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Research-Based Instructional Strategies to Support Newcomers in the Mainstream Classroom

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Research-Based Instructional Strategies to Support Newcomers in the Mainstream
Classroom

By

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A culminating Project submitted to the Department of Education and Human
Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial
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Abstract

After Hurricane Maria hit the island of Puerto Rico in September of 2017, the Rochester City School District received an influx of Newcomer students; over 600 students were placed in the District. Teachers at Enrico Fermi School No. 17 shared, by way of survey, that they did not feel comfortable nor adequately prepared to teach these students. When teachers complete a teacher certification program, they are taught many strategies to use in the classroom; however, strategies specific to Newcomers are not included in those teachings. The effects of not having trained and qualified teachers for Newcomers in the mainstream classroom is negative. Newcomers are more likely to drop out of school or be referred to special education.

The researcher created a survey on *Teaching Newcomers in the Mainstream Classroom*. The survey was given to teachers from Grade Kindergarten through Grade 7 from Enrico Fermi School No. 17 in the Rochester City School District to gauge how comfortable teachers felt with teaching Newcomers in their classrooms. The survey also gave insight to what resources/strategies teachers are currently using as well as strategies of interest. The researcher found that by educating and training teachers of Newcomers, these educators will feel more equipped and prepared when planning lessons and teaching Newcomers in the classroom.

It is the researcher's recommendation that all educators, not only ENL teachers, of the Rochester City School District be required to take a professional development training on research-based strategies for Newcomers in the mainstream classroom. All educators (support staff, classroom teachers, and administrators) should be informed and equipped with the most effective research-based strategies for Newcomers as well as the

available resources specific to Newcomers in order to ensure that these students have an equal opportunity to the education that native-English speakers have.

CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

All educators have a great responsibility to ensure that their students are growing intellectually as well as helping them develop into responsible citizens while in their care. However, teachers in the United States are not prepared for the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students (Ashworth Cain, 2018). Students come from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures such that the educators assigned to their education are not fully equipped with the academic preparation or appropriate strategies needed to ensure student academic success. The need for qualified and dedicated teachers in the Rochester City School District teaching English language learners, especially Newcomers, has definitely increased in the past two years. According to Goodwin (2017), “teachers must ensure that immigrant children receive the education and services to which they are entitled. Good intentions alone cannot ensure culturally responsive practices. Teacher must look past their own opinions and views on immigration and uphold the law to educate all students” (p.445). After Hurricane Maria hit the Caribbean Islands in September of 2017, families moved to the United States in hopes of a better future for their lives as well as their children’s lives. Teachers in the Rochester City School District educate more than twenty-six thousand students in Grades Kindergarten through Grade 12 of different ethnic backgrounds. The increase of students coming from non-English speaking households has changed the culture of the Rochester City School District.

English language learners (ELLs) are students whose dominant language, or home language, is something other than English. These students come to school and receive

extra services such English as a Second Language (ESL) to help them increase their English proficiency. ELLs are students who come from non-English speaking homes and are learning the English language while in school. Newcomers, on the other hand, are children of immigrants who are new to the country, culture and language. They have not had much exposure to the English language and at the beginning of their time in the United States mostly experience a culture shock as well as confusion with the language, teaching styles, groupings in the classroom, and expectations when entering into a new school.

Educators receive a great deal of academic preparation before entering into their own classrooms. However, it is impossible to say that all educators have all the tools they need to teach such a diverse population of students as soon as they graduate from college. Being an educator means that learning is continuously happening year after year. Therefore, as times are changing and the population in the classroom is becoming more diverse, teachers need to be equipped with the best strategies to implement in their classroom that will benefit and ensure academic success for all students, including the ELLs and Newcomers.

Significance of the Problem

Judie Haynes (2007) states that Newcomers will often act out in the classroom, become aggressive or simply withdraw from everyone because of the culture shock they experience when moving to an unfamiliar culture. This type of behavior can often lead to overidentifying Newcomers as having a disability or being labeled a “troubled” child. Eventually, these students struggle so much throughout their academic life because they

are not receiving the support or being taught strategies that they can use to better their understanding of content and the English language. These students make the decision to drop out of school. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2016 the Latino population in the U.S reached nearly 58 million. It was reported that 9.9% of foreign born Hispanics (Hispanics born outside of the U.S) dropped out of high school, the highest percentage of all ethnic backgrounds (Table 2).

U.S. Hispanic population hits new high
In millions

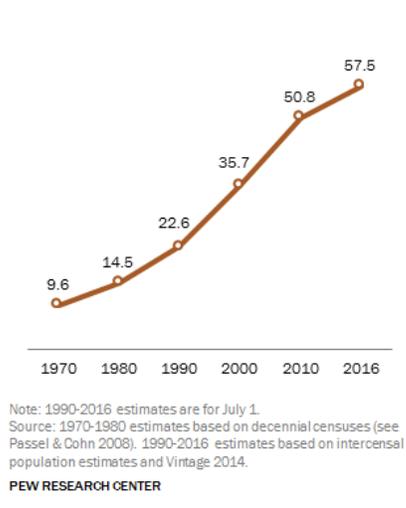


Table 1

High school dropouts and dropout rate, by nativity and region of birth: 2015

Universe: 2015 resident population ages 16 through 19

Hispanic	209,240	5.6 %
U.S. born	149,266	4.7
Foreign born	59,974	9.9
White alone, not Hispanic	311,095	3.4
Black alone, not Hispanic	113,385	4.7
Asian alone, not Hispanic	12,632	1.5
Other, not Hispanic	37,469	4.6
Total	683,821	4.0 %

