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Increasing Language Output For English Language Learners Through Interactive Language Strategies In The Elementary Mainstream Classroom

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INCREASING LANGUAGE OUTPUT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS THROUGH INTERACTIVE LANGUAGE STRATEGIES IN THE ELEMENTARY MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Research Question

As an elementary English Language teacher to students learning English as a second language (hereafter referred to as ELs) I have seen the amazing things that young students are capable of when they are given the opportunities to practice and engage with language meaningfully. When I began my career as an EL teacher, I worked in an urban school where almost every student received English language services. Most students came to school with only a small amount of spoken English, but usually little to no exposure to English at all. My students were truly set up to be multilingual; I could watch them learn new aspects of language every day and loved seeing their growth and the pride in becoming bilingual speakers. However, I was surprised by how little access students were truly given to language services, especially with such a great number of students who needed help acquiring academic English and building English proficiency. I found that my ability to work with students was limited, not only in time but also in what I was allowed to work on with them during that time. It made me start to feel concerned about how my EL students, with such limited English proficiency, were going to learn and produce what was necessary and expected of them in the mainstream classroom.

I began observing what was happening in the classrooms, which were filled to capacity with students who did not claim English as their native language. I quickly realized that if students were going to truly succeed in the elementary classroom, their entire day needed to have language scaffolds built in, and have lessons differentiated in

order for them to build the proficiency they were capable of. My small group times once a day were not nearly adequate. Students were struggling to make sufficient progress in all academic areas and were unable to produce quality, grade-level work because the content was not accessible. Classroom teachers often talked about feeling as though they knew they needed to meet the language needs of their students, but not really knowing exactly how to do that. No one had ever given them strategies or showed them how to actually differentiate for EL students. They often shared how they felt like they were just supposed to know how to do it without any training. In our grade level team meetings, many teachers often shared that incorporating more things into their day, on top of what they were already expected to do and teach, seemed daunting and unrealistic. They desperately wanted their students to succeed and be able to meet their needs, but felt that they lacked the strategies needed to differentiate for varying language abilities throughout content areas or provide effective scaffolded instruction all day long. There had to be a way to help classroom teachers build language practice into their instruction in ways that were realistic and meaningful. There were strategies out there, but most were only being used by EL teachers and were not being made known to all educators. My research question, *how can classroom teachers increase language output for English Learners through interactive strategies in the elementary mainstream classroom,* will help define training that can be done for mainstream teachers and help them confidently support their language learners all day and in all content areas. The goal of my project will be to create a professional development series that focuses on helping all classroom teachers easily implement language output strategies in their classes that will support EL students, and ultimately benefit all the students in their class.

Rationale and Connection

Every teacher is a language teacher. The expectation that teachers provide high-quality instruction to ELs has grown in the past decades and has been codified in the Minnesota LEAPS Act. This legislation requires all teachers to meet the needs of their language learners. It creates the legal expectation that all teachers are language teachers. The law expects instruction and assessment that are aligned to support ELs. Often the job of teaching language learners is seen as solely the responsibility of the English Language (EL) teacher, but the fact is that any teacher who has an EL student in their classroom, even for a small portion of the day, is a language teacher. Unfortunately, mainstream classroom teachers often lack the professional training to differentiate and scaffold for these students with any kind of consistency. While most schools provide ESL services through specialized teachers, these services are often short in time and limited in scope. I know mine are. Regardless of whether I see students in a small group or in a co-taught classroom, my time is limited and simply cannot meet the language needs that students have, nor does that instruction cover the whole of their academic day. Mainstream classroom teachers need tools to make content accessible to language learners throughout all parts of their academic day and in ways that are easy to implement and differentiate for each individual classroom.

Classroom teachers need to provide scaffolded support to ELs and implement appropriate tools for students during instruction to help students overcome language barriers in the mainstream classroom. They are often expected to simply do this automatically without being provided with any true strategies or realistic means of implementing these ideas into their current classroom structures. Instead, they need

direct training and coaching. They also need strategies that have a clear and observable impact on student learning and work. The evidence of inadequate training teachers receive in working with EL students is evident on a macro level: Only fourteen percent of students identified as ELs pass the MCA (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment), which leaves over sixty thousand Minnesotan students underserved. Despite the state's growing number of EL students, the number of proficient students has actually decreased in the past five years. This decrease is largely due to the fact that the time students spend with a specialized language teacher is a small fraction of the day. The majority of their school experience is in a mainstream classroom, with a teacher who wants to meet their needs, but may not have the tools or training on how to do so. Classroom teachers are amazing people who do amazing things with students, and when given strategies that can easily and effectively meet the needs of students in their classrooms, most jump at the opportunity to elevate their instruction.

Teachers want to help their students succeed. I have seen the love and devotion that classroom teachers have for their young learners. The desire to meet their needs exists, but the knowledge and resources to do so often do not. There is little to no information given to teachers on how to interpret language levels, what supports students might need, or strategies that could realistically be done in an elementary classroom setting. They are told to differentiate and meet language needs but are not actually told how to do that. My hope is that the professional development series for teachers will offer them realistic strategies that they feel they can implement into their classroom instruction and differentiate for their own students, content, and needs. The training will

also allow them space and time to try out strategies, ask questions, and see results that allow them to build on language practices.

Teaching Experience and Professional Relevance

My teaching experience started in a school with an extremely high number of EL students. The school was 80% EL, 98% free and reduced lunch, 99% racial diverse. Most EL students shared a similar language background. So, while they often came to school with very limited English skills, they were still able to communicate with one another, but struggled to connect with academic content. Eventually I made a change and started a new position as an EL teacher in a suburban school. While far fewer students were categorized as English language learners, those that were came from a wide variety of countries and language backgrounds. Usually my learners do not share a common language with one another or anyone else in the school building. The number of different languages spoken is extremely diverse. I have also found that some students often come to school with higher language skills than at my previous building. Thus, while they still need language interventions to become proficient in all four language domains, that intervention looks different because they may already have a base in English and vocabulary, rather than encountering it for the first time at school. Having language learners at such varying levels of language learning and understanding provides all teachers with many different challenges in the classroom, and an urgency to create new types of learning opportunities.

While these two experiences vary significantly, I was incredibly surprised that my role as an EL teacher in both settings was almost identical. The strategies that teachers had to work with language learners were almost identical. I realized that the need for EL

training and strategies is not limited to certain schools or districts but is widespread. This need became even more evident as I began to participate as a presenter for International TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). I began giving simple presentations showing different interactive language strategies that I had used or designed over my years in teaching and showed teachers how to differentiate them for their learners. While this was not a new concept by any means, the majority of work around the impact of cooperative language learning in the classroom has focused on upper grades and older learners. But elementary level teachers need these same strategies and ways to implement them as well. Teachers from around the world were seeking ways to work with the EL students, not just those in my own building or district. After presenting at the International TESOL conferences and the local Minnesota version, the sessions on interactive oral language in the classroom were the highest attended at the conferences each time. There is a clear need for teacher training that empowers teachers to provide scaffolding and differentiated support to all students, including EL students.

