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Preparing Mainstream Teachers To Support English Language Learners

Christopher Cannady

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PREPARING MAINSTREAM TEACHERS TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LANGUAGE

LEARNERS

by

Christopher Cannady

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Jennifer Carlson, Faculty Advisor

Sara Seaburg, Peer Reviewer

Katrina Van Ruyven, Peer Reviewer

This publication is dedicated to my family, who raised me, my friends, who encouraged me, my

educators, who shaped me, my colleagues, who encouraged me, and my students, who inspired

me.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Project Rationale

From my perspective as a new teacher, as students embark on their educational journeys, classroom teachers are entrusted to provide each with the knowledge and tools required to be successful in school and life beyond. Standardized testing scores and graduation rates indicate that school systems are, in general, successful in enabling typical, native English-speaking students in achieving this goal; however, significant achievement gaps suggest that the current educational system is failing to produce equally successful outcomes for English Language Learners (ELLs). To illustrate, in 2013 the NAEP reported that ELL students demonstrated proficiency levels on standardized tests that were 23 to 30 percentage points below their English-speaking peers. During this same time period, according to the NAEP, ELL students' high school graduation rates stood a full 25 points below their native English-speaking peers, resulting in ELL students graduating from high school at the lowest rate of all student subgroups.

As an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, I have had the opportunity to work with many mainstream educators. While all are exceptional in their own way, I have observed a nearly universal struggle to plan and deliver lessons that meet the needs of ELLs. Research suggests that many classroom teachers lack the specific knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to provide effective instruction to linguistically diverse students placed in their classroom; for example, a study by McCloskey (2002) supports this statement, reporting that only twelve percent of K-12 teachers nationwide had training in working with ELLs. Furthermore, the perception of many educators appears to be that differentiating lessons for ELL students is the job

of the ESL teacher alone; when in reality, teachers are responsible for the learning of all students in their class. A 2004 study by Walker, et al. illustrates this concerning viewpoint, reporting that 20 percent of teachers surveyed directly objected to adapting their classroom instruction for ELLs and another 27 percent were neutral on this issue. Walker et al. further reported that 70 percent of mainstream teachers surveyed stated that they were not actively interested in having ELL students in their classrooms. With the number of ELLs predicted to double by the year 2050 (Samway & McKeon, 1999), it is increasingly vital that mainstream teachers become better prepared to successfully serve this population. To that end, my guiding question for this research is: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?*

In this chapter, I will discuss my personal and professional backgrounds and how it informs my interest in the capstone project.

Personal Background

I was born in 1989 and raised in Minnesota, growing up in an upper, middle-class neighborhood with wonderful parents and siblings. My father made a good living working as a salesman for a prominent apparel company and my mother was a homemaker. My parents have always been exceptionally supportive and attentive to my siblings and myself and had the financial means to provide an idyllic childhood, complete with opportunities to participate in activities, travel, and spend quality time together.

Starting to work as an ESL teacher in 2012, it was obvious that my privileged upbringing is a stark contrast from those experienced by most of my students, primarily first or second generation refugees from East Africa. I was blessed with a stable household, living at the same address from the day I was born until I was twenty-four years old. My parents spoke the same

language as my teachers and knew how to navigate our nation's, oftentimes extremely convoluted, educational system. Despite starting life with numerous advantages and opportunities for success, my educational journey included challenges that led to my decision to become an ESL teacher.

My first educational experience was at a Montessori preschool, where the model of discovery-based education nurtured my inquisitive, young mind and I was afforded the opportunity to pursue learning that interested me. By the time I entered kindergarten in 1995, I was reading exceptionally well, speaking German, and developing confidence in myself and my abilities.

As a kindergartener in a public school, I had my first experience with the inflexible, one-size-fits-all approach to education. Despite being able to read, I was forced to sit still at my desk and recite the ABCs with the rest of my class. On one memorable assignment, I responded to the question, "What sound does a cow make?" with the statement, "It is so ahvus (obvious)," leading my teacher to put a big, red X through my answer and giving me a zero on the assignment. In June, my teacher made the recommendation that I be retained in Kindergarten for another year; citing the previously described assignment, as well as poor cutting and pasting skills, as justification. Thankfully my parents, as well as the principal, refused to hold me back, recognizing that my performance on these assignments were not accurate reflections of my academic abilities.

In the year 2000, my last year of elementary school, I was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and a 504 plan was put into place, enabling me to be successful in school. Throughout middle school, high school, and college, I received accommodations for tests and assignments, including extended time and quiet testing locations; enabling me to demonstrate my understanding of the content and succeed at a very high level. Without the identification of my needs and adaptations provided, I am confident I would not have been nearly as successful in the educational setting.

Although on the surface my early educational experiences may not seem analogous to that of a language minority student, a connection can be made to the effect a dominant culture approach has on students whose needs differ from the majority. My kindergarten teacher, and many other, well intending educators like her, focused on teaching what she felt was appropriate for the majority of students and I was expected to adjust to fit in. In a similar way, many mainstream teachers attempt to utilize the same instructional strategies for native English-speaking students and new ELLs, expecting "one size to fit all".

Professional Background

I entered college confident in myself and my future path to becoming a lawyer. As I neared the completion of my degree in 2012, I signed up to take the LSAT and was shocked to find that I was denied the testing accommodations I had received throughout my education (a class action lawsuit was later brought against the Law School Administration Council for violating the Americans with Disabilities Act through their refusal to provide disability accommodations). Believing I would be unable to achieve the score required to facilitate entrance into law school, I found myself defeated and searching for a new career plan.

As I attempted to determine a new path forward, I found myself repeatedly reflecting on my educational journey.   The unwillingness of the current educational system to make accommodations for learners who are different from mainstream cost me my vision for the future; I could only imagine the damages inflicted upon those with more significant differences than mine. It was then that I recognized the opportunity to become part of the solution and become a teacher myself.

