

Sample Paper

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role that teachers have in advocating for the success of their students and how new technology can improve all students' ability to overcome academic challenges. The first section suggests that teachers play an imperative role in communicating student needs to parents and then advocating for those needs to school administrators. Parent involvement in student advocacy is crucial, as is teacher involvement, to student learning. The last part of this paper discusses how teachers and parents advocacy for technology improves learning and access to this technology. Computer-assisted software and digital storytelling are two types of technology that can influence diverse students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

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Colombo reports that teachers identify more “instructional and behavioral problems for students from culturally and linguistically diverse families” (2006, p. 315). In his report, teachers acknowledged that students’ “lack of school preparedness and insufficient family involvement” are significant variables that hinder with students’ academic achievement (p.315). Unfortunately, while nonimmigrant parents typically become active in their children’s’ school experience, immigrant parents of ESL students are less likely to take on these active roles due to language and cultural barriers. While parent-teacher connections are formed somewhat easily when both sides share a “common culture, language, and background,” the connection between immigrant parents and teachers remains insufficient (Colombo, 2006, p. 316). This current disconnect between teachers and parents must be eliminated to give ESL students a higher chance at succeeding in their learning environment.

Home-School Connections

With the lack of parental involvement and communication between teachers and parents directly affecting the success of ESL students, one superintendent created a program called Parent Partnership for Achieving Literacy (PAL) (Colombo, 2006). His goal was to bridge the gap between teachers and parents, as he believes “the relationships between teachers and families had to improve if the district was to achieve its mission of promoting educational excellence for all children” (p. 316). Colombo states that with this program, teachers take part in professional development to enhance their understanding if culturally diverse students and families while families take part in workshops that help them to understand a mainstream classrooms expectations (2006).

An important aspect of the PAL program is literacy nights. During literacy nights, parents and students learn about literacy practices in school along with ways parents can help promote literacy at home. Parents had such a high interest in the literacy nights that school coordinators expanded the program to include computer and ESL classes for the parents to further allow them to help their children with school work at home (Colombo, 2006). In addition, PAL's programs included parent/child storytelling, shared reading in English and the home language, hands on math activities, and additional homework support. After implementing the program for a year, parents felt "that they understood classroom literacy better and, with the help of the ESL classes, would be better able to communicate with mainstream teachers" (Colombo, 2006, p. 317). Programs such as PAL should be created in schools throughout the nation to ensure all students have the same opportunities in academic success.

Advocacy

According to Guo (2010), teachers must have awareness of their ESL students' cultural values, beliefs, and practices if they want to successfully bridge the disconnect between parents and teachers. Guo states that:

Communicating with parents whose first language is not English and whose children are struggling academically adds another dimension to the interaction between home and school because of linguistic and cultural differences. In addition, many other barriers work against effective home-school communication, such as teacher attitudes and institutional racism. (2006, p.123)

By promoting cultural awareness in both the parents and teachers, these barriers can be broken.

In Guo's study (2010), teachers' and parents' expectations often differed; when teachers encouraged separate ESL classes, parents wanted to speed up separate ESL instruction and have

their children in mainstream classes because they felt separate language instruction slowed down their English learning. Additionally, parents wanted more teacher-led instruction and intense written homework (Guo, 2010). These differences were based on cultural values, and the expectations and desires of parents were not being communicated with teachers for the very same reason. For example, Chinese immigrant parents feel that teachers have authority over their children's education and are less willing to voice their concerns so as to not disrespect the teacher (Guo, 2010). Together, parents lack of English proficiency and unwillingness to communicate their concerns or expectations along with teacher's unawareness of cultural values and disbelief in immigrant parent's parental support, creates tension between the school and home.

teachers and students. Guo (2010) stresses the importance of having bilingual assistants at parent events so that immigrant parents feel more comfortable attending and communicating with teachers. Bilingual assistants act as language interpreters, but even more importantly, they serve as cultural interpreters. As cultural interpreters, bilingual assistants have the opportunity to explain differing cultural values, beliefs, and expectations that immigrant parents and English teachers have, ultimately increasing cultural awareness between the family members and educators. In turn, awareness and parental involvement benefit ESL students' success in the classroom.

