

Establishing a Welcoming Environment for English Language Learners

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Abstract

English language learners (ELLs) require a welcoming and safe environment to access their education. Without a welcoming environment, ELLs can fall victim to the stereotype threat that results in academic underperformance and poor emotional wellbeing. As ELLs are students in all content areas, the overarching research question presented here is: How can teachers create a welcoming environment for ELLs. This capstone aims to provide teachers, administration, and school staff with tools to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs in all subject areas. The literature reviewed for the capstone discusses themes like modifications, relationships, and administrative support. The professional development (PD) of this capstone educates teachers, administration, and school staff on the importance and practices for a welcoming environment, as well as tools to achieve that goal. The expected outcome of the PD is that all participants develop a deeper understanding of the research question and identify ways in which they can combat the issue in their classrooms and to promote academic success for ELLs.

Keywords: English Language Learner, ELL, welcoming environment, stereotype threat theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Establishing a welcoming classroom environment for English Language Learners (ELLs) is essential to their success. This environment is crucial to the language acquisition and the academic success of ELLs. Many ELLs face major changes like moving to a new country, adapting to a new culture, and navigating interactions with new peers in addition to learning a new language. A classroom environment that is grounded in respect for students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds can support students as they acclimate to their new life. This welcoming environment gives them the confidence and risk-taking attitude needed to acquire language and succeed in all content areas.

There is a constantly growing number of English Language Learners in the United States public school system. In 2015, 9.5% of students in the United States were English Language Learners. This number is higher than the 8.1% recorded in 2000 and will only continue to grow (McFarland et al., 2018). To support this growing number of ELLs, teachers should be informed of the best practices that support the social-emotional and academic wellbeing of these students.

The overarching question for the capstone is How can teachers create a welcoming environment for ELLs? There are several terms that will be used throughout this Capstone. The first is welcoming classroom environment. While there are several factors that contribute to this environment, this can generally be defined as positive interactions with students and families that are grounded in respect and with the intent of student growth. Reference of this environment is not limited to the physical space of the ELL classroom. Instead, it refers to any interaction between the teacher, student, and community regarding the ELL students and their academic or social-emotional wellbeing.

Significance of the Problem

At the school level, the issue is of great importance because it establishes the overall view of ELLs educational experiences. When ELLs feel welcomed and accepted in their schools, they feel confident and engaged in their learning process. Students are more likely to learn in an environment in which they feel that their culture and experiences are valued. Additionally, when this message of acceptance is portrayed to all students, not just ELLs, tolerance for all is established in the school.

The issue is also relevant at the state level, as this is where teacher practices and trainings should be managed and established. By recognizing the importance of a welcoming environment for ELLs at the state level, a uniform level of support can be established for all students without variation across districts. Additionally, addressing the issue at a state level can ensure that ELLs have access to the resources, instructional support and cultural support systems needed to promote their academic success.

It has been found that ELLs benefit from classroom environments that promote the use of both their homes and target languages (Bauer, 2011). In addition to this multilingualism, teachers should create a classroom environment that incorporates benevolent relationships with families and positive classroom practices (Hill, 2020). With these factors present, a welcoming classroom environment is established. Ultimately, it has been found that ELLs whose teachers have established this environment are more successful both in the development of English and in other content areas (Alaei & Ameri, 2022).

The establishment of a welcoming classroom environment for ELLs can help to mitigate the linguistic challenges that students face. Research supports the notion that in addition to responding to the cultural needs of ELLs, teachers must also respond to the linguistic needs of

students (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). These linguistic needs can be met through methods like translanguaging. Translanguaging is a practice in which the students' home languages are intertwined into instruction. Students experience both their home languages and English in the classroom. Adams (2020) finds that translanguaging can be used to both establish a welcoming environment and promote literacy in the ELL classroom. Through translanguaging, students feel that their home language is being valued, rather than being replaced by English. Additionally, translanguaging supports the academic growth of students in both languages and makes students eager to learn.

Establishing a welcoming environment for ELLs can also alleviate some of the cultural adjustments that students face in their new surroundings. To help students adjust culturally, teachers should inform themselves of the backgrounds of their students. This includes their countries of origin and some of their cultural practices. This knowledge should inform the establishment of a welcoming classroom environment. Teachers can incorporate things like personal stories, texts from or about students' home countries, and classroom discussions to create this environment (Cavalieri, 2012). These practices help students to feel that the cultures and languages of their home countries are not being replaced. This can help students to adapt to their new environment and make them feel inclined to learn.

A welcoming classroom environment also involves assessing ELLs in a way that is fitting towards their needs. Teachers need to be informed on the individual needs of their students and create meaningful assessments using this knowledge. These assessments should help students to feel successful in their language acquisition and content development. While students must feel successful, the expectations for these students should not be lowered. A welcoming classroom environment is grounded in making students feel value and capable of success. By lowering

expectations, ELLs are given the false idea that they are not capable of the same successes as their peers, which is certainly not the case. To assess students at a high level while retaining this high standard, teachers should differentiate assessment and provide individualized support to ELLs (Figueroa Murphy & Torff, 2019).