Unfortunately, my philosophy degree, an asset for one applying for law school, did not provide me with the educational experience and background required to achieve a teaching license. It was then that I applied for and was accepted to Teach for America; a program committed to reducing the achievement gap through recruiting leaders and providing foundational knowledge, skills, and experience, enabling them to receive alternative certification and teach in under-performing, urban schools.

During the course of my training for the Teach for American program, I experienced culture shock, learning that the United States is not necessarily the beacon of equal educational excellence I always believed it to be. Appalled by our nation's achievement gap, I found myself especially drawn to ELL students. Furthermore, I recognized parallels between ELL students and the start of my professional journey. Like ELLs, my educational path was very different from most of my peers and I would likely require additional resources, support, and evaluative feedback during my first years to perform to the best of my abilities. Additionally, I had an increased likelihood of being dismissed by coworkers who may believe, given my different background, I had little of value to offer. This revelation gave me an increased appreciation and empathy for the challenges that ELLs face and inspired my dream to become an ESL teacher.

Since achieving licensure in 2012, I have spent the last six years as an ESL teacher in urban schools, working primarily at the middle school level. In 2018/2019, I was employed at a K-8 school with a predominately East African student population and a very high concentration of ESL students. Approximately 50 percent of our students qualify for language support and an additional 20 percent were recently exited from the ESL program. My position affords me the opportunity to co-teach the 6th grade mainstream science classes and, as well as teaching sheltered science and English Language Development (ELD) classes for students in grades 6-8.

Now, I am thankful for not becoming the lawyer my 18-year-old self envisioned, and instead have the opportunity to shape the academic experiences, educational outcomes, and life trajectories of my students. In order for ELL students to have the same opportunity to succeed academically, pursue higher education, and discover their own fulfilling career paths, they first need exceptional teachers capable of providing high quality educational experiences. Unfortunately, the research presented in Chapter Two's literature review will reveal that, though our nation has made progress, we still have a long way to go.

Potential Significance of this Capstone

Providing mainstream educators with the knowledge and skills required to better support ELL students in their classrooms' will result in improved language development and academic achievement for all students. Educators develop their knowledge, skills, and overall teaching practices over time through ongoing training, experiences, and professional development. My goal for this capstone project is to be a part of that process by sharing information and resources through a professional presentation.

Findings from this capstone may be useful for teacher educators, emphasizing the importance of including content and pedagogical knowledge in the coursework they provide to preservice teachers. This research may also benefit school administrators as they plan professional development experiences that support teachers' knowledge of instructional practices that contribute to the language development of students learning English as a second language. Finally, findings from this study may be beneficial for mainstream classroom teachers as they examine their personal instructional practices and preparedness for teaching non-native English speaking students.

Chapter Summary

The guiding question of this capstone is: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?* In this chapter, I have discussed my personal and professional experiences and teaching beliefs that motivated the creation of this project. Chapter Two contains a detailed literature review, including information regarding the history of ESL education in the United States, the persisting achievement gap, and the influence of educators' perceptions regarding their ELL students. Chapter Two will also describe the lack of preparedness reported by educators to meet the needs of their ELL students, suggested areas of preservice education and professional development reform, and detail broad topics demanding proficiency by mainstream classroom educators. Chapter Three includes a detailed description of my research project, including its methodology and project design and, finally, Chapter Four contains a reflection and conclusion of the capstone project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

According to McKeon (2005) English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing student population in the country. The United States Department of Education (2015) reports that over 4,800,000 ELLs were enrolled in schools in 2014-2015, representing over 10 percent of the K-12 student population. The growth in the United States (US) is also reflected in Minnesota, where the number of ELLs has increased over 300 percent during the past twenty years (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). As the number of ELLs enrolling in US schools increases, so does the need to prepare mainstream classroom teachers to work effectively with this population. The overall increase in the number of ELLs supports my exploration of the question: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?*

The importance of my question is described by Goldenberg (2008), who notes that, like their native English speaking peers, ELLs deserve exceptional instruction, which includes high standards, clear learning objectives, a content rich curriculum, well-paced instruction, opportunities for application, appropriate feedback, frequent progress monitoring, and re-teaching as needed. According to the NCELA (2005), while mainstream teachers may be prepared to meet the needs of their native English-speaking students, most report feeling ill equipped to provide the additional modifications and supports required to enable ELL students to succeed.

This chapter provides background information and research-based theories regarding how mainstream teachers can better support English Language Learners in their classrooms. It describes in detail the history and evolution of ESL education in the US, the persisting achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers, and the influence of educators' perceptions

regarding their ELL students. From there, the lack of preparedness reported by educators to meet the needs of their ELL students is discussed as well as suggested areas of reform, including preservice teacher education programs, field experiences, and professional development. Chapter Two concludes with a description of the knowledge required and strategies that should be utilized by mainstream educators to support their ELL students through the phases of second language acquisition described by Krashen and Terrell (1983), to develop expressive and receptive language, and to foster vocabulary development.   Also included is information regarding the importance of maintaining consistent expectations of ELL and native English-speaking students, providing culturally compatible instruction, and supporting ELL students through unique challenges.

Evolution of ESL Education

To determine how to better prepare mainstream educators to teach ELLs in the future, we should first examine the successes and failures from our past. According to de Jong (2013), the early 19th century, when Americans first began formal, public education, marked a period of linguistic pluralism as multiple languages were often spoken in the classroom setting. Pavlenko (2002) wrote that around the turn of the 20th century, in response to the massive influx of immigrants from non-English speaking parts of Europe, the ideology of English as the only language of America emerged. According to Castillo (2003), between 1920 and 1960 English Immersion, or "sink or swim", policies were the primary methods of instruction for language minority students. Few or no remedial services were provided, and students generally remained at the same grade level until English was mastered, enabling advancement in subject matter

understanding. This remained the official pedagogical approach until several legal decisions played a key role in shifting policies from assimilation to pluralistic models.