This Project

WIDA, the assessment system used for EL learners across most of the nation to determine adequate language development, has shown that the modalities of speaking and writing are often the lowest in proficiency and growth in language learners, according to the Minnesota Department of Education. These modalities are important for all learners but must be focused on and developed in EL learners in order for them to make language growth. My project will be to create a series of trainings for mainstream teachers that would allow them to focus on these output modalities in their classrooms in realistic and meaningful ways. The strategies would need to be simple, adaptable, and effective, but

provide a bridge for language learners between the “I do” teacher lessons, and the “you do” independent work that students produce. This project will be a combination of a presentation and modeling for teachers of different strategies that are proven to be effective in supporting EL students’ language output. The training will be created to train teachers on how to implement peer-to-peer differentiated language practice during the “we do” portion of each lesson, which is where practice happens. The goal is that when these strategies are implemented regularly by mainstream teachers throughout the day, the students will be better able to produce meaningful output that meets the desired targets.

In my first school, I began to work with an EL teacher colleague to provide training for a small group of teachers in one grade level to bring language strategies into their classrooms in a structured way. The goal was that the teachers themselves learned the strategies and how to differentiate them so they were using them at times where there was not an EL teacher present and in multiple content areas throughout the day. I wanted to give them the tools to scaffold the instruction and outcomes for their EL students in all parts of the day. For the small group of staff that did these trainings, the results were measurably different. These teachers saw increased engagement, elevated test scores, and greater degrees of output in all areas of content instruction. Their students' confidence increased and the quality and capacity for writing was greatly impacted in a positive way. We saw that the teachers could observe the direct link between using different strategies and the work that students were producing. However, with only a small handful of teachers in the school building implementing interactive language strategies, the impact fell short. With this project I want to create a professional

development series that will train and support all classroom teachers in the school building on a larger scale and in an ongoing manner. The goal is for the training to be for all staff so that the impact can be seen and felt school-wide and the knowledge can be built upon year after year. With a solid training system in interactive strategies that target output for EL students, teachers can incorporate these strategies into their content instruction with confidence. I hope that by taking the guesswork out of differentiating and scaffolding activities for language learning, staff are excited and willing to see how effective these strategies can be for their students and see results. I also hope that by providing training that is based in research and best practices, it will create a school culture that values what EL students bring to the classroom and meets their needs head on.

Conclusion

As teaching constantly evolves and students become more diverse, teachers need as many tools as possible to meet their student's wide range of needs. Seeing language as a benefit rather than a deficit is crucial to creating classrooms where students truly thrive. Creating a training and coaching system for teachers that would allow them to learn and experience scaffolded ways to help ELs build proficiency in the output modalities of speaking and writing, would empower teachers to create a classroom space where all learners' needs were being met. Students and teachers will be empowered in new ways. The training would not only show teachers strategies to increase oral and written output, but also give them ongoing support in differentiating to fit into their daily instruction and individual and unique classroom needs. EL students will feel empowered and included in new ways. With training that is focused on the unique challenges of

elementary school teachers and their learners, these educators will be able to effectively implement strategies that make their classrooms an empowered and engaging place for all students to learn and thrive.

In the following chapters I will develop and discuss the details of my project. Chapter Two will discuss research of literature reviews that align with my project. The key components will include domains of language learning, interactive language strategies, the importance of language strategies in the classroom, and the impact these strategies have on EL student output. Chapter Three will detail my project and show how it will be presented to classroom teachers and school staff, along with other tools that will be provided to support their professional development. Chapter Four will focus on my reflections on the professional development that was created in the project and outline what next steps will be to continue the learning and implementation of the project.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two of my capstone project will focus on research related to my question, *how can classroom teachers increase language output for English Learners through interactive strategies in the elementary mainstream classroom.* My research will lead me to a capstone project, which will be a professional development series for elementary classroom teachers that will focus on using interactive language strategies in their classroom. The goal of the professional development will be to help teachers differentiate and scaffold instruction by using specific language strategies to increase output for their language learners. In Chapter Two I will be reviewing research focusing on topics that are relevant to the project. First, the chapter will examine how every teacher is a language teacher, then explain the different domains of language. From there it will discuss the idea of the unbalanced classroom and then move on to interactive language strategies and intentional grouping. Finally, this chapter will address incorporating interactive language strategies and the effectiveness of interactive language strategies in the classroom. This information will help teachers understand the role that interactive language strategies can have in their classrooms and how to use them effectively in order to see growth in their students' abilities.

Every Teacher is a Language Teacher

Most schools have an English Language teacher that is tasked with working with EL students and helping them grow and develop in their language abilities. Classrooms

across the nation, however, are quickly filling with students who claim a language other than English as their first language and find themselves learning academic English for the first time at school. The task of helping young children acquire English skills can no longer be left solely to the EL teacher. In 2015, the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed into law. The main focus of this new legislation is to prepare all teachers to educate EL students and emphasize the importance of all teachers having the skills and training to meet the needs of the EL students in their class. (August & Haynes, 2016). Going hand-in-hand with ESSA, the state of Minnesota passed The Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act in 2014. This act specifically emphasized support for EL students at all levels of education. It focuses on seeing bilingualism and multiculturalism as an asset in the classroom. The other aspect of the LEAPS Act that was very important was the emphasis put on teachers and administrators receiving appropriate and ongoing preparation and training to support EL students and differentiate instruction to make it accessible to diverse multilingual learners. Essentially, this legislation communicates that all teachers are language teachers. (Minnesota Department of Education, n.d.). Teachers are required to provide effective strategies that result in language growth for all their students. These laws increase the importance of providing teachers with effective strategies for the diverse language needs in their classrooms. For EL students to succeed, teachers need to have high expectations of them, as well as a variety of strategies that target language needs throughout the academic day (Pettit, 2011). The focus on the language in the mainstream classroom and making it a priority for all teachers is a necessary shift in education. The responsibility of addressing

language needs of EL students no longer falls solely on the shoulders of EL teachers, but is an expectation for all educators.

While there is an expectation that teachers provide quality instruction for all EL students in their classrooms, many teachers feel ill equipped or prepared to do this. A study of classroom teachers conducted by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2005) found that 87 percent of educators in the mainstream classroom setting felt underprepared to teach students from diverse language backgrounds. They reported needing more training in working with EL learners and a need for more strategies that can be used to educate their ever-changing group of students. Educators also felt that they lacked the training and support to adequately implement instruction that meets the needs of EL and non-EL learners simultaneously in the same classroom. Teachers feel ill-prepared by their academic institutions and lack of resources that they can use to meet their needs that are ever-present in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom (Santibanez & Gandara, 2018). Teachers felt that they had been given a great deal of information on the expectations of them to provide rigorous and differentiated instruction to EL students, without receiving strategies to do so. The need and desire for training and strategies exists, but the resources seem scarce.

Domains of Language Learning

There are four domains of language learning; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. All four domains are essential for EL students to obtain true English proficiency. ELs progress through these different domains at different speeds. A student rarely reaches proficiency in all domains at the same time, as some domains often take much longer to develop (Gottlieb & Hamayan, 2007). Throughout an academic school

day, students must interact with all language domains in order to participate in the academic and social components of school (Breiseth, 2019). The four domains are categorized into input and output modalities. Input includes the domains of listening and reading, while output includes speaking and writing.