Purpose

The purpose of the professional development will be to inform teachers on the best ways to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. The professional development will be fitting for teachers of all content areas, as all teachers are instructors of ELLs. The professional development will establish the factors that define classroom environment and inform teachers on how these factors should be catered to the needs of their ELLs. Additionally, the PD will contain a brief overview of how this welcoming environment will positively impact the language acquisition and academic development of students. The anticipated outcome of the PD is teachers who are informed on the importance and best practices to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs.

The professional development aims to inform teachers in all content areas of the ways in which they can support their ELLs through a welcoming classroom environment. Teachers will also have an understanding that this environment can be integrated into content instruction and used in some way on a daily basis to support their students. In establishing this welcoming environment, teachers will find that students start to grow in all content areas.

Summary

Creating a welcoming classroom environment for ELLs is crucial to their language acquisition and academic development. A welcoming classroom environment that includes positive interactions with both students and families helps students overcome linguistic

challenges, adapt to cultural differences, and feel successful in their new language. By establishing an environment that is informed by student background, teachers can help to promote the success of ELLs.

In chapter 2, the capstone addresses the literature on the issue. This includes research on the factors that establish a classroom environment, how teachers can use these factors to cater to the needs of ELLs, and the effects of establishing such an environment for ELLs. In chapter 3, the capstone addresses the professional development that will be created to address the issue. In chapter 4, the capstone will provide a conclusion of the work, including implications for teachers and students and recommendations for future teaching.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Welcoming Environment as a Remedy to Stereotype Threat Theory

The importance of establishing a welcoming environment in the English Language Learner (ELL) classroom is supported by the stereotype threat theory. The stereotype threat theory argues that students who are concerned with conforming to negative stereotypes are more likely to academically underperform (Steele, 1997). While the theory was originally established using data regarding the standardized test scores of African American college students, it has since been applied to other groups. Wasserberg (2022) researched the impact of the stereotype threat theory on Latinx ELLs. Findings confirm that ELLs were more likely to perform poorly when concerned with negative stereotypes. The theory extends to ELLs in all content areas. Sato (2019) found that race and culture-based stereotypes perpetuated by physical education teachers had a direct negative impact on the social inclusion and communication challenges of ELLs.

The stereotype threat theory is directly linked to the establishment of a welcoming environment for ELLs. Students will not feel welcome in a classroom where they are concerned

with conforming to negative stereotypes. It is possible that some teachers do not even know the ways in which they are fostering a hostile learning environment for ELLs. Shim (2017) found that teachers must be aware of the implications of stereotypes on ELLs. Active awareness and defiance of negative stereotypes have been found to have a direct link to the social and academic support of ELLs. Due to these findings, it can be concluded that establishment of a welcoming environment is directly linked to the overall success of ELLs. The academic and social ramifications of the stereotype theory can be remedied by an informed and welcoming environment. This environment should be established not only in the ELL classroom, but in all content areas. The professional development will guide teachers in the factors needed to create such an environment and overcome the stereotypes that negatively impact ELLs.

Teacher Candidate Experiences for a Welcoming ELL Classroom

For teachers to combat the consequences of the stereotype threat theory, they must first understand the elements of a welcoming environment for ELLs. This understanding can be formed before the teacher enters the classroom, during their observations and practicums. Research has shown that these firsthand experiences are more valuable to teacher candidates in supporting ELLs than learning best practices in their education courses. In a study of 21 ENL teacher candidates, Kim et al. (2021) found that intentional field placements were the most useful in preparing future teachers to understand and meet the needs of ELLs. Through these field placements, teacher candidates expressed concerns for the lack of accommodations they were witnessing in mainstream classrooms. As a result, they displayed growth and understanding of teaching techniques by discussing and presenting strategies to make ideal practices for ELL instruction realities. Without experiencing the lack of support for ELLs firsthand, teacher

candidates would not be encouraged to establish an environment in which students are supported and successful.

The findings of Kim et al. can be applied to all teacher candidates, not solely those preparing to teach ELLs. With an increasing number of ELLs in the United States, teachers of all subject areas will teach ELLs. Fan (2012) conducted a qualitative study of secondary teacher candidates to establish the pedagogical sociolinguistic tools needed to support ELLs. Findings report that all teacher candidates must develop an understanding that curriculum should be created and implemented with awareness of the social, linguistic and political aspects of second language learning. Fan argues that while candidates can learn about these qualities through education courses, they are best understood through service learning. Without these qualities, curriculum of any content area will not be supportive of ELLs. Proper experience is needed to apply these factors and establish a welcoming environment for ELLs.

In addition to practicums and field experiences, research supports the idea that teacher candidates should learn about the needs of ELLs throughout their coursework, regardless of their teaching placement goals. Peker (2019) investigated the efficiency of endorsement and infusion models for teacher education programs. The findings show that endorsement programs, in which teacher candidates take courses specifically structured for the purpose of teaching ELLs, were more effective in preparing candidates to teach these students and meet their needs. However, Peker suggests that infusion programs, in which instruction for teaching ELLs is applied to coursework for all teacher candidates, could be equally or more effective than endorsement programs when backed by the proper time and resources.