Note: Dropouts are people not enrolled in school and who have not attained a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, such as a General Education Development (GED) certificate. "Other, not Hispanic" includes persons reporting single races not listed separately and persons reporting more than one race.
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2015 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS). "Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States, 2015"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Table 2

In order to get a clearer picture of the seriousness of the problem with the English Language Learners' population in the Rochester City School District, the researcher reviewed the Rochester City School District budget for the 2019-2020 school year. It was reported that in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the Rochester City School District saw an increase of nearly 600 English Language Learners who fled Puerto Rico after the hurricane. The District then opened the Bilingual Language and Literacy Academy as a

newcomer program for the recently arrived students. However, what happened with the other newly arrived students who did not attend the newcomer program offered by RCSD? Simple, the other Newcomers were placed in different schools throughout the district. The researcher works as a Bilingual Special Education Teacher for Enrico Fermi School No. 17. The researcher, as well as the other Grade 4 teachers, were given the responsibility to instruct four Newcomers that arrived in their classrooms after January of 2018. The other grade levels also had their additions of Newcomers in their classrooms.

After the researcher reviewed the Rochester City School District's graduation rate for English Language Learners these data show that in 2016 there was a total of 37 (17%) of ELLs who graduated from RCSD with a diploma of some sort. In 2017, the graduation rate for English language Learners was 52 (20%) out of a total of 254. Only 23 (9%) ELLs graduated with a regents diploma. The drop-out rate for English Language Learners in the RCSD district in 2016 was 93 (43%). In 2017, the number of dropouts decreased to 103 (41%). It is clear that there is major gap in the system when it comes to English Language Learners, including Newcomers, succeeding academically and being able to achieve a NYS diploma. These data suggest that there is an immediate need for educators, all educators, to be trained and informed on the most effective strategies for English Language Learners, especially Newcomers, in the classroom to increase student engagement, participation and success.

Based on the information reviewed in the Rochester City School District NYS 2016-2017 Report Card, the researcher decided to create and release a survey (Appendix A) on *Teaching Newcomers* to Rochester City School staff members. The purpose of the survey was to gauge how comfortable teachers felt with teaching newcomers in their

classroom. The survey also gave insight to what resources/strategies teachers are currently using in the classroom as well as other strategies of interest.

Teachers from Grade Kindergarten through Grade 7 from Enrico Fermi No. 17 were asked to fill out the *Teaching Newcomers* survey due to the increase in number of students classified as Newcomers to Enrico Fermi No. 17 in 2017 after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. Staff members were asked to circle if they felt comfortable teaching newcomers in their classroom on a scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. At least 23% of the staff reported that they *strongly agreed* with feeling comfortable in their classroom with newcomers. At least 17% of the staff members reported *not sure* of how they felt about teaching newcomers in their classroom and at least 11% of the staff members *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement that they felt comfortable.

Having appropriate resources in the classroom was also surveyed. At least 64% of the staff members reported needing *leveled readers* as well as age-appropriate *educational websites* (including Spanish websites) to meet the needs of the newcomers in their classrooms. Staff members were also given a list of strategies for teaching newcomers to check off if they are currently being used in the classroom as well as checking off any additional strategies of interest. At least 64% (11 out of the 17 respondents), reported that the strategies currently being used are non-linguistic cues (visuals), cooperative learning, use of graphic organizers, and the use of word walls in the classroom. The top three strategies that respondents reported wanting to know more about were the use of sentence frames/sentence starters, scaffolding, and preview-view-review of lessons.

Purpose

It is evident, based on the above data, that not all educators of RCSD, feel prepared nor comfortable in teaching ELLs, specifically Newcomers. These data show that in response to these feelings by the educators of RCSD, ELLs are not receiving the quality education they deserve and the rate of drop outs of ELLs in RCSD will only increase if something is not done to “fix” the problem. Teachers must acknowledge their weaknesses as an educator and be willing to learn how to best educate these students and apply that learning in their instruction. Only then will our ELLs truly be given equal opportunity in their education.

The purpose of this investigation is to identify the trauma and difficulties Newcomers experience once in a new environment that hinder their academic progress. The investigations will also identify the lack of special training and preparation for teachers in the Rochester City School District and how this greatly effects the academic success of students, specifically Newcomers. Teacher preparation must focus on “equal access to rich, meaningful and intellectually demanding instruction; however, recognizing that Newcomers, poor children, and children of color have historically been systematically denied education, equal and quality resources and basic caring” (Goodwin, 2017, p.446). In order to increase the success rate of *all* students, teachers must first recognize that there is a problem and educate themselves on how to fix the problem.

