students through positive encouragement and by believing in them, providing them with resources and personal assistance, and by recognizing their achievements. In other words, culturally responsive teaching practices “encourage and enable students to find their own voices, to contextualize issues in multiple cultural perspectives, to engage in more ways of knowing and thinking, and to become more active participants in shaping their own learning” (Tran et al., 2016).

Dubetz and de Jong (2011) state that to advocate for ELLs, teachers must recognize and celebrate the linguistic and cultural resources that ELLs bring to the classroom. When you incorporate a learner’s language and culture into the school setting it helps the student rediscover their identity that is being swallowed up in the mainstream, monolingual school setting. The authors note that creating an open and welcoming environment makes the student feel safe and willing to engage in the lessons. Something as simple as having culturally diverse posters, books, or flags all around the room can reduce the student’s stress. Smiling, pronouncing the student’s name correctly, and incorporating the student’s interest into lessons are little strategies that could go such a long way to create this positive environment for ELLs. Dubetz and de Jong point out that creating a positive classroom environment will help decrease the socio-emotional challenges

ELLs may face in the classroom. Creating a positive classroom environment is a way of advocating for ELLs because it will help the student keep their identity of themselves which would reduce stress and anxiety in the student. As a result, a less stressful environment would help them succeed in the classroom. The authors write that the way teachers change their instruction and environment can benefit the student and the outcome of their learning experience which is what advocacy is all about. All of these techniques will help eliminate the socio-emotional barriers ELLs may be facing in the classroom.

Teacher Preparation

Song (2016) examined systematic professional development (PD) training and its impact on teachers' roles for and attitudes toward ELLs. A small school district in St. Louis, Missouri, adopted a PD model that includes the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP) and guided coaching. This PD was presented to help teachers in this school improve their instruction and teaching strategies for ELLs. The study aimed to explore whether these PD sessions helped the teachers who participated in improving the teacher's instructional strategies and also to see if these strategies impacted the teacher's behaviors and attitudes towards ELLs.

Song indicates that the SIOP model can benefit ELLs if teachers know how to incorporate it properly into their instruction. This model consists of high quality instruction that can make language and content more comprehensible for ELLs. The components of the SIOP model include teaching to content and language objectives, teaching and reviewing the key concepts using ELLs' first language (L1), grouping configuration for differentiated instruction, and assessing planned and desired results. According to the author, this model is effective in districts and buildings with a PD plan in place.

This study included 65 sixth- to twelfth-grade teachers who participated in the workshops and coaching sessions from August 2008 to May 2011. Eleven SIOP workshops were conducted by professional trainers from Pearson, three for overviews and eight for SIOP component training. Two district coaches provided monthly workshops with corresponding SIOP components that the trainers covered with content- and grade specific activities. One-on-one coaching was provided for each participating teacher at least twice during each semester. Each coaching followed the three cycles of preconference, observation, and post conference. An instrument called the instructional strategy survey was used in the study to measure the teacher's perceptions of their teaching performance before and after the PDs.

Song reports that 87.5% of teachers agreed it was helpful to know the background and previous learning experiences of their ELLs to help with instruction. The findings also showed that 87% of teachers showed significant differences in their instructional strategies after the PD sessions. Participating teachers show great improvement in their teaching after the post test survey which was encouraging to see because improvements in teaching can lead to improvements in ELLs learning experiences and second language acquisition.

Song concluded that PDs can show improvements in the instructional strategies of mainstream teachers when working with ELLs. PDs also support the improvement of teachers' attitudes while working with ELLs. In most cases, teachers wanted to give the responsibility of teaching ELLs to the ELL specialists, and some teachers viewed their ELLs as an extra burden on their time. As shown in this study, many of the classroom teachers recognized the necessity of accommodating ELLs in the classroom through the PD sessions to implement their instruction effectively. This study makes it evident that PDs and SIOP training is a useful tool for supporting ELLs learning in the mainstream classroom.