The suggestion that infusion programs can be highly successful in preparing teacher candidates is in line with the findings of Fan (2013). Both studies report that all teacher

candidates should be prepared to work with ELLs, not only those who are preparing to become ELL instructors. More research is needed on the efficiency of infusion programs with proper time and resources.

The findings of Peker and Fan defy previous findings that report that teacher candidates are completely prepared to work with ELLs strictly through coursework. A previous study investigated the changes needed to address growing numbers of ELLs in the United States (Markos, 2012). Findings report that specific coursework about the needs of ELLs should be required for all teacher candidates. Markos argues that through this coursework, teacher candidates acknowledged and deepened their definitions of the term English language learner. While the limited thinking and expansion of the term ELL is necessary for the establishment of a welcoming environment, more work is needed. More recent findings report that teacher candidates should use observations, practicums, and service learnings to supplement the material learned through coursework and develop a firsthand understanding of the needs of students (Kim et al., 2021; Fan, 2013; Peker, 2019).

In addition to firsthand interactions with ELLs, research supports the notion that teacher candidates should participate in role-play activities to understand the lives of ELLs and develop empathy as a result. Zhang (2016) argues that if teacher candidates have never studied abroad, they have never truly experienced what their ELL students feel in school. In the study, Zhang conducted a 20-minute lesson in Mandarin, which none of the teacher candidates understood. After the lesson, teacher candidates reported heightened anxiety and lowered inclination to participate. Teacher candidates collected several teaching strategies through their role-play experience. They reported that simple instructions, visual aids and positive reinforcement were

beneficial to the experience of ELLs. Without the role-play activity, the teacher candidates would not have understood the value of these instructional strategies.

The findings of the previous study are confirmed by those of a more recent study. In a qualitative study of ELL teacher candidates, Guerrettaz et al. (2022) sought to establish the relationship between role-play and empathy for ELLs. In the study, the teacher candidates acted as ELLs in a setting that mimicked a real classroom. The authors note that the participants reported greater understanding and empathy for what ELLs experience in schools.

The findings of both Guerrettaz et al. and Zhang have major implications on the way teacher candidates can prepare to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. The role-play activities involved in both studies assisted teacher candidates in forming empathy and a better understanding of how to meet the needs of ELLs. An understanding of these factors is needed to establish a welcoming environment for these students. Previously mentioned research would suggest that these role-play activities should be conducted for all teacher candidates, not only those seeking to become teachers of ELLs. It is through this understanding of student identities that all teacher candidates will be equipped to combat the stereotype threat theory and create a welcoming environment for ELL students.

Content and Modifications in a Welcoming ELL Environment

Creating content and assessments with the needs of ELLs in mind is essential to establishing a welcoming environment. Findings from Vangh et al. (2017) reports that instruction suitable for non-ELL students is not enough to support the unique and everchanging needs of ELLs. The study compared the test results of ELL students who received traditional text-comprehension instruction to those of ELL students who received instruction with accommodations. These accommodations included increased attention to academic vocabulary

and additional peer discussion. The results confirm that ELL students with accommodated content instruction performed better on assessments. The findings of Vaughn et al. can be used to support the need for a welcoming environment for ELLs. Heineke et al. (2023) found that the social-emotional wellbeing of ELLs is directly linked to their in-school experiences, shaped by interactions with adults in academic settings. Findings encourage teachers in all content areas to integrate accommodations for ELLs through use of home languages and instructional program variations. The delivery of instruction to ELLs in a way that is accessible to them is essential to making them feel welcome and successful in an academic setting. These accommodations are directly linked to the overall wellbeing of ELLs. The next sections present possible accommodations that can be provided for ELLs.

Modification Using Visuals

Specific modifications to traditional instruction, including visual aids, have been proven to directly support the comprehension of ELLs. In their study, Wilcox and Rose (2022) evaluated the relationship between visual aids and ELL's ability to comprehend science concepts. In the study, instruction was scaffolded to include visual aids of animals before content about their habitats was introduced. Findings of the study confirm that the use of visual aids assist students in comprehending scientific concepts. These findings of this study can relate not only to content instruction, but to assessment as well. In a separate qualitative study of ELLs in fourth through sixth grade, Cappello and Barton (2022) research the efficiency of drawings as assessments. The authors advocate for drawings as assessments, stating these assessments provide students with differing learning styles to access and interact with the content. Findings confirm that by providing ELLs with multiple opportunities to engage with material, including visually, students not only perform better, but are better understood. Based on these findings, it can be concluded

that visual learning should be applied not only to content instruction, but to student assessment as a means to create a welcoming environment for ELLs. Through these visual aids, these students are given multiple opportunities to access content and display comprehension.