Input

Input is any language that the English learner is exposed to, either through listening or reading. (Zhang, 2009). Input is what we give to students or how information is received. It must be attainable and comprehensible, meaning that it needs to be understood by the student in order to be meaningful. Language acquisition experts have known for a long time that input is a crucial part of acquiring language and making meaning of what is being taught in school. However, the key to viewing listening and reading as valuable input for students, is ensuring that the input is understood by the learners (Rastagar & Safari, 2017). This requires them to understand language components such as vocabulary, grammatical forms, and sentence structures (Zhang, 2009).

The input domains tend to develop faster than the output domains. One of the major contributors to the accelerated rate of acquisition in these two domains is that they are usually the main focus of a traditional school day. Students sit and listen to lessons and take in information constantly from both teachers and peers. They are usually able to use physical cues or picture supports to determine meaning from unknown language, and therefore the listening domain develops quickly because it is often easily scaffolded for students so they can develop meaning. Reading is a major focus of elementary school education. The extensive focus on reading strategies for young learners typically

includes strategies for increasing comprehension and reading techniques. Much research and study has been done in promoting reading skills among young learners and EL students. Often teachers have an abundance of resources at their disposal to use when working on early literacy skills in the elementary school setting and often receive a variety of training and professional development to prepare them to effectively teach reading to young learners (Zhang, 2009). Due to the high level of support and focus given to reading, students are generally able to read and intake information through literature early on in their language acquisition.

In a school setting, it is easy to identify areas of language input and how they are being implemented in the classrooms. Language input is necessary for language production, or output. Students must be able to make meaning of the language they intake before they can produce it. (Anthony, 2008). Teachers are responsible for providing students in their classrooms with comprehensible input throughout activities in the academic day. This is both through listening and reading that happens in the lessons. Language learning happens when the EL student understands input. (Zhang, 2009).

Intake

When ELs are exposed to quality input, their capacity for language understanding and production increases. However, they do not necessarily understand all of the language input they are exposed to. Corder (1967) explains that there is a difference between input and intake. Input is considered all of the language that a learner is exposed to, while intake is what is actually understood and internalized by the learner. The intake is what can then be used for output. Intake can be thought of as a middle place for a learner between the target language that is available to them as input, and what they are

actually able to internalize and make meaning of in their second language. Each individual student's intake is based on their understanding of the rules, strategies, sentence structures, and vocabulary in the second language. For ELs with higher level language skills, these things may be more well developed and they are then able to intake a high volume of language. For EL students with lower language skills, they may intake a smaller portion of the language they are exposed to because they have less solidified understanding of English rules and vocabulary. Thus, even when children are all receiving the same input, from a classroom lesson for example, they may not all intake the information in the same way and have the same level of understanding (Chauldron, 1985).

Output

Output is the production of language. The output domains of language are those of speaking and writing, where students are expected to produce ideas in either written or oral form (Rastagar & Safari, 2017). The main difference between the input and output domains lies in how students are asked to use the language associated with the different areas. ELs are often able to make meaning of language they intake from listening and reading because they are able to use the language, vocabulary, and sentence structure of the native speakers they are gleaning information from. When they listen or read, they are using someone else's language and interpreting it. However, when they are asked to speak or write, ELs are required to use their own lexicon of language to form sentences correctly, choose adequate vocabulary, and produce enough language to get their ideas across and be understood. The language needed for output activities is authentic and comes from within the learner themselves, and thus requires a much greater level of

language control (Anthony, 2008). There are many considerations when asking students to produce oral or written work. The number of new concepts the students are learning, the amount of cultural knowledge the student has around the subject area, and the language load involved in the tasks all contribute to a student's ability to adequately produce work or communicate their ideas effectively (Swain, 2005). Unlike input, there is often far less support or focus on speaking or writing in a supported way for EL students. For EL students, writing can be a challenge for many reasons. If they do not have a high level of language control in English, writing will prove to be difficult. When students write, they need to authentically produce language that is correct in syntax, meaning that they need to be able to form their ideas into the proper sentence structure in a precise and concise way in order to communicate their thoughts. This can be very challenging if the student does not have the language control or grasp on syntax to allow them to do this. Similarly, students also need to be able to recall the necessary vocabulary to effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas to their readers. Without an extensive lexicon, or word bank, this may be difficult or impossible for students to do without support. Lastly, the students must also meet the complexity requirements for the writing task. This requires them to hold on to their ideas and build upon them with details, which they may not have the language capacity to do. All of these things are part of the daily challenges that both EL students and their teachers face in writing (Anthony, 2008). When students struggle with writing, it impacts their academic growth and inhibits their ability to express their ideas and show their learning. For teachers, finding a way to support the writing needs of their students can often seem overwhelming,

especially when those writing needs are a direct correlation of the student's language abilities (Bauler, et al., 2019).

The Unbalanced Classroom

Speaking is an important output domain that is necessary for students to communicate their learning and ideas effectively. However, schools often do not put much priority on helping students become better speakers or writers by focusing on language needs. In a traditional elementary school setting, most classrooms are teacher centered, meaning that students spend most of their day listening to a teacher talk and provide information through a lesson and are then asked to raise their hands one by one and provide short sentences or one-word answers to closed questions. While many see this as an interactive approach to whole group learning, it easily becomes unbalanced. Teachers do most of the talking, while students do most of the listening (Anthony, 2008). Many factors easily make the traditional teacher-led exchanges in classrooms ineffective. These factors include teachers asking closed-ended questions that elicit one-word responses, using the exchange to test knowledge rather than inviting conversations, or only calling on students who volunteer to speak; this leads to confident learners using most of the talking space, and increases the level of teacher talk. These factors combined work to hinder language input, and eliminate the opportunities for speaking practice and showing authentic understanding through output (Anthony, 2008). A study conducted by Arreaga-Mayer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) showed that in a traditional teacher-led elementary classroom, students are engaged in speaking only 2%-4% of the day, and engaged in speaking with academic language only 1%-2% of the school day . This statistic shows that students are getting more than adequate amounts of input throughout

the day, but the amount of language production is woefully insignificant. This should make us, as educators, take a hard look at what we can do in our classrooms to make that number shift in favor of our students.

Writing is an exercise in language output, especially for young learners who are developing writing skills with language skills simultaneously. Writing is necessary and valuable as a means for students to share their ideas and communicate their learning. It is also an area of academics that schools expect students to do, but often with very little support (Anthony 2008). There is the mentality that if students can read, they can write, which is rarely a correct assumption. Writing is difficult for EL students because it requires them to have high language control and authentic ideas about what the sentences sound like in order to get their ideas on paper. For young children, writing is a skill in and of itself that is developing, and for language learners this is compounded by the need to develop concise, correct ideas in their second language and then hold them in their minds long enough to be able to physically write them down. This can be a daunting feat for many EL students (Anthony, 2008).