Hansen et al. (2013) is another study that shows the positive effects on teacher preparation after participating in PDs. In the study, the participating teachers were experienced, skilled practitioners in their content areas (math, science, social studies, or English language arts) who were challenged with meeting the needs of students who were learning English as well as course content. The goal of the professional development project was to improve student performance by enhancing the skills of the secondary teachers. The purpose of the study was to focus on the participants' experiences with the PD project, and their new knowledge of ELLs they have gained. To analyze the participants effectiveness, data was collected and analyzed. A variety of documents from the participants' were collected to indicate developing awareness of multicultural competence, second language acquisition, and ESL knowledge. The participants then completed an online survey that assessed their experiences using the training materials they were given as well as their competency to lead training. The last type of data was taken through a 90-minute semi structured focus group session, or an interview.

Hansen et al. analyzed the results from the midterm and final course evaluations, online reflections and assignments, analysis of teacher and student surveys on multicultural competency, second language acquisition and ESL awareness, as well as on the results of the PD training online survey. According to the authors, the data analysis showed that the PD program was beginning to shift their thought processes regarding ELLs in mainstream content area classrooms. Hansen et al. point out that this research based PD gave the participants a great deal of information that is supported by research which encouraged the participants to implement these strategies into their classroom. Participants described feeling more knowledgeable about instructing ELLs, more comfortable with the pedagogical techniques, and more expert in meeting the needs of ELLs in their classes because of their graduate courses and the PD they participated

in. They also experienced increased confidence. Therefore, the findings of the Hansen et al. study also supports the notion that PDs have a positive outcome on a teacher's instruction. Attending PDs is a way of advocating for ELLs because it can increase their academic outcomes in the classroom which is a challenge ELLs face every day.

These two studies emphasize that teachers need high quality research base training to improve ELLs learning and academic achievement. A huge step that teachers can take to gain knowledge of how to work with ELLs is to attend professional developments (PDs). By attending PDs educators are advocating for ELLs by wanting to improve ways to modify curriculum and instruction for ELLs in mainstream classroom settings.

Beyond the Classroom

Haneda and Alexander (2015) examined the actions of proactive ESL teachers who advocated on the behalf of diverse students to ensure they were being treated equitably and had access to the resources they needed. Handea and Alexander examined data from a qualitative interview based study with 34 ESL teachers in different elementary schools across 5 districts. Most teachers were interviewed individually to reflect on their teaching careers and training paths. In their findings the authors report that 100% of multilingual teachers reached out to ELLs parents, creating opportunities to communicate or interact with them. However, only 31% of monolingual teachers did. Consequently, the multilingual teachers worked with the monolingual teachers to enhance community outreach for ELLs. Although the monolingual proactive teachers did not have any prior experience of community engagement, they had become involved in parent outreach as a result of close collaboration with other teachers who were community activists. The authors note that for teachers going outside their classrooms and collaborating with others is a huge step in advocating for your ELLs. If the monolingual teacher in this study just gave up

and did not collaborate with the other teacher in the building, the monolingual teacher would have never been able to reach the ELLs parents to create communication opportunities.

Advocacy strategies for the ELLs in the classroom can go beyond just creating a positive environment, attending PDs to extend your knowledge, and knowing the rights of ELLs. Going beyond the classroom to include the parents, collaborating with colleagues and the community, can help reduce the barriers ELLs may be facing in mainstream classrooms.

Scaffold Advocacy

Fenner (2013) states that scaffolding is an instructional strategy that provides ELLs an appropriate level of support as they access content material in a language in which they are developing proficiency. To scaffold instruction, the teacher must know the student and the student's background in order to determine appropriate scaffolding techniques and also when to add in or remove the scaffolds. No two ELLs are the same, and the amounts of scaffolding for each student will differ along with the type of scaffolding used such as visuals, graphic organizers, or first language support. Fenner explains that it's an educator's goal for families and students to advocate for themselves. The author offers that scaffold advocacy gives the student and families support in and out of the classroom so the student will be able to eventually gain an education that is equal with their peers, or the families will be able to acquire more English and become familiar with the cultural practices of the U.S. Fenner offers that the strategy of scaffolding advocacy gives the student and families support they need which is a way of helping and advocating for these families.