Modifications Using Students' Personal Experiences

Research has proven that content across all subject areas should be differentiated to fit the needs of ELLs. While Elsbree et. al (2014) notes that there are many ways to differentiate instruction for ELLs, it has been found that some of the most effective strategies are those that integrate students' cultures, experiences, and unique learning styles with content instruction. Elsbree et al. evaluated the lesson plans of 35 teachers in a California school. The lessons were analyzed using a multi-faceted differentiation criterion. While results indicate that over 90% of teachers in the study provided this crucial differentiation for ELLs, there was still a need for strategic implementation of modifications.

Botelho (2020) found that the use of children's books that include or are written by members of students' home cultures can be used to promote instruction of ELLs. The authors focus specifically on children's books that are written by or include members of the Latinx community. However, the findings that they report can be applied to all student backgrounds. Botelho concludes that by teaching with texts that are culturally relevant to students, teachers resist cultural storylines and pedagogical practices that police and restrict students' language use. Additionally, findings report that these texts support classroom community, as they prompt students to discuss their shared experiences. This is a concrete example of how teachers can use content and assessment to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. Through culturally relevant texts, teachers of ELLs can teach and assess themes like reading comprehension in a way that makes students feel accepted. Classroom community is built as students connect with

both each other and the teacher while learning English. This is crucial to both the academic and social emotional wellbeing of ELLs.

Modifications Employing the Home Language

The need for more literature that reflects the culture of ELLs raised in the aforementioned study can be remedied by the findings of Garcia and Li (2014). The study found that ELLs benefited greatly from the use of translanguaging in academic settings. By intertwining students' home languages with English in the classroom, students reap both academic and social emotional benefits. Song (2022) applied Garcia and Li's ideas to a qualitative study of preservice elementary ESOL instructors' use of translanguaging. Findings concur with the previous research, confirm that translanguaging can be used specifically to improve students' comprehension of new content and teacher-parent interactions. These academic and social interactions both contribute to the overall wellbeing of ELLs. Teachers can use translanguaging to guide the creation of content and assessments for ELLs. Through this method, students' social emotional and academic wellbeing are promoted, leading them to success. This should be used to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs.

It has been found that assisting the development of students' home language can contribute to improved English learning. In a qualitative study, Garrison-Fletcher et al. (2022) investigated the relationship of home language (L1) and English (L2) development in Spanish-speaking emergent-bilingual students. The study reports that L1 reading comprehension has a major impact on L2 reading comprehension. While Song's ideas regarding translanguaging can be applied to assist the development of L1 support of L2, the study indicated that more instructional support is needed. Nakamoto et al. (2012) in their study provided specific instruction to ELLs in both L1 and L2. The study included 502 Spanish-speaking ELLs. The

findings suggest that explicit phonetic and decoding instruction in the L1 and L2 promote reading comprehension.

Meng (2019) conducted a qualitative study on the relationships between vocabulary retention and the relationships of teachers with ELL and non-ELL students. Research was collected from Head Start programs across the United States over a one-year time frame. The findings reflect that strategies traditionally for interacting with ELLs, like open-ended questions, modeling grammatically correct forms, and extending conversations can promote comprehension for all students, not just ELLs. This concept further supports the idea that instruction and assessment should be used to create a welcoming environment for ELLs. Teachers should consistently use strategies for content and assessment that support ELLs, as they benefit all students.

Fostering Relationships in a Welcoming ELL Environment

Jennerjohn (2022) explores the ways in which the families of ELLs can be used to promote learning and inclusion in the classroom. The author suggests that ELLs can co-create texts with their families to be used in their classrooms and shared with their peers. These texts include images and writing that are authentic and relevant to both students' lives and a selected theme. A number of benefits for both the teacher and student are shared. For example, Jennerjohn reports that co-created texts assist the teacher and families in establishing communication, give teachers a better understanding of students' lives and establish culturally relevant texts to support literacy learning (Jennerjohn, 2022). This relationship-building opportunity helps students to understand that their lives are important in their classrooms and can be used to support their language acquisition. Teachers should prioritize relationship-building strategies such as this to foster a welcoming classroom environment for their ELLs.

Kandel-Cisco et al. (2020) discuss the challenge of lack of attendance and communication when employing common practices in establishing positive relationships between schools and families. Jennerjohn (2022) discusses ideas regarding co-creating texts are effective in establishing relationships between the teacher and families of ELLs can be used to combat the issues relating to attendance and communication. In their study, Kandel-Cisco et al. reports that while many school administrators understand the importance of including families in the classroom, it is not always easy to communicate with parents and guardians of students. An example of a commonly used family night where the families of students are invited to schools is used. Grievances over attendance in these events is expressed. The administrators and teachers who participated in the study explain that while they understand that families have limited availability to visit the school, these interactions are of great importance. The article suggests that schools implement collaborative family projects like multi-lingual story sharing to engage families of ELLs. These findings are consistent with Jennerjohn's ideas regarding co-created texts.

