

Initiating the Third Wave for English Learners: Teaching Self-Advocacy

GATESOL Journal
2022, Vol. 32(2), pp. 3–13
doi:10.52242/gatesol.168
ISSN: 2331-6845

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Abstract

In special education, self-advocacy intertwines with self-empowerment. Special education teachers integrate self-advocacy skills into the curriculum to support their students' efforts toward self-determination. In contrast, teachers of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) are encouraged to advocate for their English learners but self-advocacy has received scant attention in the ESOL field. As the English learner population in K–12 public schools steadily rises, it is increasingly urgent for ESOL educators to seek culturally responsive solutions that support their students' language, academic, and socio-emotional development. With a brief review of literature from the fields of special education and Disabilities studies, authors delineate components of self-advocacy and apply them to a self-advocacy unit that supports English learners in acquiring the knowledge and language they need to develop their own form of self-advocacy.

Keywords

advocacy, self-advocacy, English learners, K–12 education, equity

Introduction

In Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, a 12-year-old child of color sat in the back of a church solving math problems while his parents listened to the civil rights activist, Martin Luther King, Jr. Young Freeman Hrabowski III wasn't paying much attention to the meeting until he heard Dr. King say that the children needed to participate in a peaceful demonstration. Their being directly involved in the protest would be more powerful, he said. That evening, Freeman told his parents he wanted to participate. His parents firmly responded, "Absolutely not!" It was too dangerous. Freeman persisted to advocate for himself and by the next morning he had gained his parents' support to participate in what would be a life-changing experience for him. He could not have realized that

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his early self-advocacy act would pave the way to a series of leadership roles that would eventually lead to him becoming President of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) where he continued his work by collaborating with others to create an environment to bolster under-represented students. The ripple effect of his early self-advocacy can be seen throughout the campus and beyond.

Just as Freeman Hrabowski was taught by Martin Luther King, Jr., MLK successfully learned peaceful resistance to affect social change from Gandhi. Inherent in the models of Gandhi and King, leaders are called to not only champion social justice and equity within society, but to also guide individuals to stand up for themselves and for others. Gandhi and King gathered like-minded others to assist them in leading and educating many more people how to advocate for their own rights and needs. Hrabowski notes that the most important lesson he learned from his experience in 1963 was that “children can be empowered to take ownership of their education” (Hrabowski, 2013, 3:54). In a similar way, educators of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) can empower students by teaching them to self-advocate.

Background

The concept of self-advocacy gained attention in the late 1960s through the People First movement in Sweden when people with disabilities wanted to speak for themselves and make their own decisions about their lives (People First, n.d.). As People First made its way to the United States in the 1970s, U.S. society was already moving away from institutionalizing people because of their disabilities and toward providing people with self-help skills to live independently, creating energy around self-determination and self-advocacy activism. Building on the civil rights movement of the 1950s–60s, the self-advocacy movement for people with developmental disabilities led to legislation and protections to ensure continued opportunities for self-determination from birth to adulthood. (Dowse, 2001; Fenn & Scior, 2019; Pennell, 2001; Test et al., 2005; Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

Currently, special education teachers and service providers are required to foster self-advocacy skills as part of supporting their students’ efforts toward self-determination. Websites, curriculum, and instructional materials are now readily accessible for individuals with disabilities so they can become resolute self-advocates who know their strengths and weaknesses, set goals for their future, discuss their goals with others and lead their yearly Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Denying equitable treatment to anyone with a disability in school, employment or society has professional and legal consequences.

Despite the potential for English learners (ELs) to benefit from developing self-advocacy skills to address their own learning needs, self-advocacy has received scant scholarly attention in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). The connection is not necessarily obvious, since teaching self-advocacy skills to English learners requires an acute awareness of the learner’s English language proficiency and potential cultural obstacles for the individual EL relating to speaking up for one’s needs.

To address linguistic and cultural challenges regarding self-advocacy for ELs, we have drawn from our experience in Special Education, TESOL, and teacher education, to outline successfully implemented activities for developing self-advocacy skills within K–12 curricula. Using a conceptual framework for self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005) to bolster first author, Emily Day’s (Day & Prado, 2020) self-advocacy unit, we examine culturally responsive ways to guide English learners toward self-advocacy and consider the potential impact on society that promoting self-advocacy could have for the future.