Abobaker (2017) research applies three phases of scaffolding. The first phase is the scaffold itself. It represents the supportive structure, task, or strategy that helps learners accomplish the goal, without which they could not achieve it. The second step is designing tasks within the

learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). This entails placing the learner within his or her range of learning, which ranges between tasks that cannot be accomplished without assistance and tasks that could be completed independently. The third step is determining the appropriate time for removing the scaffold, which represents eliminating the scaffold and transferring the responsibility for completing the task to the learner. The participants in the study were 80 ELL students from three different language backgrounds. During the study, the researcher showed videos with written scaffolds. The scaffolds used with ELL students were full captions, keyword captions, and full transcripts.

The researcher points out that having full captions on a video supports learners' listening comprehension, develops their vocabulary recognition, acquisition, and retention, and enhances their summarizing skills. Full captions help ELLs process and decode the spoken input from the written form. The researcher states that keyword captions minimize the amount of text shown, and exposes learners to only content words as a scaffold. Keyword captions allow learners to focus more on listening to the words rather than reading full captions. Lastly, the researcher talks about full transcripts. According to the study, full transcripts are a read-along written version of the full listening text. Full transcripts are used as a scaffold because the researcher points out that they promote top-down decoding skills.

The students were divided according to their level and data was collected throughout one whole academic year. A total of six videos and two audio texts, with their listening comprehension tests, were prepared for the study. Each group was then introduced to videos with four different conditions: no scaffold at all, a video with audio and only content words in English, a video with audio and English full-text that mirrored only the spoken words, and lastly a video with audio and a sheet with full transcription in English. The students were directed to

watch the video once and then take a comprehension test after watching. Data was collected during each of the sessions of the study.

The findings of this study showed that ELLs performed significantly better with the presence of scaffolds. The findings indicated that full captions and key word captions might be the best options for learners at the beginner level and advanced level. Working within the learner's ZPD is the key for promoting listening comprehension in particular and L2 development in general. Being aware of the learners' needs and being able to fill in the gaps with scaffolds can raise the learners' awareness and help them succeed.

Conclusion

If educators partake in some of the advocacy strategies discussed in this review of literature, the challenges that ELLs face in and out of the classroom can be decreased and eventually, eliminated. "The way kids learn English in school can make all the difference in how they progress" (Dean, 2020, p. 6). This quote is so important because as educators, we need to advocate for our ELLs so they can have a positive learning experience and are able to progress each and every day. If we strip a student of their identity and force the English language on them, the student can experience many academic and socioemotional challenges. However, if the teachers come together and create a welcoming environment where learning English still involves the child's culture and primary language, then ELL students can thrive.

By understanding the language and culture of ELLs it is possible for people to refine their perceptions of this population of students (Khong & Saito, 2014). Teachers need to be involved in having a deeper understanding of where ELLs come from so they can support this population of students and give them the resources they need in hopes that they will become more engaged in learning. Therefore, preparing teachers through professional developments is imperative.

Advocates bring awareness of issues of equity and social justice, and teachers need to put this awareness into action in the classroom. (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). Supporting the student's cultural background in the classroom, making an effort to meet parents, supporting the student's use of their native language, attending professional developments, scaffolding ELLs in the classroom and working together with colleagues are all ways an educator can take action to support ELLs (Dean, 2020).