The information surveyed is important to the researcher as it assists in determining in which areas teachers in Enrico Fermi No. 17 need more support and/or training. At least 70% (12 out of the 17) reported that a workshop demonstrating appropriate strategies with a take-home manual would be beneficial to them. For this

reason, the researcher will develop a Professional Development (PD) with a take-home manual on research-based strategies for teachers to implement in their classroom while planning instruction and/or daily activities as well as during instruction. It is the hope of the researcher that after RCSD teachers complete the PD and receive their take-home manual on strategies, the quality of their lesson planning and teaching improves. In turn, the success rate of ELLs in RCSD will also improve.

Summary

Although 64% of the staff members surveyed reported that they are currently using strategies for ELLs, specifically Newcomers, in their classrooms, data researched on the Rochester City School District report card for 2016-2017 show that the drop-out rate for ELLs is very high in the Rochester City School District. Newcomers are forced to adapt to an unfamiliar culture and way of instruction when they are displaced from their native land and placed in a new school. They are expected to perform alongside non-English language learners after the first year of being in the United States. English Language Learners are sitting in classrooms where they are not understanding the language; therefore, they are not understanding the content. The effects of this type of environment for ELLs, specifically Newcomers, is negative. In the experience of the researcher, ELLs tend to withdraw from the class or act out. They tend to develop low self-esteem and lose confidence with themselves, they may even say that they are dumb. Low performance or progression of ELLs in the classroom can lead to over classification for Special Education services.

English Language Learners need to feel that their teachers are dedicated to helping them progress in their language acquisition, as well as their education. They need to know they are valued and have great potential. ELLs deserve the same quality of education as all other students. In order for Newcomers to succeed in their language acquisition as well as their education, the Rochester City School District teachers need to be better informed and trained on the most effective strategies to use in the classroom. The researcher hopes that teachers of the Rochester City School District will apply these strategies in their teaching to increase the graduation rate and academic success of all students, especially ELLs.

IDENTIFICATION OF TERMS

English Language Learners (ELLs)- students who come from non-English speaking homes and backgrounds who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English

Newcomers- students who are English Language Learners and are new to the United States and arrive with limited or interrupted formal schooling

Diverse learners- students from racially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse families

Culture shock- feeling of confusion and distress felt by an individual who is suddenly exposed to a new, strange, or foreign social and cultural environment

Culturally and Linguistically diverse- an individual who comes from a home environment where a language other than English is spoken and whose cultural values and background may differ from the mainstream culture

Immigrant- a person who leaves their native country and moves to another country to live permanently, in hopes of having a better life

ENL- (English as a New Language) a specialized instruction program for students whose first language is not English to help them develop English language skills

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

It has been researched and proven that student success is influenced by the preparation and dedication of their teachers. “The American Educational Research Association published an article showing that the most important influence on student success is what teachers learn” (Roblero, 201, p.104). Newcomers require intense focused educational support as they are working towards acquiring English skills as well as content knowledge. The majority of the studies completed on English Language Learners have not been specific to Newcomers. Most studies group English Language Learners, from all proficiency levels, together when providing statistics. However, with the rise in population of immigrants to the United States, there has been an increase in the development of studies on Newcomers.

This chapter will be broken into four main parts; Part I: Understanding Culture Shock, Part II: Over-classification of English Language Learners, Part III: The Need for Teacher Preparation, and Part IV: Success with Newcomers. The purpose of this chapter is to educate teachers on the most effective, research-based strategies to apply in their teaching when educating Newcomers. However, it is the hope of the researcher that after reading the research provided in this chapter, teachers will also be able to self-assess and make a personal commitment in delivering culturally responsive lessons with effective strategies that will improve the academic success of ELLs, specifically Newcomers, in the classroom.

Villegas & Lucas (2002) state that teachers who are unaware of the language and environments their students come from are often unable to estimate a child’s competence

accurately. If teachers are unable to accurately state where their students are performing academically, any possible future goals placed on these students will most likely be low academic goals. According to Hansen-Thomas & Chennapragada (2018) “withholding challenging academic experiences for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students can be detrimental to a student’s growth and success in school” (p.83). Understanding students’ backgrounds and experiences and making the effort to utilize the most effective ways to teach our Newcomers, is the only way teachers will be able to make a positive difference in their students’ academic lives.

Part I: Understanding Culture Shock

According to Haynes (2007), “if we want linguistically and culturally diverse students to gain long-term social and academic success, then we must be ready to provide a challenging and enriching program that helps them become part of the mainstream environment” (p.42). However, before we can provide or even develop a challenging and enriching program, teachers must first understand the culture shock Newcomers experience when first coming to a new country as well as how it affects their learning once attending school.

What is Culture Shock? Culture Shock is a “process that someone goes through as he or she is experiencing a new, unfamiliar situation or environment that requires developing new modes of representation and new perspectives on self, others, and the environment” (Cupsa, 2018, p. 185). According to Washburn (2008), “confusion is a natural response to a new system when people do not know how they are supposed to act or what they are expected to do” (p.248). Cupsa (2018) describes culture shock as being

“like a fish out of water.” Therefore, by understanding what Newcomers may be feeling when they are sitting in our classrooms, the educator is then able to empathize with them and be able to help them cope with the situation as well as move forward in a positive way. Through understanding culture shock, we can build the capacity for compassion toward ourselves and others and become more sensitive to what individuals need when they are dealing with radical life changes (Cupsa, 2018).