Self-Advocacy Defined in Special Education

Self-advocacy is an individualized, iterative process. For a person without disabilities, self-advocacy develops incrementally as the person gains the maturity to speak for themselves. For an individual with a disability, self-advocacy happens developmentally as they gain the ability to make choices independently and express their wants or needs for the future. In special education literature, self-advocacy is defined and researched as an extension of advocacy. Pennell (2001) defines self-advocacy as “speaking up, speaking out, and speaking loud” (p. 223), describing the process as knowing your rights and responsibilities, standing up for them, and making your own choices. Self-advocacy intertwines with self-empowerment and self-determination. Inherent in self-advocacy is a systemic shift of power from the system to the individual. Reusen (1996) defined self-advocacy as “an individual’s ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs and rights. It assumes the ability to make informed decisions” (p. 50).

Petri et al. (2020) used “practice theory” (p. 207) to expand the definition into five major types of activities that self-advocates, parents, and professionals participate. The five activities of self-advocates included “informing and being informed, using media, supporting each other/solidarity in the community, speaking up, and bureaucratic duties” (p. 216). Ryan and Griffiths (2015) described self-advocacy from a transformational learning perspective meaning that individuals who self-advocate increase leadership capabilities and have new self-concepts, which bolsters their confidence to develop prominent voices affecting academic and local communities. Collective voices of self-advocates cause increased awareness on governmental boards and committees. These governing bodies make decisions and change rules and policies emphasizing the impact self-advocacy has on us all.

Conceptual Framework for Self-Advocacy

Related to special education is Disability studies, which examines disability as a concept and explores the societal consequences for individuals with disabilities. Recognizing the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination, research indicates that when young people practice self-advocacy at school in the presence of supportive mentors, they are better prepared to self-advocate independently. However, students need explicit instruction in self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Recognizing a gap in the literature regarding instructional strategies for self-advocacy and its implementation, Test et al. (2005) developed a conceptual framework for self-advocacy. Reviewing research on self-advocacy for people with disabilities that occurred between 1972–2003, the researchers identified 26 distinct self-advocacy definitions. From these definitions, Test et al. (2005) determined that the four most frequently used characteristics to describe self-advocacy were: 1) an educational goal, 2) a civil rights movement, 3) a component of self-determination, and 4) a skill or act.

Building on these four descriptors, Test et al. (2005) designed a framework for self-advocacy with four primary components for instruction, 1) knowledge of self, 2) knowledge of rights, 3) communication, and 4) leadership. Knowledge of self requires introspection for the individual to recognize their own strengths, dreams, goals, interests, learning needs, and responsibilities. Knowledge of rights entails understanding relevant laws and policies to identify the individual’s own rights. Communication includes pragmatic skills such as persuasion, assertion, compromise, or negotiation, as well as additional communication skills such as problem-solving, listening skills, and interpreting body language. The leadership component calls for the

individual to understand group dynamics, the roles of group members, and to have the skills to participate in a group.

Test et al. (2005) emphasized that teachers can adapt the framework's teachable components to meet their students' learning needs. Explicit instruction in self-advocacy can be taught both situationally as well as in lessons during group instruction. When teachers take the professional stance to develop their students' self-advocacy skills, they look for incidental opportunities to coach students through self-advocacy. As with the teacher stance if bullying is encountered, the teacher would coach the student(s) through the situation, and then guide them through self-advocacy practice as needed.

The Need for Self-Advocacy in ESOL

Within TESOL literature, Staehr Fenner's (2014) presentation of *scaffolded advocacy* most closely resembles the concept of self-advocacy for English learners. By applying the pedagogical metaphor of scaffolding to describe advocacy work, Staehr Fenner (2014) explains ways for teachers to determine how much support an EL or their family needs at the beginning and when to encourage independence by removing the support. By analyzing individual EL variables, teachers can determine whether more intensive or less intensive advocacy work is needed in the beginning. After assessing need, ESOL professionals gradually remove support systems as the EL/family gains confidence. The important distinction is that TESOL advocacy work, even scaffolded, assumes that the learner, once independent, will start self-advocating, but removing the support does not guarantee that the learner has the skills needed to self-advocate.