ELLs experience many challenges that prove to be hard on them such as academic, socioeconomic status and socio-emotional strains that can make it difficult for ELLs to learn, but if educators implement effective strategies mentioned above when working with ELLs they can provide many positive learning experiences for the students. In the upcoming chapter I will give a description of the professional development (PD) created to mitigate the problems ELLs face identified in the review of literature. The intended outcome of the PD supports the overarching question of the review of literature which is how can elementary mainstream classroom teachers be an advocate for ELLs within their own classroom? The PD informs teachers that they can become advocates for ELLs through a strategic process: teacher training, reaching out beyond the classroom and scaffolding. In the chapter I will include a description of the PD, the reason for creating the PD and go over the strategies presented in the current chapter. The goal of sharing the PD is to remove the barriers ELLs face in the classroom and to become knowledgeable on the advocacy strategies teachers can use in their classrooms.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

The current chapter of this capstone will give a description of the professional development (PD) created, which was influenced by the review of literature in chapter 2. The purpose of this PD is to inform elementary mainstream classroom teachers how they can be an advocate for the English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. This PD will address the challenges ELLs face and the advocacy strategies teachers can implement to help their ELLs overcome these barriers. Byrd and Alexander (2015), state that 82.7% of teachers in the United States are white which shows the importance of this PD, as these teachers can not relate to the culture, background, challenges and experiences of ELLs. According to Bell et al. (2013), the number of ELLs in classrooms of young children is increasing dramatically and teachers lack preparation and training for working with ELL students. Therefore, this PD will be highly effective to teach elementary mainstream teachers how they can advocate for the ELLs. Day one of the PD will take place one week before the new school year starts.

Agenda for Day 1

9:00-9:05 Independent reflection and video

9:05-9:30 Presentation of ELLs challenges

9:30-9:33 Definition of advocacy

9:33-9:40 Pair share

9:40-10:20 Presentation of advocacy strategies

10:20-10:30 Wrap up

To begin day one of the PD, participants will be asked to reflect on how well they feel prepared to work with ELLs. Participants will have a blank sheet of lined paper and will write down their reflection. This activity is a quick write and participants are able to write in a bullet

point format if needed. This piece of paper will be kept in the participants folder for the remainder of the PD sessions and will be revisited on day 3.

After the beginning activity, I will present each challenge ELLs face in the elementary mainstream classroom. To begin the presentation, I will play a short YouTube video that addresses each challenge area of ELLs. The video briefly describes areas of advocacy for ELLs. After the video I will start my PowerPoint slides and presentation. Participants will be given a graphic organizer and are encouraged to take notes as they follow along with the presentation (Appendix A). The information on the challenges aims to make participants aware of the areas they need to look out for while working with ELLs in their classrooms.

The first challenge ELLs face that I will discuss is socio-emotional challenges. This is an important area to talk about because Bell et al. (2013) states that ELLs develop a negative perception of themselves and their language and begin to feel disconnected from their home, culture, and family when they enter a new classroom that does not welcome them. Perez (2016) claims that all of this creates the ELL to experience stress, depression and anxiety because the student is expected to leave their home and restart a new life in a completely new language. Knowing this challenge ELLs face will help teachers create a positive classroom environment where the student feels recognized and seen.

The second challenge ELLs face that I will address is socio-economic challenges. Perez (2016) states that approximately 75% of ELLs come from low-income families. Classroom teachers must provide students and families with the resources and information they need to succeed. Parents want to be involved, but sometimes it is hard for them due to the language barrier and living conditions, so it's the teachers' job to be a voice for these families in guiding them into this new atmosphere.

ELLs also face academic challenges which is the last area I will discuss. Khong (2014) argues that one of the biggest reasons ELLs struggle academically is because teachers lack the training to work with this specific group of students. Attending PDs and learning new strategies to work with ELLs is crucial to ELLs learning development. Most ELLs spend the majority of the day in the mainstream classroom and this PD will emphasize the importance of knowing how to advocate and help ELLs in all areas of struggle.