Based on research carried out with students enrolled in the University of Pittsburgh’s Semester at Sea Project, Paul Pederson (1995) described the experience of culture shock in terms of five stages; First stage: *The Honeymoon*; in this stage the person usually feels excitement, curiosity, and joy coupled with anxiety about entering a new place. Second stage: *Disintegration*; in this stage the person begins to feel confusion and disorientation. The person feels a sense of disconnection from one’s surroundings which can lead to withdrawal and isolation. Third stage: *Reintegration*; during this stage the person will feel that everything from their home culture is good and everything in the new culture is bad. This conflict can either progress toward resolution and movement to the next stage or possibly to a regression to the previous stage (Cupsa, 2018). Fourth stage of culture shock is labeled, *Autonomy*. During this stage the person learns how to balance more in things in life, and differences are perceived as nonthreatening; the person is beginning to feel as if they have a role in the new culture. Lastly, *Interdependence* is the stage where the person begins to feel at home in this new culture. They start to integrate different aspects of the culture in their daily life and begin to form a multicultural identity. When Newcomers arrive in our classrooms, educators must be able

to identify in which stage their students are currently, in order to better service their needs.

According to Edwards-Joseph & Baker (2012), stressors such as culture shock could affect students and their academic performance. Therefore, “it is important for professionals working with these students to be knowledgeable on ways to help with their general adjustment concerns as well as dealing with symptoms of culture shock” (p.727). Nowadays, diverse classrooms are becoming more common in schools with the increasing number of immigrants coming to the U.S. Some classrooms may not include such intense diversity; nonetheless, all classrooms will indeed be diverse. When teachers understand and are being responsive to the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds, an importance of supporting them in their efforts towards academic success is created. Hansen-Thomas & Chennapragada (2018) believe that with the evolving demographics in the United States, it is important for teachers entering the profession to be prepared to teach in classrooms that are more diverse. As human beings, we need the contact with a different other in order to learn and grow; however, for this growth to happen, we must feel safe and embrace others’ differences (Cupsa, 2018).

Part II: Over-classification of English Language Learners

It has been established already that in order for *all* students, specifically English Language Learners, to succeed in school the appropriate resources, as well as trained professionals need to be in place. However, having the appropriate resources or trained professionals is not always followed by the school district. There has been a serious problem with the rising percentage of ELLs being classified in special education. In the

United States the classification of ELLs has increased in the past decade (Sullivan, 2011). This issue has become a controversial one as some researchers believe that by classifying ELLs into special education, the support received in school will help meet the needs of those performing below grade-level, while other researchers do not believe that classifying ELLs is in their best interest (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013).

According to Fernandez & Inserra (2013), when students are performing below grade-level and there is a concern from the mainstream teacher, it is the responsibility of the mainstream teacher to take that concern to the building's Response to Intervention Team (RTI). The Response to Intervention team is a group of professionals and administrators in the same building who meet to discuss a support plan for a struggling student (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013). When the RTI team meets, the team discusses a possible support plan for the student and if any assessments need to be made. When an ELL is referred to the RTI team, if determined by the team, a bilingual evaluation will be completed. However, according to Fernandez & Inserra (2013) if the ELL student is not proficient in their native language when given the bilingual evaluation, they may perform poorly, "skewing the results of the assessment and making that child appear to have a learning disability when in fact the child is still in the process of acquiring a second language" (p.2). Students who are learning English are often disadvantaged due to the inaccuracy of the assessments and lack of trained teachers who are trained to distinguish the difference between language and disabilities (Ortiz, 2001).

It has been determined in Chapter 1 that the Hispanic population has increased in the last decade. It has also been established that the Hispanic population is the largest minority group in public schools and is increasing at a greater rate than any other ethnic

group. The problem here is that public schools have a limited number of ESL teachers. How does not having enough certified staff affect our ELLs? According to Fernandez & Inserra (2013), “ELLs spend the majority of their schooling with mainstream teachers who are not certified in ESL and have little to no training on how to support ELLs” (p.3). Mainstream teachers are pressured by their administrators, team leaders, and even the state to have their students pass state assessments at the end of the year. Spending so much time with a teacher who is not trained on how to support the needs of an ELL, as well as dealing the pressure of passing a state assessment, can lead to serious problems for English Language Learners. The lack of academic success of ELLs is the cause for referrals to special education, which, according to Fernandez & Inserra (2013), does not increase the rate of ELLs who graduate. Artiles & Ortiz (2002) state that ELLs with the least amount of language support in schools are more likely to be referred to special education and less likely to graduate with a high school diploma.

“Researchers such as Cummins (1997), Krashen (1981), and McGlothin (1997) suggest that the lack of understanding of second language acquisition by teachers influences the high number of referrals of ELLs to special education” (as cited in Fernandez & Inserra, 2013). According to Fernandez & Inserra (2013) “research based-teacher practices in teaching ELLs can draw upon multicultural strategies, learning styles, and diverse needs to reach all ELLs” (p.4). Learning about and implementing these strategies will in turn open a door to more appropriate strategies that can be used to meet the needs of ELLs. Teacher education programs do not adequately prepare prospective teachers to teach ELLs, and practicing teachers who serve as their mentors during student teaching, do not provide the guidance for doing so (Ortiz, Robertson, Wilkinson, Liu,

McGhee & Kushner, 2011). Ortiz et al. (2011) state that research studies have found that practicing teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach ELLs. If teachers do not feel prepared to teach ELLs, how can the school or state expect for these students to succeed in such an environment?