However, self-advocacy for an English learner is not defined only by age or the ability to state future dreams. Besides developing English language proficiency, individual variables (Staehr Fenner, 2014) need to be integrated into the self-advocacy learning process. Because the concept of self-advocacy is culturally bound, ELs need to consider how to integrate elements of self-advocacy into their own acculturation process, and what their own self-advocacy would look like. Once an individual has the maturity as well as the language skills and cultural knowledge to actively participate in their environment, they can choose to self-advocate instead having others advocate for them. In this way, promoting self-advocacy for ELs builds on Staehr Fenner's (2014) scaffolded advocacy by extending the process to explicitly teach ELs the knowledge and communication skills that promote agency and self-determination.

Developing Self-Advocacy in English Learners

Complementing the conceptual framework for self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005), we propose a set of four teaching activities to develop self-advocacy skills in ELs (Day & Prado, 2020). Although originally designed and taught as a unit, several activities could be integrated as standalone complements with previously developed lesson plans. The self-advocacy descriptors of educational goal, civil rights movement, component of self-determination and as skill or act serve as reliable but flexible categories for aligning these activities with content curriculum. For example, educational goals for EL self-advocacy align or overlay K12 social studies topics, such as exploring multiple voices from the 1950s–60s civil rights movement. Advocacy activities afford students opportunities to practice verbal and written language skills as they learn self-advocacy skills.

As Staehr Fenner (2014) recommends, advocacy—or teaching self-advocacy—is most effective when teachers identify the EL's background variables as soon as possible. Knowing your learners is a long-held best practice in the TESOL field (TESOL, 2018). Individual variables

include, but are not limited to, home country, home province, state, or region, home city, town, or village, home language(s), cultural background, learner age, English language proficiency, length of time in the U.S., formal educational opportunities, learning preferences, the student's current access to resources, interests, gifts and talents, special needs, or unresolved trauma. ESOL educators gather some of this information by using an intake protocol and taking a needs assessment with their learners. Gaining clarity about the student's cultural background, including cultural norms and behaviors, is necessary to afford the student opportunities to bridge culture gaps when practicing self-advocacy. However, cultures are complex and fluid. Other students who are originally from the same country may have a different social status than the new student due to factors such as ethnic differences, religious preferences, or geopolitical tensions. Credible online sources can provide up-to-date information, followed up with a culturally sensitive conversation with the student's family. In the classroom, teachers can assign a cultural autobiography to learn about the culture from the student's perspective (TESOL, 2018).

Each teaching activity integrates one or more of the self-advocacy descriptors and one or more of the four teachable components from the conceptual framework for self-advocacy (Test et al., 2005). Each section also includes an example lesson from Emily's secondary special education classroom that included English learners. These classroom examples include instructional strategies for students to learn laws that support English Learners, the importance of self-advocating, and how to lead their *Individualized-Limited English Proficiency* (I-LEP) plan. In the unit, students develop presentations to lead their I-LEP meetings. The lessons were taught to a small group of learners who have both *Individual Education Plans* (IEP) and I-LEP plans. While Emily draws experience from a high school classroom, several activities offer implementation suggestions that can be adapted for all grade levels.

Teaching Self-Advocacy

A compelling story, such as the vignette, makes a powerful tool to introduce any of the four components in social studies, civics, history, literature, life skills, or health lessons. Since stories exemplify and contextualize the teachable components, ELs can use journaling activities, exit polls, or small group discussions to draw from their background knowledge to make personal connections. Perhaps a student has been inspired to action like 12-year-old Freeman Hrabowski (2013) who was stirred by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech to join the civil rights movement in 1963. A student may remember a time when they persuaded their parents to do something unusual, just as Freeman did when he gained his reluctant parents' permission to join the dangerous Children's March of 1963. The following lessons seek to inspire, challenge, and support ELs as they decide what self-advocacy could look like for them.

Negotiate Cultures

Unlike the other sections, Negotiate Cultures was not taught as a separate lesson within Emily's original self-advocacy sequence, so there are no lesson details as there are in the other four sections. Instead, this section is intended to raise awareness among teachers of the significant, but sometimes invisible, role that culture plays in developing self-advocacy skills among ELs. Teachers are encouraged to analyze their self-advocacy lessons through the lens cultural responsiveness. ELs who acknowledge and value their cultures, can learn 1) to recognize personal (cultural) needs and wants, 2) to communicate effectively within and across cultures, and 3) to develop leadership skills. With the freedom to navigate their cultures, they have space to build their own culturally appropriate version of self-determination.