Blanton (2005) asserted that the 1968 passage of the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments was the first United States federal legislation that recognized the unique educational challenges faced by non-English speaking students. According to Ricento (2005), this legislation indicated a major shift in tolerance towards bilingual education and allocated funds to establish innovative educational programs for students with limited English-speaking abilities.

1974 saw Lau v. Nichols, which decreed schools must provide specific instruction to meet the language and academic needs of students with limited English proficiency stating,

> There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education. Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the education program, he must have already acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful (414 U.S. 563).

The Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA), also passed in 1974, codified Lau v. Nichols into law by prohibiting discrimination against students, staff, and faculty and requiring school districts to take action to overcome barriers to students' equal participation (Chen, 2014).

Another of the most significant court decisions affecting language minority students was 1981 Castaneda v. Pickard. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals developed the "Castaneda Standard", mandating that programs for language minority students must be based on sound educational theory, be implemented effectively with sufficient resources, instructional materials, and space, and be proven effective in helping students overcome language barriers" (Crawford, 2004; Wright, 2010). This three-part assessment better enables determination regarding whether schools are taking appropriate action to address the needs of English Language Learners as required by the EEOA.

A final of the more significant legal decisions contributing to the return of bilingual education is the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). According to Dee and Jacob (2009), NCLB demands greater accountability for ELLs' English language and academic progress and established high expectations for all students, seeking to reduce the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. School districts must help ELL students to make continuous progress toward this goal, as measured by performance on yearly student assessments, or risk serious consequences.

Achievement Gap

Several researchers (Goldenberg, 2010; Short, Fidelman, & Lougit, 2012) report that, despite the previously described legislation, educational reform, and improved allocation of resources, a significant achievement gap persists between language learners and native speakers in nearly every content area measured by standardized assessments. Data supporting the existence of the achievement gap for ELLs is demonstrated in the results of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Between 1990 to 2013, the NAEP results document that the

achievement gap between ELLs and native speaking students has been essentially unchanged. The NAEP further reports an average of only 30 percent of ELLs scored at or above a Basic level in comparison to non-ELLs where an average of 70 percent of students score at least Basic level. Even more troubling is the fact that this achievement gap widens over time.

In our own backyard, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) reported in 2016 that ELLs taking the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) scored significantly lower than their peers. On the math assessment, only 23.2 percent of ELs exceeded or met academic standards, compared to 59.6 percent of all students. On the reading assessment, only 14.7 percent of ELLs exceeded or met academic standards, compared to 60.2 percent of all students. Finally, on the science assessment, only 8.4 percent of ELs exceeded or met academic standards, compared to 54.2 percent of all students (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

In addition to scores on standardized assessments, ELLs have lower graduation rates. According to McKeon (2005), the 2001-2002 academic year saw ELL students with four times the dropout rate compared to that of their native English-speaking peers. ELL students are also significantly less likely to pursue a post-secondary education, with only 18 percent of ELLs advancing to four-year colleges upon high school graduation, compared with nearly 70 percent of native English speakers (Kanno & Cromley, 2015). Finally, according to the Census Bureau (2005), people who speak a language other than English at home are less likely to be employed, less likely to find full-time work, and experience a lower median earning than those who speak only English. These alarming statistics indicate that teachers are not adequately meeting the linguistic needs or providing the necessary educational supports required to enable ELL students in their classroom to succeed; bringing us back to my capstone question: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?*

Educators' Perceptions

With the right attitude, the previously described achievement gap between ELL students and native speakers could be viewed, not as today's greatest educational challenge, but as today's greatest potential for growth. Unfortunately, in addition to other trials, ELL students may face the challenge of educators' negative perceptions of non-native English speakers.

Menken (2010) states that, since the implementation of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools are required to demonstrate through standardized test data that their ELLs are making adequate academic progress. Schools that are unable to do so face stiff punitive consequences. No Child Left Behind legislation therefore places tremendous pressure on schools to show that their students with limited English proficiency are achieving. This pressure on schools and teachers may have the unintended consequence of negatively influencing teacher attitudes regarding their EL students (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004).

In their 2001 study, Pang and Sablin concluded that there is in fact an underlying current of prejudicial, deficit beliefs about minority students that contributes to negative teacher attitudes. Their survey reported that 65% of the teachers who participated in the study felt that their minority students performed poorly no matter what instructional strategies were used. They also found that teachers' perception of minority students tended to actually worsen over time leading to the hypothesis that teachers' perceptions are being adversely shaped by the attitudes of co-educators. Walker et al. (2004) also reported that these negative perceptions cause failure in meeting the academic and social needs of ELLs and affect students' school success and the overall classroom environment.

Studies (Echevarria et al., 2008; Reeves, 2006; Walker et al., 2004; Young and Young, 2001) have revealed four factors that can influence teachers' perceptions of ELL students including:

- The number of years teaching ELLs:

    o A study by Sandra Mitchell (2016) indicated a significant, direct correlation between teachers' years of experience with ELLs and their reported attitudes toward the population.

- Teachers' language learning background:

    o A study by Velez Salas et al. (2005) found that bilingual teachers demonstrate more supportive attitudes toward ELLs than those who identify as monolingual.

- Teachers' demographic features:

    o Research by Young and Youngs (2001) indicates that younger, female, or Latino teachers generally report more positive attitudes toward ELLs than older, male, or non-Latino teachers.

- The teacher's own education:

    o Research by Sandra Mitchell (2016) indicated a significant, direct correlation between hours of university coursework in ELL instruction techniques and a teacher's reported attitudes toward the population.