Part III: The Need for Teacher Preparation

In the past, it has been the responsibility of bilingual teachers to educate ELLs. However, as times are changing and ELLs are spending more and more time in the general classroom, it is now the responsibility of the general education teacher to educate these ELLs. According to Roblero (2013), “as the number of ELL students increases, educators will continue to encounter the challenge of providing effective second language instruction and academic content” (p.101). Teacher requirements vary across the United States. Most states fail to prepare teachers to educate students of vulnerable population like ELLs. With the shift in demographics of the United States, it is likely that most teachers will encounter a student who is an ELL. Many teachers do not have the adequate preparation to provide highly effective instruction to these students (Roblero, 2013).

Recent research suggests that general education teachers who do not hold a bilingual certification or ESOL are prepared to meet the needs of ELLs. ELLs require teachers who are skilled in a variety of instructional, pedagogical, and cultural strategies. “Professional development should aim to improve teachers’ knowledge and enhance their understanding of student thinking” (Roblero, 2013, p.104). According to Roblero (2013), teachers themselves have expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of resources and

feeling unprepared to teach ELLs; these teachers find themselves struggling with the lack of skills and absence of professional development.

In October of 2011, the Los Angeles Unified School District agreed to improve the ways it teaches ELLs after a nineteen-month investigation by the U.S Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The investigation found that 30% of students were denied equal educational opportunities by not affording ELLs access to core academic classes needed for graduation and to enroll in college or job training programs (Roblero, 2013). "The nation should not wait for a school district to violate the rights of students in order to provide them with well-qualified instructors and equal education" (Roblero, 2013, p. 99). "The academic success of ELLs is in the best interest of the United States as it will contribute to the success of the U.S economy by providing a fast-growing and well-educated labor force" (Roblero, 2013, p.100).

According to Mohr (2004), currently most ELLs in the U.S are assigned to ESL teachers who typically remove the students from regular classroom instruction if they are new to the English language, like Newcomers, or if they have yet to acquire enough English skills to no longer need a pull-out service and will then push-in to the classroom for English support. However, Mohr (2004) suggests that without extensive support from classroom teachers, ESL teachers cannot be expected to work miracles, especially in less than an hour of targeted instruction. Some teachers do not place much expectations on their ELLs, not because they endorse this approach, but because they just do not know what to do differently for them and are hoping the ESL teachers can provide more appropriate instruction.

ELLs struggle most with reading and writing in the English language. It is important for teachers to understand that by building on their first-language competencies rather than assume that they have few language strengths, ELLs will “multiply their chances to personalize their learning (the why of learning) and be more productive (the how of learning)” (Mohr, 2004, p.24). Being able to own their own learning will then increase their sense of agency which will in turn mitigate the temptation to withdraw or drop out of school (Mohr, 2013). According to Lee (2012), in New York City, all students, including Newcomer ELLs, must pass five Regents exams to earn a high school diploma. ELLs have consistently struggled with passing these exams, and the dropout rates have increased. In 2005, only 33.2% of ELLS in NYC passed the English part of the Regents exam. Many ELLs have to retake the exams over and over before earning a passing score. However, when classroom teachers’ instruction is culturally respectful, cognitively challenging, and academically oriented, ELL students will then have stronger opportunities for success.

Part IV: Success with Newcomers

According to Dellicarpini, Musetti, Salas & Perez (2009), the arrivals of Newcomers in mainstream classrooms often have teachers thinking “what do I do now?” However, Dellicarpini et al. (2009), state that if we understand second language literacy from a developmental standpoint, educators should be able to make better choices when creating a diverse literacy classroom. Ensuring success with Newcomers means “working purposefully with them which requires that practitioners first gauge, and then work from, wherever students are in their home language” (p.95). Newcomers should receive first

language support before sheltered instruction in English for instruction to be maximally meaningful and effective (Collier & Thomas, 2004). In reality, Newcomers are in catch-up mode as soon as they begin schooling in the U.S. They must try to catch up to the native English speakers already performing at or above grade level. Because Newcomers are already behind academically from peers, they require much more instructional time, where the instruction is engaging and relatable to them as well as addressing first and second language literacy.

“Teachers can best support Newcomers by learning about their cultures, families, and backgrounds” (Dellicarpini et al., 2009, p.96). Newcomers need teachers who will advocate for and with them through caring while promoting flexibility, patience and creativity. Through this kind of commitment will Newcomers have the greatest chance for success. Educators need to look for and implement natural and meaningful ways to work for and with ELLs. According to Siefert (2010), “when we honor first languages in the classroom, ELLs and their families are connected with the school, the classroom community begins a journey of learning a second language, and ELLs are encouraged to continue literacy development in their native language” (p.97). When ELLs, specifically Newcomers, feel confident and successful in their native language this same confidence transfers over when learning a new language. This in turn aids in the acquisition of learning a new language, building self-esteem, creating positive peer relationships and a community that demonstrates acceptance and respect (Cain, 2018).