Interactive Language Strategies

As teachers, we understand that speaking and writing are important for students in order for them to show their learning and express their ideas. However, for many classroom teachers, they may not understand the connection between the two and how they work hand in hand to enhance language output in any content area (Rojas, 2014). This is where interactive language strategies become an important part of the classroom experience. Interactive language strategies are not new to the world of education. Many interactive language strategies, known as cooperative learning strategies, or Kagan's

strategies, have been an option for classroom teachers for some time. These strategies are engaging and fun, while simultaneously scaffolding language for students (Ebrahim, 2012). Interactive language strategies refer to activities that can be used for instruction, in which intentional group or partner work can be used to learn and practice academic content. There is a great deal of evidence that when these strategies are done intentionally, they are successful in helping students succeed in the classroom, in any content area (Slavin 2011). However, there is a misconception that any group work is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning strategies, or interactive language strategies, are unique in that they create structure and provide accountability for all members. Each individual has equal participation (Schul, 2011).

The goal of interactive language strategies is to engage students in authentic language practice with peers. They enhance classroom instruction and provide a means of improving language skills. The ability to become proficient in language is directly linked to the learning environment created by the teacher (Omar, et al., 2020). Students learn best when they are not just passive participants, which easily happens in a class of native English speakers or in an environment where the teacher is the main producer of language. Rather, they should be actively engaging in language practice and learning in order to make it meaningful (Rodriguez-Valls & Ponce, 2013). In fact, research proves that when teachers use interactive language strategies to allow students to practice their learning, the students who are usually the observers or non-participants, quickly become active participants in the group. This happens because the activities are scaffolded and provide a non-threatening environment with their peers in which to learn and practice academic language and content (Slavin, 2011).

However, simply creating a classroom that is supportive of EL students does not automatically mean that there are ample output opportunities (Anthony. 2008). Students need time to practice, in a scaffolded and supported way, in order to make growth and lead to firm concepts of oral language. Interactive language strategies give students the opportunity to work in groups or with partners and practice or produce oral or written work. The activities allow for practice and support from peers, as well as time to work through misconceptions and barriers where the students help one another improve. (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Interactive strategies allow for students to talk about their ideas in many different ways with peers and encourage participation in ways that would not otherwise be available for EL students (Omar, et al., 2020).

Types of Interactive Language Strategies

The list of interactive language strategies is extensive and teachers have a huge base of strategies to choose from to fit any lesson, student group, or desired outcome. There are proven strategies that provide a high level of support for all students and are easily scaffolded or differentiated. These strategies are easily implemented by classroom teachers to meet the needs of Els in their classroom and enhance output from all their learners. For classroom teachers that are looking to make the most impact in the most realistic ways, there are specific interactive language strategies that can be used as a base. These can be seen as a toolkit for teachers, which they can add to as their comfort level and familiarity with using interactive strategies in their classroom grows. These strategies come from different language acquisition experts and can be tailored for any classroom need and differentiated in any way in order to meet the desired language targets for the day or lesson. While there are many different strategies, Kagan(1994)

provides us with a great base of strategies to start from. Melody Shaw (n.d.) created a quick reference guide to the different Kagan's strategies and some of the most effective for young language learners are listed below. Virginia Rojas (2014) also compiled her own list of strategies based on her research and these are included as well.

Inside Out Circle. Two groups of students are created based on language abilities. The students with higher language abilities form one inside circle, facing outward. Then students with lower language abilities form another outside circle facing their peers. The teacher provides a question, sentence frame, vocabulary words, or something they want the students to orally practice. The students take equal turns speaking. Then the outside circle rotates and the students now have a new partner and resume or repeat their practice with that new partner. This allows them to incorporate any new language or ideas from their previous partners in their speech. They are also given multiple opportunities to hear ideas and practice their own. This strategy allows for differentiation in the shape of the students, such as putting them in lines instead of circles, having them at desks, sit, or stand, and the types of supports they are given to successfully speak such as pictures, sentence frames, or question cards.

Talking Chips. This strategy works well for practicing or generating many ideas. The students are placed in a heterogenous group of students and given a prompt or question. Each student is then given a set of colored pieces of paper, or "chips." Each time a child speaks or contributes a response, they put one of their chips in the middle until they are gone. This ensures that all students have equal opportunity to share ideas. The ideas the students contribute can be authentic or repeated from another partner. The teacher can determine if these oral contributions can be done whenever the students wish

to speak or by going in order around the group. When the students finish, they should have a wide range of ideas to use in their writing.

Fan-N-Pick. students are given cards that have their speaking prompts on them. These can be questions, pictures, or sentence starters. Students are given a paper with four different jobs on it, and they sit next to one of the jobs. These jobs can be very flexible and the teacher can make the jobs anything they wish depending on the desired practice. They might say something like: student 1 "pick a card," student 2 "read the card," student 3 "answer the questions," student 4 "paraphrase the answer." After each student has done their specified job, they rotate the board and the students now have a new job on the board. They repeat this after each card. This allows for each student to have each job many times. This is effective because it breaks the language responsibilities into smaller, more manageable pieces. Students are only responsible for one part of the language at a time but are receiving quality input from their peers with the other jobs. Teachers are able to easily differentiate this activity by putting anything they desire on the cards and also creating any jobs they choose to put on the board. The jobs could change for the specific activity or be specific to student abilities and needs.

Four Corners. The teacher poses a question to the students. In each corner of the room there is a possible answer or opinion that corresponds to the question. Students choose the one they think is best and go to that corner. Once they are there, they share why they believe this is the correct response. Then a new question is posed by the teacher and the process is repeated. This strategy can also be used for vocabulary practice, story retelling, or any number of situations that illicit academic language. The teacher can scaffold the activity by using picture supports and by implementing sentence

frames during the conversation and structures to ensure that all students have a chance to speak at each corner.

Numbered Heads. The teacher puts students into groups that intentionally include students at different language levels and gives each student a number. They then pose a question and ask students to collectively come up with one response as a group. The students work together to form one or more sentences to use as their response and practice it over and over until the time is up. The teacher then calls a number and the child in each group with that number raises their hand as quickly as they can. They are then able to give their group's response out loud. Because the students do not know what number the teacher will call to answer the question, they are responsible for making sure that all members of the group know what to say for their group response. To make the game the most differentiated and effective, the teacher should give all the lowest students in each group the same number so when that number is called, they are providing answers alongside their language peers. Similarly, the mid-level and highest students in each group should be numbered in the same way. As with many of the other strategies, the teacher can scaffold the activity by requiring different levels of responses, using picture supports and sentence frames, or by allowing for different types of responses.

Pass and Write. The teacher intentionally pairs students and then gives them a writing prompt. Each student is given a job. One is the writer, and this student is responsible for scribing what their partner says to write. The other is the speaker. Their job is to orally dictate what to write to their partner, along with providing support on how to write the words. The students proceed with their designated roles until they hear a signal from the teacher, at which point they stop what they are doing and immediately

switch jobs. They then continue the writing right where they left off, but in the opposite role. This switching continues many more times until the writing is complete. This strategy allows students to focus on just one part of the writing process at a time, either the generating of ideas and comprehensibility, or the physical writing. It also allows them to see the writing before they go do it independently.

Paraphrase Passport. Students are given a partner and posed with a question or a prompt to orally respond to. The higher student goes first and gives their response while the other student listens. Then the second student must repeat, or paraphrase, what the first student said. Then they repeat this process with the other child going first. This allows for students to hear ideas from higher language peers before providing their own oral response and also requires active listening from both participants.