Collaboration between Content Area Teachers and ESL Teachers

Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney (2010) indicate that ESL teachers are generally not able to connect with content-area teachers of their ELL students to discuss important factors that influence an ELL's progress in the language acquisition process. Often, school administrators do not have specific training on ESL instruction but still make decisions regarding an ELL student

without consultation with an ESL instructor; this can lead to unfair decisions that will impact the ELL in a negative way and can lead to marginalization (Brooks et al., 2010). Slater and Mohan state that “most content-area teachers are not trained to work with ELLs, and cooperation between ESL and content area teachers is urgently required” (2010, p. 92). ELL’s are at a high risk for academic failure if ESL and content teachers do not cooperate with other. It is significant for ESL instructors, content-area teachers, and school administrators to understand the role they play in an ELL’s education so they can provide the necessary tools for academic success.

According to Dove and Honigsfeld (2010), collaboration between ESL and content teachers can successfully replace ESL pull out services by using coteachers in the mainstream classroom to aid ESL students. Dove and Honigsfeld state:

Through the use of successful cooperative planning and organizational techniques, teams of classroom educators and ESL teachers not only discover how to improve their lesson delivery and differentiate instruction for ELLs, but also offer peer support to each other and engage in formal or informal mentoring and peer coaching arrangements. (2010, pp. 3-4)

When working in collaboration by using coteachers in a mainstream classroom or by content area teachers working with ESL instructors to enhance their understanding of ESL student needs, teachers can positively shape their instruction to promote content learning and English proficiency. According to Slater and Mohan (2010), collaboration and cooperation between teachers promotes ESL teachers’ awareness of language needed for specific content areas. If the teachers modify instruction to guide ELLs in using this language, opportunities for their students to learn relevant meanings specific to the content area increase. Most importantly, Dove and

Honigsfeld suggest that to be effective, ESL and content teachers must be committed to taking an active role in communicating with each other in order to improve students' academic success.

Impact of Instructional Technology

With the modern day era's consistently advancing technologies, an abundance of instructional technologies are available for teachers to use in place of traditional resources to modify instruction for ELL students who are struggling to succeed in the classroom. Students learning a new language require a lot of language support in the classroom, and any type of support for students learning English as a second language is vital to an ELL's language acquisition (Green, 2005). ELLs need opportunities to hear, speak, read, and write English, and technology provides a great deal of resources for ELLs. Computers and electronic devices, such as iPads or iPods afford ELLs endless prospects for learning all the language skills.

access to technology. Introduced in the 1980's, digital stories have become an effective method of teaching in the secondary English classroom. Digital storytelling promotes literacy in media, reading, and writing, while giving students the ability to personally connect with traditional texts. Used as an effective technology in the English classroom, digital stories can guide a student into the realm of critical and analytical thinking while actively engaged with their peers in the learning process. Digital storytelling is a successful tool and supportive system for

ELLs struggling to read and write in the traditional paper and pencil manner.

Woven intricately together, voice-overs, sound effects, music, videos, and still images make up the foundations of a digital story in which the student uses age-old steps in writing the story. (Rule, 2010) As the creation of a story has changed (Rule, 2010), digital storytelling combines the old literacy of traditional storytelling with new digital literacy (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). Digital stories help the learner to make autobiographical connections with

course content such as themes, motifs, and symbols. To illustrate, a student studying the theme of heroism in the *Odyssey* could create a digital story of their own personal account with someone they consider to be a hero. In the end, the student would be able to make an autobiographical connection with the literature they are learning, making the work more memorable and meaningful to them, as language learners must be able to do for successful language acquisition.

In 2008, Sadik found that students who produced their own stories were encouraged to think more intensely about the meaning of the story and personalize their experience in relation to the meaning of something they are learning about. Students were also found to be able to more effectively clarify what they had known about a specific story or topic before and during the course of actively developing and communicating their own narratives or stories (Sadik, 2008). Digital storytelling promotes literacy on all levels; students articulate experience, thesis, audience, and performance in their creation of a story (Rule, 2010). As literacy has extended to reading, writing, and media, a digital story gives students who are struggling with writing traditional texts an alternative for success and growth (Sylvester & Greenidge).

Struggling writers usually are not very strategic writers; thus, for ELLs who are struggling to write in English, the mechanics of putting together a digital story may help them to become more strategic by promoting other areas of language use rather than just focusing on their writing skills, like traditional story writing does. In addition, digital stories lessen explicit flaws in areas such as spelling, grammar, and handwriting that may discourage a student from excelling in his or her writing (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). As a supportive tool for reading and writing comprehension, digital stories can help ELLs; digital stories provide ELL's with support and cues they need to be able to connect the written text to the language being heard out

loud, helping them to read independently and construct their own interpretations of the story.

With a digital video, ELL's are able to listen to pronunciation of words while watching visual cues that go along with words, promoting their literacy of the English language.

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