According to Haynes (2007), what teachers do and do not do in the classroom influences the success of ELLs. She states that there are five essential practices effective teachers implement in their work (p.73):

- Creating a thriving learning environment
- Differentiating instruction for ELLs
- Encouraging flexible groupings
- Using diversity as a resource
- Developing alternative assessments for ELLs

When effective teachers create a positive learning environment it lowers Newcomers' anxiety level and allows them to rapidly integrate into the classroom (Haynes, 2007).

Providing more kinesthetic and visual cues for lessons helps ELLs understand subject-area material better. Beginning ELLs, or Newcomers, are most successful when they are given specific content vocabulary to learn when studying a unit. Vocabulary words with simple definitions, or fill-in-the-blank worksheets with a word bank are modifications to help ELLs be successful in the classroom (Haynes, 2007). Diane August (2018) shares that “for ELLs who are Newcomers, especially those in upper grades, core content provided in their home language will support them in developing their knowledge and skills while they are acquiring proficiency in English”(p.7). According to Ferlazzo & Sypnieski (2018), teaching ELLs, especially Newcomers, can be a challenge; however, remembering the assets that ELLs bring to the classroom “can help teachers and students view the challenges not as problems but as opportunities for growth” (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018, p.16).

Today's focus on standards, testing, and data in education may make it more challenging for teachers to implement these essential practices; however, it is possible to achieve and when these practices are implemented and followed, *all* students will be given the opportunity to succeed at something in school (Borrero, 2011).

Conclusion:

As educators of ELLs, it is important to remember that learning a second language may seem simple and that our students have grasped the English language because they are seen and heard talking with their friends in English within a short period of time. However, academic language takes years. Goodwin & Hein (2016), state that English Language Learners learn the basics of reading: decoding words, word recognition, and even spelling, within the first two years. However, reading comprehension and writing skills in English can take many more years for ELLs to achieve.

Classroom teachers must understand that the success of students lies within their preparation, dedication, and creativity. If teachers want the education system to change, they will need to be the first to change. Teachers will need to renew their way of thinking, as well as their way of teaching. Learning to understand, embrace, and respect all cultures should be the focus of all teachers, administrators, and schools. Educators must understand that teaching is a profession where teachers are life-long learners; where teachers are continuously learning new strategies and methods to use in the classroom in order to meet the needs of *all* students.

Chapter 3: Product Description

Introduction

After reviewing the Rochester City School District Report Card, RCSD District budget for 2019-2020, as well as the graduation rate for ELLs in the District, the researcher chose to create a take-home manual for the Rochester City School District teachers to be handed out during a professional development (PD) on *Research-Based Strategies for Newcomers in the Mainstream Classroom*. It has been established through the survey given to teachers at Enrico Fermi School No. 17 that teachers in the Rochester City School District do not feel as though they are adequately prepared to teach Newcomers in the mainstream classroom.

After reviewing the survey on *Teaching Newcomers* given to teachers in Enrico Fermi School No.17, the researcher chose to create a PD sharing the challenges Newcomers face when arriving to the country, and strategies that will help increase the success rate of ELLs. The goal of this take-home manual is for RCSD teachers to gain more knowledge and understanding of the ELL population, specifically Newcomers. This product and professional development intend to improve teacher preparation while lesson planning. It is the hope of the researcher that after this professional development, teachers are more strategic when planning and executing lessons in the classroom to increase student engagement, specifically Newcomers, in the classroom.

Description of the Product: PowerPoint

The take-home manual is divided into nine sections. The manual begins with an introduction, a list of key terms, and five essential practices effective teachers implement

in their work. The manual also contains additional research-based strategies that staff members of Enrico Fermi School No. 17 from Grade Kindergarten through Grade 7 shared more interest in when surveyed. The last page of the manual shares online resources available for mainstream classroom teachers to use in the classroom with ELLs.

The take-home manual will be passed out to participants towards the end of the PD. The session will begin with a PowerPoint. The facilitator will first introduce herself and then share the learning targets (I can statements) of the session which include:

- explaining the difference between an ELL and a Newcomer student
- incorporating one new strategy to implement in the classroom with Newcomer students

After sharing the learning targets, the facilitator will then ask all participants to take five minutes to fill out a self-survey. The purpose of the self-survey is to have the participants self-reflect on how much knowledge they currently have on what it means to be an ELL. The second part of the self-survey asks the participants questions about their journey of learning a second language. The last section of the survey gives the participants the opportunity to truly reflect on how comfortable they feel with speaking, reading, and writing in a second language, as well as implementing new strategies for Newcomers in the classroom. This same survey will also be given again at the end of the session as an exit ticket, to give feedback to the facilitator on whether participants met the goals of the session but also to give feedback to the participants themselves on their learning during the session.