Order These. This begins with a group of students who are given a prompt to respond to or write about. Collectively, they create one or more sentences as their response. These can be written down if students are able to do so, or given as oral responses that are written down by the teacher. The sentences are written on individual strips of paper. The teacher can then ask students to do a number of different tasks which can range from one day of practice to multiple. They may ask students to mix up the sentences and put them back in order and then practice them together out loud, or the teacher may cut part of the sentences off and ask students to orally practice filling in the missing information together. Regardless, the end task is for students to independently be able to write what was on the sentence strips in their own writing.

Intentional grouping

Jeff Zwiers, an expert in language acquisition, noted that when we are planning any type of interactive language strategy, the goal is to move from unstructured learning to activities that are meaningful and rich in language (Zwiers, 2008). There are three considerations when planning for these activities to ensure that they are beneficial: who are they speaking to, how are they participating, and what are they supposed to be saying? The first is very important, but often not an intentional part of the planning process. Often when thinking about doing interactive language strategies in the classroom, teachers choose to use a turn and talk. While this strategy is fine, it is not enough to simply tell students to do a turn and talk and then make the assumption that the activity was sufficient to enhance their learning or allow them to practice academic language. When students engage in a turn and talk, the first barrier that prohibits the activity from being effective is that the students are turning to whomever is next to them at the given time or in the current seating chart and talking. That partner is often not the appropriate language peer in order for the activity to increase learning for EL students. Instead, teachers need to thoughtfully provide partners for students to talk with this, and every interactive language activity. The person that each student speaks to should be intentionally chosen as scaffold to their individual language needs and abilities. When partners are strategically chosen, the strategies become effective (Zwiers, 2008).

Choosing Effective Groups

Interactive language strategies are effective because they allow for the teacher to scaffold the activities in any way needed or desired. One method of scaffolding the activity is to intentionally group students to create success in the desired outcome. By

providing students with more proficient language peers, learners at the earlier stages of learning English are able to have a language example for their own output. For the students with higher language abilities, it gives them a level of responsibility to go first and provide exemplars for other students, thus providing both high- and low-level language students with a challenge or a support. The higher language partner should be a partner that is one to two language levels higher, in order to ensure that the language model is providing a model for attainable language. The students with the lowest language abilities should not be paired with the highest because the lowest language student will never be able to attain the same level of language production as the native speaker or highest language peer. By providing students with language peers from mixed ability groups or with attainable language partners, it ensures that more quality language practice occurs (Rojas, 2014).

When grouping is done intentionally, it allows for students with limited English to participate by repeating answers and ideas from their language model peers. Having language that is within their grasp allows them to practice the target language while also helping them have a tangible means to continually participate in the group work or practice time. For students with more advanced language skills, it gives them an opportunity to try out more complex communication skills and they are expected to be the leaders and contribute ideas with correct vocabulary and syntax (VanPatten, 2003). Teachers should be creating teams or partners based on what they know about students' needs and abilities in order to ensure that the highest degree of practice and learning is able to happen. Groups will likely not have much diversity or purpose if students are always able to choose their teams. Thus, when the goal of the group work is to allow for

language practice, the groups should be strategically chosen by the teacher (Slavin, 2014).

Incorporating Interactive Language Strategies

Classroom instruction typically consists of three main parts, often referred to as gradual release. The first is the "I do." During this time, the teacher is providing direct instruction of material. The teacher is teaching and students are listening and intaking information. This is often in the form of a read aloud, direct content instruction, or whole group class learning. The last part is the "you do." This is the independent practice. During this time students are asked to complete tasks to show their ideas, learning, and understanding. Often this is a writing task, usually a response to the learning or reading. Often in the elementary classroom, teachers skip directly from the "I do" to the "you do," expecting students to glean information from listening to the teacher talk or read and then immediately write about their learning or ideas. (Rojas, 2014). The "practice" consists of a few hands being raised to ensure that students understand what to do with the given task. The meaningful practice to prepare students for the output tasks that are to follow does not exist (Rodriguez-Valls and Ponce, 2019).

In between these two parts of a content lesson should be the "we do." This stage can be the most effective part of the instruction but is often overlooked. This is where we often see teachers asking questions to the whole group of students and calling on students with their hands raised to give basic responses to closed ended questions. While this is often the norm, it is not an effective way to prepare students to produce work in the "you do" section. Instead, the "we do" is where interactive language strategies can be

implemented as a means to practice language needed for independent work and prepare students to generate their own written or oral thoughts (Rojas, 2014).

Rojas determined that if a teacher wants the end result of a lesson to be a written response to a question or prompt, then the "we do" section should focus on interactive language strategies that allow students to orally practice their ideas out loud. This is important because it not only allows students to practice their ideas but also allows them to hear the ideas of other peers and glean ideas from higher level language models. They are able to add ideas, appropriate vocabulary, and sentence structures to their own learning and use these things when producing their own writing. The oral practice should be directly related to the writing the students will be expected to do in the "I do" portion of the lesson. The idea is that everything they are orally practicing can then be translated to their writing. They will have a bank of ideas they have gathered from peers and had the opportunity to practice what they want to say out loud many different times and can then translate them to their own writing (2014). Oral activities are also a way for the teacher to determine if the student has enough language to do the desired writing. If not, it allows them to fill in the gaps for that student (Zwiers, 2008, p. 209).

Likewise, if the desired output during the "I do" portion of a lesson is oral, such as a presentation or sharing of what they learned, then the practice that students should engage in during the "we do" portion should be written. Students should be intentionally grouped and practice their ideas by writing them down with a group or partner, in a scaffolded way, in order to practice exactly what they want to say and how it should sound to get their meaning across (Rojas, 2014).

Established cooperative learning strategies can focus on any of the different language domains and can be differentiated for any content, skill level, or desired outcome. The goal of using interactive strategies is to increase students' authentic output and academic language practice. It allows for a structured and supported means for teachers to incorporate oral language into their classroom practice.

Effectiveness in the Classroom

Interactive language strategies are effective in helping language learners prepare for and practice speaking and writing. There are a variety of reasons that this is true. First, incorporating these strategies into the "we do" portion of the lesson allows for a greater level of comprehensible input for students. They tend to adjust their speech and the language they are using to match a level that their partners can understand because they are working together. Students also have the ability to adjust their language output. They have the opportunity to change their speaking and ideas based on what their partners are saying and practice the new speech many times in order to get it right. Another reason these strategies are effective is that they provide a lower affective filter. It might be intimidating to speak in front of the whole class, especially for a language learner who may not feel confident in how to formulate the sentence or ideas they wish to share. However, it is much less frightening to share ideas with supportive classmates in a small group setting that already offers built in tasks and scaffolds (Anthony, 2008). Interactive strategies are also motivating for students because they are engaging and fun. This provides a motivation for students to understand each other and interact because it allows them to be part of the activity. They want to engage and thus put forth much greater effort to do so. Lastly, it allows teachers to provide students with much greater

language use in a quick and organized way. If a teacher took the time to call on every student in the class and allow them a full minute to share an idea, it would take an untenable amount of time and allow the other students to disengage from the learning. In contrast, if that same teacher used an interactive strategy, they could allow all their students to share an idea or practice speaking for a full minute or more in a short amount of time, and the other students would actively be listening and engaged. Overall, these strategies enhance the classroom environment and create a place where all students truly feel successful (Kagan, Kagan, 2000), (Kagan, 1994).