The interplay of culture and self-advocacy. It is important to remember that self-advocacy and self-determination originated within individualist cultures. If home cultures are more collectivist, familial expectations for appropriate behavior in school may confuse ELs or cause stress because principles of self-advocacy contradict their background knowledge and home culture expectations. Teaching self-advocacy in multicultural settings involves negotiating the differences in individualistic and collectivistic value systems (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

Before teaching self-advocacy, inform yourself about your ELs' cultures (Staehr Fenner, 2014; TESOL, 2018). Ask your ELs to confirm culturally influenced communication styles to avoid stereotyping. For example, pose an advocacy issue to your students and ask them to explain how they would approach it in their home cultures. Ask why, when necessary. In this way, you are learning from your students how to be communicatively competent when interacting with people from their community and culture.

Whether an ELs' heritage is from a country outside the United States, or their family has lived in the U.S. for years, individual variables play an important role in the make-up of the EL's current home culture. Individualist and collectivist cultures is not a binary concept. Different cultures across the world fall on a spectrum between two end points. For example, both collectivist and individualist cultures value extended family. However, the role that each person plays differs within the family system. Collectivist cultures perceive an individual to be an interlocking part of the extended family. The extended family unit nurtures and protects all members and each family member prioritizes the well-being of the family system over conflicting individual interests or activities. In contrast, the extended family in an individualistic culture is more loosely connected. Individuals pursue unique interests and focus on developing nuclear families. Finally, within each category, some collectivist cultures exhibit many individualist characteristics and vice versa. Most of the world's countries (each country having multiple subcultures) exhibit more collectivist characteristics. While the United States has many subcultures, scholars recognize it overall as one of the world's most individualist cultures (Oxford, 2017).

Culturally responsive teaching. When ELs learn about self-advocacy skills, verbally describing their feelings and experiences of marginalization may be difficult, especially if self-determination through self-advocacy conflicts with cultural values. Art teacher educators, Wellman and Bey (2015) used interactive group projects to implicitly strengthen confidence in refugee ELs between 10 and 17 years old and from 13 countries across Asia and Africa. At the beginning of the program, they realized the children got lost between school and home or got bullied at school, and urgently needed self-advocacy skills. To address this need, they created a small group activity in which groups competed to build the tallest tower possible with their own shoes, requiring the children to practice the self-advocacy skills, such as leadership as they collaborated with group members, and communication as they negotiated, listened, and problem-solved to build the tower. After infusing communication and leadership skills into the art curriculum for 8 weeks, Wellman and Bey (2015) reported higher levels of confidence in the refugee children who practiced self-advocacy skills in a culturally responsive way.

Inspire

Lesson one aims to inspire students with multi-media stories of individuals who initiated significant societal change by speaking up for civil rights of marginalized communities. The goal is not to teach the laws but to tap into students' knowledge of self and to expand their knowledge

of rights by modeling the technique of speaking up for oneself and analyzing the guaranteed rights stated First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, particularly the right to free speech.

Lesson one overview. Show your students what achievements are possible through multimedia content (e.g., video clips, movies, books, podcasts) that highlight the advocacy and self-advocacy work of well-known individuals such as Cesar Chavez, Malcolm X., Malala Yousafzai, Ruby Bridges, Aung San Suu Kyi, Harvey Milk, or lesser well-known success stories, such as Freeman Hrabowski's. Ask students to identify and explain unfair treatment and discriminatory practices they listened to, read, or watched in the learning material. Tell stories of times when you have advocated for someone or supported someone in advocating for themselves. Together with your students, define terms relating to being an advocate such as advocacy, self-advocacy, self-determination, and empowerment. Every leader mentioned is known for advancing civil rights, aligning with content areas of history, social studies, or current events, such as Myanmar's activist, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Pre-teaching key vocabulary. For words such as, advocacy, self-advocacy, self-determination, and empowerment use a graphic organizer with picture support determined by students' English language proficiency (ELP). In pairs, students practice making sentences with a partner for each word and speaking the sentence to the class. Involve students in the heads-up game in which students hold a vocabulary word on their forehead and their teammates verbally help the card-holder guess the vocabulary word or use pictures as additional support.

Experiencing advocacy stories. Before sharing each multi-media story, provide a graphic organizer for students to identify Who, Problem Faced, What Advocacy Looks Like, Results/What Happened and My Story (optional, since not all advocacy stories will resonate with all ELs). Learners can use their graphic organizers to identify key elements and then write a summary of each story. Adapt summaries for various language levels by including a variety of paragraph frames. Share the story as many times as needed for all learners to grasp the main ideas. Learners could work individually on the graphic organizer or paired with peers who have higher levels of English proficiency.