Banse et al. (2019) evaluated the behavior patterns of effective teachers of ELLs. Banse et al. recorded and evaluated English Language Arts lessons from an effective teacher data set. The research compares teacher support in fourth and fifth grade classrooms with ELL students. The findings report that high-performing ELL students were all taught by teachers who used high levels of support throughout their lessons. These levels of support were characterized by praise, background of content and relationship advancements. The findings of this case should be used by teachers of all content areas to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. The strategies mentioned are applicable to all subjects, not only a contained ELL classroom. These strategies not only make ELLs feel supported and successful, but shows them that they are cared about in

an educational setting. The research is limited to elementary students, but the strategies mentioned can be used in classrooms at any level.

Owens and Wells (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between the instructional practices of teachers of ELLs and student performance. The study was conducted on three elementary schools within the same school district in the Eastern United States. Interviews with nine general education teachers who had ELL students in their classrooms were evaluated. Lesson plans for the same teachers were also reviewed. The findings report that while the teachers implemented positive and cooperative learning styles, more work was needed in the district. The authors conclude that while the present practices were effective in teaching ELLs, a stronger focus on implementing culturally responsive teaching was needed. Owens and Wells argue that culturally responsive teaching is essential to the establishment of a welcoming learning environment for ELLs across the school system.

Muhammad (2020) expresses ideas that agree with those of Owens and Wells (2021). Muhammad argues that ELLs should be exposed to content that is relevant to their lives and enables them to think critically about concepts that they see in the world. Ekiaka Nzai et al. (2012) suggest storytelling as a culturally relevant way to teach ELLS. The authors find that by giving students the opportunities to share their experiences, positive relationships are built, and students acquire language.

These practices can be coupled with those witnessed by Owen and Wells. Through positive learning styles and culturally relevant materials, ELLs will be given the message that their experiences, perspectives and voices are relevant and valued in an academic setting. Teachers should use these principles to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs.

Administrative Support for a Welcoming ELL Classroom

In a mixed-research study, Gómez and Diarrassouba (2014) research the elements needed for teachers to support ELLs. Researchers studied teachers of kindergarten to eighth grade in a public school district in Michigan. A web-based survey was distributed to subjects to collect data on their preparedness to interact with ELLs on a meaningful level. Based on the results, 80% of teachers reported that they felt prepared to teach in a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classroom. However, the teachers also reported that they did not have the cultural knowledge, nor the professional skills needed to align with students' cultural backgrounds. The researchers conclude that schools must provide teachers with updated professional development regarding culturally relevant instruction for ELLs. Furthermore, they assert that states should mandate the completion of this professional development to ensure best practices for all students. This research is relevant to the establishment of a welcoming classroom environment for ELLs. The findings indicate that policies and structure on a school and statewide level are needed to establish these environments for students.

A study conducted by Theoharis and O'Toole (2014) confirms the findings of Gómez and Diarrassouba. Theoharis and O'Toole conducted a study of the role of principals in effective environments for ELLs. Two elementary schools were studied across three academic years. Data was collected through a variety of ways including interviews, classroom observations and faculty meeting observations. Findings of the study report that school leaders should take an active role in the support of ELLs. Specifically, administrators should take lead on establishing meaningful professional development for teachers. Furthermore, administrators should advocate for small class sizes and coteaching when available to best support all students, and specifically ELLs.

The findings of Theoharis and O'Toole can be used to mitigate the questions raised by the research conducted by Brooks et al. (2010). In their study, the authors discuss the ways in which administrators frequently find surface-level solutions for deep-rooted problems faced by ELL students in their schools. An example of translated signs posted across buildings is provided. The authors discuss that while these signs can be helpful for students, they do not address the isolation and lack of support that students may feel in a new environment. Previously mentioned research about the importance of professional development and targeted support for ELLs can be used to resolve this deeper-rooted issue. While signs in students' home languages are certainly helpful, they are not enough to foster a completely welcoming environment for ELLs. All members of the school community should receive training on updated concepts for establishing this environment.

Finally, Sasson and Malkinson (2021) investigated practices that school districts can use to support ELLs through previously mentioned models like co-teaching. Sasson and Malkinson collected research from over 300 teachers in the form of questionnaires and interviews. The study sought to investigate the efficiency of professional development specifically geared towards co-teaching. The findings suggest that professional development sessions designed to support co-teachers were effective in creating teachers who design lessons that are positive and effective for students. These findings can be used to establish an improved environment for ELLs. Not only should these students be co-taught when applicable, but their teachers should receive training on best practices for managing a co-taught environment. This will contribute to the overall improvement of students' academic experiences.

Eliminating Bias for a Welcoming ELL Classroom

Garcia et al. (2019) suggests that teachers should evaluate personal bias to ensure best practices when working with marginalized students. Researchers conducted a short-term study in an ethnically diverse elementary school. The study sought to establish whether teacher bias impacted their evaluations of students with different genders, ethnicities, and ELL statuses. Teachers were asked by researchers to rank their students' executive functions (EFs) relative to one another based on a computer-based test. The findings indicated that there are systematic inefficiencies in teachers' findings of students' EFs by their gender, ethnicity and ELL status. This study has implications on the way a welcoming environment can be established for ELLs. The data suggests that even if teachers are unaware of their bias, it could impact the ways in which they interact with or assess their ELLs.