By incorporating interactive language strategies into the daily classroom structures, teachers are able to effectively differentiate for their students' language needs in meaningful ways that yield academic results. When these strategies are taught and regularly implemented teachers can see increased capacity for speaking and writing. These strategies need to be learned by students and made to be part of the classroom routine so students develop an understanding of the expectations surrounding them. However, once these structures are in place, teachers report real and substantial growth in output for EL students, as measured through daily work, assessments, homework, and peer interactions (Hsiung, 2012). Embracing these strategies as part of the classroom culture allows teachers to embrace the idea that all teachers are language teachers.

Conclusion

In today's classrooms, every teacher is a language teacher. All teachers need to have a repertoire of strategies to help them engage with all of their students and meet the diverse needs of the children in their classrooms. When these needs are language needs, research shows that utilizing interactive language strategies are effective and simple ways

to scaffold instruction for all students. These strategies provide a practice and engaging way to master skills and language needed for learning and success. They create a means for equal inclusion and remove barriers for language learners, while creating space for the teacher to change or differentiate activities to meet the class's specific needs. There are many different interactive language strategies to choose from, giving teachers a variety of options to find those that fit best for their purposes or settings. The research proves that by consistently implementing these strategies in daily instruction, students are able to increase their oral and written output exponentially and their academic language capacity increases.

The next chapter will provide an overview of my chosen project, which will focus on teaching and training teachers on the importance of using interactive language strategies in their classrooms, as well as how to do this effectively in order to see growth in their students' language output. The chapter will discuss the presentation, which will be a two-hour staff development directed at elementary classroom teachers. I will also discuss the targeted participants and the setting for the project, the method used, and a detailed description of the completed project. The final project will be a summation of my research into the importance of using interactive language strategies in the mainstream classroom, but also show teachers how to best use this information to meet their students' needs and incorporate these activities into their daily teaching practice.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The focus of my capstone project is *how can classroom teachers increase language output for English Learners through interactive strategies in the elementary mainstream classroom.* This chapter will outline my plan for the project, which will be a staff development presentation. I will show the need for this particular staff development training and provide evidence that the information in training is important and necessary for instructional staff to learn and have access to. I will then provide a detailed description of the project, including the major components of the training that will be provided for staff. I will also include information on the participants, context, timeline, and goals of the project.

Rationale for Capstone Project

When designing my staff development presentation for this project, I considered Knowles (2005) work around adult learning. First, the idea that adults can learn best when the setting is flexible, comfortable, and informal. Also, that adults learn best when they are educated regarding the importance of a topic and show the significance of the new learning. Knowles (1984) also suggests that having a personal connection to the goal of the training and learning is an important piece of adult learning. Trust, respect between the learners and the facilitator, and authenticity in the information and teaching are also key to successful adult training and learning. Taking these pieces into consideration will ensure that the training is designed to meet the learning needs of fellow

educators and that those involved are able to take away quality new learning and new strategies from the professional development that they will be involved in.

This project is important because teachers are in need of strategies that will allow them to provide their EL students with scaffolded practice in different academic areas. Teachers in my building often communicate that they are at a loss for how to help their young language learners in the areas of speaking and writing, or are unsure of ways to move their classrooms away from teacher talk and into meaningful student lead learning and practice. My goal in presenting training for instructional staff is to give them strategies that they can use with their EL students in their classrooms to fill these gaps.

My short-term goal is to provide classroom teachers with the time to learn new strategies and then practice them in order to build confidence to use them with their students when they return to their classrooms. The objective is for each teacher to begin using at least one new strategy and create structure in their classrooms around speaking and writing. When teachers begin implementing the new strategies and learning into their classroom instruction, student abilities in speaking and writing should show improvement. Using the interactive language strategies will also change the way in which the "we do" time in the classroom can be done to give students more time to practice language and learn from their peers.

The long-term goal would be to build on this training to incorporate new strategies that teachers can begin to fold into their instructional practices. The other long-term goal would be to share this training with other schools in our district so these strategies and ideas become more widely used and more teachers have access to the information, which they will be able to use with students across multiple school sites.

Context

The professional development training will be held at the elementary school where I currently work as an EL teacher. The school is a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) school in a large, diverse suburban district. Our enrollment data shows students who speak 19 different languages. The population of the school is very diverse and there are EL students in every classroom in the school, at all grade levels. The school, per the district's outlined structure, teaches a reader's workshop, writer's workshop, and math workshop each day for students, with predetermined units for each workshop throughout the year. Our school also adds special STEM programming to each workshop and unit to incorporate specialized educational components into student learning. Teachers at all grade levels have EL learners in their classrooms, as well as a diverse classroom makeup which includes students from different language backgrounds, even if they do not qualify to receive EL services. There are four EL teachers in the building that service all EL students. Typically, this service is provided by seeing EL students in small groups for 20-30 minutes each day, or through a co-teaching model. While this time with EL students is valuable and important, it does not meet their academic needs throughout the whole school day or in all content areas. Teachers at the school do not have many opportunities to gather new learning around the instruction of EL learners. As the EL teacher, I see a significant need for teacher training around EL instruction in the classroom and the implementation of strategies for EL learners in all grade levels. Teachers are in need of things that can be applied to their classrooms easily and effectively, and that yield academic results for their EL learners. This training will allow teachers to take their new learning and apply it to their individual classrooms and

students immediately and in the future. It will provide them with strategies that will enhance the academic outcomes in their classrooms, particularly in the areas of speaking and writing.

Participants

The target audience of the presentation will be classroom teachers, but all instructional staff will also be attending. Specialist teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who work with students will all attend the training. When all staff have similar knowledge and strategies, they will be able to use them across their different subject areas and students will become more familiar with them. Administrators will also be present. It is important that the building leadership becomes familiar with strategies that they should see in classrooms throughout the building and understand the impact these strategies have on student outcomes. In my school, there are 50-60 educators that will be attending the professional development training.

Project Description

The project will be a professional development presentation for elementary instructional staff. The training will be split into three two-hour presentations at different intervals throughout the school year. Breaking the training down into smaller sections allows for teachers to internalize the information and try the strategies in their classes before adding more. Teachers need time to try out one or two of the new strategies and implement them into their classroom routine before they will be ready to add more strategies to their repertoire. Each session of the training will follow the same format, but focus on new strategies so teachers can continually, but slowly, add strategies to their classroom instruction.

The training will take place at three different intervals throughout the school year. The first will be during workshop week, prior to the start of instruction. This initial training will allow teachers to choose one strategy, or more, that they wish to start the year with and build into their routines and procedures once school starts. The second training will occur in November. This training will be similar to the first but will introduce new strategies. By this point in the year, teachers should be comfortable with the initial strategy and be able to glean one to two more new strategies to start incorporating into their classroom instruction. The final session will be during a staff development day at the beginning of March. This will allow teachers to reflect on the use of the previous strategies in their classrooms, share successes, and look at data. They will then choose one or more new strategies that they can use until the end of the school year. The strategies at this presentation can be more complex, as teachers and their students will be ready for them by this stage in the year.