One would assume, therefore, that ensuring mainstream teachers are being prepared to work with ELLs would be a top priority of education preservice programs; however the review of the research completed for this capstone project did not support that new teachers are entering the field feeling prepared to meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms.

Educators' Lack of Preparedness

Tragically, research and surveys indicate that a vast majority of mainstream teachers are feeling ill equipped to support ELLs' in their classroom. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2005), 87 percent of educators report they are underprepared to teach linguistically diverse students and need further training. More specifically, a study conducted by Santibanez and Gandara (2018) revealed over 70 percent of teachers surveyed stated their educational programs had not prepared them well to design formative assessments, engage with parents of EL students, tailor instruction to ELLs with multiple levels of English proficiency, or to organize instruction that meets the needs of ELLs and non-ELLs in the same class.

Furthermore, Alamillo, Padilla, and Arenas (2011) conducted a study which indicated that teachers believed the training they had received in their preservice programs was not useful in supporting ELLs in the monumental task of acquiring proficiency in English language usage while achieving academically. Unsurprisingly, this lack of preparedness to meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students has been found to lead to the proliferation of instructional practices that are detrimental to ELLs (Chiznik, 2003). It could be suggested, therefore, that teacher education programs are inadequate and immediate reform is required.

Revising Teacher Education Programs

Given the size of the ELL population in the United States, it is important that teacher education programs are preparing their candidates to develop the knowledge and skills to support the ELLs in their future classrooms. Alarmingly, however, a new report from the National Council on Teacher Quality indicates that more than 75 percent of teacher preparation programs are failing when it comes to readying future teachers to work effectively with ELLs. According to the

Education Commission of the States (2018), over 30 states (including Minnesota) do not require ELL training for general classroom teachers, beyond federal requirements. Furthermore, Ballantyne et al. (2008) revealed that only 29 percent of teachers received specific training in ELL instruction. Without specific coursework relating to the unique learning needs of ELLs, educators will be inadequately prepared to work effectively with these students.

Another consequence of not requiring specific coursework relating to the unique learning needs of ELL until student teaching has been reported by Wiggins and Folio (1999). These researchers have concluded that delaying multicultural awareness until student teaching assignments is too late to have a significant effect on teachers' practices and beliefs; therefore, it is essential that teacher preparation programs, namely university coursework, assume the responsibility of ensuring the complex and critical aspects of working with ELLs are thoroughly addressed.

Fillmore and Snow (2000) suggest curricular revision and enhancement is required, dedicating specific semester hours to developing and applying knowledge of effective instructional practices for teaching nonnative speakers. Samson and Collins (2012) assert that preparation programs should include coursework in foundations of language instruction for students learning English as a second language, linguistics, language acquisition, literacy development, cultural diversity, and ELL advocacy practices. Coursework should also illuminate the similarities and differences in instructional methodologies for diverse students, how to promote inclusivity, encouraging productive interaction among ELLs and English native speakers, and effectively utilizing assistive technology in the classroom. In addition to pedagogical content knowledge for teaching linguistically diverse students, preservice programs should include opportunities for

educational partnership with ELL teaching candidates to illuminate the benefits of professional collaborations and information exchange (McGraner & Saenz, 2009).

These changes in coursework depend on reform of academic institutions themselves and should include modifications in course syllabi, professional development for faculty, and ESL department collaboration (Brisk, 2006). Research also indicates potential benefits of educational programs encouraging studying abroad (Mikael, 2010), as the experience generally results in an increased appreciation for other cultures and improved ability to support and empathize with students as they transition to a new country. Finally, teacher education programs should attempt to increase their own diversity through refocusing their recruitment process. In the 2009-2010 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that approximately 45 percent of the country's students were from ethnic minority families, yet 83 percent of teachers were white. This cultural mismatch must be corrected, as research indicates that increasing teacher diversity results in improved academic performance for students of color, including increased reading and math test scores, graduation rates, and college aspirations (Dee, 2005).

Field Experiences

Darling-Hammond, et. al, (2002) note that in addition to coursework, field experiences are essential for providing preservice candidates with learning experiences that support and extend university coursework and opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in authentic classroom environments. To better prepare mainstream teachers for working with ELL students, field experience locations should be strategically selected at schools with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, thus providing opportunities to observe, interact, and teach these diverse learners. Furthermore, student teachers should be paired with educators who are proficient

in ESL pedagogy so they may observe successful teachers model effective techniques (Panaque & Barbetta, 2006).

Unfortunately, Siwatu's 2001 mixed methods study indicated that field experiences for preservice teachers typically occur in middle-class, predominately white schools that closely resemble teachers' own educational background. Without practice implementing ELL specific instructional strategies and working with ELL students in supportive and instructional contexts, mainstream teachers are unlikely to develop the skills and confidence they need to effectively instruct and support ELLs in their future classrooms.

Professional Development

While the importance of coursework and fieldwork cannot be understated, the research of Deussen et al. (2008) indicates that information is most effective once teachers are working regularly with ELLs and have a clear understanding of the challenges their students face. Deussen and his colleagues further recommended that on-going and practical education providing research-based information, resources, and strategies to teach, evaluate, and nurture ELL students is a key step toward enabling mainstream teachers to effectively work with their ELL students.

Unfortunately, a 2008 study by Ballantyne et al. revealed that, though most general education teachers have at least one ELL student in their classroom, only 29.5 percent of those teachers have opportunities for professional development in working with ELLs. These researchers, therefore, concluded that, to maximize achievement opportunities for ELL students, system-wide reform in professional development for general education teachers is recommended.

A first step toward professional development reform is described in Chapter Three, as it provides details regarding a professional presentation aiming to provide pedagogical content

knowledge, as well as practical tools and strategies that will be useful for busy educators who are passionate about increasing their effectiveness in teaching ELL students.