The facilitator will then have participants share out on who the Newcomer students are in the classroom. The facilitator will clarify any misconceptions about Newcomers vs. ELLs. The next part of the PowerPoint is discussing the challenges Newcomers face when arriving at a new school. It is essential that teachers understand the challenges faced by these students in order for them to know how to impact each student. Challenges that will be discussed are:

- experiencing culture shock
- over-classification of ELLs to Special Education
- higher drop-out rates
- being placed in classrooms with teachers who are not qualified or prepared to teach ELLs

After discussing research on each challenge, the facilitator will introduce the group activity participants will need to complete. Each table/group will be given twenty plastic straws and masking tape. The directions of the activity will be explained: Each group will have ten minutes to build a structure strong enough to withhold the weight of a textbook without collapsing. The challenge in this activity is that participants will not be allowed to speak with their team members in their dominant language. After the time allotted, participants will be asked to “turn and talk” with their group members about how difficult the task was to complete, what strategies did the participant need to implement in order to complete the task, and how did it make the participant feel not being able to use their first language as primary source of communication. The purpose of this activity is to allow teachers to put themselves in their students’ “shoes.” Being able to experience

what Newcomers have to go through in the classroom will allow teachers to feel empathetic towards their ELL students.

The next part of the session will be to view a video on how to create a welcoming environment for ELLs. The goal of the video is to give teachers an inside view from a teacher of ELLs' point of view. The video also shares strategies this teacher uses to welcome and engage her ELLs. After the video is viewed, participants will be able to take a post-it note from the table and first write down any thoughts or questions they may have regarding the video. Then, the group will be asked to share out any thoughts or questions in whole-group. The take-home manual will then be introduced and handed out to each participant. The first essential practice shared in the manual contains strategies that ensure a thriving learning environment that promotes and encourages participation of English Language Learners. The second essential practice shares strategies on how to best differentiate instruction for ELLs. The third essential practice shares strategies on how to use flexible groupings in the classroom. The fourth essential practice shares how important it is for teachers to embrace and promote cultural diversity in the classroom. The last essential practice shares how to develop/use alternative assessments for ELLs. Understanding that Newcomers are not yet performing at the same level as their English-speaking peers, ELLs can still succeed in the classroom with differentiation and alternative assessments. Utilizing these strategies will ensure academic success for ELLs. Teachers will have the opportunity to look through the manual and choose a strategy they have yet to use and share with the group how they would use it in their classroom. After sharing out, the self-survey will then be given again. The facilitator will use this survey

as an exit ticket. The exit ticket will give the facilitator feedback on the session and teachers' learning.

Solving the Problem

Only 11% of the teachers who were surveyed stated that they felt comfortable teaching Newcomers in their classrooms. At least 64% of the staff members surveyed reported needing resources in order to teach to the needs of Newcomers. The researcher has developed a manual of strategies that will give teachers a selection of research-based strategies that are effective in the success of ELLs. Teachers surveyed shared the strategies they currently use in the classroom as well as strategies they were interested in learning more about such as the use of sentence frames/sentence starters, scaffolding, and preview-view-review of lessons. The manual shares both the strategies that were currently being used as well as the strategies teachers wanted to learn more about. It has already been shared that the success of students, specifically Newcomers, lie within the preparation, dedication, and creativity of the teacher. This PD and take-home manual offer these teacher participants the opportunity to grow in their profession and learning, and become even more creative in their deliverance of information.

Intended Outcome

The presentation and take-home manual were created to educate teachers on effective strategies for Newcomers in the mainstream classroom in order to address the unpreparedness felt by teachers of ELLs, brought to the researcher by way of survey. Based on the data collected from the survey and data researched on the Rochester City

School District, the researcher intended to address these concerns by creating a professional development that included a take-home manual to educate teachers on the challenges faced by Newcomers as well as the most effective research-based strategies that can be used with ELLs, especially Newcomers, to ensure academic success.

The manual will be a resource that is easily accessible to teachers when planning lessons and activities for the classroom. The researcher intended to offer a manual of strategies to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom. When students see their teachers making the effort to engage and teach to all students' needs, they are more likely to put forth their effort in reaching their potential; therefore, lowering the RCSD high school dropout rate. The researcher hopes that at the end of this session teachers feel professionally equipped with new tools in their teacher toolbox to teach ELLs, especially Newcomers, even though they are not the ENL teacher. It is important to remember that the success of a student lies in the hands of all professionals who work with the student, not just one person. As stated by Dennis Van Roekel (2008), " In the past, the responsibility of ELLs' learning fell on the shoulders of bilingual teachers. However, as ELLs today spend the largest percentage of their schooling in regular classrooms, it is now the responsibility of general education teachers to educate ELLs" (p.101). Mainstream classroom teachers cannot leave the responsibility of educating and working with Newcomers solely to the ENL teacher.

Chapter 4

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the influx of children from foreign countries to the United States has drastically increased over the years. The Rochester City School District took in at least 600 Newcomers from the island of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria destroyed families' homes, communities, and schools. Many Newcomers were placed in schools with teachers who do not have the appropriate tools/strategies for these type of students. Newcomers require specific, focused instruction as they are not only trying to learn content but also a new culture, and language. Unfortunately, not all educators are informed and equipped with the appropriate and most beneficial strategies that will help Newcomers succeed in their academic career.

Newcomers experience a culture shock when they arrive to a new country. This culture shock often hinders their ability and effort to work towards their potential. English Language Learners, including Newcomers, will most likely drop out of school when they reach high school because of their low performance throughout the years, or they may be labeled as having a learning disability. The increase of Newcomers in the Rochester City School District in the last two years has changed the culture of the classroom. The change in culture suggests that educators of RCSD need to be prepared and equipped with the proper tools to educate the Newcomer students sitting in their classroom so that they too can have achieve academic success.