After discussing the challenges ELLs face in the classroom, I will present the definition of advocacy. “Advocacy holds different meanings for different people, but at its core, advocacy is about action” (National Education Association, 2015, p.10). Advocacy strategies can include participating in professional developments, knowing the rights of ELLs, including the parents in their child’s learning, using the student’s primary language, incorporating different cultures into the classroom and creating a positive classroom environment. Advocacy is about making a change, and for the participants of this PD, advocacy is about being a voice for the ELLs in their class who cannot advocate for themselves. The teachers will get together in a group by grade level and share ideas of how they think they can advocate for ELLs. Each group will present their ideas with the rest of the participants.

I will then present advocacy strategies participants can use in their classrooms to help ELLs succeed. Participants are again encouraged to take notes on the graphic organizer handed out earlier in the PD. Knowing the rights of ELLs is an important part of advocating for your ELL students because it will help the participants serve their students appropriately. Ferrin (2013), discussed the U.S. Supreme Court under *Lau v. Nichols*, which declared that an intervention or program is required to remove language barriers that might impede ELLs' participation in any federally funded program, including public schools. *Lau v. Nichols* states that students cannot be

denied equal education or the right to participate in activities based on language. This makes the participants aware that it's important to make sure all students have the same opportunity in the classroom. The Civil Rights Act should also be recognized when advocating for ELLs because it made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, color, religion, or national origin (Bent-Goodley, 2014). Participants should be informed of these laws so they are able to determine if their instruction serves ELLs appropriately.

The next advocacy strategy I will present is creating a positive classroom environment. Tran et al. (2016), investigated culturally responsive teaching which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference. I will provide teachers with a working definition for culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching refers to teacher attitudes and expectations, cultural communication in the classroom, culturally diverse content in the curriculum and culturally congruent instructional strategies. I will inform teachers that when they respect and recognize ELLs language and culture as a resource and asset to the classroom, it will benefit the students greatly. To create a positive environment participants will learn to incorporate the students' backgrounds into their instruction, have culturally diverse materials and resources, and even use the students first language if possible. A list of websites will be presented in the PowerPoint slides which the teachers can copy down on their graphic organizer. The websites are there to inform teachers where they can get culturally diverse materials and resources for their classrooms.

Teacher preparation is another important advocacy strategy when working with ELLs. Attending PDs will give teachers the knowledge to instruct ELLs in their classroom. Song (2016) concluded that PDs can show improvements in the instructional strategies of mainstream teachers when working with ELLs. PDs also support the improvement of teachers' attitudes

while working with ELLs. If teachers are not prepared to work with ELLs, it can impede their learning and academic achievement greatly. A huge step that teachers can take to gain knowledge of how to work with ELLs is to attend professional developments (PDs). By attending PDs, you are advocating for your ELLs by wanting to better yourself and your instruction to make a change for these students within the classroom setting. I will tell teachers that attending PDs can also be linked to professional evaluations. I will ask participants if their school uses a specific evaluation format.

The last strategy I will present is scaffold advocacy. Fenner (2013) states that scaffolding is an instructional strategy that provides ELLs an appropriate level of support as they access content material in a language in which they are developing proficiency. Scaffolding your lesson, activity and instruction will help ELLs reach a goal alongside their peers. Abobaker (2017) shows that ELLs performed significantly better with the presence of scaffolds. Being aware of the learners' needs and being able to fill in the gaps with scaffolds can raise the learners' awareness and help them succeed.

To wrap up day one of the PD, I will ask what strategy the participants liked the best and can see themselves incorporating into the classroom. Each participant will share their answers before they are dismissed, and we will have a quick discussion. Their answers do not need to be written down. I will remind participants that the PD continues tomorrow morning, Tuesday, at 9:00am.