The Five Pillars

With the number of ELLs predicted to double by the year 2050, most, if not all teachers can expect to have ELL students in their classroom, and therefore must be prepared to successfully serve this population (Samway & McKeon, 1999). The next sections outline some of the necessary knowledge and strategies that mainstream teachers need to develop through preservice education and professional development.

Pillar One: Pattern of Second Language Development

ELLs enrolled in K-12 education are expected to acquire English proficiency while learning required grade level content information. To accomplish this task, it is crucial that all mainstream educators understand the process of second language acquisition first proposed by linguists Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in their 1983 book, *The Natural Approach*. Without understanding of the five predictable and sequential developmental stages described by Krashen and Terrell and outlined below, teachers will likely have unrealistic expectations resulting in failure to effectively differentiate instruction for their ELL students.

The first phase of second language development described by Krashen and Terrell (1983) is termed preproduction (though is also known as "the silent period"). Lasting anywhere from hours to six months, during this stage students have up to 500 receptive words but are not yet able to communicate verbally. Early production is the second stage; spanning 6 to 12 months. During the early production stage, students develop close to 1,000 receptive words and speak using short

words and sentences. The third stage described by Krashen and Terrell (1983) is speech emergence and typically takes from one to three years. During speech emergence, students have developed approximately 3,000 words and, though sentences are longer, context clues and familiar topics are still often necessary. As vocabulary increases, errors decrease, especially in common or repeated interactions and students will be able to do some content work with teacher support.

Intermediate fluency, described by Krashen and Terrell (1983) is the fourth stage, and is marked by the development of close to 6,000 words, excellent language comprehension, the production of few grammatical errors, and the ability to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in English, including offering an opinion or analyzing a problem. Finally, during the advanced fluency stage, which takes five to seven years to achieve, a students' expression and comprehension become increasingly comparable to same age native speaking peers and they are able to participate fully in grade level classroom activities, given occasional extra support.

Kull (2011) describes how undoubtedly, each student's trajectory of language acquisition will be unique depending on a variety of factors including the language spoken at home, how old they were when they began learning English, their prior level of education and literacy, as well as other individual differences. However, while students will have individual language acquisition paths, having an understanding of the basic path enables teachers to predict and accept a students' current stage and utilize appropriate instructional strategies, described below by Hill and Flynn (2006), enabling progression to the next stage.

In the preproduction stage, Hill and Flynn (2006) recommend that teachers offer as many language supports (gestures, pointing, visuals, etc.) as possible and should monitor their own language, speaking slowly utilizing short phrases and repetition. During the preproduction stage, language comprehension should be emphasized utilizing activities including choral reading and

music and new learning may be supported with interpretation from a classmate at a higher stage of development.

Throughout the early production stage, Hill and Flynn (2006) remind teachers that they can support students' development by offering opportunities for the production of simple language and modeling correct language, instead of providing excessive error correction. These authors also note how educators may modify content information to the language level of ELLs and should focus on key vocabulary and concepts.

During the speech emergence stage, Hill and Flynn (2006) support teachers using modeling of more advanced academic language structures and ask questions requiring full responses. In addition to modeling during this period students may complete activities including reading short, modified texts in content area subjects, compose brief stories, and completing graphic organizers with word blanks.

Throughout the intermediate fluency stage, Hill and Flynn (2006) suggest that students should also receive correction of errors related to syntax, pragmatics, pronunciation, and other elements that do not affect meaning but contribute to oral fluency. A common error at this stage is utilizing an incorrect preposition (primarily with, to, or on, as they have fewer clear-cut rules): "What happened with you last weekend?" Hill and Flynn (2006), further suggest that during this stage, idioms should be introduced, and educators should focus on learning strategies including different note taking formats.

Finally, during the advanced fluency stage, as near-native fluency has been achieved, Hill and Flynn (2006) ask that teachers should offer constructive feedback similar to that offered to native English-speaking peers, enabling students to perfect their oral and written language skills.

Educators should provide challenging activities and practice for development of academic skills including effective note taking.

By understanding the stages of second language acquisition, identifying which stage students are in, and providing adequate accommodations, mainstream teachers can optimize ELL students' success and support them in pursuit of the ultimate goal: reaching English fluency while achieving grade level academic goals.

Pillar Two: Types of Language

In addition to knowledge of the stages of second language development, classroom teachers must understand the difference between varying types of language, including expressive/receptive and conversational/academic.

Expressive language refers to one's ability to speak and convey thoughts and ideas while receptive language involves the skills required to comprehend spoken language. Classroom teachers must understand that ELL students, especially those with previous language and academic learning experiences, are able to comprehend significantly more than they are able to produce (Gibson, Pena, & Bedore 2014). Therefore, it is important to not make assumptions regarding a student's language levels and, instead, utilize accurate assessments.

Furthermore, classroom teachers must be familiar with conversational and academic language. While fluency in conversational language may be achieved in two to five years, academic language fluency takes four to seven years, as academic language demands more complex and specific vocabulary and is decontextualized, abstract, technical, and literary. Teachers must understand that fluency in everyday conversation is not sufficient to ensure access

to academic texts and tasks and that academic language typically requires explicit modeling and instructional focus (Echevarria et al., 2004).

To support language development of all types, Brown and Broemmel (2011) suggest that teachers should provide comprehensible input, which presents verbal messages just above students' current proficiency level enhanced with gestures, pictures, manipulatives, and connections to previous knowledge. A primary method of providing comprehensible input is scaffolding, which involves building on prior knowledge and forming associations among new information. Scaffolding enables students to do more than they could independently by providing gradually fading supports ("I do it, we do it, you do it"). Some ways teachers can effectively scaffold include modeling (providing clear examples or demonstrating the required task), bridging (connecting new material to prior learning), and utilizing multiple representations including graphic organizers, real life objects, and manipulatives (Brown & Broemmel, 2011).