Altavilla (2020) evaluated bias in the ways that ELLs were educated during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Altavilla raised concerns over ELL's access to technology during the pandemic. While schools were closed, technology was used as students' only means of accessing education. The author raises concerns first over the bias that comes with assuming that all ELLs have access to technology in their homes. Second, the author argues that even when students do have access to technology, it must be used in a way that meaningfully eliminates bias. The example of speech-recognition software is discussed. It is argued that while this software can be useful, it is created with English-speakers in mind. The ideas mentioned about bias in technology for ELLs during the COVID-19 pandemic can be applied to all time frames. While technology can certainly be used to create an environment that promotes the wellbeing and academic advancement of ELLs, it must be used in a way that is intentional. If technology is used to perpetuate bias, it is not effective in establishing a welcoming environment.

In a qualitative study of four teachers at two high schools in the United States, Dávila and Linares (2020) researched best practices to combat prejudice against ELLs in an anti-immigrant climate in the United States. Research was collected through observations and interviews over the course of one academic school year. Findings report that since the 2016 election, teachers have had an expanding duty to create a safe environment where their students feel welcome and able to make mistakes. To create this environment, the research suggests several strategies, including conceptualizing care as empathy and trust, pedagogic reflexivity and translanguaging. These are techniques that can be applied to any classroom and will contribute greatly to the welcoming environment needed to assist ELLs. By combating the anti-immigrant bias, ELLs will feel welcome in their classroom environment.

Sanatullova-Allison and Robison-Young (2016) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the cause and suggest remedies for the overrepresentation of ELLs in special education. The findings suggest that many of the indicators currently used to identify students with learning disabilities overlap with typical qualities of ELLs. For example, difficulty following directions and phonological awareness are behaviors associated with learning disabilities. However, these are also behaviors associated with a typical ELL. The authors suggest that all teachers should be informed on the typical behaviors of ELLs and consider their learning environments when evaluating them for learning disabilities. This will contribute to a welcoming environment for ELLs as they will feel appreciated and have access to the education that is best for them.

A continuation, in the next chapter I present a professional development that aims to instruct educators on the research literature presented here and provide a feasible approach to making a welcoming environment for ELLs.

Chapter 3: Professional Development

This chapter will review the professional development (PD) created to address the problem of creating a welcoming environment for English Language Learners. The chapter contains the agendas, materials, and purpose of the professional development. The PD is a one-hour PD, broken up into 30-minute sessions over the course of two days. This is meant to be presented to teachers of all content areas in a faculty-meeting style setting. Each session will cover a different topic related to a welcoming environment: Modifications for a Welcoming Environment and Relationship Building for a Welcoming Environment. All the materials and tools for the PD can be found in the Appendices section of the capstone.

Session 1: Modifications for a Welcoming Environment

Session one of the PD is titled Modifications for a Welcoming Environment. The session will start with an engaging question to initially serve as an icebreaker for teachers. The question asks, what is your favorite ice cream flavor? with a text box via PearDeck for participants to respond. The question purposely does not include answer choices or visuals, as these modifications will be used as an exemplar later in the session. The answers will be quickly reviewed and discussed as a group.

After the icebreaker question is discussed, the day's agenda is presented. The agenda consists of Introduction to the Problem, Modifications as a Remedy, Simple Modifications, and Exit Ticket. Additionally, two learning goals are presented to participants. The first is a learning goal for the entire PD, I can establish a welcoming environment for English Language Learners. The second is a learning goal for the first session, I can identify one modification to use on my next assessment that contributes to a welcoming environment for ELLs. This learning goal will be displayed through the simple modifications activity and the exit ticket collected from

participants. Both learning goals address the problem by having teachers brainstorm realistic ways to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. By having teachers identify one modification they can use to create this environment, they are helping their ELLs to feel successful and welcome.

The first topic of the session, Introduction to the Problem briefly explains the stereotype threat theory. This brief overview will give participants an understanding of why a welcoming environment is especially important for ELLs. The PD draws on Steele's (1997) and Sato's (2019) findings that students are more likely to underperform when faced with stereotypes in the classroom. This is crucial as it will increase participants' understanding and willingness to implement suggestions and theories mentioned throughout all sessions. During the PD, teachers will have access to slides that include an overview of how the PD will combat the stereotype threat theory.