Reviewing the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Decide whether to use the original wording of the First Amendment or a credible paraphrased version. If needed, pre-teach key vocabulary pertaining to the First Amendment. For example, students can develop digital or paper individualized dictionaries or word cards. Personalized dictionaries often include the L1 translation, a drawing or picture of the word, L2 synonyms, an example sentence. Learners can also include the part of speech, a semantic map, collocations, and derivative information, such as prefixes and suffixes (Hedge, 2000).

Depending on age and ELP, conduct a choral reading or other read aloud of the First Amendment. As a class, complete a concept map of the rights stated in the First Amendment, and focus on the right to free speech. Ask students to explain "free speech" in their own words. Explain the cultural importance of free speech in the United States. Because the constitution protects the right to speak, society encourages individuals to speak up for what they want or need.

Adapting for young learners. To introduce self-advocacy, consider using a digital tool to create a short video or doing a short skit with puppets. The video or skit illustrates that when one person decides what someone else wants or needs, the speaker can make a mistake. For instance, two people go to an ice cream shop, and one person orders chocolate ice cream for both. The other person may be allergic to chocolate or would rather have strawberry ice cream that day. Discuss how it is important to communicate for yourself instead of others speaking for you.

Teach the Laws

Lesson two aims to deepen students' understanding of their right to be treated fairly. Using the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the baseline, students determine the need for the passage of the Civil Rights Act and explore additional court cases and laws that continue to develop this right. The educational goal is for students to demonstrate an understanding of their legal rights as individuals who live in the United States.

Lesson two overview. Studying a primary source brings history alive. Share the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as the original document, a summary. If supplementing with a summary, provide a written copy of the original text for comparison, so students can analyze how the words prohibit, discrimination, race, color, religion, or national origin are used. Ask students to explain why the Civil Rights Act was passed to protect people regardless of the country where they were born, the language they speak, the color of their skin or their religious preference. Discuss how the Civil Rights Act established a legal precedent for other important court decisions, and legislative actions to address unfair treatment. Examples include, but are not limited to, *Lau v. Nichols*, *Castañeda v. Pickard*, The Lemon Grove Incident, and the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

Previewing and reviewing key vocabulary. With graphic organizers or the heads-up vocabulary game, review advocacy, self-advocacy, self-determination, and empowerment. If using the personalized dictionary, ask students to explore this lesson's vocabulary that includes prohibit, discrimination, race, color, religion, and national origin.

Contextualizing the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Instead of focusing on the individual activists from lesson one, select excerpts from children's or young adult literature or poetry. Use art, music, photography, or short documentary clips that describe unfair treatment to certain groups of people before the Civil Rights Act came into existence, such as the Lemon Grove Incident. Use a cause and effect (fishbone) graphic organizer for pairs of students to record the examples of unfair treatment (causes), leading to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (effect).

Exploring additional protective actions. As time allows, introduce students to later examples such as *Lau v. Nichols*, *Castañeda v. Pickard*, and the American Disabilities Act (ADA). Depending on age and ELP, students could work in pairs or small groups to research additional court cases and legislative actions, and report back to the whole group with a summary and/or illustration.

Adapting for young learners. Use children's literature, art, music, or games to explore the difference between fair and equal.

Practice the Difficult Conversations

The goal of lesson three is for students to practice being both an advocate for others and a self-advocate. As a class, in small groups, and individually, students are given situations and are asked to brainstorm situations in which self-advocacy is needed.

Lesson three overview. When practicing a difficult conversation, one goal is to provide students with appropriate language for a respectful discussion. One suggestion is to select sentence starters that are appropriate for your learners' age and situation. Examples for agreeing, paraphrasing, and disagreeing are *I agree with ___ because ___*. *What I hear you say is ___*. *I see it differently because ___*. With support, students can create dialogues, stories or role plays about various topics that relate to the students' situation. Sample topics include: 1) asking the teacher for help or for an accommodation in class, 2) addressing unfair treatment at work or school, or 3) responding to someone who made a hurtful remark. Once students are familiar with the language, learners perform the dialogues or role plays in groups of two or three to practice advocating for each other and self-advocating to peers.