Agenda for Day 2

9:00-9:05 Pair share question

9:05-9:30 List of ideas to create a positive environment

9:30-10:10 Present

10:10-10:15 Wrap up

To begin day two of the PD, I will begin by asking participants to share about what they learned yesterday, focusing on setting up a positive classroom environment. Participants will then break up into groups by grade levels and work together to create a list of ways they can create a positive environment in their classroom outside of the ideas they learned yesterday using the graphic organizer they took notes on yesterday. Participants will create a list of ways they can create a positive classroom environment and discuss how this benefits ELLs. Participants are encouraged to also sketch out a diagram of the layout of their classroom design. Teachers can base their design off their current classroom and make the sketch on a blank piece of paper.

After this activity, each group will present their new ways of creating a positive classroom environment, and their sketch of the classroom if they created one. The participants presenting will share how their ideas create an environment that welcomes and recognizes ELLs into the classroom. The rest of the participants will give feedback to the groups presenting.

To end this PD session, we will wrap up the discussion by revisiting the key points of creating a positive classroom environment for ELLs. The participants will be reminded that the last day of the PD will be tomorrow, Wednesday, at 9:00am. The participants will also be told to come prepared tomorrow with a copy of a lesson plan they would like to edit to make new accommodations using the strategies learned throughout the PDs.

Agenda for Day 3

9:00-9:05 Pair share question

9:05-9:35 Lesson plan edits

9:35-10:25 Presentation of revised lessons

10:25-10:50 Briefly revisit all advocacy strategies

10:50-11:00 Revisit reflection from day 1

11:00-11:10 Checklist and wrap up

To begin the last PD session, I will begin by asking the participants how they have scaffolded their instruction or lessons to help ELLs. We will take a few minutes to orally share ideas before breaking up into groups. Participants will be given five minutes to brainstorm ideas. These ideas will be written on the smartboard and displayed for the participants to refer back to during the activities. The participants will break up into groups by grade level. Each grade level will pull one of their ELA lesson plans up on a laptop and revise the lesson to fit the needs of ELL students. The participants will keep what they have in the lesson already but add scaffolds in red to show how much is being added. During this activity I will remind the participants to look back at their PowerPoint slides from day one of the PD session to use the information they have learned. After the activity each group will be able to present their lesson and show what types of scaffolds they added to help their ELLs succeed. The rest of the participants will be able to give feedback during the presentations.

After the activity the participants will take out the reflection they wrote on day 1. The participants will now rewrite this reflection being that they have gone through a few PD sessions, learning about advocating for ELLs, and they will write how well they feel prepared to work with ELLs in the upcoming school year. The participants' answers should change drastically as they have gained new knowledge and information on how to advocate for ELLs in their classroom. The reflections will be collected as the participants finish.

Lastly, the participants will be given a checklist to fill out the first 2 months of school before the next PD session where I will check in with the participants (see Appendix B). The checklist will consist of all the advocacy strategies. When a strategy is completed, the participants will check off the strategy, date it, and write a few sentences showing how or what they did to

complete this strategy. The checklist is to encourage participants to take what they learned in the PD session to their classrooms. After the check-in PD in October, participants will be able to plan out more strategies they wish to accomplish during the remainder of the school year.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

English Language Learners (ELLs) face many problems in the elementary mainstream classroom and it's important for teachers to advocate for these students. The problems ELLs face include academic challenges, socioeconomic status, parental involvement, socio-emotional strains. Throughout this capstone project, I have examined the overarching research question: How can elementary mainstream classroom teachers be an advocate for ELLs within their own classroom? Advocacy refers to acting on behalf of ELLs in and out of the classroom to help them succeed. In order for teachers to be advocates for ELLs in the classroom, teachers need to implement the strategies discussed in this capstone.