The second topic of the session, Modifications as a Remedy will explain how teachers can use modifications on assessments and activities to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. This section will start by briefly reviewing the NYS required testing accommodations for ELLs. Then, the presenter models a simple modification that can be used to make ELLs feel successful. To do this, the presenter poses a question in Swedish, vad är din favorit glass smak? Participants are given one minute to respond in a text box via PearDeck without using Google. Unless any participants speak Swedish, they will not be able to respond, which is the point of the activity. The presenter will explain that often times, this is how ELLs feel when presented with no modifications. Then, participants are presented the question again with some simple modifications. The same question is shown, this time with choklad, vanilj, and jordgubbe as options. This time, it is anticipated that more participants to answer, with very few choosing the

non-cognate, jordgubbe. After allowing participants to answer, I will explain how the answer choices were helpful, but can be improved. Finally, pictures of a chocolate ice cream cone, vanilla ice cream cone and strawberry ice cream cone will be included with each option. Now, all participants are expected to answer the question with a full understanding of what it asks. Next, there will be an explanation that this is the same question they were asked at the start of the session. When presented with the same question in a new language, they were able to understand what was being asked only when modifications were used. The daunting question became easier with these modifications, and they can do the same for ELLs by prioritizing simple steps like the ones that I used. The purpose of this activity is to give participants a ready-to-use strategy for modifications that can be used in their classrooms, regardless of content area. This demonstration is modeled after the findings of Wilcox and Rose (2022) regarding visual aids to assist understanding.

For the Simple Modifications section of the PD, participants will be split up into their departments. Each department will be instructed to select a question from a recent assessment. As a department, they will come up with two ways that the question could be modified to contribute to a welcoming environment for ELLs. Appendix A contains the handout that will be distributed to each department for this activity. The purpose of this activity is to have participants identify ways that they can contribute to a welcoming ELL environment in their particular classrooms. After 10 minutes of working in groups, each department will share their modifications. Through the Exit Ticket, teachers will explicitly state one modification that they can use to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs. The Exit Ticket can be found in Appendix B.

Session 2: Relationship Building for a Welcoming Environment

Session two of the PD is titled Relationship Building for a Welcoming Environment. Similar to the first session, this session will start with a question to engage participants. The question will be What animal do you see? with an image of an optical illusion projected on the board. Participants will answer through a PearDeck and have the opportunity to share their answers and justify the image from their perspective.

After the question is presented and discussed, the daily agenda will be reviewed. The agenda will include five parts: Review, Relationship Building with ELLs, Administrative Support, Eliminating Bias, and Exit Ticket. With the agenda, two learning goals are presented. The first learning goal is the general learning goal for the PD, I can establish a welcoming environment for English Language Learners. The second learning goal is the specific goal for the second session, I can identify three ways to build relationships with ELLs in my classroom. This learning goal will be met through activities that participants complete during the final three sections of the session. This addresses the problem by having teachers reflect on their own practices and identify ways they can establish a welcoming environment for ELLs.

The first topic of the session is Review, which is a brief overview of the problem and information covered in the first session. During the review the question Why is a welcoming environment important for ELLs? and how can we do this through modifications? Participants are given time to respond and brief answers with citations are provided.

The second topic of the session is Relationship Building with ELLs. First, participants are posed with a simple question, how do you relationship build with your students? Participants will respond on a post-it note and turn them in anonymously. This is done to increase engagement. After this question, the presenter asks What challenges do you have building relationships with

ELLs? Responses will be discussed in the same format as the previous question. The presenter also displays some of the barriers mentioned in the study conducted by Kandel-Cisco et al. (2020) and Owens and Wells (2021), including language and cultural barriers. Next, the presenter will model two ways to overcome these barriers. First, participants are instructed to take out their cell phones and pull up Google Translate. While most participants likely know about the tool, having them physically open it up shows them how easy it is to use. Additionally, participants are presented with the findings of Jennerjohn (2022), which can be used to remedy the cultural barrier that prevents relationship building with ELLs. The image from the icebreaker activity is re-presented. Participants and the presenter will discuss how just like we all presented our own perspectives of the image, students should be given an opportunity to share their perspectives in the classroom.

The third topic of the session is Administrative Support. First, there will be a brief overview of the connection between administrative support and building relationships with ELLs. This overview will be based in the findings of a study conducted by Brooks et al. (2010), who discuss the issue of surface level solutions for deeper rooted issues. To demonstrate this, teachers will receive a handout with two scenarios (see Appendix C). Each scenario contains a problem faced by a teacher regarding ELLs in their classroom. For each scenario, teachers will have to identify the surface level issue and the deep-rooted issue. The purpose of this activity is to give teachers a clear view of the importance of administrative support when it comes to relationship building. Teachers will be presented with a brief overview of the findings of Gómez and Diarrassouba (2014), who argue that classroom teachers alone cannot be responsible for relationship building with ELLs, as it should be a building-wide effort. This section is meant to

encourage teachers to advocate for ELLs, ultimately establishing a welcoming environment both in their classrooms and across the school building.

The fourth topic of the session is called Eliminating Bias. In this section, the presenter will provide an overview of the research of Altavilla (2020), who raises concerns over bias that teachers might not even be aware that they are perpetuating, like assuming that all students have access to technology. Next, the presenter highlights how this issue is directly related to the establishment of a welcoming environment for ELLs. Finally, the presenter will provide teachers with solutions for this issue. These solutions include distribution of technology surveys, found in Appendix D, and providing paper copies of readings, handouts and assignments for students. After this section, concluding slide with an Exit Ticket is shown, which can be found in Appendix E. This exit ticket asks teachers to name three new ways they will relationship build with ELLs. The exit ticket also asks participants to reflect on the overarching learning target, asking them How will you establish a welcoming environment for ELLs?