After each session of the training is complete, teachers will work in their PLCs (professional learning communities) each week to discuss implementation of new strategies, share ideas around differentiation, and analyze student work. This time will give grade level teams time to work together around the new strategies and how they affect the output in their classrooms. They will also use this time to work with the EL teachers assigned to that grade level to share concerns, look at student data, and collaborate to move forward. This will happen after each piece of the training to ensure that teachers have ample time to familiarize themselves with the new strategies and work in teams to make sure everyone is able to use them in their classrooms in some capacity.

Input and Output

The presentation begins by explaining the different stages of a typical lesson. The "I do", which is the teacher-talk, or the lesson. This stage is where students receive their input, or all the language that they have accessible to them to learn. It is also where students glean intake, which is what they are able to actually understand from what they hear (Zhang, 2009). This portion is usually a teacher directed mini lesson, a read aloud, whole group experiment, or presentation. During this time, the teacher is doing most of the teaching and modeling. Usually from there, teachers jump directly into the "you do" portion of the lesson. This is where students are taking the new learning and applying it to their individual work. This is usually some type of output, or produced language, either through writing or speaking, such as writing about reading or learning, writing assignments, or oral presentations (Rojas, 2014). The presentation will show teachers how to focus on the "we do," or the middle part of a lesson that falls between the "I do, and the "you do." The "we do" section of a lesson is where teachers can effectively and simply insert interactive language strategies. The goal of this part of the presentation is to show teachers how to think about the output they desire from students, and then choose a type of interactive language strategy that will help them meet that goal. With this knowledge in mind, educators will be prepared to learn more about the strategies that they can choose from to enhance and scaffold language output.

Strategies

The bulk of the presentation focuses on different interactive language strategies. These strategies are strategically chosen to fit well into elementary classroom settings and are strategies that seem simplest for teachers to begin implementing into their classrooms.

Each strategy is presented in the same format. First, the interactive language strategy is named, along with a list of possible scenarios in the classroom or lesson where this strategy may be ideally used. An overview of how to do each strategy in a classroom setting is given, including how to start, what happens during the strategy, and what to expect at the end or afterwards. Teachers will also learn how to think about intentional grouping considerations and differentiation ideas. Examples such as pictures, modeling,visuals, videos, or realia are used to make sure all attendees understand the strategy. The next step is the practice piece. After hearing the directions for each strategy, teachers will then have a chance to actually practice doing or "playing" each strategy like they would as a student. This is important, as it allows for all teachers to see what the strategy actually looks like and feels like, and where they may have confusions. It also allows them to see where they might change things to fit their own classroom needs or to better meet the needs of their students. The practice for each strategy is followed by possible ideas for differentiation or scaffolding. It is important that teachers understand the foundational purpose of each strategy, but it is also very important that they know that there are numerous ways to change or differentiate each strategy to fit their own teaching styles, classroom setting, content, or student needs. The strategies are flexible and allowing time to show how they can be differentiated can help teachers start thinking of how to do this for themselves. Lastly, there is time for teacher groups, most likely by grade level or content area, to plan together around how each strategy could be used in their current or upcoming unit of study. The goal is for them to attempt to implement these into their instruction as soon as possible and as often as possible. Teacher groups are asked to think of not only how to insert these strategies into their

lessons frequently, but also how they would need to change or differentiate them to make them work for their specific grade level, content, or student abilities.

Strategies Included

The initial training focuses on intentional grouping and introduces two strategies. There are many valuable strategies that would be excellent for teachers to use, but giving too many strategies may feel overwhelming. Providing a smaller number of strategies that provide a noticeable impact on student achievement and progress will increase the likelihood of teachers internalizing the information and applying it to their classrooms. The second training session will consist of three new strategies, and the third session will include two more new strategies as well as discussions around determining which strategies are best to use..

Presentation one will include:

- intentional grouping
- Inside-Outside Circle
- Talking Chips

Presentation two will include:

- Quiz-quiz-trade
- triangle talk
- Pass and Write

Presentation three will include:

- Numbered Heads
- Order These
- choose strategies effectively

Closing and Exit Ticket

Before participants leave the presentation, they will be asked to identify one interactive language strategy that they will be attempting to implement in their classroom sometime in the upcoming weeks. They will be asked what strategy they chose, when they plan to use it, and how they plan to use it. They will also be asked how confident they are in being able to use the strategy successfully. If they would like assistance in preparing materials, planning the strategy into their lessons, or teaching it with students, they will have the opportunity to indicate that on their exit ticket and an EL teacher will provide them assistance in making sure they are able to confidently use their chosen strategy with their class. EL teachers will also be following up with grade level teams in weeks following the presentation to encourage ongoing use of different interactive language strategies and continue to provide feedback and ideas on how teachers can use the strategies to better support the language output of their EL learners, and hopefully all their students will benefit.

Moving Forward

After the first two-hour presentation, grade level teams will use their PLC times each week to collaboratively plan one or more new strategies into their lessons for the week. They will also discuss challenges and victories surrounding the strategies they implemented the week or weeks prior. EL teachers will be part of these PLCs to help coach and guide planning and implementation of the strategies. During the PLCs, grade level teams will be bringing writing samples from days or lessons when the interactive language strategies are used. This will allow them to analyze the output that is being supported by using the strategies. Teachers may choose to bring writing samples from

just their EL students, or from their entire class. The principal of our school has also agreed to make the strategies something that he looks for during formal and informal observations.

Once teachers have become comfortable with the first five strategies that were presented, a second presentation with four to five more strategies will be presented to give teachers a new set of strategies. They can add these to their repertoire of language strategies and use them to enhance their instruction. The presentation will follow the same format as the first, but the introduction to the presentation will be a short share or presentation by someone from each grade level. During this time they will be asked to share one strategy they have been using, how they used it, and how it affected their students' output. Just like the first time, after the presentation, teachers will collaborate through PLCs to plan the new strategies, supported by EL teachers to implement them, and observed by administrators to ensure consistency.

A third presentation will happen in March that will include more complex strategies, with the idea that teachers will have made at least a few interactive language strategies a norm in their classrooms and their learners will be ready for more complex strategies.

Summary

The staff development presentation offers important information and strategies for teachers of students with diverse language needs. In this chapter I explained my rationale for creating the presentation, identified my participants and context, as well as an intended timeline. I outlined the main components of the presentation and how they will ultimately provide elementary educators with strategies that they can use to meet the

needs of the EL learners in their classrooms. All educators should have access to strategies that allow them to meet the needs of all the learners in their classrooms each day, and this presentation will be one way for them to learn new ways to help their students grow.

In Chapter Four I will reflect on my project and creation of the presentation, as well as describing next steps that can be taken in order to continue to provide teacher colleagues with strategies to meet the language needs of all EL students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The driving question for my capstone project was *how can classroom teachers increase language output for English Learners through interactive strategies in the elementary mainstream classroom?* In this chapter I will reflect on my journey to answering that question and the learning that took place through my research. I will look at the implications of my professional development capstone project that I created. Then, I will think through future projects, and also consider limitations of my capstone project. Finally, I will reflect on my capstone process.