Preparing to self-advocate in school. For their self-advocacy project, students can lead their next I-LEP meeting. Provide sample presentations for the whole class to watch. Ask students for their reactions to the meeting, particularly about the language used to request support or accommodations. Offer organizational tips to structure the requests, such as 1) describe the need and why it is important. 2) Give an example of when that need was not met. Describe what happened and how it made you feel. 3) Describe what you wish had happened and why it matters. 4) Suggest how teachers could support you in making that wish a reality for next time (Baines, 2020). Besides general project guidelines, students will need additional documents, such as feasible accommodations and other support options as well as copies of their own ACCESS test scores. Provide the remainder of class and a second class-period to work on their projects and to practice their structured requests with partners or small groups.

Design a Self-Advocacy Plan

The goal of lesson four is for students to identify situations in their own lives in which self-advocacy is important and to develop a plan. Aligning with this goal is the culmination of their advocacy project, leading their I-LEP meeting. This project requires students to know themselves, specifically what support they need from their teachers, and their rights within the I-LEP process. Leading their I-LEP project requires students to develop communication skills and to understand group dynamics, as well as participate within the group.

Lesson four overview. Guide learners to identify a need in their own life that would benefit from self-advocacy. Remaining mindful of all cultural perspectives and norms, talk through their chosen situations with small groups of students and ask them to brainstorm with each other ways to manage the situations. Guide your ELs on choosing and planning a course of action. In future classes, students can practice their plans together through conversation, new projects, and role-play. During part of this class, they will role play their I-LEP meeting, their final advocacy project, in preparation for leading the official I-LEP meeting.

Developing an advocacy plan. As a class, brainstorm topics where self-advocacy would be useful. Then ask students to write a list of needs in their own life that they wish to self-advocate

for. Encourage them to use their notes and graphic organizers from earlier lessons for ideas. Each student should select one need and write it on a fresh graphic organizer for small group discussion. Before sharing their topic with the group, ask students to consider cultural ramifications and make notes on their graphic organizer. When students are ready to share, they take turns collaborating with group members to identify which skills, such as knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication or leadership would be most useful for that situation. Circulate through the groups to offer advice as needed.

Preparing for the I-LEP meeting. In whole group, review the I-LEP meeting process and provide an agenda. Review the list of likely participants—other than the student—such as the assistant principal, counselor, ESOL teacher, content/classroom teacher(s), family member, and interpreter. Explain the purpose for the participant’s attendance. Invite available members of the I-LEP team to join the role plays and assign students remaining roles. Give each student an opportunity to lead the role play meeting.

Self-Advocacy in English Learners

After completing the unit on self-advocacy, Emily interviewed her students to learn that the English learners who participated in the four lessons listed above were able to explain the meaning of advocacy, self-advocacy, and empower. Several students said that they felt they were more likely to meet the goals they set for themselves than goals set by their teacher. Students showed an increased positive attitude towards attending their Individualized Limited English Proficient(I-LEP) meetings. I-LEP meetings were student-led instead of being teacher-led. The positive attitude change included being more confident to share their culture, academic successes, difficulties, and goals with others. Students demonstrated the leadership skills to lead their I-LEP meetings, reflecting individual growth within the four primary concepts of the self-advocacy framework: 1) knowledge of self, 2) knowledge of rights, 3) communication, and 4) leadership (Test et al., 2005).

The digital presentations reflected the student’s individual culture, including what they needed as an English Learner to be successful in the classroom as well as their plans for improving their ACCESS scores and entering the adult world upon graduation (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008; Test et al., 2005). Students used their multifaceted language skills to describe their backgrounds, their progress in learning English, their current proficiency levels, and what they needed to improve so they could meet their goals. Through these lessons, ELs learned to speak up for their home cultures, their current experiences, and their plans for the future while practicing listening, speaking, reading, and writing and developing 21st-century skills.

Conclusion

History tells us that the greatest change for equity will come when students, the English learners themselves, find their voices. Systemic change will occur when English Learners advocate for themselves. Whether ESOL educators work in a school with children, a university, or in the community, they need to speak up for rights and give voice for others. It is also imperative for professionals to understand that self-advocacy is the culmination of advocacy and a desired pedagogical practice. Professionals should not stop advocating for others. Instead, educators can strengthen their advocacy work by actively educating English learners in the process and promoting EL self-determination through self-advocacy. Our job as teachers and practitioners is not only to teach language development, but to lead students to find their own voice, so they can speak up, to be their own advocate, and change their world.

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