Conclusions

For Newcomers to be successful in school, achieve a high school diploma, and eventually make it to college, teachers must remember that in the field of education we

are life-long learners. Teachers must be open to change and receptive to new strategies that are based on research and proven to be effective. When teachers are open and accepting to change, whether it be in their thinking, planning, or teaching, not only do the teachers benefit but also the students, in this case, the Newcomers. Teachers increase their knowledge on students and learn ways to engage them better as well as deliver the information being taught. Students benefit because their needs are being met throughout the lesson. There is no one-size fits all, and as educators, teachers must acknowledge that all students learn differently and need to be taught to their understanding, especially Newcomer students.

Teachers have the power to enrich, diversify, and modify the curriculum if they are equipped with the appropriate tools. Teachers of Enrico Fermi School No. 17 have failed our English Language Learners, specifically our Newcomer students to some degree. Too often classroom teachers believe the responsibility of ensuring that Newcomers' progress lies in the hands of the ENL teacher; however, that is incorrect. The responsibility belongs to the entire team that educates these students. Proper training on effective research-based strategies for ELLs, specifically Newcomers, cannot be ignored by the District and if implemented, will make such a difference in the school's culture, the classroom's climate, and most importantly in the students' lives.

Implications for Student Learning

Having qualified, trained educators in the school to educate Newcomer students, besides the ENL teachers, has the greatest potential to change student learning, student engagement, and student outcome in school. Classroom teachers who embrace

Newcomers' cultures and use those experiences to enrich the classroom and lessons help Newcomers feel accepted and part of the classroom community. Often times, Newcomers feel isolated or pushed to the side in their own classroom. When teachers acknowledge the assets Newcomers bring to the classroom paired with enhancing their learning by filling their toolboxes with effective strategies, Newcomers are more likely to experience academic success.

Implications for My Teaching

As a bilingual special education teacher at Enrico Fermi School No. 17, I have had the opportunity to work with Newcomer students who are classified with having a disability. Many times I have attended meetings where classroom teachers are wanting to refer Newcomer students to special education because they are performing as the teachers believe they should. However, pushing into classroom to service students, I have witnessed the lack of dedication and training mainstream teachers have when it comes to teaching ELLs, especially Newcomers. Newcomers are not succeeding not because they have a disability, but because they are not being taught the way they learn best. I plan to not only share the knowledge I have learned in this investigation with my fellow colleagues, but also ensure that the teachers with whom I co-teach with are also informed and practicing these research-based strategies in the classroom on a daily basis.

Limitations

The researcher would have hoped to find data on the graduation rate as well as the dropout rate for Newcomers in the Rochester City School District for this last year

considering the District received such an influx of Newcomers. Unfortunately, the research that has been completed on the graduation rate and dropout rate in the RCSD, groups all ELLs as one focus group; it does not specify how many of the ELLs are classified as Newcomers. Based on this investigation, more research focused on Newcomers needs to be done in order to truly understand the challenges faced by Newcomers and how it effects their academic success.

Final Thoughts

The increase of Newcomers in the Rochester City School District in the last two years has made it highly essential for educators to be informed, educated, and equipped with strategies that will meet the needs of *all* students, especially Newcomers. Although teachers may feel uncomfortable at first, the need to get out of that comfort zone is so important for the success of the students in the Rochester City School District. It was shared in Chapter 2 that the success of *all* of our students contributes to the success of the United States. We want our students to grow and be well-educated in order to be successful in the work force. Newcomers deserve the same opportunities as native-English speaking students. Newcomers need to know that their teachers are rooting for them and willing to help them thrive for the best in school and in life. Ensuring that professional developments and other resources are available to teachers is the first step in fulfilling the expectations we have for our Newcomers.

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Appendix A



Survey on Teaching Newcomers

1. Years of experience teaching:

1st year teacher 2-4 years 5-10 years

10-15 years 15-20 years 20+ years

2. Years of experience teaching newcomers:

1st year 2-4 years 5-10 years

10-15 years 15-20 years 20+ years

3. I feel comfortable teaching newcomers in my classroom.

Please circle one:

5- Strongly agree 4- Agree 3- Not sure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly disagree

4. I have enough resources to meet the needs of newcomers in my classroom.

Please circle one:

5- Strongly agree 4- Agree 3- Not sure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly disagree

5. If you do not have enough resources to meet the needs of your newcomers, what resources would you need?

_____ Paper/Pencils

_____ Textbooks

_____ Leveled Readers

_____ Educational Websites

Other: _____

6. Which of the following strategies do you currently use in your classroom to teach newcomers?

Please check all that apply:

_____ Nonlinguistic cues (visuals)

_____ Cooperative learning

_____ Use of graphic organizers

_____ Use of word walls

_____ Comprehensible input

Other: _____

7. Which of the following strategies would you like to know **more** about?

Please check all that apply:

_____ Scaffolding

_____ Jigsaw

_____ Questioning

_____ Preview-View-Review

_____ Sentence frames/Sentence starters

Other: _____

8. A workshop demonstrating appropriate strategies with a take-home manual would be beneficial to me.

Please circle one:

5- Strongly agree 4- Agree 3- Not sure 2- Disagree 1- Strongly disagree