Reflection on Research

There is a vast amount of research supporting the need for teachers to have the skills to effectively teach their EL students. Language acquisition experts agree that it is important for EL students to have language supports throughout their academic day, and that these supports greatly impact the oral or written output that students are able to produce. Much of the research showed that mainstream classroom teachers, specifically at the elementary level, desire ways to scaffold and differentiate for their EL students but often come up short. The need for teachers to have simple, effective, and appropriate strategies that focus on students' language output is not only greatly important, but it is also greatly missing from classrooms. These strategies are tools that all teachers need in their tool belts in order to effectively change their classroom culture to be one of learning and inclusion for all students, regardless of language proficiency.

One major take away from the research is that when students are able to engage with language in meaningful, structured ways, there is a measurable difference in their output. This can be seen in their speaking and writing abilities in group work, independent work, and class participation. Teachers who make the shift in their instruction to include interactive language strategies are able to see the direct connection between the "we do" practice time in their classrooms where these strategies are implemented, and the oral or written work their students produce.

Another take away from the research is that these interactive strategies encourage teachers to prepare their lessons in a way that ensures that students' language needs are supported throughout each part of the lesson. Teachers also find a great deal of flexibility and ability to differentiate when including the interactive language strategies into their lessons each day.

Teachers are empowered by empowering students to be their best, most successful selves. Interactive language strategies allow them to insert best practices for EL students into their daily instruction without having to up-end their entire plan or teaching practice.

Implications of the Professional Development Project

The goal of my project was to deliver a series of staff development presentations that would provide teachers with new strategies to use with EL learners, and ultimately all students, in their classrooms on a regular basis. As a larger goal, I hope that by being part of these ongoing trainings, staff will change the way they plan, deliver lessons and differentiate for EL learners. My desire is to see a large-scale change in the way that teachers practice with their students during lessons and how they help scaffold learning so that all students are ready to produce written or oral work. However, if teachers

implement only the minimum number of strategies each year, this will already be a huge victory for the teachers, the EL learners, and the school climate as a whole.

As I created my presentations I felt that they were done in such a way that the content would feel very relevant to the teachers in attendance. I also created it to be interactive and give teachers the opportunity to try out each strategy and create a level of comfort with each one before attempting it with their students. The structure of the presentations gives teachers the chance to learn about each strategy, when it might be most effective, walk through the steps of each strategy, try it out, and then talk with colleagues to brainstorm ways to differentiate the strategy to fit their specific grade levels or student needs. I feel that all participants will be provided with all the information and materials needed to successfully and confidently implement the new strategies into their classroom instruction and be able to measure results through students output and work samples.

As I created the presentations I relied heavily on the research of literature presented in chapter two. Building my presentation on the foundation of academic research and language acquisition experts was key in creating something meaningful and effective for teachers to learn from and engage with. I believe that it also made me a stronger teacher and gave my own teaching practice a stronger foundation. I feel that I know more about why I do what I do and how I do it, and can speak to my others about my field and my students in ways that are founded in research and expertise.

Future Projects

The work in this capstone project is meant to be a starting point. The hope is that teachers will find valuable strategies that they are able to implement with students and

continue to use and develop in their own teaching practice and classrooms. As teachers become more familiar with how these strategies can help their students, they will also hopefully develop their own ways of doing each strategy, new ways of differentiation and scaffolding them, and personalized ways of making them effective in their classrooms. For future training I hope to build off of that success and allow teachers to share ideas so they can learn from their peers and glean new ideas from others. With that comfortability with the strategies, new strategies will be able to be introduced in later professional training that will allow teachers to increase their repertoire of strategies.

Other future projects would include sharing these presentations with other schools in the district so all teachers can have the opportunity to learn and develop much needed skills for working with EL students. The population of EL learners continues to increase in our district exponentially each year. Teachers are becoming more and more vocal in their need for ways to meet the needs of these students at the elementary level and in ways that can help with output skills that they are working so hard to develop in young learners. I believe these presentations would help fill the gap and provide teachers with strategies that will empower them to meet the needs of their EL learners in ways that are not available to them yet.

Limitations

The information in these presentations is important and a valuable piece of helping EL learners produce and practice language output. However, it does not, by any means, give teachers all the tools they need to meet the vast and different needs of their language learners. There is much that teachers need to understand and do in order to ensure that their learners' needs are being met on a daily basis. The interactive strategies

they will learn through the presentations will help them create a bridge for scaffolded language practice in their lessons each day, but it is not a comprehensive means of meeting the needs of EL students. While it is a very good start, there is still room for more.

Reflections on the Capstone Process

The process of writing and creating my capstone project has been enlightening for me both personally and professionally. It caused me to see how my current beliefs as an educator and EL teacher were supported in different ways and which ideas needed to be reassessed or realigned to new learning. It allowed me to view my profession and the work I do on a daily basis through the lens of research and expertise. Most importantly I believe that it showed me how great the need is for EL supoprts in the mainstream elementary classroom and that there is a large gap to fill.

As I shared in chapter one, my experience as an EL teacher has varied between buildings and populations of EL learners, but the part that has remained constant in all my experiences is the lack of time students spend with me versus the vast amount of time they spend in their classrooms. My experience has shown me that there is a great need, regardless of where you teach, to provide EL learners with more opportunities to practice and interact with language at their level and in ways that make them feel successful while yielding positive and measurable results.

As I began my project I initially thought I would be providing teachers with different strategies and allowing for practice and discussion around each one in order to create comfortability and confidence in using them in their classrooms. However, my project soon expanded to include many different ideas that are important for helping

teachers prepare to scaffold and differentiate effectively for EL learners, and ultimately all their students. The project quickly grew to also include explanations of why scaffolding for language learners is important, where it fits into a daily lesson, differentiation ideas, and teachers-focused planning strategies. Looking at the professional development presentations I have created, I feel confident that teachers can learn a great deal of information in a short amount of time and that they will have something tangible to take back and use in their own classrooms and with their own students in ways that are manageable and effective. By adding the coaching sessions during PLCs I think that teachers will have the opportunity to look through student work and talk about ideas that help these strategies be effective at different grade levels or situations.

The development of my capstone project into something so inclusive and supportive of teachers' learning makes me excited to see the outcome and see the strategies in action throughout my school building. It has also made me reflect on how I work with students and how I can bring these ideas into my own practice in new or better ways.

Summary

As educators, reflection is key to getting better, learning more, and being the best we can for our students. In this chapter I was able to reflect on the journey that led me to answering my research question: how *can classroom teachers increase language output for English Learners through interactive strategies in the elementary mainstream classroom?* I looked at the implications of my professional development capstone project that I created, discussed future projects, considered limitations of my capstone

project, and finally I reflected on my capstone process. It is very apparent that EL learners are a growing part of our classrooms and student bodies. Their needs are different, vast, and important. It is my hope that this capstone project will impact the way that teachers view their role as educators of EL learners and empower them in their work and practice.

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