In supporting vocabulary development Samson and Collins (2012) suggest that teachers in all content areas, not just language arts, should provide intensive vocabulary instruction focusing on academically useful words. Coordination across content areas should occur and structured opportunities for ELLs to develop academic language vocabulary must become an integral part of curriculum planning. Direct instruction of vocabulary should be an educational priority, however, other strategies including providing multiple exposures, teaching word analysis and word learning strategies, creating language rich environments, and utilizing the three R's (repetition, review, and reinforcement) also must occur, as direct instruction has practical limitations. As students build their vocabulary, comprehension is improved which reduces the cognitive load and enables ELLs to allocate more mental faculties to the academic content (Gibbons, 2002).

When selecting the vocabulary to teach, educators should be aware that not all words have equal value should be mindful of focusing on those that maximize comprehension. To accomplish this, classroom teachers should all be familiar with the three-tiered model of vocabulary development created by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013). Tier 1 includes common words ("but" and "when") and concrete nouns and verbs ("butterfly" and "run") that ELLs typically know in their primary language but may not in English. Tier 2s are high utility words appearing frequently across all content areas that empower ELLs to have command of academic language and must be mastered for adequate comprehension and performance on tests. Finally, the 3rd Tier consists of low frequency, content specific vocabulary (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2004). Educators should be aware that direct instruction may be required for Tier 1 words with ELL students and that Tier 2 words will need to be mastered before a student can gain proficiency in Tier 3 words.

By supporting learners' language and vocabulary development, comprehension will improve, thereby reducing the cognitive load and enabling students to focus on mastery of academic content and closing the ever-present achievement gap.

Pillar Three: Educator Expectations

In addition to the previously mentioned linguistic knowledge and strategies required of mainstream teachers working with ELL students, educators must also develop an understanding of the role their own expectations have on a students' success in their classroom, and in the world beyond.

Research suggests that it takes five to seven years for ELLs to develop English proficiency high enough to perform on the same level as their native English speaking peers; therefore, ELLs

cannot wait until they are fluent in English to learn grade level content and must develop language and academic content simultaneously (Cummins, 1984). Teachers need to know that ELLs should be held to high standards and that they are capable of achieving them. Unfortunately, Youngs and Youngs (2001) noted language minority students are often harmed by the low expectations that their teachers have for them, which leads to disastrous consequences.

To enable ELL students to reach their maximum potential in the shortest amount of time, teachers must avoid watering down instruction for ELLs, as it does not help them achieve academically or prepare them to be constructive citizens after they leave school. To support students to continue to build in the necessary content knowledge, even as they are developing proficiency in English, teachers should provide bilingual instruction when possible. Unfortunately, this is rarely a realistic option, in which case teachers should utilize sheltered instruction.

Sheltered instruction is instruction in English that provides additional support to ELLs in vocabulary, syntax, and background knowledge which enables grade level content accessibility, even if students are not fully fluent in English. Some components of sheltered instruction include the use of primary language supports (i.e. repetition of directions in a students' primary language, providing a preview of a lesson in their primary language, allowing students to read texts in translation, providing dictionaries, and encouraging collaboration with students who speak the same language), high levels of student social interaction, instruction in learning strategies (metacognition), and the use of formal and informal assessments to measure student learning in both content and language (Short, et. al 2012).

Improved academic outcomes for ELLs begin with teachers who believe that ELLs are capable of learning grade-level content alongside their English-speaking peers. When the

necessary supports described previously are provided, the academic performance and language proficiencies of ELLs improve (Short, et al. 2008).

Pillar Four: Culturally Compatible Instruction

In addition to consistent expectations between ELL students and their native English-speaking peers, educators should prioritize consistently integrating aspects from all represented cultures into the classroom and curriculum. Teachers must appreciate that many of their ELL students come from families that have recently immigrated into the US or live within communities that speak languages other than English and maintain their own traditions. English language learners hail from a rich tapestry of culture and bring just as much background knowledge as any other student; however, it is often knowledge of different histories, cultures, and places than those of their English-speaking peers. In order to effectively teach ELLs, teachers should view the diversity of cultural backgrounds as resources, rather than deficits, as doing so will enrich the learning experience for all students (August & Shanahan, 2006).

It is critical that mainstream teachers actively seek to learn more about their students' cultural backgrounds and experiences. Doing so enables the utilization of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them effectively (Gay, 2002). Furthermore, having an understanding of their students; cultures allow mainstream teachers to better anticipate and respond to cross cultural differences. Common cultural mismatches that should be anticipated include differences in parental involvement (many cultures defer decision making regarding school to their child's teacher and are unlikely to get involved in their child's education), the concept of inquiry (some cultures teach the utmost respect for the authority of adults, meaning students may be reluctant to ask questions, challenge ideas, or

engage in inquiry based instruction), and large group interactions (some students may be less inclined to publicly display their knowledge, or lack thereof, through questioning, answering, or guessing in front of a large group, or may be unaccustomed to competing against or collaborating with their peers (Au, 1998).

To create a classroom environment where students feel understood, supported, and celebrated, Gonzalez, et al. (2011), suggest teachers should utilize culturally compatible instruction: incorporation of the language and cultural backgrounds of all students in the classroom. Being part of a caring, inclusive learning community where they feel affirmed and valued creates an environment where ELLs are comfortable drawing upon their previous knowledge and bridges their home and school lives, thus reducing the risk of disengagement. Culturally compatible instruction strategies that may be utilized include incorporating culturally familiar texts, supporting students' development of bi-culture identity, developing classroom traditions, and rituals, and ensuring all backgrounds are represented (Lee & Luykx, 2006).