Conclusion

If educators partake in some of the advocacy strategies discussed throughout this capstone, the challenges that ELLs face in and out of the classroom can be decreased and eventually, eliminated. The way we teach students English in school can make all the difference in how they progress (Dean, 2020). If we strip a student of their identity and force the English language on them, the student can experience many academic and socioemotional challenges. On the other hand, if the teachers come together and create a welcoming environment where learning English still involves the child's culture and primary language, then ELL students can thrive. By understanding the language and culture of ELLs it is possible for people to refine their perceptions of this population of students (Khong & Saito, 2014). Teachers need to be involved in having a deeper understanding of where ELLs come from so they can support this population of students and give them the resources they need in hopes that they will become more engaged in learning. Advocates bring awareness of issues of equity and social justice and teachers need to

put this awareness into action in the classroom (Dubetz & de Jong, 2011). Supporting the student's cultural background in the classroom, knowing the rights for ELLs, scaffolding, and attending PDs are all ways an educator can take action to support ELLs (Dean, 2020). ELLs experience many challenges that prove to be hard on them such as academic, socioeconomic status and socio-emotional strains that can make it difficult for ELLs to learn. However, if educators implement the effective strategies mentioned throughout the capstone when working with ELLs they can provide many positive learning experiences for the students.

Implications for Student Learning

ELLs will benefit from the strategies in this capstone because the teachers are a voice for students who do not have a voice of their own. Strategies such as scaffolding allow ELLs to have a better learning experience in the classroom, where instruction is tailored to meet the needs of each student (Abobaker, 2017). This will benefit ELLs because when teachers use visuals, use the students L1, and have diverse materials and resources it can decrease the academic challenges these students are facing. Creating a positive classroom environment decreases socio-emotional challenges and students will feel comfortable and welcomed in the environment they learn in every day (Fenner, 2013). When the teacher opens up conversation, respects the student and their background, and involves the family, the student knows they can trust the teacher and other classmates and that they are in a safe classroom. A little help can go a long way for ELLs and the advocacy strategies in this capstone will help ELLs prosper.

Implications for Teaching

Teachers will benefit from this capstone because the PD will allow them to learn new strategies to accommodate and advocate for ELLs in their classroom. Teachers lack the training to work with this population of students and this capstone project will give them information to

start expanding their knowledge on advocacy. According to Moreno-Recio et al. (2018), hours of training and not years of experience predict leaders' efficacy. The authors state that investing on individuals' preparation programs rather than rewarding years of experience could yield higher results for school districts. The PD sessions created with the capstone research will help teachers for the upcoming school year to work with ELLs.

Recommendations

While this capstone reviews studies that helped us better understand the challenges ELLs face and advocacy strategies to mitigate those challenges, there is a gap in the existing literature that can inform future research. It is difficult to check in on every single teacher to make sure they are completing advocacy strategies in their classroom. It is also difficult to determine how teachers' advocacy work changes over time or looks different in each classroom. Further, investigation is needed to determine whether teachers who engage in activism outside the classroom differ from teachers who advocate for learners in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

In the current capstone project, many of the studies showed the benefit of advocacy strategies in the mainstream classroom to benefit ELLs. Advocating for ELLs in and out of the classroom will decrease the challenges they face such as academic, socio-emotional and socioeconomic challenges. Teachers in mainstream classrooms need to be more than just educators to their students, they need to be advocates for ELLs, their families and for ELLs educational opportunities. If all teachers implement strategies discussed in this capstone project, ELLs will be able to succeed alongside their peers.

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Appendix A
Graphic Organizer

Name _____ Date _____

Socio-Emotional Challenges ELLs Face:

Advocacy strategies to mitigate this challenge:

Other Ideas?:

Socioeconomic Challenges ELLs Face:

Advocacy strategies to mitigate this challenge:

Other Ideas?:

Academic Challenges ELLs Face:

Advocacy strategies to mitigate this challenge:

Other Ideas?:

Other notes during the PD:

Appendix B
Advocacy Checklist

Name _____ Grade Level _____

Strategy and Details of Completion (Check off box when completed)	Date of Completion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knowing the Rights of ELLs How did you complete this strategy? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Setting up a Positive Classroom Environment How did you complete this strategy? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher Preparation How did you complete this strategy? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scaffold Advocacy <p>How did you complete this strategy?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Beyond the Classroom Advocacy <p>How did you complete this strategy?</p>	