Conclusion

The overall goal of the PD is for participants to develop an understanding of the importance of a welcoming environment for ELLs. Through a research-based explanation of the research question and solution based-activities, participants will identify ways in which they can foster a welcoming environment to best serve ELLs. Chapter 4 of the capstone includes a re-statement of the research question, conclusions, implications for teaching and learning, and recommendations for future research and policies.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

The problem of establishing a welcoming environment for ELLs should be the concern of all teachers. As ELLs face a multitude of changes as they enter a new school and setting, embracing them in a welcoming and positive learning environment will contribute to their academic success and language acquisition. The research question, How can teachers create a welcoming environment for ELLs? seeks to explore the ways in which teachers can establish this environment in support of their students.

Conclusions

Through researching this problem, I have found that this is a multi-faceted issue. The establishment of this positive environment should be done with the intent to combat the stereotype threat, which in turn has positive implications for the social and academic wellbeing of ELLs. This can be done through a number of techniques and modifications. The research on the problem shows that any effort to foster a positive learning environment in a classroom or school building supports the wellbeing of ELLs.

Implications for Student Learning

Students will benefit both emotionally and academically through the techniques and methods mentioned in the research on the problem. Emotionally, students will feel valued and respected through the inclusion of their perspectives and voices in the classroom and co-created texts (Jennerjohn, 2022). Additionally, students will be more engaged in their learning when teachers select content that is relevant to student experiences, and provide consistent praise to ELLs (Banse et al., 2019).

Academically, ELLs will acquire more language and perform better when teachers provide modifications that consider their needs. For example, students perform higher on academic assessments when provided with visual aids (Wilcox and Rose, 2022), and opportunities for translanguaging (Garcia and Li, 2014). These elements contribute to a welcoming environment by considering the needs of ELLs and helping them to feel accepted in their school environments. They will succeed academically as a result.

Implications for Teaching

The research on establishing a welcoming environment for ELLs will benefit teachers as well as students. The research has shown that strategies traditionally reserved for the instruction of ELLs can benefit all students (Meng, 2019). This benefits teachers as they are able to incorporate methods that contribute to a positive environment while still meeting the needs of non-ELLs. The PD sessions will benefit teachers because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the problem, factors of a welcoming environment, and how to establish one.

Recommendations

While all teachers understand the importance of a positive classroom environment, the research shows that students are best served when their instructors take measures to intentionally create a welcoming environment for ELLs. While there is extensive research on the topic, future work should be focused on requiring PD geared towards ELLs and the benefits of a welcoming environment for all teachers. Both teachers and students will benefit greatly from the everchanging techniques and methods used to establish this environment.

Final Thoughts

A welcoming environment is crucial to the academic and emotional success of English Language Learners. ELLs can best be served by this environment when implemented at both the

classroom and schoolwide level. Through measures like modifications, relationship building, administrative support and elimination of bias, this positive and ELL-supporting environment is created.

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Appendix A**Day 1: Simple Modifications Activity**

Department: _____

Choose one question from a recent assessment that your department has administered. Write the question and answer choices (if applicable) below.

Question:

Now, identify two ways in which this question can be modified to fit the needs of ELLs. Write each modification and new question below.

Modification 1:	Modification 2:
Revised question with Modification 1:	Revised question with Modification 2:

Appendix B

Day 1: Exit Ticket

What is one modification that you can implement to establish a welcoming environment for ELLs? Write your modification in the space below.

Appendix C

Day 2: Scenario Activity

Read each scenario. Identify both the surface-level and the deeper-rooted issue present in each situation.

Scenario A	Scenario B
<p>Djovany recently moved to the United States from Haiti. Djovany is an entering-level ELL student with very little understanding of spoken or written English. Djovany does not know his way around the building and frequently gets lost going to his next class.</p>	<p>Mari immigrated to the United States from El Salvador two years ago. Mari recently received a bad grade on a math test and has since shut down in the class. Mari refuses to take notes, complete work, or participate in class. The teacher has talked with Mari and called her mother at home. Mari’s mother speaks no English, and the teacher is unsure if her mother understands the situation.</p>
<p>Surface-level issue:</p>	<p>Surface-level issue:</p>
<p>Deeper-rooted issue:</p>	<p>Deeper-rooted issue:</p>
<p>Supports needed:</p>	<p>Supports needed:</p>

Appendix D

Day 2: Sample Technology Survey

Name: _____

Guardian's name: _____

Guardian's relationship to student: _____

Does your student have access to computer at home?

_____ yes _____ no

Does your student have access to Wi-Fi at home?

_____ yes _____ no

Are there any foreseeable circumstances in which your student's access to a computer or Wi-Fi will change? If yes, explain if possible.

_____ yes _____ no

Explanation:

This should be translated to students' home languages as needed.

Appendix E

Day 2: Exit Ticket

What are three ways you can relationship build with ELLs?

1.

2.

3.

How will you establish a welcoming environment for ELLs? Write your answer below.