In addition to creating a welcoming classroom environment, mainstream teachers may need to teach their ELL students how to effectively and appropriately participate. Differences between ELL students' home cultures and that of the classroom can lead to confusion, frustration, reduced engagement in learning, and even complete withdrawal. Educators can help by making the classroom norms explicit which may include describing expectations for behavior, conveying that questions are encouraged, and teaching how and when to ask questions (Deussen et al, 2008). Providing clear expectations can help avoid misunderstandings, discipline problems, and feelings of low self-esteem, creating a classroom culture that is fully engaging, nonthreatening, and affirming of students' native languages and heritages, thereby increasing motivation and encouraging risk taking.

Pillar Five: Unique Challenges

A final area mainstream educators need to be educated and supported in is developing awareness and sensitivity to the additional challenges often facing ELLs, in addition to the monumentally difficult task of acquiring proficiency in English language usage while achieving academically. Although ELLs represent a wide spectrum of socioeconomic levels, they are more likely to come from households in poverty (according to Kanno & Cromley (2015), approximately 75 percent of ELLs come from low income families). ELL's are also less likely to have a family history of formal education; only 22 percent of ELL students' parents have postsecondary education, compared to 44 percent of non-Ells' parents (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). English language learners are more likely than their English-speaking peers to have responsibilities at home that could interfere with their education including serving as an interpreter for parents, supplementing the family income, and providing childcare for younger family members. In addition to the strain of entering a new school in a new country, ELLs may also be experiencing effects of trauma, extreme violence, detention centers, sexual abuse, and stress related to legal status (Kanno &Cromley, 2015).

To create a classroom environment where students feel safe and supported teachers should develop and maintain a predictable and consistent classroom routine, minimizing disruptions and transitions to offer stability. Education regarding stress management is also critical and should include opportunities to practice age appropriate strategies such as journaling, breathing exercises, mediation, sports, music, drawing, etc. Additionally, ELL students may need specific instruction to develop the emotional language necessary to express feelings, manage interactions, and resolve conflict. Teachers should be vigilant for changes in behavior as stressful experiences can lead to anxiety, fear, depression, anger, and social isolation and should have mental health resources to

refer students to as needed. Teachers must protect ELLs from bullying often prompted by foreign accents or different cultural mannerisms by setting ground rules with clear examples, establishing consequences, and creating a classroom environment of inclusivity where differences are celebrated. Finally, teachers should develop real relationships with their students through honesty, acknowledging the challenges they are facing, avoiding platitudes, frequently checking in, and ensuring students know you are here for them (Stegelin, 2017).

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two explored the literature and research related to the capstone question: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?* The following chapters will present the project design, research framework, conclusions, and reflections.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The central question for this project is: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners?* As previously described in Chapter Two, reform at all levels of preservice education and professional development is required to truly solve the problem of underprepared teachers. My personal contribution to the larger reform effort will be to design and deliver an informative and engaging professional development presentation, providing pedagogical content knowledge, as well as practical tools and strategies, that will be useful for busy educators who are passionate about increasing their effectiveness in teaching ELL students.

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed description of this project including goals, intended content, timeline, and participants.

Rationale for Capstone Project

My immediate, short-term goal was to deliver a professional development workshop that provided my colleagues with knowledge, skills, and tools that can immediately be implemented in classrooms, thereby increasing ELL student support and improving linguistic and academic outcomes. Research by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences concluded that student achievement can improve by as much as 21 percentile points as a result of teacher's participation in well-designed professional development programs.

My long-term goal was for my presentation to be the pilot for a catalyst of change toward comprehensive EL professional development for the district moving forward. My introductory

professional workshop served as an excellent first step in preparing mainstream educators to better support ELLs, however, long-term and ongoing professional development is required as the educational field and the populations it serves is ever growing and ever changing.

Project Overview

My professional development workshop was designed with consideration of Knowles et al. (2005) theories of adult learning: namely that adults learn best when they are in an informal, comfortable, flexible, and nonthreatening setting and when they are educated regarding the significance and importance of the topic. The professional presentation was delivered in the school's library in two sessions, one before and one after school; allowing participants to select the time that better suited their schedule and learning preferences. The presentation was opened to all educators and professionals who come into contact with ELL students and occurred during the middle of the 2019-2020 school year, rather than the beginning when many teachers will have just received an abundance of workshops; or the end of the year, allowing time for attendees to apply learning and refine their teaching techniques. The learning materials were delivered with the use of Microsoft PowerPoint and reflected findings from Chapter Two's literature review. PowerPoint was a logical delivery modality, as it had been previously utilized successfully in meetings and professional development experiences.

I began my presentation by providing statistics regarding the rapid growth of the ELL student population in schools, emphasizing that all mainstream teachers can expect to have ELLs in their classrooms and, therefore, need to be prepared to serve this population. I transitioned into a description of the achievement gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers, providing evidence that our current educational system is failing to produce equal results for ELLs.

From there, I discussed a primary cause of this achievement gap: deficiencies in the teacher preparation program. This led to a proposed solution: professional education designed to give teachers the knowledge, tools, and skills required to better serve their ELL students. The introduction was concluded with a description of my presentation's goals, my own personal and professional history, and an opportunity to share how the audiences' experiences have shaped their ability to better relate to and instruct their ELL students. The bulk of my presentation was spent providing education regarding the "Five Pillars", five main topic areas that all mainstream educators should have knowledge in to better meet the educational needs of their ELL students.

The first involved a detailed description of the Pattern of Second Language Development proposed by Krashen and Terrell (1983). Each of the five stages were described, teaching strategies were provided, a video showing examples of students at different levels of English language acquisition was screened, and an exercise was completed, providing opportunity for information implementation.

The following section covered different types of language: expressive vs. receptive language and conversational vs. academic. Education was provided regarding each language type, comprehensible input, and scaffolding. Furthermore, strategies to support language development were detailed followed by a video discussing the conversational and academic language.

The third section discussed the importance of educators maintaining high expectations for their ELL students and provided information regarding sheltered instruction.

