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Teaching English Language Development (ELD)

“It was really difficult because I couldn’t watch TV or chat with people, I couldn’t just pick up a book and read it. And so, it was really really hard,” says Lisa Gallo, a Mountain View High School English teacher who has lived abroad in Italy. Moving to Italy in 1991 for six months, she had to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. The Internet wasn’t popular in 1991, so she couldn’t access the life that she had before moving to Italy from the U.S. because nothing really was in English. At that moment, she realized how difficult it is to completely immerse herself in a new language and a new culture. After working at many American international schools and junior colleges as an English Language Development (ELD) teacher, Gallo noticed that her training in teaching ELD would be really helpful for English learners. Her experience in Italy also assisted her through her 29 year career in teaching ELD.

While ELD is also known as ESL (English as a Second Language), ELD is, according to Gallo, a better program that helps immigrant English learners who do not have a strong English learning background to develop in a fully English environment. ELD provides appropriate learning materials and levels for students instead of assuming all students are already somewhat proficient at English like ESL does. “A strong ELD program is absolutely essential to each school’s effort to close the achievement gap because it equips students with the English language skills they need for content learning” (SCOE). Some challenges for students that would occur

daily without ELD's help include social and emotional challenges (or even a combination of the two).

One challenge Gallo had during her teaching was the high expectations for ELD students from both adults and students themselves. "When the expectations for ELD students are so high, but students don't really have the time that they might need to learn the language," she says, "often students and grownups expect the students to learn it really quickly, but that's just not practical" (Gallo).

According to Education Week, "A landmark study of California ELLs in 2000 found students in both bilingual and sheltered English programs typically took three to five years to become proficient in oral English and five to seven years to become proficient in academic English" (Sparks). With the high expectations from students and grownups, Gallo had the pressure of helping students achieve those expectations. She needed to tackle all the minor and major difficulties in a limited time to help students achieve their goals in terms of getting better at English, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, Gallo said those challenges were not bad. All the challenges helped her to get better with coping with problems she and the students had. Those challenges helped her improve little by little every day as an ELD teacher.

Gallo has also seen students having challenges in other areas. The biggest emotional challenge she saw among students was the students' homesickness. Generally, it is the parent's decision to immigrate because of better opportunities, better education, and better resources. Rarely does the child have the will to leave his or her hometown because of years of connection to their hometown. In addition, students are essentially forced to be comfortable with a new

language and a new culture. “I’m not happy with this decision because my parents decided to move to the U.S. when I was 17,” says Janessa Nga, an ELD student, “and everything like my life, my friends, my family are all stable in Hong Kong. And I don’t want to start a new life here because it takes time and it is also hard to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture.”

Circumstances Nga has can apply to most of the ELD students. Being hundreds and thousands of miles away from their hometowns, students suffer emotionally by trying to immerse themselves in a new country as much as possible. Even if they seem to be adjusted to the language and the culture, being homesick will still be a part of their lives.

Besides facing numerous challenges, Gallo also helps the students improve academically. She points out that it is difficult for her to read the writing of a person whose first language is not English. Many times, students translate directly from their own languages. They could be using the wrong words or the wrong grammatical structure. When a situation like this happens, Gallo would help the student to identify the problems and adjust the problems. “The opportunity to talk to students as well as not have it just be like online or adjusting writing is really important,” she says. Gallo says the best parts are the student having a moment of realization that they have improved and learned something from the initially confusing text. It helped her to stay more focused on teaching as well as to feel that she had helped the students accomplish something. As students experience more with the language and work more with others, they find it easier to practice their English.

For Gallo, being a good listener is the key factor in helping students to overcome emotional and social challenges. It is, however, very difficult for her because she is usually a talker. Sometimes she needs to teach a class or another class might be coming in, and that can be

difficult for her to have a conversation with a student and answer the student's questions.

Therefore, she patiently practices listening to the students whenever they need to talk as much as possible. Gallo also mentions that she can stand in students' shoes because she knows what learning a new language in another country feels like. That helps her remember the time when she was feeling hopeless, stupid, and everyone looked at her as a pain in Italy. She couldn't truly be herself and function normally in her daily life in a situation where barely anyone spoke English. Gallo's empathy helps her to understand what students exactly need and how to assist them through defeating those emotional and social challenges.

When teaching students, Gallo expects the students to challenge themselves, to do something difficult. She always hopes students do not give up and work towards understanding the language and the culture. When Gallo lived in Italy, she forced herself to watch TV shows in Italian, listen to music in Italian, read books in Italian, and have conversations with people in Italian. All of these helped her to pick up the language much faster because she was only surrounded by Italian. Therefore, she suggests ELD students practice English with a variety of media. "You just have to completely immerse yourself," she says, "find a TV show you like that is only English, find a movie that you like and watch it over and over again, listen to music, figure out somebody to hangout with that only speaks English. And your English will get better." An adult English learner, Chrisian Chang, has also been learning English through reading different types of writing. "I just keep speaking, listening, and writing. And I even try to read a lot of English novels, journals, newspapers... any kinds of articles, even from all those articles from my working environment."(Chang).

Being a kid who has to start a new life in a new country with little knowledge of the language and the culture is much more exhausting and terrifying than what many people may think. Thus, ELD teachers are especially helpful for ELD students both academically and socially. With the help of ELD teachers, students are able to get more familiar with U.S. culture faster and learn English at a suitable level. ELD teachers have the role of making ELD students feel safe with their professional teaching skills. As Gallo says, “everyone finds it difficult to speak a language that doesn’t seem natural.” Students might be scared or embarrassed to practice English, but ELD teachers can guide students towards defeating those challenges. In addition, many schools are not providing enough resources for students to improve their language skills. According to a research from NPR, “no matter where they go to school, most ELLs are struggling because they have little or no access to quality instruction tailored to their needs” (NPR). Therefore, if more teachers can understand what the students are truly suffering and learn more about how to assist them to get past the hard time, learning a new language and a new culture will seem much happier and easier for the students.

To an ELD student, Gallo would like to say, “Don’t give up, don’t lose hope. It’ll take time. But the more you surround yourself with the language the more it’ll become natural to you.”

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