The fourth section described the importance of culturally compatible instruction, provided recommended teaching strategies, and detailed common cultural mismatches and how to address them.

The final section illustrated additional challenges often facing ELL students, provided strategies for educators to utilize to create a classroom environment where students feel safe and supported, and included an activity for information implementation. The presentation concluded with closing remarks, and an opportunity for questions and comments.

Participants

My audience was comprised of educators from the urban school where I currently teach. Our school serves 686 students in grades K-8 with a predominately East African student population (83 percent). Over 10 percent of our students are homeless, over 20 percent are in special education, and nearly 90 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. We have an extremely high concentration of ESL students with approximately 50 percent qualifying for language support and an additional 20 percent having been recently exited from receiving services.

Our school has 55 teachers, creating a student teacher ratio of 12:1. We are fortunate to have the resources to staff one ESL teacher per grade level and, while our most of our staff has experience working with ELLs, many report feeling ill-equipped to adequately serve our academically, culturally, and linguistically diverse population. This lack of preparedness is evident from our overall test scores (we rank in the bottom 50 percent of all schools in Minnesota with 26 percent of students achieving proficiency in Math and 27 percent achieving proficiency in Reading/Language Arts). This achievement gap indicates the desperate need for professional development. I am hopeful that my presentation can serve as a first step in a series of trainings that will support classroom teachers and produce better educational outcomes for all of our students.

Summary

  In this chapter, I outlined the plan for my professional development presentation. I provided my project rationale and an overview, including my application of Knowles' et al. (2005) theories of adult learning and my intended content, timeline, and audience. In Chapter Four, I will reflect upon my project and describe future steps that should be taken to help educators in my school meet the educational needs of their ELL students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The question that drove my capstone project was: *How can mainstream educators be better prepared to support English language learners?* In this chapter, I reflect on the journey I took to answer that question, including the research conducted, the professional development presentation I created, and the future research I hope to complete.

Reflection on Research

There are two key takeaways from my research that are most important for all mainstream educators. The first being the information that makes this topic relevant and personal: with the rapidly growing population, all mainstream teachers will have ELL students in their classroom and statistics prove our current educational system is failing them. Teachers in suburbs may hear the topic "Teaching ELL students" and think, "This doesn't apply to me", however; the statistics my research unearthed illustrate that all educators need to be better prepared to serve this growing and deserving population. Our profession is one where success is measured, not by what we accumulate, be it income, power, or fame, but by what we leave behind. Teachers want to leave behind students who are prepared to succeed in school and life beyond; however, research I shared regarding the achievement gap between ELL students and their native English speaking peers will impress upon all readers that we as educators must make changes if this goal is ever to be fully realized.

The second most important takeaway from my research was the five broad topics that all educators working with ELL students should have comfort and familiarity: the pattern of second

language development, types of language, the importance of educators maintaining high expectations of their ELL students, the value of culturally compatible instruction, and the unique challenges facing ELL students. In addition to scholarly information, the provision of teaching strategies and educator resources will give all readers and presentation participants a foundation of information enabling them to better support the ELLs in their mainstream classrooms.

Reflection on the Professional Development Presentation

The goal of this project was to provide fellow educators with an active learning opportunity and to clearly and concisely deliver new information that was easily applicable to their classrooms. I hoped to motivate my fellow teachers to try new things and to view topics from a fresh perspective, with the ultimate result of enhancing both students' and teachers' lives.

I feel that my presentation was developed in a way that met all previously stated goals. The research was well organized, and the presentation included opportunities for group discussion, application of knowledge in functional exercises, and the delivery of information in multiple modalities including several engaging videos. Participants were provided with literature and resources to examine at their leisure and had the opportunity to ask questions and share experiences in an open, relaxed, and supportive atmosphere.

As I reflect on all of the work that has gone into this capstone project, it's clear that the process of writing the literature review and creating the professional development project has helped develop my own identity as a scholar and professional educator. I learned a lot about the shortcomings in teacher preparation programs and how that lack of efficacy can harm language minority students. This project is a first step on my journey to help make school a more equitable place for all learners. My greatest frustration in the development of this presentation was the

knowledge that our few short hours only enabled us to scratch the surface. In the next section, I will detail future research I hope to conduct and share. I would like to create a series of professional development sessions similar to the "Strategy Spotlight" slides in the project. I think teachers would find those activities easy to implement to their classrooms immediately after the session.

Future Research

The statistics and data from the research prove that sweeping and system wide changes from teacher preparation programs to professional development are required to truly enable mainstream teachers to provide equal opportunities for academic, social, and professional success for ELL and native English-speaking students. My presentation offered an introduction; however, future research should focus on all topic areas in significantly more detail. As a researcher, I am especially interested in the exploration of strategies for teachers to create a culturally inclusive and emotionally supportive environment conducive to learning for all students, as statistics and studies proved no true learning can occur until these requirements are met.

Furthermore, world events and unprecedented nation, state, and district wide changes during the completion of my project, including schools being shut down and the implementation of distance learning due to COVID-19 demonstrated to me the vulnerability of in person professional development opportunities. An ultimate goal to reach the maximum number of educators, in all geographic areas, in a place and time best suited to their needs, while achieving the frequency and duration required to deliver the information and strategies necessary would be to create a professional development podcast. The ability to deliver weekly, informal but informative, virtual presentations providing up to date research and strategies teachers could

instantly apply in their classrooms is the best way I can envision to truly solve the question this capstone has covered: *How can mainstream teachers be better prepared to support English language learners*?

Summary

In this chapter, I reflected on the research and development of my professional development presentation and concluded with a description of visions for future research. It is my hope that this capstone project and its accompanying resources can be utilized to inspire a movement of greater focus on preparing mainstream teachers to better support ELL students. As teachers we all want to improve our communities, and ultimately the world, for future generations. I am proud of my project and I hope that it can be useful to my fellow educators.

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